

Adoption hours analysis

Every hour contains 60 minutes. But some hours are more valuable than others.

Highlights

- Adoption rates tend to be higher in shelters where evening and weekend hours make up a large share of business hours
- This pattern applies broadly, regardless of a shelter's intake level
- Shelters where weekend hours make up 40% of overall hours had adoption rates roughly 20% higher than those where weekend hours make up just 20% of overall hours. Shelters with 10% evening hours had adoption rates of about 63%, compared to 68% for shelters at the 20% level.



Background

As our [2025 Mid-Year National Data Report](#) explained, dog intake is down nearly 3% compared to 2024 and relatively unchanged for cats. Meanwhile, adoption rates have remained stable overall. This is good news, as it suggests that lifesaving has improved — and many shelters are feeling some long-awaited relief from the intense pressure post-pandemic. To the extent that adoption rates can be increased, shelters can achieve further improvements in lifesaving. *(For the purposes of this analysis, we defined adoption rate as the number of adoptions divided by total intake.)*

Any number of factors can affect an organization's adoption rate — effective marketing and community outreach, for example. Perhaps the most fundamental of these factors is the public's access to the pets. For pets to be adopted, a shelter's adoption hours need to meet the needs

of their community. Being open 40 or even 50 hours a week sounds impressive, but which hours? Our recent audit of 482 shelters revealed some valuable insights.

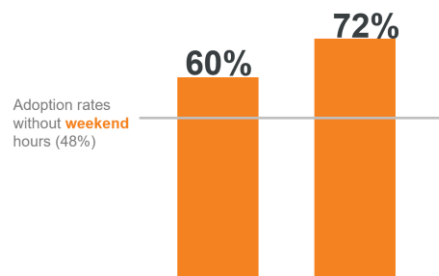
Key findings

The results of our analysis largely align with conventional wisdom, but there were also some surprises.

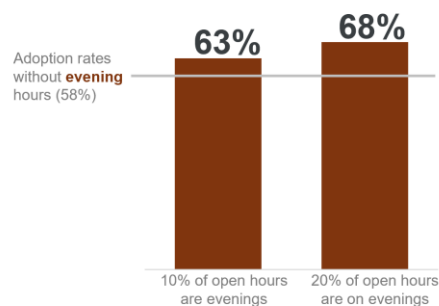
Evening and weekend hours matter

We found that adoption rates tend to be higher in shelters where evening and weekend hours make up a large share of business hours, which is no surprise. After all, these shelters are providing their community with greater access to adoptable animals by being open at times when community members are more likely to be free.

What's interesting here is that we examined evening and weekend hours as a *share* of overall business hours. It's not necessarily a matter of more hours overall; the evening and weekend hours are more valuable.



As an example, consider shelters where weekend hours make up 20% of overall hours. A simple linear regression shows these shelters with adoption rates of about 60%. Shelters where weekend hours make up 40% of overall hours, on the other hand, have adoption rates of about 72%.



The impact of evening hours was more modest but not insignificant. Again, using a simple linear regression, we see that shelters with 10% evening hours had adoption rates of about 63%, compared to 68% for shelters at the 20% level.

There's a lot of variation in the data, and every shelter has its own staffing limitation — but these results illustrate the larger point.

Different hours for different intake levels

A deep dive into any large dataset is likely to yield some surprises. In this case, we found that the relationship between a greater share of weekend hours and higher adoptions rates varied somewhat with shelter intake levels. Shelters admitting more than 2,100 animals annually seem to benefit more from weekend hours than shelters admitting fewer animals do — but, again, the general pattern persisted regardless of intake level.

Putting the research into context

It's important to recognize that this sort of analysis is inherently tricky because, although the results can reveal important relationships, it's not clear whether any particular factor *causes* a particular effect. That said, our findings align very well with our experience and that of our many Network partners; they quantify what so many in the animal sheltering field already "know."

To that point, this analysis establishes a consistent correlation between which hours a shelter is open and their adoption rates, but it's possible that something related to adoption hours, but not the hours themselves is driving higher adoption rates in these shelters. Perhaps it's the public's knowledge of the shelter, its services, and how well they are welcomed upon visiting.

It's also important to recognize that adoption hours are only one piece of the puzzle. How much do residents know about the animals in care? Do they feel welcome to visit? How much do they know about the programs and services available? Each aspect of a shelter's operation can contribute to adoptions — and, ultimately, lifesaving.

Take action

Which days and times are best for adoptions in your shelter? When was the last time you conducted an audit? There might be some surprises. And even if you don't have the option to increase or reduce adoption hours, you might be able to reallocate staffing so the potential adopters receive the best experience during "rush hour."

Sample/methods/analysis

Our analysis was based on a convenience sample of 482 shelters (42.3% municipal, 30.1% private shelters with contracts, and 27.6% private shelters without contracts) for which we had both shelter data (from our national dataset) and adoption hours (from Petfinder listings). The bulk of the shelter data was from 2024 (84.0%), with the remainder from 2023 (9.5%), 2022 (4.6%), and 2021 (1.9%).

The available data included shelters from all states other than Alaska, Delaware, Idaho, and Vermont were included in our convenience sample. Hours of operation from Petfinder listings were considered adoption hours, unless otherwise noted. We treated "closed" and "appointment only" as essentially the same (i.e., 0 hours), and hours after 5:00pm were considered "evening hours."