Return-to-Field Handbook

NEIGHBORHOODCATS

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES

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In 1999, **Karen Little** and her husband founded Alley Cat Advocates, a TNR nonprofit based in Louisville, Kentucky. The group has altered more than 45,000 community cats and transformed the culture of care provided community cats in the region. In 2012, Karen helped change Louisville law, resulting in a return-to-field program and a live release rate of over 95% in 2017 and 2018 for cats at the municipal shelter. Alley Cat Advocates currently holds the citywide contract for TNR and all related community cat issues.

Susan Richmond joined Neighborhood Cats as executive director in 2010 after over 20 years managing a leading New York City shelter and nonprofit veterinary clinic. Co-author of Humane Society Academy's TNR training course, Susan has led numerous large-scale targeted TNR projects; oversees Neighborhood Cats' programs in NYC, New Jersey and Hawaii; and is involved in two major RTF projects.

If you use this handbook to implement a return-to-field program, please let us know. Contact us at *cats@humanesociety.org*.

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1. Policy

WHAT IS RETURN-TO-FIELD?

Many animal shelters, especially if they are open admission, must deal regularly with an influx of community cats: feral or stray cats who typically live outdoors and are unowned. When first presented to a shelter, most community cats are not sterilized. They may be captured and brought to the shelter by private citizens or animal control officers responding to citizen complaints. If the cats lack the temperament to be adopted, their outcome has traditionally been euthanasia. Even if the cats are friendly and not feral, when a shelter is already at or past capacity for cats, they too, have been euthanized as a matter of course.

Return-to-field, also known as RTF, shelter-neuter-return and SNR, is a program that has emerged in recent years as a way for community cats to have live outcomes. If the cats are healthy but cannot be adopted due to either temperament or lack of space, they are spayed or neutered, ear-tipped and vaccinated, then returned to their original locations. This happens regardless of whether the citizen responsible for the cat coming to the shelter wants the cat back or not.

The rationale for returning the cats is that if they were healthy and thriving at the time of impoundment, they are likely to continue to do well upon return. Their body condition, coat, eyes and other indicators of good health strongly suggest, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, they have adequate sources of food and shelter. The fact that a caretaker has not been specifically identified—or that someone in the area does not want the cat around—is not considered a good enough reason to end the cat's life.

WHY NOT EUTHANASIA?

Justifications for a policy of euthanizing community cats vary. Many open admission shelters believe there is no alternative—cages fill up, the cats are unadoptable and space has to be made for the inevitable next round of impounds. Others assume it is the duty of the shelter, like it or not, to comply with the wishes of citizens who want community cats permanently removed from their properties. Some shelter officials believe allowing an unowned cat to live outdoors is inhumane or a threat to wildlife and euthanasia is the best available outcome. For others, it may simply be that euthanasia "is the way it's always been done" and there is an unwillingness to explore other options. Some shelters may want to change course but conclude they lack the necessary resources to move in a new direction.

Whatever the underlying rationale, the fundamental problem with euthanasia is it doesn't work as a way of dealing with community cats. If the goal is reducing the number of cats on the landscape, lowering intake or euthanasia at the shelter, improving public health or receiving fewer complaints about cats, euthanasia has

COVER: NEIGHBORHOOD CATS; OPPOSITE PAGE: ED LALLO/THE HSUS

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failed to achieve these results in most communities where it has been practiced despite what has often been decades of trying.

Euthanizing community cats rarely solves the problems associated with them for many reasons. There may be too many cats on the landscape for limited animal control resources to engage in anything more than a token effort at removing and euthanizing them, which may explain why a growing number of agencies no longer task their officers with trapping or picking up cats. When most private citizens and many animal control officers trap, they usually do not capture enough cats quickly enough to outpace the reproduction of the cats still at large. Even when all or most cats at a location are removed, the absence of cats may be only temporary. If the now vacant territory is not altered to permanently remove what had been the cats' food source, whether a cat-friendly neighbor or an unsealed dumpster, it's only a matter of time before new cats are drawn to the available resources and repopulate the area. Another factor is that many citizens like having the cats around, and they provide care for them and may have strong bonds. They are unlikely to cooperate with efforts that will lead to the cats' deaths and may instead actively resist.

Euthanasia, while ineffective, comes at a high cost. There is of course the loss of life. There is the constant stress to shelter workers from ending those lives, especially to staff responsible for performing euthanasia procedures. This can lead to high turnover and psychological harm. Shelters labeled as "high-kill" may have difficulty attracting adopters, volunteers, talent and donations. If taxpayer funds are being expended, there is little progress to show on a community scale in reducing cat overpopulation and its negative impacts.

