

# How to Conduct Successful Adoption Events

An action kit to help shelters and rescue groups find homes for many animals at once



**SAVE  
THEM  
ALL**

[bestfriends.org](http://bestfriends.org)





## About Best Friends Animal Society

Best Friends Animal Society is the only national animal welfare organization dedicated exclusively to ending the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters. When Best Friends began in 1984, some 17 million animals died every year in our nation's shelters, simply for not having safe places to call home. Today, that number is down to about 4 million. That's incredible progress, but it also means that more than 9,000 wonderful dogs and cats are still losing their lives every day. Together, we can change that.

For 30 years, Best Friends has been working with you to create a no-kill nation by running innovative grassroots programs, supporting spay/neuter and TNR (trap/neuter/return) programs, promoting shelter adoptions, fighting puppy mills and breed-discriminatory laws, educating the public about animal issues, holding major adoption events, and conducting both large- and small-scale animal rescues. Best Friends also leads a No More Homeless Pets Network to help animal welfare groups around the country save more lives in their own communities.

The work of Best Friends began at our scenic sanctuary located in the majestic red-rock canyons of southern Utah, which still serves as a model of care for special-needs animals, who often need just a little extra help before they're ready to be adopted. On any given day, about 1,700 dogs, cats and other animals from around the country take refuge here.

All of this is made possible by the donations of our members. Together, we can **Save Them All**.™

### **Best Friends Animal Society**

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**Adoption events don't have to cost a lot of money or involve a huge investment of time. To pull off a successful event, though, you need to do some planning. The goal is to bring the animals to the people in a festive, fun atmosphere so you can increase the animals' exposure to the public and better their chances of adoption.**

A successful adoption event — one that draws a crowd and results in many adoptions — benefits all the animals at area shelters and rescue groups because it publicizes your efforts, thereby encouraging even more adoptions. You can also collaborate with other local rescue groups or shelters to put on adoption events. Pooling the resources of several groups allows for larger events, attracts more potential adopters, offers the public a bigger selection of pets from which to choose and, in the end, saves more lives.

**Here are the steps for putting on a successful adoption event:**

1. Establish your event's goals and create a plan for achieving them. (p. 3)
2. Set a budget for the event. (p. 3)
3. Select the best location and date to host your event. (p. 4)
4. Create a layout for the event. (p. 5)
5. Recruit, qualify and prepare local rescue groups and shelters. (p. 6)
6. Decide what equipment and supplies you'll need, and figure out how to acquire them. (p. 7)
7. Fundraise to cover event costs. (p. 8)
8. Recruit and train volunteers to help before, during and after the event. (p. 8)
9. Publicize the event. (p. 10)
10. Conduct the event and showcase your adoptables. (p. 11)
11. Prepare to relax: you're almost done. (p. 13)

See the resources section (starting on page 14) for a sample *Adoption Event Timeline* that gives suggested times for when to accomplish these tasks.



## 1. Establish your event's goals and create a plan for achieving them.

The first step is to set goals for your event. Decide how many adoptions you want to take place, how many attendees you would like to draw to the event, how many volunteers to have, and, if you're planning a multiple-group event, how many other rescue groups or shelters you would like to have participating. Without goals, you will not be able to describe your event in detail to those who will need to know what it's all about (e.g., the city officials who approve your permits, the sponsors you reach out to, the rescue groups and shelters you ask to participate).

The general rule of thumb is to have twice as many animals on-site as you wish to adopt out. For example, if you hope to complete 50 adoptions, plan on having around 100 animals for potential adopters to choose from during the event. While the idea of "running out of animals" may seem wonderful, it's not really desirable for adopters to feel as though there aren't many animals from which to choose. You also want to make sure that a good selection remains as animals are adopted out, so plan to replenish the number of animals throughout the event.

Next, start planning the event. How small or large do you want the event to be? The size of the event will depend on factors such as funding, human resources (staff and volunteers) and time available to prepare. In the resources section, you will find *Profiles of Small, Medium and Large Events*, which will give you a baseline to begin your planning. You'll need to be flexible as you develop plans for the event, but having a general plan will help you move on to the next steps in the process, such as setting a budget and selecting a location.

Another thing to consider early on, since it might affect the time of year that you hold the event, is whether you want to use a certain theme to help promote your event. You can use the time of year for a theme: seasons, holidays (e.g., Valentine's Day, Halloween), sports events (e.g., the Super Bowl, the World Series) or school events (e.g., homecoming, prom night). You can also use popular TV shows, awards shows, and current trends as themes. The way you express the theme doesn't have to be elaborate: At a December adoption event in St. George, Utah, that had a holiday theme, the venue was simply decorated with snowflakes and Santa images. In fact, you don't want to get so caught up in the details of planning around a theme that you lose focus on the main purpose of your event.

## 2. Set a budget for the event.

The next step is to create a budget, which means detailing all the potential costs for the event. In the budget, you will want to include all potential costs that you can think of, and then you'll want to do some research to come up with estimated dollar amounts. The resources section contains a *Sample Event Budget* that may be helpful.

One rule of thumb: When creating a budget, don't forget to allocate funds for marketing and publicity, since actively promoting your event is the best way to ensure that droves of people will come and, consequently, lots of animals will be adopted. If no one knows the event is happening, it won't matter how catchy your theme is, how prime the location is, or how well-run the event is.





### 3. Select the best location and date to host your event.

You can hold your adoption event at your organization’s facility or at an off-site location. It’s easier and cheaper to have the event at your own facility, but if it is located in an out-of-the-way spot with little pedestrian and vehicle traffic, that might not be ideal in terms of attracting lots of people. The best venues for adoption events are convenient to get to, well known to the public, in busy areas with lots of other nearby attractions (stores, restaurants, etc.), visible from the street, and pleasant places to visit with plenty of free parking.

Some possible locations for off-site adoption events are parks or the parking lots of pet supply stores. You’ll need to get permission from store managers or park officials, of course, and work out the details of event logistics. The sidebar lists some of the pros and cons of hosting the event in a park versus a parking lot. To help you know what to look for when choosing a location,

refer to the *Venue Checklist* in the resources section.

If you plan to hold the event at a time of year when the weather might be too hot or too cold for an outdoor event, consider finding a suitable indoor venue. Either way, indoors or outdoors, you’ll need to find out what permits are required for an off-site event. See *Getting Permits* in the resources section for more details.

If you do decide to host the event at your own facility, see *Tips for Events Held at Your Facility* in the resources section.

When should you hold the event? Weekends are generally best, since most people are off work and kids are out of school. Be sure to choose a weekend that doesn’t conflict with major religious holidays or other big community events. If you have the resources, consider hosting the event for more than one day in order to attract more people. Spring and fall are the best seasons for outdoor events.

Public City Park		Private Parking Lot	
PROS	CONS	PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaded, grassy area: visually more inviting, cooler in the summer</li> <li>• More relaxed feeling, more family-oriented: people more likely to stay longer</li> <li>• More comfortable for the animals</li> <li>• Staking allowed: easier to secure tents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More permits are usually needed</li> <li>• Often more secluded: More advertising needed to draw people</li> <li>• Possibility of damaging grass and trees</li> <li>• Harder to clean and disinfect</li> <li>• Electrical power, water and rest rooms may not be available</li> <li>• May have to design layout around trees and uneven terrain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often in high-traffic areas, making the event more visible</li> <li>• Easier to clean</li> <li>• Electrical power, rest rooms and water are more accessible</li> <li>• Terrain is level</li> <li>• Few permits to obtain</li> <li>• Local businesses may drive traffic to the event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In summer, pavement heats up and often there is little shade, making it uncomfortable for both animals and people</li> <li>• Staking for tents is not always allowed</li> <li>• No place to dispose of wastewater</li> <li>• Less inviting than a park setting: people may not stay as long</li> </ul>



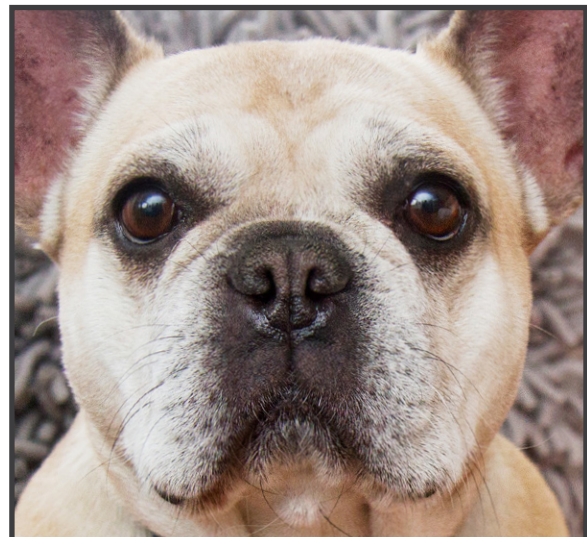
#### 4. Create a layout for the event.

Once you've selected your venue, you'll want to create a layout so that you can determine the maximum number of animals that can be shown at any given time and ensure that you have good "traffic flow." Here are some things to take into consideration when planning your layout:

- If possible, dogs and cats should have separate spaces because it decreases the stress level of the animals, and more relaxed pets show better to potential adopters.
- Put cats in a prominent location, as they tend to be more difficult to adopt out than dogs.
- If you're holding the event outside at a time of year when the weather might be warm, the animals will need to be protected from direct sunlight. Spend some time at the event site figuring out where the sun will be hitting during the event, and plan accordingly. It is best for cats to be housed in a completely enclosed tent if the event is outdoors, but make sure that you have suitable lighting and proper ventilation, such as fans and tent walls with windows or screens.
- If you will have food or other business vendors on-site, put them in a spot convenient for both you and them. They can also be used as a buffer between your dog and cat areas. (Keep in mind that having food and other vendors may mean you must get additional permits.)
- Designate several quiet spaces as meet-and-greet spots, where potential adopters can get to know a pet away from all the other animals and distractions, and can also introduce their own pets to an adoptable pet. It's a good idea to have trainers on hand at the meet-and-greet areas to

help facilitate dog/dog or dog/cat introductions, as well as answer adopters' questions about training and behavior.

- Set aside a space for tables or booths for adoption counselors to conduct interviews and facilitate adoptions.
- To encourage the public to circulate, think in terms of creating "flow," leaving no dead ends and creating paths that allow people to easily view the adoptable animals.
- If the venue is fenced, make sure the entrances are large enough that supplies can easily be hauled in and out.
- Make sure important components, such as restrooms, volunteer check-in, an information booth and a payment processing table, will be easy to find. (During the event, use signage to indicate where these things are located.)
- Designate an area where dogs can be walked and take potty breaks. (During the event, this area will need to be regularly monitored to keep it clean, especially if it is in a public area.)
- Generators tend to be very noisy, so if you are using one, position it as far away from the people and animals as possible.





## 5. Recruit, qualify and prepare local rescue groups and shelters.

If you are going to be putting in the time and resources to plan an adoption event, why not invite other shelters and rescue groups in the area to participate? Reaching a time of no more homeless pets can only be achieved if we all work together to save lives, and an adoption event is a perfect opportunity to do so. If you already partner with other local rescue groups and shelters, collaborating on an adoption event can strengthen those ties. If you haven't developed these types of partnerships yet, it's a great way to "break the ice."

The groups you invite may be able to contribute financial resources, staff and volunteer hours, event planning experience and more. Most important, the more groups that participate, the greater variety and number of animals you will have available for adoption at your event, which will result in more pets going home. Once you make the decision to include other groups, you will want to reach out to them as soon as possible, because the number of animals they can bring will affect the size of the space needed, the event layout, the expected number of attendees, your adoption goals and the number of volunteers needed.

