

# APPENDIX F

## Delayed or Diverted Intake

*By Bethany Colonnese, live release manager, Animal Care Services of San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas*

**Delayed or diverted intake programs use a number of strategies to help pet owners keep their pets rather than surrendering them to a shelter, and they ultimately play a key role in addressing the root cause of the potential surrender to avoid future relinquishments.** These programs benefit shelters by giving them the opportunity to have the time to plan a positive outcome for the animal if intake cannot be diverted. Morale of intake staff is drastically improved because they are able to empower citizens and play an integral role in keeping families together and reducing deaths in shelters. Programs like these go a long way toward improving a shelter's reputation in the community, as the shelter's image shifts to that of a resource center where people can get assistance.

The diversion program for Animal Care Services (ACS) of San Antonio was implemented in November 2015. The shelter had been steadily working toward the 90 percent live release threshold and finally achieved that percentage at the end of December 2015, after the program had been operating for one full month. Before implementing such a program, it's crucial to do some process mapping to understand how the various aspects will affect each division.

The goals of the program will fluctuate across organizations, but ACS of San Antonio maintains an over-the-counter diversion rate of around 30 percent. The wait times in the lobby went from 2-3 hours on a busy day to under 30 minutes even at peak times, with many people completing the process online. In two years, we processed about 6,000 pets through the program. Those pets either spent no days in the shelter before going to placement or a reduced number of days. The number of days in the shelter is two days shorter for diversion pets than for the average pet, saving 12,000 shelter days over the span of two years.

As mentioned above, the morale of intake coordinators is very different when diversion strategies are available to them. Working in intake can be dreary if all that staff are doing is impounding animals. By understanding and using the available resources, the intake coordinators at ACS of San Antonio feel like they have more to offer citizens, especially on days when they are closed for intake.

## Components of diverted intake

Diverted intake programs give intake teams one or more options that they can offer pet owners:

- Counseling and access to free or low-cost training to prevent intake altogether for behavioral problems
- Access to free or low-cost medical care for people who are faced with surrendering their pets because they can't afford medical care
- Access to financial assistance for people who are faced with high pet deposits for housing rentals
- Access to housing, legal humane tethering and/or fencing repair for people who are facing citations because they don't have adequate housing or containment for their pets
- Access to temporary housing or kenneling for people who are temporarily unable to care for their pets due to a move, hospitalization, military service or other short-term issues
- Asking or requiring people to hold onto their pet for a period of time to allow the shelter to advertise the pet for placement or make arrangements to return the pet to the original rescue group (if applicable)
- Providing resources to pet owners so they can find a new home for their pet themselves
- Asking citizens who find strays to hold onto the pet in their homes to allow the shelter time to find the owners or secure placement

The options listed above require different amounts of time and money to implement. Some of the costs are:

- Staffing (these programs are labor-intensive)
- Medical (either on-site or off-site)
- Housing deposits
- Computer equipment, scanners, cameras
- Doghouses, fencing repairs, pens
- Trainer to help with behavioral issues

You can determine which of these strategies are immediately feasible for your organization and work to re-allocate resources to incorporate others. Grants can also be used to fund all or a part of these programs.

Don't forget to reach out to the community for help. Resources can often be found outside the shelter setting, including listings of boarding facilities (which might work for pet owners in transition), food pantries, and pet-friendly apartments and houses for rent. Divert-

ing intake may sometimes be as simple as connecting pet owners to resources that they didn't know existed.

## Staff responsibilities

Proper staffing, supervision and training are crucial for intake counselor positions. Staff should be able to listen without judgment, show empathy, relate to a variety of types of pet owners, and be patient with people who may be demanding or frustrating to deal with. Here are some criteria to consider when determining which individuals are suited to this position:

- Representative of the community they are serving
- Preferably speak the language of any large non-English-speaking group in the area
- Able to speak to pet owners without judgment or condemnation
- Able to embrace different kinds of pet owners, including those who may not have their own values about pet ownership
- Able to give instructions or state requirements clearly
- Willing to view diversion as an opportunity to educate people about pet ownership

Intake counselors and any other staff members who come into contact with the diversion program should understand how it works and what it's all about. They should know how intake diversion benefits shelter animals, shelter staff, pet owners and the community at large. They should be aware that the diversion program not only improves the image of the shelter in the community, but also provides a valuable service to constituents, which is important for municipal government.

