Paws in the Field Challenge Practices Guide
May 2025 | *Paws in the Field Challenge*

You recently registered for the Paws in the Field Challenge and agreed to pilot innovative community-based field services tactics to increase return-to-home (RTH) rates in-field and in-shelter this May. Your success in the challenge will be measured by an increase in RTH rates (both in-field and in-shelter) in May 2025 compared to May 2024.

We're here to help you be successful! Review the challenge steps and resources below to support your new lifesaving practice. Need additional support? Complete this contact form, and a member of our network team will reach out to you shortly.

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Ready. Set. Challenge!

These steps are our recommendation based on the experience of other shelters, but if that doesn't work for your organization, that's okay! Do it the way that works for you, and we're here if you need support.

- **Step 1: Create A Plan:** Create a plan to implement your new return to home practices and the operational requirements of this challenge. Towards the end of April, you will receive field services kits that include a universal microchip scanner, found pet flyers and door hangers, a slip lead, carabiners and more! We encourage you to print more door hangers and flyers as needed. We used Minuteman Press, but feel free to use whichever company is most convenient for you. In a separate shipment towards the end of April, you will receive QR code pet tags to distribute within your community.
- **Step 2: Get Buy-in:** Discuss with staff, volunteers and any other stakeholders and get them excited about the Challenge and what this could mean for your org! Having a hard

time securing buy-in? Sometimes positioning a new change or program as a pilot can help you secure buy-in with your community or officials; pilots often feel less intimidating because they're time bound, impact is measured, and it's clear that if they're not successful, they can be undone. Our hope is that whatever you call these changes, you'll see an increase in lifesaving and decide to keep them in place long-term.

- **Step 3: Communicate:** Use the [Paws in the Field Marketing and Communications Guide](#) to inform the community about these changes. For example, promote your plans to post found pet information and distribute QR code tags!

- **Step 4: Track Your Data:** Make sure that your monthly data is current in Shelter Pet Data Alliance (SPDA) to ensure that you meet the requirements for grant funding. In SPDA, we combine RTH in-field and in-shelter numbers into one RTH number, but we recommend that you make note of your May 2024 return to home from in-shelter and return to home in-field numbers so that you can see how each type of RTH was impacted by your new operations. We recommend that you share your numbers from May 2024 with your team before you start and do weekly updates on how your May 2025 numbers compare to May 2024 to help motivate the team and keep the momentum going!

- **Step 5: It's Challenge Time:** May 1, get going using the resources below to save more lives! We're here to support you along the way. Don't forget to use your field services kits that include a universal microchip scanner, QR code pet tags, found pet flyers and door hangers, and more!

Return to Home Practices & Resources

- [Return-to-Home (Owner) Training Playbook](#)
- [Field Return-to-Home (Owner) Training Playbook](#)
- [Beyond the Scanner: Advanced Return-to-Home (Owner) in-Field Techniques](#) (video)
- [Lost and Loved: Empowering Your Community to Get Lost Pets Home](#) (webinar)
- **Heat Mapping:**
  - Plotting your data as a heat map can be extremely effective in targeting services, especially as it relates to field operations.
  - Some shelter management platforms have integrated heat mapping software that can be utilized, while many do not and will require use of an external tool.
    - Follow [this guide](#) to prepare your data for mapping and to utilize Google Earth to [build a heat map](#).
  - We recommend that you utilize heat maps to do things such as:

- **Map locations of stray dog intakes** by officers and stray intake found locations when citizens bring them to the shelter, then use that data to concentrate the following efforts in areas with a high volume:
  - **Allocate enough officer coverage** to the area to allow for return to home in-field efforts
  - **Deploy Network Neighbors** program (if provided Network Neighbor pilot yard signs as part of the challenge)
  - **Target pet retention efforts,** including microchipping clinics, QR code tag distribution, and sharing lost pet resources.
- **Map addresses of residents that reclaim their pets** as part of RTH and compare with stray intake map.
  - Are there areas of your community where you see a lower reunification rate (high numbers of stray intakes and low numbers of RTH)?
    - What are the characteristics of that area?
    - What can you do to better communicate with those populations?
    - Examples include translation of materials, speaking at neighborhood meetings, offering Network Neighbors yard signs, etc.