In the resources section, you'll find samples of a *Letter to Potential Participating Rescue Groups or Shelters* and a *Shelter and Rescue Group Participation Form* that will give you an idea of how to approach other groups.

To ensure that participating groups know exactly what is expected of them before, during and after the event, it's advisable to have them sign a document explaining policies and procedures relevant to the event. See the resources section for a sample

*Policies and Procedures* document used by Best Friends at an adoption event in St. George, Utah. Once you have the signed policies and procedures document from a group, you'll want to send them a confirmation email that includes all the pertinent information about the event. (See the sample *Email Confirmation for Participating Shelters and Rescue Groups* in the resources.)

If you are asking other rescue groups or shelters to participate, put some thought into ways that you can streamline the event to ensure that it goes smoothly and results in a maximum number of adoptions. You don't want staff, volunteers and, especially, prospective adopters to find the event confusing or frustrating. For example, one easy thing that you can do as the event organizer is to print signs or banners containing the names of the groups for them to hang in their tents.

Consider asking all groups to use a standardized adoption application or the same adoption fees. Using reduced adoption fees for all dogs and cats (e.g., \$50 for dogs and \$25 for cats) is a great marketing tool, and may bring more people to the event. Because some groups are resistant to lowering their fees, you might want to give them the document called *Reduced-Fee Adoption Promotions: Concerns and Responses*, which can be found in the resources section.

Another issue is whether participating groups or shelters require home checks or personal reference checks before they adopt out their animals. You'll want to find out if they will have the appropriate people on-call in order to get these checks done within the time frame of the event.

You should also ask participating groups to prepare an adoption flyer or cage card for each of the animals they will be bringing to





the event. To be attached to the pet's cage at the event, the flyer or card should contain basic information about the animal and an adoption bio. The website [petbond.com](http://petbond.com) has a free flyer-maker that groups can use to create the flyers. It's helpful to give them a sample flyer to help them with formatting and wording. A [Sample "Adopt Me" Flyer](#) is in the resources section, along with [Sample Cage Cards](#). Ask the groups to bring extra copies of the flyers or cards to the event for your records.

To ensure the health and welfare of the animals and the integrity of your event, we recommend that you require rescue groups and shelters to provide you with copies of the following documents when they check in at the adoption event:

- A copy of each animal's veterinary records showing that he or she has been spayed or neutered, is current on rabies vaccination, and is current on the combo vaccination for dogs (DHLPP or similar) or cats (FVRCP)
- A copy of the animal's license or rabies certificate in the rescue or shelter's name

We also recommend that cats be tested for FIV and FeLV. To avoid confusion, establish beforehand who will be responsible for collecting these documents on-site. Also, be sure to communicate with representatives from each group before the event kicks off so that the host group and the collector of paperwork can introduce themselves, review important details and go over the event's schedule one more time.

In the resources section, you will find a sample [Event Schedule for Groups](#). You should prepare something similar to give to participating rescue groups and shelters so they know exactly what the schedule will be. It's also a good idea to have a meeting with

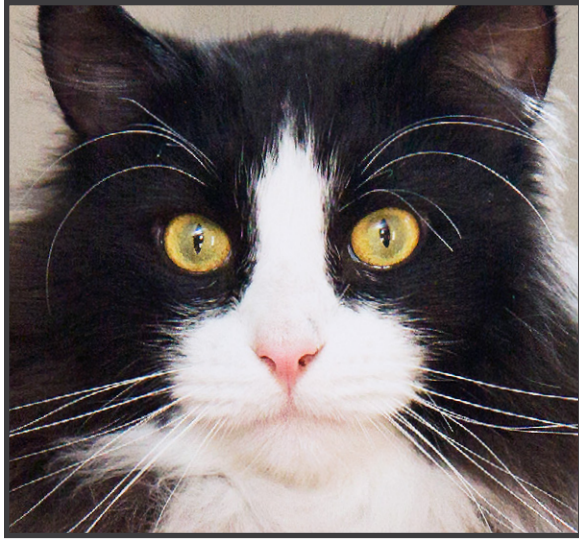
participating groups in the week before the event to review policies and procedures and answer any questions they have. During the meeting, you can also cover updates to the event's details; check-in and checkout processes; and on-site communication, including who to contact if they have questions once they arrive at the event location and how to contact vets or trainers on-site. In addition, the meeting is a good time to make sure that you have a name and cell phone number for each group's representative, in case any last-minute issues arise.

## **6. Decide what equipment, supplies and services you'll need, and figure out how to acquire them.**

Depending on the size and location of the event, you may need to procure a variety of equipment and supplies. It would be helpful to make a list of these supplies as soon as possible so you have plenty of time to gather the necessities. Supplies needed may include:

- Pop-up canopies
- Folding tables and chairs
- Office supplies (clipboards, pens, paper, tape, scissors)
- First-aid kit
- Large trash bags and trash cans
- Hand sanitizer
- Cleaning supplies
- Signage (e.g., "Welcome to our Adoption Event," "Volunteer Tent," "Ask a Trainer," and signs for the different groups if it's a multi-group event)
- Porta-potties (if no restrooms are on-site)

See [Suggested Supplies](#) in our resources section for a more detailed list of supplies you may need to purchase or rent for your event. If you're going to rent equipment such as canopies, tables and chairs, get bids from



several companies to compare costs. You may save quite a bit of money that way.

If your event spans multiple days and will take place outdoors, consider hiring a security guard to watch the premises overnight.

### **7. Fundraise to cover event costs.**

The number one reason that people give to a cause is simply because they are asked. One way to defray the costs of putting on an adoption event is to ask local businesses to donate either money or items that you need for the event, such as prizes and adopter gift bags. Send a letter to local companies explaining your adoption promotion and specifying what you would like them to donate. If you don't get a response, go to the business location and ask to speak to the business owner. In general, smaller companies may be more flexible and easier to work with, but be sure to approach any potential donor or sponsor in a professional manner.

For tips on soliciting donations from businesses, read *Getting In-Kind Donations* in the resources section. Make your proposal

to them unique, be upfront about what you want from them, and be prepared to offer the more generous donors some benefits in return. Examples of benefits to a business sponsor include:

- A reminder that their products will be seen by however many attendees you are expecting
- Placement of their logo on your print advertising
- Mention of the company's name on your radio or TV ads
- The emcee thanking the company for their sponsorship multiple times during the event
- The option of the company having a booth at your event, where they can promote their products or business

If you and your staff are too busy to do the legwork for getting donations, ask some of your best volunteers to help. Volunteers might also be willing to hold small fundraisers (e.g., bake sales, yard sales) to raise money for prizes or gift bags, or even donate some items themselves.

To encourage future donations, don't forget to send thank-you cards or emails — complete with photos of animals who were adopted — after the event to participating businesses.

### **8. Recruit and train volunteers to help before, during and after the event.**

Before recruiting volunteers, make a list of all the jobs you'll need filled, and the minimum age required for each job (or just set one overall minimum age). Depending on the size of your event, you might need to recruit volunteers to help with tasks such as putting up posters, handing out flyers,



walking and grooming dogs, staffing an information booth, helping to process adoption applications or serving refreshments. See the resources section for *Volunteer Position Descriptions*, which lists a variety of roles that volunteers could fill.

Once you determine the exact number of volunteers you will need, consider recruiting an additional 10 percent, since about 10 percent of volunteers either cancel or don't show up. How do you find volunteers?

First, invite volunteers already working at your shelter to help, and be sure to send them a save-the-date email so they put it on their calendars. You can use social media and local events to encourage involvement and recruit additional volunteers. You can also contact high schools and universities, social clubs, church groups, military groups, volunteer organizations and local corporations that send employees to volunteer in the community.

Word of mouth is another way to recruit volunteers. You can ask existing volunteers to invite their spouses, co-workers, friends and family to participate. Send out email invitations or make phone calls to people who have adopted pets from your organization and ask them to help. Of course, staff from your group or other participating groups can also serve as volunteers.

If your adoption event will be big and you'll need a large number of volunteers, consider forming volunteer subcommittees to handle specific portions of the event. Ideas for subcommittees include:

- Fundraising
- Shelter and rescue group coordination
- Volunteer coordination
- Marketing
- Entertainment and refreshments
- Site logistics

If possible, recruit a certified dog trainer (or two) to volunteer to be on hand during the event. In the resources section, *Enlisting the Help of a Dog Trainer* gives tips on finding good trainers and a list of roles dog trainers can fill at your event. One important role of the dog trainer is to serve as a facilitator in your "meet and greet" area, helping to ensure that introductions between adoptable dogs and prospective adopters' dogs go as smoothly as possible.

You should also consider asking a veterinarian to volunteer at the event (or, if you can't find a volunteer, pay a vet to be there) if multiple groups will be participating. A vet can check the animals' medical records as they arrive to verify that any required procedures have been done, identify animals who may be sick and contagious to others, and quickly address any medical issues that arise during the event.

To ensure that volunteers know what their duties are and what shifts they are expected to cover, create a document to track that information. See the resources section for an example of a *Volunteer Shift Tracker* that lists the shifts for a two-day event. As volunteers sign up, match their skills, interests and time availability to shifts that you need covered at the event.

Once you have your volunteers on board, consider inviting them to a volunteer orientation. At the orientation, you can make sure volunteers are up-to-speed on all the event details that they need to know. You should also have volunteers sign a release agreement indicating that they will not hold your organization liable for any injuries or harm. Inform them of their exact duties before the event, and give them a refresher once they arrive on-site. It's a good idea to assign the job of coordinating volunteers to one person (either someone on staff or a volunteer) so that volunteers aren't



left standing around during the event with no guidance or tasks to do.

At the event, designate an area for volunteers. It should be a place for them to check in and out, receive their job descriptions, get any questions answered, and access drinks or snacks that you are providing for them. Volunteers should be given name tags or T-shirts so they can be easily identified as volunteers.

Be sure to treat your volunteers graciously and respectfully from beginning to end. Try hard to meet their requests for their preferred shifts and jobs, allow time for breaks, thank them sincerely during the event, and send a thank-you card or email after the event.

## 9. Publicize the event.

Since the success of every event depends on lots of people showing up, it is vital to get the word out in as many ways as you can. Here are some fairly inexpensive ways to promote your event:

- Email all of your supporters and ask them to come to the event and also help you spread the word.
- Have a large banner created and put it up outside the shelter.
- Create eye-catching flyers or posters advertising the event and have volunteers ask local businesses (e.g., Laundromats, grocery and convenience stores, veterinary clinics, stores, pet supply stores, pet grooming businesses) and other places (e.g., churches, community centers, libraries) to post them where clientele can see them. You can also make smaller flyers and ask local businesses to stuff them into the bags of their customers.
- Create a door hanger and have volunteers distribute them in neighborhoods.

- Before and during the event, get volunteers to dress up in dog or cat costumes and position them on nearby busy street corners. Have them wave large signs steering the public toward the event. Be sure to check local ordinances in case this is not allowed or you need a special permit for this activity.
- On setup day or first thing in the morning on your event day, put up big yard signs at busy intersections and on medians all around your venue, ideally within a 1-2 mile radius of your event. Keep the text on the signs simple (e.g., “Pet Adoption Event at Green Park, 9-5 Today”).
- If you have multiple groups participating in the event, collaborate on marketing and publicity, sharing the costs and pulling together ideas from all the groups.

