



Lost Pet Reunification Toolkit

What is Lost Pet Reunification when it comes to HASS?

Lost and found programs prevent lost pets, reunite lost pets with their people, and support lost pets from getting lost again.

For most shelters, the highest intake type is stray animals. Initial data collection shows that a significant number of these lost animals are healthy, appear cared for, and many are only blocks away from their homes. To reduce intake and keep more pets with their families create or enhance your Lost Pet Reunification Program.

The Most Successful Lost Pet Reunification Programs:

- Operate under the assumption that the majority of lost or stray animals have people who love and care for them.
- Ensure lost animals are returned quickly and safely.
- Build community partnerships to utilize people's willingness and desire to help.
- Develop an organizational culture and a community expectation that promotes reunification.
- Involve dedicated staff and volunteers to focus on reunification efforts.

What problem(s) does Lost Pet Reunification solve?

- Many animal shelters do not operate or only operate limited lost and found programming.
- The majority of animals entering shelters are taken in under the intake category of 'stray.'
- The assumption that loose animals are stray and do not have homes or people who care for them rather than assuming that they are lost, missing, escaped, or are cared for and live outside.
- Animals have only a small chance of returning home once entering animal shelters.
 - National return rates for cats typically range from 1 to 5%
 - National return rates for dogs are typically 5 to 30%
- Limited data on where animals are found when they are lost or missing.

Get Started

1. Dedicate staff and/or volunteer hours to getting lost pets home.

See the [Lost and Found Coordinator job description](#). Most animal welfare agencies don't even have one person dedicated to this function, but the return-on-investment is HUGE!

2. Explore the [technology catalog](#) to see technology that can save time, improve services, and get lost pets home without them having to enter the shelter.



3. Let the public help get lost pets home and move away from the idea that every lost pet must be impounded.

4. Offer resources: tips and links to [online resources](#) to assist/educate the community in lost pet recovery.

5. Provide [lost pet resources in Spanish](#) and languages other than English.

6. Save kennels for pets who truly need intake: those that are sick, injured, in immediate danger, or have no other options apart from shelter intake.

How to Start or Grow a Lost Pet Reunification Program

Getting lost pets home can feel like an overwhelming task, so we break it up into three segments. Lost pet prevention, reuniting lost pets, and reducing lost pet recurrences. In this section we will touch on the prevention measures, what to do once a pet is in your shelter and last, how to make sure they don't come back.

Lost Pet Prevention

- Ensure that every program (community-based and adoption based) has a “return to home” component.
- Provide identification and resources to assist and aid in the prevention of cats and dogs from becoming lost or missing.
- Empower the community to assist in pet reunification, and message to the community that stray and lost animals are often very close to home.
- Create partnerships with local lost and found social pages, fire stations, libraries, and other community spaces where people can go for help when they find or lose a pet.

Reuniting Lost and Missing Pets

- Utilize a staff or volunteer role charged with reuniting lost pets.
- Reunite animals quickly and effectively with their caretakers.
- Prevent unnecessary shelter intake by empowering field officers and good samaritans to help. See the [ACO/Field Officer Return to Owner Checklist](#).
- Make it easy and free for owners and caregivers to get their pets home.
- Make it easy for volunteers and staff to help in reunification efforts. (Setting up a process to match lost pets with shelter inventory), Transport volunteers on call to get pets home, etc.

Reducing Lost Pet Recurrence



HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- Provide resources, support, and supplies such as collars, tags, and microchips.
 - You can find examples of microchip resources [here](#).
 - Identify affordable collar and tag suppliers.
- Assist in repairing fences or securing yards.
- Connect to spay and neuter services, when applicable, explaining that S/N can reduce an animal's interest in roaming, spraying, barking, and fighting.
 - Provide a list of low-cost spay and neuter programs

Evaluate Your Program

1. How are lost animals coming into the shelter?

What percentage are coming in 'over the counter' by Good Samaritans and what percentage are coming in from field services or animal control?

2. What is your current 'return to owner' or return to home rate?

Here's how to calculate this: Total number of pets returned home/total number of STRAY animals taken in = RTO rate

3. What are the highest intake zip codes and or census tracts?

Common Barriers to Getting Lost Pets Home

- Lack of understanding about what resources exist to get lost pets home.
- Lack of community education/resources describing what one can do upon finding a lost animal in lieu of transporting to an animal shelter
- Absence of a finder-to-foster program
- Field Services or animal control unwilling or unable to return in field (lack of scanners on trucks, training of field personnel, organizational culture)
- Lack of consistent messaging to the community about the criticality of ID tags and currently registered microchips
- Providing pet owners with additional tips on how to prevent the loss of a pet (secure fencing, [auto shutting mechanisms on gates](#), etc.)
- The availability of free or low-cost ID tags and microchips
- Failing to register a microchip on behalf of the owner at time of implant.
- Hard to locate lost and found pages on animal services websites
- Shelters lost and found web pages are not consistent and do not always provide clear, concise, accurate or actionable information
- Reclaim fees
- Language barriers



HUMAN ANIMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

- Local city codes and ordinances
- Internal policies, procedures and culture
- Lack of transportation for owners to reclaim animal
- Accessibility of service hours during which a pet owner can obtain ID tags, microchips
- Lack of dedicated staff or volunteers assigned to effectively focus on RTO
- Elected leadership and boards not having a full understanding of the mission, changing mindset at the highest level
- Failure to fully utilize volunteers
- Lack of microchip scanning services outside of the shelters and/or private medical facilities