As more people in the animal welfare field have come to see a policy of euthanasia as wasteful, unproductive and at odds with lifesaving values, the desire for a new approach has grown. The first large-scale return-to-field program was launched in 2008 in Jacksonville, Florida. The county operated an open admission shelter with a high euthanasia rate: In 2007, approximately 11,000 of 13,000 impounded cats were euthanized. Rick DuCharme, the director of First Coast No More Homeless Pets, a local high-volume spay/neuter clinic, decided to seek the shelter's support for TNR (trap-neuter-return). He asked the director of the shelter, who was an engineer by trade and serving on an interim basis, if he would transfer impounded ear-tipped cats to Rick's organization for return to their colonies. The director thought about it and then offered to not only transfer ear-tipped cats, but all community cats, tipped and untipped. Rising to the challenge, FCNMHP began retrieving every eligible cat from the shelter on a daily basis, spaying or neutering them and driving them back to their locations of origin. The following years saw dramatic declines at the county shelter in cat euthanasia as well as intake.

As progressive shelter leaders have learned of the Jacksonville model, they too, have begun implementing similar programs. Today, adoption of RTF programs continues to increase. Agencies report many benefits from the change in addition to greatly reduced euthanasia. Morale and creativity among staff improve as saving lives takes precedence over ending them. Overcrowding and the spread of disease in the shelter decrease. Resources formerly spent on euthanizing cats are diverted into new programs like RTF, TNR, barn cat relocations and bottle-baby nurseries. The public becomes more supportive of the shelter. Overall, the shelter becomes a community leader, promoting spay/neuter as the real solution to cat overpopulation.

HOW DOES RETURN-TO-FIELD AFFECT INTAKE?

The effect of return-to-field on shelter intake will vary and can be unpredictable. While euthanasia is almost certain to decline, intake may go up or down depending on several factors. In many communities, there are known individuals responsible for bringing disproportionately high numbers of outdoor cats to their local shelter. Some may consider cats a nuisance and want them gone from their property or neighborhood, while others may be more ideologically driven, believing they are helping their community and the cats by trapping and removing as many of them as possible. In most areas, there are also pest control companies that profit by trapping cats and dropping them off at the shelter, leaving the shelter to place or euthanize them at its own expense.

Return-to-field effectively puts these individuals and companies out of the cat-trapping business. Individuals who want the cats gone, whether for personal or ideological reasons, no longer have the shelter as a place to bring them for permanent removal. Pest control businesses no longer have a taxpayer- or donor-funded cat disposal location either. Depending on how many cats were involved in the past, the elimination of these "volume trappers" could result in a drop in the shelter's intake.

It is unlikely spay/neuter of RTF cats alone will reduce the population of community cats and lower intake in this manner. That's because RTF surgeries are not targeted—the cats come to the shelter randomly from throughout the service area, usually one or two at a time. It's rare that a high enough percentage from a specific part of the community is sterilized through the program to affect population size. However, if return-to-field is paired with targeted TNR, population reduction becomes more feasible.[1] Targeting can take various forms. Follow-up trapping can be performed in neighborhoods where a relatively high number of RTF cats originate or in colonies where finders report large numbers of cats. TNR efforts can be focused on a large section of the community responsible for high intake for both RTF and non-RTF cats.

Another way return-to-field can reduce intake is by raising public awareness that the best way to manage community cats is by fixing them, not by bringing them to the shelter for impoundment. Through its RTF program, the shelter becomes a leader in spreading this message. If the message takes hold, it can lead to more TNR activity performed by citizens and fewer community cats.

Publicity surrounding return-to-field can be a double-edged sword, so it must be handled carefully. In some high-euthanasia communities, it's possible many citizens had avoided bringing cats to the shelter because they feared the outcome. If, after an RTF program launches, these people hear the message, "It's ok to bring cats to the shelter now," this could result in an increase in intake. Promoting TNR as an alternative to surrendering community cats can help prevent this.

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[1] *For more on how a return-to-field program can be combined with targeted TNR, and the benefits of doing so, see Kortis, B. (2014). Community TNR tactics and tools. Phoenix, AZ: PetSmart Charities.* petsmartcharities.org/pro/community-tnr-tactics-and-tools.

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People bringing in unweaned kittens they find can also become a new source of rising intake if the general public starts regarding the shelter as a safe place for cats. Educating the public on how best to handle these kittens can help forestall a flood. Explain that a litter of kittens may be alone because their mom is out looking for food, so neonatal or unweaned kittens should be left in place for at least several hours before scooping them up. For guidance, see the infographic in **Appendix 1** created by the Arizona Humane Society. Also encourage finders to foster kittens themselves, at least until they're old enough to be fixed and adopted out. Miami-Dade Animal Services' Milkman and Wait Until Eight programs[2] and Cleveland Animal Protective League's Foster to Surrender program[3] are great examples.

Another way to lower intake is to teach the community what an ear-tip looks like and what it means. Explain that tipped cats are already sterilized, play an important role in rodent control and should be left where they are. Intake can also be reduced by not lending out traps to citizens with nuisance complaints who intend to surrender cats. Only lend them out to those who agree to return the cats after they've been fixed. Along the same lines, do not send animal control officers out to trap or pick up healthy cats unless they will be returned.

THE BIG PICTURE: HOW DOES RTF FIT IN?