Make sure the flyers, posters and signs you create are attractive and will appeal to your target audience. Ask your volunteers and staff if any of them have graphic design skills or if they know a graphic designer who might be willing to donate his/her services to produce attention-grabbing promotional pieces. If you can't afford full-color printing, use brightly colored paper or cardboard.

Don't forget to promote your event online:

- Advertise it prominently on your website and the websites of the other groups, if multiple organizations will be participating.
- Go to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Craigslist, and post notices, photos and information about the event. Add an event page to your Facebook account and post flyers for the available adoptable pets on your Facebook wall. Ask friends, family and fellow rescuers to share the posts.
- Start your own blog (free via Blogger or WordPress) or go to your local newspaper's online blog or forum pages and





leave a comment with details about your adoption event.

- Post event details on online community calendars, which are available in most cities and are usually free.

You'll also want to publicize the event through traditional media, such as newspapers, television and radio. Generating a news release and a PSA (public service announcement) for radio and TV will help attract the attention of media outlets. For tips on writing news releases and PSAs, read [Writing a News Release](#) and [Writing a Public Service Announcement](#) in the resources section. If you plan far enough in advance, you can ask a radio station to conduct a live broadcast from your event.

Another idea: Consider coming up with a special pre-event promotion just for the media, to get the news out in advance of the event. For example, invite the media (via a special press release) to a pre-event “puppy party” that includes adoptable puppies romping around, party hats and balloons, and dog-friendly “pupcakes.” Include some cute visuals in the press release to grab the attention of the media. The mention on the



news will probably be short, so emphasize the dates and location of the event.

Don't hesitate to ask for free or discounted advertising or publicity. You may be surprised at how willing people are to help out nonprofits, especially if it's a cause dear to their hearts. See [Getting In-Kind Donations](#) in the resources section for some tips on how to approach potential donors.

Finally, to figure out what aspects of your marketing and publicity were most effective, ask attendees to fill out a short survey indicating how they heard about the event. On the survey, list all the avenues through which you advertised so they can check off all that apply, and give them the option to list other sources as well. If you want to find out what attendees think about other aspects of the event (e.g., ease of getting information about adoptables or figuring out the adoption process), include additional questions on the survey. Also, collect the full names and email addresses of attendees on the survey so that you can add them to your mailing list. To provide an incentive for attendees to fill out the survey, consider asking a local business to donate a prize or gift certificate to be given via a random drawing to one of the attendees who completed the survey.

## 10. Conduct the event and showcase your adoptables.

Your event will hopefully attract multitudes of potential adopters, all looking for that one special pet. Here are some tips for making the event run as smoothly and successfully as possible:

- If it's a multi-group event, make sure you ask groups to report to the venue early enough for them to get set up and have animals in place well in advance of the start time for the day. The event will ap-



appear disorganized if potential adopters are strolling through the venue while staff are still setting up. Also, ask groups to stay until the end of the event; it looks unprofessional if staff are packing up while the event is still going on.

- If your budget allows, rent a stage and consider bringing in an emcee for the event, at least for the hours when you expect peak attendance. To find an emcee, search your network of friends, family and co-workers for potential ties to local celebrities, or ask a gregarious staff member or volunteer to do it. The emcee can give out adoption updates, profile individual animals, announce special adoptions, talk about the importance of adoption and spay/neuter, and keep the enthusiasm level high.
- Devise a way to easily identify staff and volunteers. For example, they could wear name tags or shirts or vests of the same color.
- Have all the adoptable dogs wear bandanas saying “Adopt Me” so that it’s easy to identify which ones are still looking for a home (to distinguish them from dogs undergoing the adoption process or brought in by the public).
- Assign a few volunteers the job of keeping the venue clean: picking up doggie messes and trash on the ground, cleaning litter boxes, making sure trash cans are emptied regularly. You want attendees to have as pleasant an experience as possible so they will stick around and adopt.
- If you can secure the appropriate permits and it is allowed at the event venue, have food and drinks for sale because it encourages people to stay longer.
- Find the biggest white board, flip-chart or chalkboard that you can, and use it to display an updated number of adoptions

to the crowd. It will help keep morale high, reminding everyone why they are all there.

- Have basic supplies (a few pens and markers, paper or cardboard, tape, scissors, paper towels, doggie poop bags, etc.) available for people to use if needed.
- Keep accurate records of the number of animals brought to the event and the number of animals adopted. These statistics will help support your future fundraising efforts.

After all the planning and preparation, you’ll want to do everything you can to highlight the animals at your event. Here are some tips to make your adoptables appealing:

- Have an adoption bio attached to each animal cage, to allow potential adopters to get to know the animal even if staff or volunteers are occupied with other people. The adoption bios should include more than a list of the animals’ vital statistics. For tips on writing bios that will help get pets adopted, see [How to Write Compelling Adoption Profiles](#) in the resources section. If you want to put each bio on a flyer, go to [petbond.com](#) to get access to a quick flyer-maker.
- Have plenty of volunteers and staff in the dog and cat areas to answer questions about the animals. Be sure to train volunteers in advance so they can talk about the animals using positive language (for example, “would be a great running companion, especially with a harness” instead of “kind of hyper and pulls on leash”).
- Decorate the tops of the cat cages and dog kennels to make them look snazzy. You can find cheap decorations at your local dollar store.
- Make sure the animals are clean and well-groomed (including clean ears and clipped nails) so they are looking their best.



- If possible, have cat-savvy volunteers take cats out of their cages to show to potential adopters. Cats are more appealing when they are interacting with people.
- Dress up animals who are more challenging to find homes for (e.g., big dogs, black cats) with colorful bandanas or sparkly collars.
- Have volunteers take dogs (wearing bandanas proclaiming “Adopt Me”) on leash for brief walks around the venue to greet attendees. The exercise not only gives dogs some “face time,” it helps to reduce their anxiety.
- Have the emcee showcase some of the more challenging adoptables on stage, with someone who knows the animal talking about his or her great qualities.
- Read *Troubleshooting Tips* in the resources section to help you be prepared for incidents such as a loose cat, a dogfight or a sick animal.

## 11. Prepare to relax: you're almost done.

Once the event is finished and cleaned up, don't forget to take down any yard signs or other advertising that you posted in public places.

You can then relax a bit, but there are still a few things left to do. To spread the word about the success of your event, write a story about it and post it, along with photos, on your website and Facebook page and in your newsletter (if you have one). In the story, give total adoption numbers, but also focus on the human-interest angle by featuring one or two of the adopted pets and their new families. Also, small local or community newspa-

pers might be interested in publishing the story, so give them a call.

While the event is fresh in your mind, you should write a post-event recap, answering in detail the following questions: What worked? What didn't work? What could we do better next time? The recap will help you when planning a future adoption event, as well as make it easier if somebody else is leading the effort next time. To gather information about what worked and what didn't, consider inviting event staff and volunteers to a meeting to discuss it.

Another great idea: Within a week after the event, send out a survey via email asking volunteers about their experience at the event. Their feedback will tell you what went well and what needs improvement. See the *Sample Volunteer Survey* in the resource section to get an idea of what to ask.

If your event involved multiple groups, you'll want to get their input as well. The resources section contains an *Animal Groups Outcomes Form* that shows what kind of information to solicit from the participating animal organizations. If you have a large number of people from whom you want to get feedback, you could distribute a short survey (either electronic or hard-copy) and compile the results. Consider using a Google form or [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) if you decide to do an electronic survey.

Finally, send thank-you notes or emails promptly to all the volunteers, staff, sponsors, donors and others who contributed to the event. Receiving a heartfelt thank-you generally makes contributors eager to help out in the future. In the thank-you notes, be sure to mention the number of animals who found their forever homes so that people know that their efforts saved many lives and enriched many families.



# Resources





## Adoption Event Timeline

### 5-6 MONTHS AHEAD

- Establish the overall theme for the event
- Pick possible dates for the event
- Secure a location based on your date choices
- Begin brainstorming on fundraising ideas

### 4 MONTHS AHEAD

- Create a tentative budget (be prepared to be flexible with it as time goes on and planning details change)
- Take out an insurance policy if necessary
- Contact equipment companies for bids on larger items such as tents, tables, chairs, PA system
- Implement fundraising tactics

### 3 MONTHS AHEAD

- Apply for all appropriate permits through the city
- Invite other rescue groups or shelters to participate (if applicable) and set expectations
- Get marketing materials designed and ordered

### 11 WEEKS AHEAD

- Sign a contract with the equipment company
- Start contacting businesses for donations

### 10 WEEKS AHEAD

- Begin recruiting volunteers
- Add the event to online community calendars

### 8 WEEKS AHEAD

- Keep in touch with participating groups to make sure everyone is still on board

### 6 WEEKS AHEAD

- Make a plan for promoting the event via social media

### 3 WEEKS AHEAD

- Create a Facebook event and distribute marketing materials, press releases and PSAs
- Touch base with volunteers and give exact assignments
- Give any new updates to participating rescue groups and shelters

### 2 WEEKS AHEAD

- Kick social media postings into high gear
- Check in with the equipment company, vendors, sponsors and the event venue to make sure everything is still on track
- Prepare a script (if applicable) for the emcee and share it with him or her
- Confirm the participation of other rescue groups and shelters (if applicable)

### 1 WEEK AHEAD

- Shop for any supplies still needed for the event
- Have an orientation meeting for volunteers
- Email any last-minute reminders or updates to participating groups and volunteers

### 2-3 DAYS AHEAD

- Shop for any last-minute supplies
- Email final reminders to participating groups and volunteers



## Profiles of Small, Medium and Large Events

### SMALL EVENT

**Possible location:** Shelter, mall (all indoors or have dogs outside, cats inside)

**When:** If held indoors, you can do the event at any time of year. During warmer months, it may be more of a draw to have part of the event outside — perhaps dogs outside and cats inside.

**Planning time:** 1–2 months

**Adoption goal:** 50–75 adoptions

**Duration:** 1 or 2 days

**Number of groups needed:** 4+

**Number of animals needed:** 100–150

**Setup time:** 1 day

**Level of difficulty:** Low to medium, depending on how difficult it is to get landlord approval and the amount of preparation needed. The event may become streamlined enough to hold fairly often, even once a month or bimonthly. You can use the same equipment and location with a new theme each time (e.g., coinciding with the holidays or seasons). As you hold more and more adoption events, costs will go down and you may be able to find sponsors to cover some of the expenses.

### MEDIUM-SIZED EVENT

**Possible location:** Parking lot (mall or shopping center) or small park or recreation area

**When:** Spring or fall are best if the event is held outdoors. If held during summer months, you will need to provide air conditioning and shade for the animals and participants.

**Planning time:** 3–4 months

**Adoption goal:** 100–150 adoptions

**Duration:** 1 or 2 days

**Number of groups needed:** 8–17

**Number of animals needed:** 200–300

**Setup time:** 1–2 days

**Level of difficulty:** Medium. You'll need to start planning a lot sooner than you would for a small event. You may need to obtain various permits, landlord and/or city approval, and insurance to cover your group. You may need to find overnight facilities for animals in case of bad weather or cold temperatures.



## Profiles of Small, Medium and Large Events

### LARGE EVENT

**Possible location:** Parking lot, park or recreation area

**When:** Spring or fall are best if the event is held outdoors. If held during summer months, you will need to provide air conditioning and shade for the animals and participants. You will also need to provide overnight holding facilities for animals in case of bad weather or cold temperatures.