## Behavioral and training diversions

Providing pet owners with counseling and access to free or low-cost training to prevent intake for behavioral problems is one of the quickest and easiest diversion strategies to set up and operate. It can be a challenge, though, to get pet owners to admit that the true issue is lack of training, socialization and/or exercise. People are generally reluctant to give a complete picture of their pet's home life and to reveal how little time they've devoted to training their pet. Here are some strategies for coaxing out all the necessary information:

- Set up an interview or questionnaire that allows the pet owners to give accurate and complete information without being judged.
- Speak with the kids in the family; they will generally give you more information.
- Have a trainer available to speak with the owners right away. This shows them that training is available and immediate, and some people are more comfortable speaking

directly with a trainer. (The trainer, of course, must be a good fit for this role — able to interact in a nonjudgmental way with various types of people.)

- Have both classroom training and one-on-one training available. Some pet owners are more comfortable in a group and some prefer one-on-one interaction.

Here are some other ways to provide help with behavior issues:

- Have crates available to give out, even if just on loan, to help with behavior adjustment and potty training issues.
- Have tethering systems available to help with getting a dog off a chain and providing more exercise, if walks aren't an option.
- If the pet in question was recently adopted from your shelter (or even another shelter), collaborate with your adoption team to “swap out” the pet for one better suited for the family. Because we ask people to adopt pets after a limited interaction in an artificial environment, the match doesn't always work out. We must remove barriers that discourage returns; we don't want families to feel forced to keep an animal who isn't right for them.

## Medical care diversions

Offering medical care for pets whose owners can't afford it is another form of diversion. Medical diversions do not need to be for complicated medical issues only. For some pet owners, a simple vet visit for mange or ringworm is not financially possible. It is just these kinds of cases that often fill up shelters. These people should not be judged as being irresponsible for not being able to care for their animals. Many times, they are doing the best they can and they do love their pets. They simply need a little assistance in keeping them. A medical diversion program can also provide hospice care for elderly pets, and then humane euthanasia at the end of the pet's life.

Providing medical services for owned pets can be controversial, especially if your organization is the municipal shelter and local veterinarians view this as taking business away from them. In fact, this type of help for pet owners may violate a local ordinance; you should know and understand local and state laws (and if necessary, talk to a lawyer) before proceeding to offer medical services to pet owners.

Here are some of the types of paperwork associated with providing medical services:

- A surgical release form, approved by an attorney, releasing the shelter from liability
- A medical treatment waiver, approved by an attorney, stating that the medical care is being performed without the benefit of certain diagnostics (X-rays, blood work, etc.) and that this type of treatment is better performed at a full-service veterinary clinic
- A full owner surrender form to show that the shelter is now the owner of the pet, both for liability purposes and to demonstrate the owner's intent to surrender

- Processing paperwork for treatment and all items to be completed so that all staff are aware of the recommended procedures and that the animal being treated is not a shelter pet available for placement
- A sheet in a database that tracks information on the pets, the owners, the medical care received and the costs

A medical diversion program comes with financial costs that can either be covered by the shelter or by a grant. You may want to start with seeking a grant to cover the expenses, either at the shelter or at a contracted clinic, setting it up as a trial program to see the results vs. costs.

If performing the medical care on-site, you will need to determine the following:

- Do you have the space to hold pets for several days or weeks if treatment requires it?
- Are the clinic and intake staff prepared to take on medical cases that will come with a pet owner who will want visitation and updates?
- Are the veterinarians and staff onboard philosophically to support this program, and are they prepared to interact with citizens who may not show appreciation for the free medical care?
- Do you have the ability to provide certain services that pet owners might expect, such as blood work, X-rays, sonograms and specific surgeries?
- Do you have the ability to outsource or contract out some needed services not available at the shelter clinic?

You will also have to establish some operating guidelines:

- When will you offer these services?
- What types of pet owners will be eligible for these services? If your organization is tax-funded, how can you make these decisions transparent to avoid claims of discrimination?
- Who will decide which pet owners are eligible, and is there someone who will offer a second opinion?
- Will you require a formal quote from a veterinarian for medical services?
- Will you require sterilization (either already done or to be performed)?
- Will you require partial payment from pet owners?

If the medical care is being done off-site by a contracted vet, you will need to consider the following:

- Cost (i.e., a pre-established list of costs)
- Ability of the vet to see patients immediately (that day, in some cases)
- Communication with the shelter on the course of action, cost limits, procedural steps and standard protocols

- Pet owner interaction with the clinic: guidelines, rules and code of conduct
- Ability to bill within government guidelines on a timely basis

## Owner-surrender diversions

Another way to potentially divert intake is to require owners to hold onto the pet in their home for a period of time instead of allowing them to surrender the animal immediately. This strategy has numerous benefits for the pet and the shelter:

- A profile and photo of the pet can be put online to advertise the pet for adoption in advance of the pet coming to the shelter.
- It gives the shelter the time to ensure that the owners do indeed own the pet. Following up on microchips can sometimes lead to a previous owner, ex-spouse, parent or child taking the pet back because they weren't aware that their family member was attempting to relinquish the pet to a shelter.
- Another advantage is that you can often convince owners to allow the shelter to vaccinate the pet right away, helping keep the pet healthier once he/she does come back to the shelter.
- It allows time to follow up with the original rescue group (if applicable) or even a reputable breeder to see if they are able to take the pet back as soon the pet comes in.
- It allows owners some time to reconsider their decision to surrender their pet to the shelter. Perhaps they will be able to solve the issue that's causing the surrender. At the very least, they may decide to re-home the pet themselves. (The shelter should have resources available to help pet owners with both of these choices.)

Depending on local laws and ordinances, the shelter may or may not take ownership of the pet while the pet is still in the owner's home. Municipalities that do not take immediate ownership of the pet should verify whether the period of time that owners keep their pets in their homes (i.e., an "online" stray waiting period) satisfies the local ordinance for holding owner surrenders for a certain amount of time before euthanasia, fostering or adoption.

For administrative efficiency, I recommend that owners complete the intake process, either in person or via email, but not pay for the surrender until the pet actually comes to the shelter. This avoids having to give refunds if the surrender doesn't happen. Another recommendation is to do all paperwork that has to be signed and kept at the time of physical surrender, to avoid having to keep and then find the paperwork later.

## Stray pet diversions

Asking citizens to hold onto the pets they have found as strays in their home, rather than bringing them to the shelter, is a great way to reduce the number of open kennels needed on

a daily basis. It allows the mandatory stray wait period to be satisfied without the pet coming to the shelter. Some other advantages and considerations:

- Pets are more likely to be returned to their owners if the owners don't have to drive all the way across town to pick up their pet at the shelter, and if owners don't have to pay reclaim fees or face citations.
- Citizens who find stray pets are more likely to put up "found pet" flyers in their neighborhoods if they still have the pet. (Shelters can encourage this by providing resources, such as a flyer template, for these helpful citizens.) And owners are more likely to start looking for their lost pet in their own neighborhoods.
- People are more likely to hold onto found pets if they don't have to go to the shelter (especially if the shelter is far from them), so it's a good idea to enable them to do the "found pet" report via email.
- Enabling "found pet" reports to be done via email can expedite the process of reuniting lost pets with their owners. For example, let's say someone finds a stray on Saturday night and intake is closed Sundays and Mondays. If the report can be done by email, a description of the pet can be put online for owners to see on Sunday morning, rather than waiting until intake opens on Tuesday.
- By keeping found pets in their homes for a bit, citizens are able to get some familiarity with the animal, which can provide helpful information for shelter staff about the pet's characteristics and behavior, which can then be passed on to potential adopters.
- Shelter staff can start looking for placement options while the pet is in the citizen's home, so that when the pet comes to the shelter, he/she spends as little time as possible there.

Despite the advantages of a stray pet diversion program, there may be some public scrutiny that happens, as well as finger-pointing if something goes wrong. So, your organization must support and understand the benefits of this program enough to withstand any public pressure. Issues that could come up:

- The diversion pet attacks a pet or human in the caretaker's home.
- The diversion pet gets loose from the caretaker.
- The owner comes forward but the caretaker refuses to return the pet.
- The pet is injured in the caretaker's care.
- The owner wants to know why the pet isn't at the shelter for immediate reclaim.
- The caretaker physically alters the pet (sterilization, microchip, vaccines, grooming, etc.) before the release date.
- The caretaker gives the pet away to an unknown person before or after the release date.



Before starting a program such as this, there are numerous items that you must ensure or consider:

- Can the legally required minimum stray wait period be accomplished “online” (i.e., while the pet is in the citizen’s home)? Can the pet be dispositioned for placement or euthanasia if he/she was never physically in the kennel? The recommendation here is to allow for placement but not euthanasia after an “online” stray wait period.
- If a microchip is discovered when the pet physically comes to the shelter for placement, will the pet be retained at the shelter for the minimum time before allowing placement?
- Will your municipality allow you to turn away a pet without physically taking in the animal?
- Does the shelter have the support of the city council and the board to withstand any criticism of the program?

The processing of pets in a stray diversion program can be complicated, so there are numerous items to consider:

- How will these pets be labeled online? Is it clear that these pets are not physically at the shelter?
- How will the pets be labeled in your animal tracking software? Below is what we recommend for Chameleon. CARETAKER is entered in the Kennel No. field to put the pet online and to alert the staff that the pet is not physically in the shelter. DIVERSION is entered in the Subtype field.