**Planning time:** 4–6 months

**Adoption goal:** 300–600 adoptions

**Duration:** 3–4 days

**Number of groups needed:** 18+

**Number of animals needed:** 750–1,000

**Setup time:** 2–3 days

**Level of difficulty:** Medium to high. You'll need to obtain various permits, landlord and/or city approval, and insurance to cover your group. You will need to determine a layout as far ahead as possible. A committee should be assembled to delegate the various tasks.



# Sample Event Budget

## XYZ ADOPT-A-THON EVENT BUDGET

Goals: Adopt out over 100 animals during this event, create community awareness about homeless pets and help unite the community animal organizations.

### Event Expenses

Tents, tables, chairs  
Fencing, kennels  
Sound system  
Portable restrooms  
"Adopt Me" bandanas  
Venue fees

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**Subtotal** **\$6,000**

### Supplies

Cleaning supplies  
Decorations  
Office supplies  
First aid kit  
Water buckets, poop bags  
Other animal care supplies

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**Subtotal** **\$500**

### Advertising, Marketing and Signage

Posters, flyers, counter cards  
Banners  
Event signage  
Print advertising  
Radio advertising, radio remotes

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**Subtotal** **\$7,000**

### Permits

Mass gathering permit  
Zoning permit

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**Subtotal** **\$200**

### Miscellaneous

Travel  
Food and drink  
Copies

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**Subtotal** **\$300**

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**Grand Total:** **\$14,000**

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## Venue Checklist

- Venue is in a central, convenient, well-known location.
- Venue is highly visible to drive-by and/or pedestrian traffic.
- Venue has pedestrian traffic.
- Venue has a separate area for cats.
- There is good air and traffic flow with multiple, visible entrance points.
- Venue has space near the exit for an adopter checkout point (to enable you to keep track of adoption results).
- Venue has space for sponsor tables.
- There is space for a small riser or stage that is visible from most spots at the venue (to make public announcements and showcase adoptables throughout the event).
- There is an area for meet-and-greets for the dogs that isn't too far away from where the groups will be set up. (It's ideal to have several meet-and-greet areas.)
- There is a safe space just outside the venue where dogs can be walked for potty breaks.
- Venue has ample parking for attendees and groups.
- The groups will be able to load and unload their equipment and animals in an area that is close to where they will set up.
- There is a water source indoors and outdoors (ideally, with the option to hook up a hose).
- Venue has a place to sell food and drinks.
- There are public bathrooms (need one toilet for every 50 people).
- Venue has space for a volunteer and staff break area.
- There is a storage area.
- There will be access to the venue the day before the event, for setup.
- Venue has \_\_\_\_\_ square feet.

### **General size requirements, depending on the number of animals:**

250–400 animals: 14,000 square feet (20-25 groups)

400–550 animals: 20,000 square feet (25-30 groups)

550–800 animals: 35,000 square feet (30-50 groups)



## Getting Permits

Whether your event will be held in a privately owned facility a parking lot, or a municipal park, you will need to get permission in writing to have your event there.

Depending on where your event will take place, you'll need to adhere to certain city and/or state regulations pertaining to large public gatherings. Once you've received permission to hold the event, you'll begin the permit process. You will need to have a well-thought-out plan in order to complete the permit applications. You may be asked to provide information such as a detailed description of the event, a copy of your insurance policy (or possibly an additional insurance policy for the event itself), information about waste removal, fire marshal approval if there is tenting or fencing, an emergency medical plan, and a cleanup procedure.

To put on the event, you might need to get some or all of the following permits. To find out which permits are required, start with a call to the administrative office for your city government. Ask whether there are fees to secure the permits. Be sure to tell them of your nonprofit status, as some fees may be waived or reduced for nonprofits. Permits often come at no cost if an organization has 501(c)(3) status.

### Some permits you may need to get:

- **Mass gathering permit.** To get this permit, you will probably need to show that you will have an EMT at the event, portable toilets (wheelchair accessible), and insurance.
- **Zoning/traffic permit.** You'll need to prove that you will have enough parking spaces (including handicapped spaces) and that your event is not happening in a residential area or blocking any major access roads.
- **Temporary business license.** Nonprofits may have to obtain one, but you usually don't have to pay a fee.
- **Fire department permit.** The fire department probably has requirements for tent arrangements, fire extinguishers, and exits in tents. The fire department may want to do an inspection at the event itself. It depends on where you live and what the regulations are there. In terms of the pre-permitting process, the fire department usually will sign off on the zoning or temporary use permit.
- **Health department permit.** This usually falls under the mass gathering permit, but check with the health department to make sure.
- **Food handlers' permits.** These may be required for anybody who is handling unpackaged foods.
- **Sound permit.** This may be required if you are having an outdoor event and are using a PA system or speakers.



## Tips for Events Held at Your Facility

For various reasons, you may decide that instead of having an adoption event at a park or local shopping center, it would be best to host the event at your own facility. Maybe you have a new cage-free feline area that you're dying to show off, or your facility is already in a prime location that gets lots of visitors, or you don't have the funds to pay for an off-site venue. Whatever the reason, the following tips will help you to make an event at your facility successful:

- Members of the general public sometimes have a negative impression of the shelter environment, so make sure that your facility is extra clean and welcoming. If you have a particular theme for the event, decorate the facility accordingly.
- Staff and volunteers working the event should be enthusiastic and fully prepared. They should be dressed in branded organization apparel; should be able to answer questions clearly and accurately about the animals, the event and the organization; and should have excellent customer service skills.
- Even if it's primarily an indoor event, have your animals out and about on that day. If weather permits, consider putting some adoption tents in the parking lot or other outdoor space on your facility grounds. Ask volunteers to dress the dogs in "Adopt Me" bandanas and walk them around outside the facility.
- If you have areas of your facility that you want to show off, be sure to offer tours to attendees. Holding an adoption event is a great opportunity to get a large number of people coming through your doors, so take advantage of it. (Even if a family doesn't adopt on event day, if they're impressed with your facility, they may come back later to adopt.)
- To draw more people to the event, consider offering reduced adoption fees, "two for the price of one" adoptions or special fees for certain pets (such as black dogs and cats). Brainstorm with your staff and volunteers to think of ways to attract more attention to your facility and animals.
- Don't forget to market and publicize the event vigorously and widely. Again, brainstorm with your staff and volunteers; they may have some great ideas.



## Letter to Potential Participating Rescue Groups or Shelters

Dear Prospective Adoption Partner,

I would like to invite you to be a part of the XYZ Pet Adopt-a-thon, sponsored by XYZ Rescue. The event will be held at the PetSmart store located at 123 Main Street, St. Louis, MO 65432. This year, the dates for the three-day adoption festival will be Friday, May 2; Saturday, May 3; and Sunday, May 4.

If you are interested in becoming one of our adoption partners at the event, please fill out the attached Group Participation Form and send it back to me via fax or email as soon as possible. This is only a preliminary form to help us start planning for the event. The deadline for definite confirmation as to your participation will be April 10.

This is going to be a super event and I am looking forward to working with you. We will keep in close contact with you as we get closer to the adopt-a-thon. You will receive details on general policies and procedures as well as other pertinent information as the event weekend draws nearer.

If you have any questions, please contact me via phone or email.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe  
Events Coordinator  
XYZ Rescue  
(123) 456-7890  
janed@rescue.org



# Shelter and Rescue Group Participation Form

## XYZ PET ADOPT-A-THON

**MAY 2–4, 2012**

If you are interested in participating in the pet adopt-a-thon sponsored by XYZ Rescue, please provide us with the following information.

**Name of rescue group or shelter** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**What days would your group like to participate in the XYZ Pet Adopt-a-thon?**

- Friday, May 2, 2012 (3–8 pm)
- Saturday, May 3, 2012 (10 am – 7 pm)
- Sunday, May 4, 2012 (10 am – 5 pm)

**Approximately how many animals do you think your group would be able to bring to the adopt-a-thon each day?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Approximately how many dogs each day?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Approximately how many cats each day?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Would you be able to bring cat cages to the event?**  Yes  No

If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you think your group will need extra volunteer assistance with transportation of animals and basic operations during the event?**  Yes  No

**Does your group want to be on the planning committee for this event?**  Yes  No (Being on the planning committee involves attending mandatory meetings and actively participating.)

**If yes, the following person will be the committee representative:**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional comments or suggestions:**

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# Policies and Procedures for Participating Groups

## GENERAL POLICIES

**PLEASE READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY, initial in the space provided for each item, sign and return to Jane Doe by Friday, November 9. If you need clarification on any items, please contact Jane at [janed@rescue.org](mailto:janed@rescue.org).**

\_\_\_ Groups are not allowed to sell anything, but donations can be collected.

\_\_\_ Groups need to plan for adequate volunteer staffing to interact with the public, complete adoptions, and provide care and walks for their animals. Ideally, you should have at least one customer service person, one adoption person and one animal care provider for every 10 dogs and every 20 cats. Since cat and dog areas will be separate, you should have a minimum of two adoption counselors if your group is bringing both cats and dogs.

\_\_\_ **MEDICAL:** All animals must be at least 8 weeks of age, healthy, vaccinated a minimum of one week before the event, and spayed or neutered before the event. Proof of vaccination and spaying or neutering is required at the event. In instances when animals have not yet been spayed or neutered due to age, the organization must ensure spay/neuter follow-up within 30 days of adoption.

If we feel that any animals are medically unfit to be shown (e.g., because of illness or because the animal is too young), we will ask you to remove those animals from the event. Any animals under 8 weeks of age or under 2 pounds will not be allowed at the event: no exceptions. Additionally, any animal deemed by us or the volunteer trainers to pose a risk to people or other animals must be removed from the event.

\_\_\_ **SUPPLIES:** Groups need to provide their own cages, equipment and supplies, including litter boxes, poop bags, harnesses, leashes, toys, food and water dishes, bedding, animal bio signage for show cages, clips to attach them, and anything else required for their animals for the duration of the event. Cats will be housed in a separate, enclosed tent with cages placed on tables.

\_\_\_ **CAGE CARDS OR SUMMARY SHEETS:** All animals must have cage cards or summary sheets visible at all times on cages or runs. Cage cards should contain the group's name, the animal's name and some information about the animal. Animals on hold must be marked "hold" to avoid confusion and frustration for adopters. You can use the free flyer-maker at [petbond.com](http://petbond.com) to create the cage cards. We suggest that you make additional copies to provide as handouts to potential adopters who may want to "think about it." The cage card gives them both a visual reminder of the pet and your contact information.

\_\_\_ **CLEAN WATER:** All dogs and cats must have access to fresh, clean water at all times.

\_\_\_ **FOOD:** Food must be provided for all animals as needed.



# Policies and Procedures for Participating Groups

## GENERAL PROCEDURES

\_\_\_ CHECK-IN: You must check in with the designated check-in person each day that you are participating. You may unload your animals only after you have checked in. Please ensure that you leave a person with any vehicle containing animals at all times. You will need to provide the following information when you check in:

- Group name and signature of the group representative
- Number of cats and dogs
- Completed cage cards (and/or summary sheets) for your animals
- Vet records for each animal (for inspection)

Please have the cage cards (and/or summary sheets) completed before you come to the event, as you cannot check in or unload without them.

Check-in times: Friday, 8–10 am, and Saturday, 7:30–8:30 am

\_\_\_ CHECKOUT: You must check out at the end of the day. All of your cages and kennels must be clean before you can check out. After you clean your cage and kennel areas, your area captain will work with you and your volunteer assistant to check you out.

\_\_\_ LEAVING THE EVENT: Please do not leave the event early. (We need to know the number of animals at the event at all times.)

## HEALTH AND DISEASE CONTROL

\_\_\_ CONTAGIONS: For the health and safety of your animals, as well as those from other participating agencies, it is not permissible to bring animals who are currently on medications for any contagious disease or a known parasite infection. We will have the final say about the fitness of an animal for adoption. This rule does not preclude the dispensing of appropriate medication to an adopter for follow-up care of an animal in a situation when a second round of treatment (e.g., a second dose of deworming medication) is recommended but the first round has been completed.

\_\_\_ REQUIRED VACCINATIONS FOR DOGS: Dogs will be required to have received DAPP, bordetella and rabies vaccines.

\_\_\_ REQUIRED VACCINATIONS FOR CATS: Cats will be required to have received FVRCP and rabies vaccines. (FIV and FeLV testing and vaccinations are recommended, but are not required. If testing hasn't been done, please be prepared to disclose this information to potential adopters.)

\_\_\_ ROUTINE PROCEDURES: Routine procedures (including, but not limited to, administering deworming medications and vaccinations) should be performed prior to animals' arrival at the adoption event. Microchipping is recommended, but is not required.

\_\_\_ YOUNG ANIMALS: Any animals 4 months of age or younger must be kept separate from each other, unless they come from the same litter or have been together before the event. Use one area just for puppies or just for kittens, and keep younger dogs in individual cages.



## Policies and Procedures for Participating Groups

### ADOPTIONS

\_\_\_ RETURNED ANIMALS: All groups must be able to accept returned animals.

\_\_\_ ADOPTION POLICIES:

1. All groups will perform their own adoption interviews.
2. All groups will use their own contractual agreements.
3. Adoption policies are based on each individual group's policies.
4. All groups are required to respond promptly and professionally to post-adoption complaints or questions from adopters.
5. All groups agree to use the following adoption fees for this event: \$50 for dogs, \$25 (or less) for cats. (If your group is unable to do this, please contact Jane Doe).

\_\_\_ IDENTIFICATION: All dogs and cats must wear a collar and identification that states with which group the animal is affiliated. This identification must remain on the animal at all times.

\_\_\_ CAGES AND CRATES: Bring wire cages for all dogs and cats. Crates for cats should be large enough to hold the cat, a small litter box and a water dish. Please do not use travel carriers. The holding crate for dogs must be large enough to comfortably house the dog and a water dish. Cats will be housed in a separate, enclosed tent with cages placed on tables.

\_\_\_ LEASHES AND CARRIERS: All dogs must leave the event on leash or slip lead. All cats must leave in a carrier. WE WILL NOT PROVIDE LEASHES, SLIP LEADS OR CAT CARRIERS. It is critical that you know that no animal will pass through checkout without these items.

\_\_\_ ADOPTION CHECKOUT PROCEDURE: We will provide instructions about this procedure before the event.

Name of rescue group or shelter \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of rescue group or shelter representative \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of rescue group or shelter representative \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Email Confirmation for Participating Shelters and Rescue Groups

Dear (rescue group or shelter name),

We are thrilled to have you participating in the XYZ Pet Adopt-a-thon! As a friendly reminder, it will be held May 2-4 at the PetSmart location at 123 Main Street, St. Louis, MO 65432. For your reference, I have attached a copy of the policies and procedures form that you signed, as well as a copy of the group participation form stating that your organization will be bringing around \_\_\_ dogs and \_\_\_ cats for adoption at the event.

As time goes on, we will be in touch with updated details of the adopt-a-thon, including what you should expect in the days leading up to the event and on the days of the event. Please keep an eye on your email in-box for these updates. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, you can reach me by email at [janed@rescue.org](mailto:janed@rescue.org) or on my cell phone at 555-444-1234.

Thank you for participating in this lifesaving event, and I look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

Jane Doe  
Events Coordinator  
XYZ Rescue  
(123) 456-7890  
[janed@rescue.org](mailto:janed@rescue.org)



## Reduced-Fee Adoption Promotions: Concerns and Responses

Having trouble convincing your board or volunteers about the value of reduced-fee adoption promotions? We've put together this resource to help you talk to your board and your volunteers.

### **Concern: Reducing the adoption fee devalues the animals and will attract less desirable adopters.**

Using a reduced-fee promotion is a form of advertising designed to bring more people to an adoption event. It's a great tactic to use to increase the volume of adoptions, especially when your rescue or shelter is over capacity.

It's also a great tactic to use when seeking homes for animals who are not as obviously desirable as others. Many shelters and rescue groups around the country (including Best Friends Animal Society) have special or reduced adoption rates for less easily adoptable and special-needs animals, or in situations when two animals need to be adopted together. It doesn't mean these pets are valued less. The idea is to provide incentive for people to take a second look at the animals who are being offered for adoption for a reduced fee.

The ASPCA reported on a **2006 study** that compared attachment levels of cat adopters who paid a fee and cat adopters who didn't pay a fee. According to the ASPCA, the resulting data, published in the Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science, indicates the following:

- Attachment to cats adopted from the study facility was not decreased when adoption fees were eliminated.
- Eliminating adoption fees does not devalue the animals in the eyes of the adopters.
- Free adult cat adoption programs could “dramatically impact the lives of thousands of shelter cats who would otherwise reside in a shelter for months or be euthanized.”

In addition, a survey was sent to more than 1,000 people who adopted dogs and cats during the Maddie's Matchmaker Adoptathon, a waived-fee adoption event done through Maddie's Fund. The survey showed that families reported high attachment and integrated pets into their homes, suggesting that successful adoptions do not require payment of a fee. For more information, read this article on the Maddie's Fund website: **“The Truth About Free Cat Adoptions.”**

In November 2012, Best Friends' 9 Lives for \$9 adoption promotion set the adoption fee for felines at \$9 for participating No More Homeless Pets Network partner groups around the country. Eighty-two out of 86 Network partners reported that the quality of adopters who applied during this promotion was either the same as or higher than the quality of adopters who come to them at any other time.





## Reduced-Fee Adoption Promotions: Concerns and Responses

### **Concern: If adopters can't afford the regular adoption fee, how will they afford to care for the pet throughout his/her life?**

Lots of people get their animals (especially cats) from friends or family or from “free to good home” situations. Just because they acquired their pets for little or no money doesn't mean they can't afford to care for them or don't provide good homes. Best Friends wants to encourage the folks who are accustomed to getting free pets to look at adoption as an alternative. By attracting new people to adoption events through reduced-fee promotions, rescue organizations have an opportunity to educate people about the benefits of adoption and spay/neuter and the plight of animals currently in shelters.

Also, almost everyone looks for great deals, whether or not they have lots of money. It doesn't mean they can't afford the product at full price — they just relish the idea of getting a deal. Best Friends encourages all rescue groups to include the costs of caring for a new pet in their literature so that potential adopters are aware of what they are signing up for.

### **Concern: Our rescue can't afford to reduce our adoption fees. With the cost of medical care and spay/neuter, we already struggle to make ends meet.**

#### **There are several reasons why we feel reduced-fee adoptions are still a good idea:**

1. Adoption fees around the country range from free to more than \$500 in some cases. Even at the full adoption fee, most rescue groups and shelters adopt out animals at a loss or, at most, break even. Consider this: The longer an animal is with your organization, the more it costs your group to care for him or her. Reduced-fee adoption events may save money because the goal is to move as many animals as possible into adoptive homes.
2. We are not suggesting that you run free or reduced-fee promotions often, since they lose their appeal and effectiveness if you do that. But focusing for a few weeks each year on adopting out some of your harder-to-place animals (e.g., senior dogs, FIV-positive cats, animals who need to be the only pet) shouldn't compromise your annual budget.
3. These promotions could draw in people who may not have otherwise noticed your organization. These people could become future donors, volunteers and/or repeat adopters, all because you caught their attention with the reduced-fee campaign.
4. And most important: By reducing adoption fees periodically, your group is encouraging more adoptions, thereby saving more lives. Too many animals are currently dying in shelters and they need our help to find homes.



## Reduced-Fee Adoption Promotions: Concerns and Responses

Ideally, your full adoption fees were set at the current rate because you determined that is what your market will bear, taking into account the current adoption fees in your area. If you have any questions about your adoption fees, contact your No More Homeless Pets Network specialist. If you're not sure who your specialist is, email [nmhpnetwork@bestfriends.org](mailto:nmhpnetwork@bestfriends.org). We're happy to help you with this assessment.

**Concern: I've been told that you should always charge an adoption fee to avoid attracting "bunchers," people who collect animals for resale to laboratories.**

Adoption screening practices should be maintained to ensure that all animals are going into good homes. We encourage you to let adopters know that you will be following up with them to answer any questions and to ensure that the transition into the home is going well.



## Sample “Adopt Me” Flyer



# Adopt Me



## Poncho

**Breed:** American Staffordshire Terrier  
**Location:** Best Friends Animal Society  
**Sex:** Male  
**Age:** 6

**Contact:** Best Friends Animal Society  
**Phone:** (435) 644-2001 ext. 4223  
**Email:** [adoptions@bestfriends.org](mailto:adoptions@bestfriends.org)

Poncho is one of the first dogs to trot over and welcome visitors. Half-prance, half-wiggle, if his funny swagger doesn't make you giggle, his big goofy grin will. Poncho came to Best Friends from a shelter in New Mexico. Born in 2007, much about his life is a mystery. But he seems to take everything in a stride. Whether going for a walk or taking a nap with you, Poncho really wants to be someone's sidekick. What do you say?



## Sample Cage Card

# Hi, my name is:

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**Organization name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ID#:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_  Neutered male  Spayed female

**Type of dog:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity level:**

- Couch potato/lap dog (low)  Daily walks/exercise (medium)  
 I want to go for a run (high)

**Good with other dogs:**  All  Some  No

Good with cats  Lived with cats  Seems to like cats  No cats

**Lived with kids:**  Yes  No

**Manners/training level:**

I know the basics  I'm well-trained  I'm a blank slate/no training

**My personality is best described as:**

- Confident  Outgoing  Shy  Smart  Silly  
 Playful  Happy  Gentle  Curious  Easygoing  
 Affectionate  Independent  Puppy



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## Sample Cage Card

# Hi, my name is:

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**Organization name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_  Neutered male  Spayed female

**My breed is:** \_\_\_\_\_

**My personality is best described as:**

Lap cat  Confident  Outgoing  Easygoing  Playful  
 Independent  Need TLC

**I am:**

Microchipped  Vaccinated  Good with cats  
 Good with dogs  Good with kids

**My story:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Event Schedule for Groups

### THURSDAY, MAY 1

**Noon – 5 pm:** All groups drop off cages

### FRIDAY, MAY 2

**11 am – noon:** Check in at the front information booth

**2 pm:** Adopt-a-thon begins

**8 pm:** Adopt-a-thon ends for the day

- Clean up your area
- Put animals in the holding area for the night
- Get an exit pass from your tent captain
- Check out at the front information booth

### SATURDAY, MAY 3

**7:30 – 9 am:** Check in (If you have left animals overnight, please check in by 8 am)  
Spray out dog kennels (We'll have volunteers to help)

**10 am:** Adopt-a-thon begins

**8 pm:** Adopt-a-thon ends for the day

- Clean up your area
- Put animals in the holding area for the night
- Get an exit pass from your tent captain
- Check out at the front information booth

### SUNDAY, MAY 4

**7:30 – 9 am:** Check in (If you have left animals overnight, please check in by 8 am)  
Spray out dog kennels (We'll have volunteers to help)

**Noon:** Adopt-a-thon begins

**5 pm:** Adopt-a-thon ends

- Clean up and tear down your area
- Get an exit pass from your tent captain
- Check out at the front information booth



## Suggested Supplies

**Attendance clicker:** You can use a clicker to keep track of the number of attendees, a statistic you can use for post-event PR and when preparing for a future event. Keeping track of attendance is also important for communicating numbers to sponsors and potential sponsors.