Impound No	Litter No	Tot	Kennel No	Status	Shelter Tag	Microchip	Rab/Lic Tag	Activity No
K17-273393		1	CARETAKER	AVAILABLE				A_-_____ 1
Animal ID						INTAKE FACILITY		IDENTIFICATION
A446842		7M SMALL CAT ORG TABBY F DOMESTIC SH (CARETAKER)				ACS	NO ID FOUND	
Intake Information								
Person From								
P433404 EDITH JARAGUCHI 210 9901815 2406 DAHLGREEN AVE SAN ANTON								
Type	Subtype	Cond	Intake Date	Time	Due Out	Confirmed	Pull Date	OS Reason
STRAY	DIVERSION	A HEALTHY	08/16/17	11:57	08/16/17 11:58	___/___/___		
Crossing			Jurisdiction	District	Zip Code	By	Receipt No	
			CITY	06	78237	1366		

- Will you schedule caretakers to bring the pets to the shelter at the end of the stray wait period or wait until the caretaker calls you? We recommend a schedule so that caretakers know how long they will have the pet, and the various rescue groups and adopters know when the pet is coming in. ACS has a simple calendar with two slots for cats, two slots for owner-surrendered dogs and four slots for stray dogs. It’s constantly adjusted based on season and shelter capacity.



- What paperwork will you give the caretakers? Will you require the caretakers to fill out a foster application? Will you require a signature from the caretakers that they agree to return the pet to the shelter upon demand, provide adequate care, not physically alter the pet and not give the pet away?
- Upon going to the shelter, the diversion pet needs to be clearly marked as available for immediate placement but not euthanasia. Below is an example for a pet who was put online January 3 but didn't physically come to the shelter until January 8. The release date must be changed in the computer to prevent early euthanasia, but the staff needs to know that the pet can leave early for a live release placement.

Diversion pet: came to the shelter on 1/8

Original intake: 1/3/18

Online: 4 days

Live release date: 1/7/18

EBI release date: 1/12/18

- What procedure will be followed if a citizen or an animal control officer finds the diversion pet roaming free while supposedly in the caretaker's home?
- What proof or information will you require to return the pet directly to the owner from the caretaker? Will you require return-to-owner (RTO) to happen on campus? What happens if the caretaker finds the owner and returns the pet, but doesn't get any information about the owner (which means there's no owner information to enter in the outcomes database)?
- What outcomes will you designate for pets who don't come to the shelter for regular adoption or foster? Here are some recommendations:
  - » Divert: For other outcomes not covered.
  - » Rehomed: The caretaker found a new home for the pet. Ideally, the caretaker will give you the new owner's information, but that is not always the case.
  - » RTO-owner: The actual owners have been located and you have verified that they have taken possession of their pet.
  - » Lost contact: The caretakers never brought the pet to the shelter and you have lost contact with them.
- What type of report will you create in your sheltering software to show the number of pets in the diversion program and quantify what happened to them? (See below for a sample diversion program summary report.)

Finally, here are a few medical-related questions that need to be answered before starting a stray diversion program:

- Will you provide medical care for the pets while they are with the caretakers (either before or after the stray wait period ends)?

- Will you provide vaccines for the pets if required by caretakers' HOAs or apartment leases? In your area, can you legally vaccinate pets before taking ownership? (You'll need to check local laws and ordinances to answer these questions.)
- Will flea and tick medicine be provided to allow caretakers to feel comfortable having stray pets in their home?
- Do you have the support to provide medical care for kittens and puppies?
- What happens if the pets become severely sick or die in a caretaker's home?
- What happens if you provide medical care and then the caretaker gives the pet away or to another rescue group or shelter?
- How long will you let the pets remain in the system if you lose contact with the caretakers?



**City of San Antonio  
Animal Care Services  
ACS Diversion Program Summary Report  
11/21/2015 to 1/16/2018**



**Stray - Diversion Intake**

	Dog	Cat	Total
RTO	464	172	636
ADOPTION	235	311	546
TNR	0	453	453
RESCUE	315	64	379
FOSTER	48	52	100
EUTHANIZED	21	10	31
OTHER	9	20	29
STILL IN ACS CARE	51	45	96
Others	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,143</b>	<b>1,127</b>	<b>2,270</b>

**Owner Surrender - Diversion Intake**

	Dog	Cat	Others	Total
RTO	977	270	1	1,248
ADOPTION	404	198	0	602
TNR	0	13	0	13
RESCUE	1,104	66	0	1,170
FOSTER	35	0	0	35
EUTHANIZED	194	5	0	199
OTHER	6	7	0	13
STILL IN ACS CARE	206	102	0	308
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,926</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3,588</b>