**Air horn:** Using an air horn is a good way to quickly alert staff and volunteers if an animal has gotten loose or a dog fight is occurring.

**Bandanas:** Dressing all adoptable dogs in matching bandanas makes it easier to identify them as the adoptables and provides some consistency to the event, especially if multiple groups are participating.

**Broom and dustpan:** You'll need these during post-event cleanup.

**Fencing with gated openings:** If the event is outdoors in an open area, fencing will help you to keep loose animals contained, keep track of the number of attendees, and ensure that no animals are stolen from the event. Plastic fencing may be purchased, and it's lightweight and easy to move, but it can look tacky and be knocked down easily. Chain-link fencing typically must be rented, tends to be expensive, and is difficult to move once set in place, but it provides a more secure site and professional appearance.

**Cleaning supplies:** You never know what kind of messes will happen, so have cleaning supplies on hand. You especially want to be able to clean up any messes on rented equipment.

**Decorations:** Having decorations around the venue that coincide with your theme will make the event more festive and fun.

**Donation jars:** If you're hosting a multi-group adoption event, make sure the donation jars clearly indicate where the donations are going.

**Plastic bags and/or poop bags:** Having rolls or stacks of poop bags placed around the event venue makes it easy to clean up messes as they happen.

**First-aid kit:** Minor cuts and scratches are bound to happen, so be prepared.

**Folding tables and chairs:** You'll need tables and chairs for adoptions to be facilitated, tables for cat cages to be placed on so the cats will be at eye level, tables for concessions or event sponsors, and chairs for volunteers and staff to sit on.

**Giveaways:** People love free stuff, so collect donations of collars, leashes, treats, food, toys, and anything else you think prospective adopters might like. These items can be given away as door prizes or distributed to those who adopt animals.

**Hand sanitizer:** Having bottles of hand sanitizer stationed around the event venue serves as a constant reminder to people to cleanse after handling an animal.

**Heating or cooling units:** Depending on your geographic location and the season, you might want to have heating or cooling units available. It's better to be safe than sorry if you are not sure what the weather will be.

**Jugs of water or watering cans:** Unless you have numerous water sources, filling up multiple water bowls can be a hassle. It's best to have jugs that can be used to fill water bowls before the event and then replenished as needed.



## Suggested Supplies

**Large trash cans and trash bags:** Make sure you have plenty of both.

**Name tags:** Consider giving name tags to volunteers, staff and anyone else helping to put on the event.

**Office supplies:** Clipboards, pens, paper, tape and scissors are some things to have on hand.

**PA system, or portable speakers and microphone, for the emcee:** Having an emcee can add to the fun and excitement. You can also use the PA system to play appropriate background music to make the event more festive.

**Pop-up canopies or tents:** If the event will be held outdoors, shelter in case of rain or shade from the sun is a necessity. Colorful canopies or tents will also draw attention to your event.

**Portable restrooms:** If there are no restrooms on-site, you'll need to rent portable toilets. When planning the number of porta-potties needed, take into consideration the expected number of attendees, staff and volunteers.

**Ribbon or yarn:** Tying ribbon or yarn to the collars of any owned animals brought in by the public lets gate workers know that people are leaving with their own animals.

**Signage:** You'll want to have clear and prominent signs, such as "Welcome to the Pet Adoption Event," "Volunteer Tent" and "Ask a Trainer." If it's a multi-group event, you'll need a sign for each group containing the group's name. Also, have signs requesting that people follow guidelines around the animals, such as "Please do not handle any animals or open the cages without assistance" and "Please sanitize in between handling animals."

**Snacks and drinks:** Consider having refreshments available for volunteers and staff. If that expense isn't in your budget, ask local restaurants or grocery stores for donations.

**Stage:** A rented stage can be used by your emcee or staff to make announcements, showcase adoptable dogs, and highlight event sponsors or donors.

**Traffic cones:** You might need traffic cones to reserve parking spots (e.g., to allow unloading of animals and equipment close to the entrance, reserve a parking space for radio personnel who are doing a live broadcast).

**Two-way radios:** Key staff and volunteers can use these to quickly relay messages to each other.

**Brightly colored vests:** Supplying key staff and/or volunteers with eye-catching vests or T-shirts will let attendees know who they are.

**Water buckets:** Place a few buckets filled with water around the venue to ensure that dogs who are out for walks have access to water.

**White board:** Display adoption number updates as the event progresses.

**Zip ties:** Use these for hanging signs, attaching cage cards, and more.



## Getting In-Kind Donations

When seeking donations to fund your event, you don't necessarily have to ask for cash. Some businesses may be more amenable to giving services or surplus goods rather than money. You might get food or drinks donated, or items that can be used as raffle prizes or giveaways, such as dog collars or toys. Be sure to send out thank-you cards or emails to everyone who donates, no matter how grand or small.

### **Here are some suggestions for getting things donated:**

1. Have the right person do the asking. It really helps to have someone who is energetic, upbeat and excited about your cause, as well as outgoing and good with people. Not everyone is comfortable with asking for donations, so make sure you select this person carefully. You could also find out if any of your volunteers have connections to the companies and can make introductions for you.
2. Ask the right person at the company. It's always best to approach a manager or key decision-maker so you don't get the run-around.
3. Ask in person, if at all possible. This strategy may take some additional time, but it will be worth it. It's harder for the company to turn you down face-to-face rather than via email or phone.
4. Approach the company with the attitude that you are going to help them feel good about helping you, not that you are desperate and are begging for their help. Sometimes, a humble approach helps: "I'm a volunteer, not a professional, and I'm calling to take a chance that you might be interested in contributing to our cause."
5. It helps to have literature with you, as well as information about the purpose of the event. It gives the companies something tangible to associate their donation with.
6. If your group is a nonprofit, be sure to let the company know that, and remind them that their in-kind donations may be tax-deductible.
7. Tell them exactly what you would like them to do, rather than saying, "Anything you could provide would be great." Being specific makes your request more meaningful and tangible to them. If what you are asking for isn't doable, then you can ask them what they would be able to help you with.
8. Ask the company if they would like to be a sponsor of the event, and then be sure to let them know what they would get in return. Think about different types of publicity and sponsorship perks you can give them. For example, if you receive free pizzas from Eddie's Pizza Pies to sell at your refreshment stand, promote them as "Eddie's Pizza Pies" rather than just "pizzas."
9. To further entice them to donate, tell them what kind of attendance you expect at the event and what kind of people will be there.



## Volunteer Position Descriptions

### EVENT SETUP VOLUNTEER

- Hang signage (tent banners, balloons on tents, small signs on animal crates, etc.).
- Distribute and set up tables and chairs.
- Distribute supplies and equipment.
- Help groups set up crates and materials.
- Make sure all areas are tidy and ready for potential adopters.

### TEAM LEADER FOR ON-SITE VOLUNTEERS

- Make sure volunteers are checked in and out.
- Make sure each volunteer has a name tag containing his/her name and volunteer position.
- Ensure that volunteers understand their duties.
- Give out vests, slip leads or other equipment to volunteers as needed.
- Advise volunteers of who their lead is and where to go.
- Act as the main contact for volunteers.
- Reposition volunteers as needed throughout the day.
- Place “floaters” in any areas where help is needed.
- Update adoption board numbers as adoption assistants report them (every hour or so).

### DOG TENT CAPTAIN

- Ensure that volunteers in the dog adoption area are in place.
- Be sure that volunteers know their assigned duties.
- Help check participating groups in, making sure they have met all setup requirements (cage card for each dog, food and water for the animals, etc.).
- Answer questions from groups.
- Assist shelter or rescue group assistants with their duties, as needed.
- Check to make sure the dog tent is clean, cages are secured, and the area is stocked with hand sanitizer, small garbage bags, extra pens and poop scoopers.
- Ensure that all dogs are on leash before they leave the tent, and that all dogs are being walked by groups throughout the day.
- Mediate any conflicts between adopters and rescue groups.
- Notify staff if an animal needs attention (e.g., if an animal appears sick).
- Act as a liaison among groups, staff, volunteers and the public.
- Use an air horn to alert staff about loose dogs or dog fights.
- Ensure that groups are following policies and procedures, and filling out paperwork properly.
- Make sure all adoptable dogs are wearing “Adopt Me” bandanas at all times.
- Connect with each group throughout the day to find out if they need more supplies or help, or if they have a dog who needs to be promoted on stage.
- Make sure the groups check out before they leave each day, assisting the checkout person with those duties as needed.





## Volunteer Position Descriptions

### CAT TENT CAPTAIN

- Ensure that volunteers in the cat adoption area are in place.
- Be sure that volunteers know their assigned duties.
- Designate a cat door guard, someone responsible for closing doors if a cat gets loose and making sure that dogs are not brought into the tent.
- Help check participating groups in, making sure they have met all setup requirements (cage card for each cat, food and water for the animals, etc.).
- Answer questions from groups.
- Make sure tables have the correct group signage attached.
- Check to make sure the cat tent is clean, cages are secured, and the area is stocked with hand sanitizer, small garbage bags, extra pens and poop scoopers.
- Shift cages as needed to keep the tables full.
- Assist shelter or rescue group assistants with their duties, as needed.
- Ensure that all cats are in crates before they leave the tent.
- Mediate any conflicts between adopters and rescue groups.
- Notify staff if an animal needs attention (e.g., if an animal appears sick).
- Act as a liaison among groups, staff, volunteers and the public.
- Use an air horn to alert staff about a loose cat.
- Ensure that groups are following policies and procedures, and filling out paperwork properly.
- Rotate balloons among the cat cages throughout the event to draw attention to different cats.
- Connect with each group throughout the day to find out if they need more supplies or help, or if they have a cat who needs to be promoted on stage.
- Make sure the groups check out before they leave each day, assisting the checkout person with those duties as needed.

### GATE WORKER

- Provide security at the gates.
- Greet and track attendees (using a provided clicker).
- Answer questions about the event and point attendees in the right direction.
- Close the gate if the air horn blows (which indicates a loose animal).
- If an attendee brings his/her own pet to the event, give the person a ribbon to tie to the animal's collar (to distinguish the animal from the adoptables at the event).
- Check that anyone leaving the gated area accompanied by an animal without a ribbon has the appropriate adoption paperwork.
- Offer a slip lead to anyone who brings in a dog without a leash.
- If there's a special entrance for rescue group and shelter personnel, make sure they check in and out at the appropriate gate.
- As they leave, thank attendees for coming.



## Volunteer Position Descriptions

### TRAFFIC CONTROL VOLUNTEER

- Make sure people are parking where they should be parking.
- Direct traffic if necessary.
- When applicable, make sure that spaces set aside for special purposes (e.g., unloading equipment, radio station personnel) remain clear, with the traffic cones in place.

### ADOPTIONS ASSISTANT

- If needed, help groups with any adoption-related tasks.
- Keep a tally of the number of adoptions and update the team leader for volunteers every hour.
- Make sure that adopters complete checkout forms in full and that their writing is legible.
- Answer any questions from adopters about the event or participating groups. (If the question is about a particular group, direct the person to that group.)
- Encourage adopters to have a photo taken with their new pet (if a photographer is available).

### SHELTER OR RESCUE GROUP ASSISTANT

- Help direct groups to the appropriate person to get them checked in to the event.
- Help unload animals and get them set up in their space, including attaching cage cards.
- Make sure the area is clean, cages are secured, and the area is stocked with hand sanitizer, small garbage bags, extra pens and poop scoopers.
- Walk dogs, clean crates, keep water bowls filled, scoop litter boxes and/or dog poop when necessary, and generally help to keep the animals safe, calm and engaged.
- Ensure that adoptable dogs are wearing “Adopt Me” bandanas.
- Assist the cat tent captain with rotating balloons to highlight certain cats.
- Learn about some of the animals to help showcase them to potential adopters.
- Be proactive about engaging attendees in conversation.
- Handle the animals featured on stage, if requested.
- Answer questions from attendees about the adoption process.
- Help adopters find group representatives if they have specific questions about an animal.
- Alert the team leader of any problems, human or animal.
- Help groups check out with the appropriate person. Alert this person if groups are packing up to leave.
- Keep in touch with the group’s leader to find out if you can help with any additional tasks.

### PHOTOGRAPHER

- Take high-resolution pictures of the event and the adopted animals with their new families.
- Send the photos, with captions, to the appropriate person after the event.



## Volunteer Position Descriptions

### MEET-AND-GREET AREA ASSISTANT

- Advise staff if a meet-and-greet is needed so that a trainer can facilitate the introductions.
- Assist groups in getting dogs to the meet-and-greet area.
- Help to maintain the safety of both people and animals by watching for loose dogs and signs of dog fights.

### MAINTENANCE VOLUNTEER OR FLOATER

- Perform maintenance tasks, such as restocking supplies, emptying trash cans, cleaning the porta-potties, sweeping up cat litter and scooping poop.
- Help shelter or rescue group assistants to keep their areas stocked and tidy (e.g. refresh water buckets, replenish hand sanitizers, fix crooked signage).
- Give support to other areas as needed.

### EVENT TEAR-DOWN VOLUNTEER

- Help break down tables, chairs and tents.
- Help to organize and pack up supplies and equipment.
- Help groups load their supplies into their vehicles.
- Make sure the area is clean (e.g., tables wiped, ground washed down, floor swept).
- Empty trash cans if necessary.

### DISTRIBUTION VOLUNTEERS

- Before the event, distribute marketing materials (e.g., ask local businesses to put up flyers, post flyers on community bulletin boards, distribute door hangers, put up yard signs).
- After the event, take down marketing materials.

### VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS ON THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

**Fundraising coordinator:** Develop and implement a successful plan to raise funds before and during the event by coming up with creative fundraising ideas that stay within the event budget and timeline.

**Shelter and rescue group coordinator:** Manage rescue groups and shelters so they know and follow procedures when participating in the adoption event.

**Volunteer coordinator:** Manage all volunteers so they perform effectively at the event.

**Marketing coordinator:** Create and implement the event marketing and publicity plan, including overseeing the production of all printed material and promotional items.

**Entertainment and refreshments coordinator:** Arrange and coordinate the entertainment and refreshments to provide a festive atmosphere for the event.

**Site logistics coordinator:** Manage the logistical aspects of the event, including planning the layout, renting equipment, hiring security guards and EMTs, and securing necessary permits.



## Enlisting the Help of a Dog Trainer

Having a certified dog trainer on hand at your adoption event can be very beneficial in helping dogs successfully make the transition from a shelter or rescue group to a new home. The trainer can also assist with introductions in the meet-and-greet area.

Your organization may already have dog trainers who work with your group. If not, it's likely that there are dog trainers in your area who would appreciate the opportunity to increase their clientele while helping to place dogs in loving, forever homes. Best Friends recommends working with trainers who use positive, relationship-based training methods.

### **Some recommended sources of good trainers:**

- You can find a certified dog trainer through [www.ccpdt.org](http://www.ccpdt.org), the website for the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers.
- Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training ([positively.com](http://positively.com)) is a global network of positive reinforcement dog trainers hand-picked by Victoria, one of the world's most recognized and respected dog trainers.
- You can find a trainer through the Association of Pet Dog Trainers ([www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com)); choose a trainer who is a professional member of APDT.

### **Certified dog trainers can bring the following expertise to your event:**

- Provide dog handling and safety advice for the volunteers during their orientation.
- Provide matchmaking advice and help people understand what kind of environment would be best for each dog, as well as what kind of dog would be best for each family.
- Chat with rescue or shelter staff about behavior challenges and offer advice or training to get a dog ready for a new home if the dog isn't adopted that day.
- Have an "ask a trainer" table and/or do some training demos with the adoptable dogs.
- Intervene when dogs are exhibiting signs of stress or are involved in a situation that might become a problem.
- Offer going-home advice, both verbal and written, to people who adopt a dog.
- Give advice about and/or offer to assist people with dog-dog or dog-cat introductions if adopters have other pets at home.
- Offer follow-up training to adopters. If your organization has the budget to help pay for follow-up training sessions with adoptive families, it's a great idea to make training "coupons" available for this purpose.



# Volunteer Shift Tracker

## THURSDAY, JUNE 1 (EVENT SETUP)

### 3-5 pm

Volunteer(s) \_\_\_\_\_

### 5-7 pm

Volunteer(s) \_\_\_\_\_

## FRIDAY, MAY 2

### 8-11 am

Volunteer team leader) \_\_\_\_\_

Setup volunteer(s) \_\_\_\_\_

### 10:30 am-2 pm

Volunteer team leader \_\_\_\_\_

Dog tent captain \_\_\_\_\_

Cat tent captain \_\_\_\_\_

Gate worker(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Adoption assistant(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Shelter/rescue assistant(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Maintenance/floater volunteer(s) \_\_\_\_\_

### 2-5:30 pm

Volunteer team leader \_\_\_\_\_

Dog tent captain \_\_\_\_\_

Cat tent captain \_\_\_\_\_

Gate worker(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Adoption assistant(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Shelter/rescue assistant(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Maintenance/floater volunteer(s) \_\_\_\_\_

### 5-6:30 pm

Event cleanup volunteer(s) \_\_\_\_\_



## Writing a News Release

A news or press release is a short announcement of a newsworthy event. You send press releases to newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, and websites to interest them in doing a story. Editors and news directors receive many releases every day; to grab their attention, your news release must look professional and present the facts in a concise and compelling way.

First, develop a template for your news release. Using a template lets you produce releases efficiently, since the basic format is already set up.

### **Here are some tips for formatting a news release:**

- Include your logo at the top of the page, but keep it simple and don't let it take up too much of the page. Editors and news directors are interested in knowing quickly who you are and then getting to the lead sentence.
- Put contact information at the top of the page and make sure the media contact is available at the phone number and email address provided.
- Type your release using a basic font: Times Roman, 12 point size, and regular font (instead of bold or italic) is a good choice.
- Use single-spaced text and indent five spaces to begin new paragraphs.
- Use the standard order (time, date, place) when giving the details about an event. For example: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday, June 4, at the Radisson Building. Don't use zeros for times (use 11 a.m., not 11:00 a.m.) and don't use letters after numbered dates (August 22, not August 22nd).
- Keep it to one page if at all possible.

### **Here are some tips for writing a news release:**

- Write a concise, catchy headline that summarizes the story. It should be written in the style of a newspaper headline, using active verbs (for example, "Art that speaks for homeless pets").
- Your lead sentence should describe the event, and explain why it's newsworthy.
- The body of the release should contain the all-important facts: who, what, when, where and why.
- Information on sponsors should be at the end.
- The final paragraph should describe your group and clearly summarize your organization's mission.
- Proofread the release carefully for grammar and spelling, and always make certain that all the information in the release is accurate before you send it.





## Writing a Public Service Announcement

Public service announcements (PSAs) are short notices, lasting anywhere from 10 to 60 seconds, that are aired on radio and TV stations prepared to provide information to the public. PSAs are used by organizations to publicize community events, to assist in fundraising efforts, and to inform and influence public opinion.

Most radio and TV stations look for local causes to promote in the PSAs that they air. PSAs must contain information that is beneficial to the community and should not include controversial or self-serving material. Check with the program directors at your local radio and TV stations for their guidelines about content and formatting. You should submit your announcement at least 10 days in advance of the time you would like it aired.

The standard lengths for PSAs are 10 seconds (25 to 30 words), 20 seconds (45 to 50 words), 30 seconds (60 to 75 words) and 60 seconds (120 to 150 words).

### Tips for formatting a PSA:

- Use your organization's letterhead and put in a contact name and telephone number.
- Triple space the entire PSA so that it can be read easily. Use Times Roman, 14 or 16 point size, regular font (not bold or italic). Indent all paragraphs.
- As with news releases, use the standard order (time, date, place) when giving the details about an event. For example: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, May 15, at the PetSmart at 1234 Main Street.
- Keep the PSA to one sheet.

### Tips for writing a PSA:

- Include all the facts: who, what, when, where and why. Be sure to give specific starting and ending dates.
- Stick to the facts. Avoid superlatives, overly enthusiastic text, and acronyms or nicknames that the general public may not be familiar with.

After sending a news release or a PSA, call the news desk after a few days to ask if they received the release and to remind them that you are planning a newsworthy event. Say something like this: "Hello, I'm calling to remind you that People for Animals will be holding an adoption event on May 15 at the PetSmart parking lot at 1234 Main Street. Our contact number is 123-4567 if you need more information. We sent a release to your organization a few days ago."

If the release was sent to an individual reporter, call afterward to see if the reporter received it. If not, send it again. If you talk to the reporter, let him/her know you are available to answer questions. Be persistent, but not bothersome. If you leave a message and the reporter doesn't call back, do not keep calling. Assume your message was received, but other stories are taking priority.

If you can, try to establish personal contacts at your local media outlets. This gets your organization's name and you out there as an animal welfare resource, available to provide future expertise or comment on animal issues that arise in your community.



## How to Write Compelling Adoption Profiles

Here are some general guidelines for writing profiles about pets to help them get adopted.

### **1. Facts are uninspiring.**

The fact that Joey is two years old, black and brown, 46 pounds, a mix of German shepherd and pit bull, and has digestion problems will not inspire anyone to adopt him. People may be curious to learn these things, and they should be included. But none of it will get him adopted, and this stuff should never be the focus of the blurb.

The focus of your blurb should be who he is, not what he is. For example: “Meet Mikey, the happiest dog on the planet” or “When you reach out to touch Amber, she ducks her head, as though she remembers something hurtful.” Sentences like these draw people in more than a list of facts.

### **2. Make the reader a hero.**

Don’t tell the reader how great the animal is and how lucky the reader would be to have such an animal. For emotional reasons, this never works. Instead, tell them how lucky the animal would be to have them, how grateful the animal would feel toward the wonderful human being who would bless this animal with a home. This is reverse salesmanship: Don’t tell them that this is the animal everyone wants. Instead, imply that it’s the animal nobody wants. That is what they want to hear. And it keeps them from thinking, “Well ... someone else will surely adopt him. He doesn’t need me.”

### **3. Be gentle with restrictions.**

Restrictions, while often necessary, are always strikes against the pet. For example, even people without children will sometimes be scared off by “Must go to a home without children” because they wonder what’s wrong with the animal. Whenever possible, soften a restriction with your wording. For example: “Matilda would make an excellent companion for another older cat who understands that lazing about on a windowsill is enough excitement for one day” instead of “Matilda must go to a home with older cats only.”

### **4. Emphasize the positive.**

Be specific about the pet’s positive qualities and talk about them first. Mention the negative qualities, but don’t put them front and center. Keep in mind, too, that not all perceived negatives are negatives for everyone. For example, a dog who has a lot of energy to burn might be the perfect companion for someone looking for a running buddy.

### **5. There’s someone for everyone.**

What do you do when you have to write a blurb about an animal who just isn’t your favorite? Don’t feel bad. It’s OK to have favorites; we’re only human. But with adoption blurbs, you have to treat everyone equally. So the trick is to use your imagination. Imagine you are the kind of person who would absolutely love this animal — and then write the blurb from this imaginary person’s point of view.



## How to Write Compelling Adoption Profiles

For example, if you prefer calmer dogs, you might be inclined to write, “He has a lot of energy, which some people might find overwhelming.” But the following would probably be more effective in finding the dog a home: “He’s the kind of dog who keeps up with you enthusiastically on walks or runs, dancing in appreciation when you get out the leash.” The potential adopter might read the first sentence and think, “Hmmm ... too much energy? Doesn’t sound good.” But the second blurb might cause this reaction: “Yes, that’s what I want.”

### SOME SAMPLE PROFILES

OK, now it’s time to practice on some sample adoption profiles. See if you can figure out what’s wrong with these, and do a rewrite.

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#### **PENELOPE**

“Today is your lucky day! Penelope, this gorgeous calico you see before you, will go to one lucky home. She is the purrrfect cat. Beautiful, sweet, smart, affectionate ... how can you lose? So don’t let another moment pass! Grab this girl before someone else does!”

**What’s wrong with this blurb?** If someone else is going to adopt her, then she doesn’t need me. While the above blurb might be cute and fun, cute and fun does not necessarily help the animal get adopted. Most adopters don’t need a new animal. They’re motivated by wanting to help an animal in need. From this blurb, it doesn’t sound like Penelope needs anyone’s help. And that will hurt her chances of being adopted.

**Try again:** “Why Penelope has not yet been adopted is a mystery. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with this elegant and gorgeous cat. She’s smart and affectionate, the kind of cat you might think would be the first to find a happy home. Yet, she just hasn’t been picked. Perhaps this sweetheart would be the perfect fit for your home?”

By changing the focus, we can impress upon the reader that Penelope is a perfect adoption candidate — without making it seem that she doesn’t need anyone’s help.

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#### **DANNY**

“Danny the dog was brought here by Leslie and John Shmucko, who shot him twice and then changed their minds about killing him and dumped him on us! Gee, thanks. Why do people like that live in this world? But it’s not Danny’s fault! He’s a sweet guy and is looking for a great home, with someone who’s actually nice, for a change.”



## How to Write Compelling Adoption Profiles

**What's wrong with this blurb?** First of all, the name-dropping may get your organization in legal trouble. Second, while hard-luck stories do help to get the animal adopted, and should be used, they should be presented in a manner that draws sympathy for the animal, rather than wrath toward the folks who hurt him or didn't care about him. Wrath doesn't inspire adoption, but sympathy does.

**Try again:** “Danny has had terrible luck in life so far. His family didn't want him, and please don't tell him, but there was even talk of shooting the poor guy. So we took him in, hoping there might be somebody out there who would want to hug a lovable little dog like him. Is there someone who might finally love him back?”

In this way, we tell Danny's story without expressing anger toward anyone, only sympathy toward the dog. In addition, we've elevated the tone of the language, giving ourselves as an organization a gentler, more positive image than the first blurb presented. Remember that everything you say reflects not only on the animal, but on you, too. You never want to sound angry or out of control. Instead, you always want to sound like someone who is calm, patient and empathic.

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### BAILEY

“Bailey is a sweet kitty who needs a LOT of patience. She reacts violently when she is scared by lashing out, growling, hissing and sometimes even swatting. Bailey MUST be left alone when she gives warning signals. She has developed close, loving relations with both of her foster mothers after several months of patient care. Bailey needs a patient owner who does not have children, who will give her the time and space she needs to feel secure. Bailey's new owner will need to invest several months of time and energy before seeing any response. Once you reach that point, Bailey is a true love. She sits on her foster mom's lap and “kneads.” She really is a nice kitty, you just HAVE to be patient!!!”

**What's wrong with this blurb?** It tells us a lot of very specific bad things about Bailey, but not very many good things. So, to make the blurb more effective, let's try and tease out Bailey's positive qualities. What are three nice things we can say about her? First, she isn't one of those wimpy cats with no personality. Bailey's ornery nature might even be seen as somewhat comical. Second, Bailey is somebody who loves you — not everybody, just you. And it feels so special to be loved by somebody who's fussy. Third, Bailey is a cat who likes having her own personal space. Some prospective adopters might be looking for that in a cat, rather than one who is overly clingy. Can you see how we're now tapping into reasons that somebody might actually want her?

**Try again:** “Now, here's a comedy figure of a cat! Bailey is quite a character. Don't get us wrong; she's great. But Bailey is ... Bailey. And we'll be having a cake the day somebody takes this funny old lady home. Bailey loves just one person — the person who takes her home and



## How to Write Compelling Adoption Profiles

finds, over time, that they are soul mates. She will sit in your lap and ‘knead’ you. But with everyone else? Oh, it’s safe to say that she’s a fluffy terror. She swats, growls, hisses — you name it. And yet, she will be the most devoted friend ever to that one special person. Is there a character out there who wants Bailey?”

This blurb will not appeal to everyone. But then again, we don’t want everyone to adopt Bailey. The person who will find this appealing is someone with a sense of humor, someone who wants to be called a character and wants a character for a cat. And that’s probably a very good fit for an adopter for Bailey.



## Troubleshooting Tips

### Coping with loose animals or dogfights

Consider having a few air horns or loud whistles with key staff and/or volunteers in the dog and cat areas, as well as at the venue entrances and exits. Air horns or whistles can be used to alert other staff and volunteers about incidents (loose animal, dogfight, etc.) that they need to be aware of, as well as to indicate when the situation is under control. Be sure you have trained staff and volunteers on what the alerts mean and how to handle them. Some tips:

#### Loose animal:

- Secure all entrances and exits, and advise the public that they will be reopened once the animal is secure.
- Have specific staff/volunteers assigned to securing a loose animal and make sure they are trained in how to do so.
- Advise volunteers and the public to not chase the loose animal. They should stand still until the animal is secured, unless they can safely catch the animal.

#### Dogfight:

- To decrease the chances of a dogfight taking place, tell staff, volunteers and potential adopters to keep a wide space between dogs when walking them and to not let them interact without the assistance of a trained dog handler.
- Secure all entrances and exits, and advise the public that they will be reopened once the animals are secure.
- Have dog-savvy staff, trained volunteers or dog trainers on-site and assign them to diffuse any dogfighting situation that comes up.
- Advise volunteers and the public to stand back until the situation is resolved

### Having medical personnel on-site

Having a veterinarian, a vet tech and an EMT on-site is a good idea, especially if multiple groups are involved, and may be required at some venues. During the event, you'll want your vet and vet tech looking for any signs of illness in the animals. Have a plan in place on how to handle that situation if it occurs: Will the animal be taken immediately to a vet or simply removed from the event so other animals aren't affected? Will you set up a quarantine area at the event?

- *Veterinarian:* Enlist a volunteer vet to be on-site and/or have a booth at the event in case of animal medical emergencies. He or she could also help review the animals' paperwork to make sure that the animals participating meet the medical requirements you have set. If you can't have a vet on-site, have a veterinary clinic close by on call during the event and a plan as to who will transport a sick animal to the facility.





## Troubleshooting Tips

- *Vet tech*: Try to enlist a volunteer vet tech (e.g., a staff member of a participating organization or a vet tech from the clinic you use to provide services for your animals). A vet tech is very helpful at animal check-in and can also keep an eye on the animals during the event to look for any medical issues.
- *EMT*: Look for an EMT or other trained medical personnel to volunteer at the event to handle any human medical needs (e.g., dog bite, cat scratch) Check with your staff, volunteers, local fire department and medical offices to see if someone would be willing to donate his/her time. At the very least, have a first aid kit or two on-site, know where the closest clinic or hospital is located, and have someone available to transport an injured person. Consider having an incident form available to fill out in case of human injury from an animal.

Remember, prevention is key — so plan, prepare, be alert, be aware and be safe.



## Sample Volunteer Survey

*(You can use [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) to create an online survey.)*

Thank you for volunteering at the XYZ Pet Adopt-a-thon. Your efforts helped make this event a huge success. We could not have done it without you. Please take 5-10 minutes to provide feedback on your volunteer experience. Your continued support is greatly appreciated and your input is invaluable.

How did you learn about this opportunity?

Email     Facebook page     Friend or family     Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you volunteer? \_\_\_\_\_

What day(s) did you volunteer?     Friday     Saturday     Sunday     All days

What area(s) or role(s) did you volunteer in? (Check all that apply.)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Event setup         | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer team leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dogs                | <input type="checkbox"/> Gate worker           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cats                | <input type="checkbox"/> Adoptions assistant   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer tent      | <input type="checkbox"/> Photographer          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meet-and-greet area | <input type="checkbox"/> Floater               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Event tear-down     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____         |  |

How many total hours did you volunteer? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you receive an email from the volunteer coordinator before the event?     Yes     No     Don't know

How helpful was the orientation training?     Not helpful     Somewhat helpful     Very helpful

How satisfied were you with the on-site support and training you received in order to successfully complete your duties?     Not satisfied     Somewhat satisfied     Very satisfied

Do you feel your efforts were valued and appreciated?     Yes     No     Don't know

How likely are you to volunteer again with us?     Not likely     Somewhat likely     Very likely

What did you enjoy most about volunteering at this event? \_\_\_\_\_

What did you enjoy least about volunteering at this event? \_\_\_\_\_

What recommendations do you have to improve or enhance the volunteer experience?

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Please share any additional comments about your volunteer experience or the event.

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## Animal Groups Outcomes Form

Thank you for participating in the first XYZ Pet Adopt-a-thon. We appreciate you providing us with outcomes information to help us assess the event. If you do not have this information yet, please let us know, and we will follow up with you in the near future to collect it.

Please return this form to Jane Doe via email (janed@rescue.com) on or before Wednesday, May 15. Thank you!

**Group name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email** \_\_\_\_\_

### Adoption Information

Number of adoptable animals brought to the event: \_\_\_\_\_ Dogs \_\_\_\_\_ Cats

Number of animals adopted during the event: \_\_\_\_\_ Dogs \_\_\_\_\_ Cats

### Event Feedback

Please provide us with the following feedback to help us evaluate the event and improve future events. Rank the following items on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest rating.

	Excellent			Poor	
Pre-event communications	5	4	3	2	1
Location or venue	5	4	3	2	1
Hours	5	4	3	2	1
Overall quality of event	5	4	3	2	1

### How likely is your organization to participate in this event again? (Circle one.)

Extremely likely      Somewhat likely      Not likely

### How would you rate the quality of adopters who applied to adopt from your organization during the event? (Circle one.)

Higher than usual      Same as usual      Lower than usual

### Additional Suggestions and Comments

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