Return-to-field offers shelters a solution to an immediate problem: What to do with healthy community cats who enter the shelter with little or no chance of adoptive or other placement. What return-to-field does not do is address why there are so many healthy, unowned outdoor cats in the first place. As noted in the previous section, spay/neuter of RTF cats is not targeted and so is unlikely on its own to reduce the size of the community cat population. Fixing a cat or two here and there throughout your service area will certainly stop those individuals from reproducing, but it will not achieve high enough sterilization rates among overall cat populations for their numbers to decline.

Because RTF by itself does not lower community cat numbers, it does not solve issues that outdoor cats can cause outside the shelter, especially if large numbers of them are unaltered. Potential problems include nuisance behavior, exposures to rabies and wildlife predation. To eliminate or greatly reduce these concerns, there need to be fewer unaltered, unowned cats roaming the streets. That should be the ultimate goal if your agency seeks to improve conditions not only in your facility, but in the community as a whole.

Although return-to-field alone cannot solve all these issues, it can still play a crucial role in moving toward solutions. Often, before a shelter can venture out into the community and become proactive at solving problems outside its doors, it must first solve the problems inside. Lowering high cat euthanasia rates, freeing up resources that supported a euthanasia policy, changing the in-shelter mindset to saving lives instead of ending them and attracting more community support can all follow from a RTF program. Once realized, these benefits can support taking the next step and launching programs designed to reduce the sources of RTF cats. If enough pets and community cats are fixed, if fewer pet cats are abandoned, if foster networks are grown and more kittens adopted out, all this can add up to fewer community cats. A smaller outdoor cat population can, in turn, mean fewer cats entering your facility and needing to be returned to field. When RTF is successfully integrated with other programs designed to eliminate cat overpopulation, it shrinks in size over time, its role fulfilled in helping bring about a better future for all cats.[4]

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[2] *A webinar about the Milkman and Wait Until Eight programs is available at* maddiesfund.org/the-milkman-and-wait-until-8-programs-saving-cats-and-kittens.htm.

[3] *A webinar about the Foster to Surrender program is available at* millioncatchallenge.org/resources/webinars/turning-your-surrender-ers-into-foster-homes.

[4] *For an example of a successful integration of return-to-field with other cat management programs, see Spehar, D. D., & Wolf, P. J. (2018). The Impact of an Integrated Program of Return-to-Field and Targeted Trap-Neuter-Return on Feline Intake and Euthanasia at a Municipal Animal Shelter. Animals: An Open Access Journal from MDPI, 8(4), 55. doi:10.3390/ani8040055*

MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

2. Getting started

COMMUNITY MESSAGING

How you inform the community about your new return-to-field program could have a lasting impact on its success. Before RTF is launched, seriously consider discussing it with municipal officials who supervise or otherwise have authority or influence over your shelter. This might include the mayor, city councilmembers, county commissioners or the director of the public health department. Make a formal presentation in-person on what return-to-field is, why the change is being made and what benefits and results are expected.

The goal of speaking to authorities is not necessarily to gain an endorsement, unless approval is required for the program to move forward. The objective is to be preemptive. You want important officials to first hear about the program from you and not from an upset citizen who just discovered he can no longer dispose of trapped cats at your facility. Even if your officials are not completely on board after you discuss return-to-field with them, they will at least understand what you're doing. Explain they may receive a few angry phone calls from people who don't like the change. That way the calls, which are almost certain to come, won't be a surprise. If your officials are supportive, ask them to make it clear to callers or other members of the public who inquire that RTF is the municipality's new policy when it comes to community cats.

When your program is ready to launch, decide whether to start quietly without any press releases or big announcements. During the early stages of your program, it's likely there will be growing pains and internal issues to fix. Return-to-field can be controversial and until everything is worked out, you may want to avoid a public debate on the program. Down the road, after you've had time to collect data, show improvement in your live release rate and demonstrate the sky didn't fall, you may decide to publicize your efforts. On the other hand, if you believe return-to-field will be readily accepted by your community or there are publicity requirements attached to grant or other funding, you may opt to start with more fanfare. Consider too that if your agency is also running a robust TNR program, you will be better able to manage additional requests for help with cats generated by publicizing your return-to-field efforts.

Even if you launch quietly, you should prepare messaging for those members of the public who learn about or interact with the program. These may include people who bring cats in, citizens who observe releases or others who hear about the program. You may

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be partnering with other agencies, like a spay/neuter clinic or TNR group, and they may also need to discuss return-to-field with others.

To maintain consistent messaging, consider drafting a policy statement to share with staff and any partners. In the statement, describe what return-to-field is, why the change from the old approach of euthanasia is being made, what positive results are expected and what alternatives exist for citizens having issues with community cats besides bringing them to the shelter. You may choose to keep the policy statement in-house or make it available for general distribution. As an example, see the Maui Humane Society's policy statement in **Appendix 2**.

To spur more participation by the public in effectively managing community cats, you might find it helpful to create a brochure about trap-neuter-return in general. Introduce TNR and why it is the preferred approach for lowering cat numbers and nuisance complaints. Explain why simply removing cats doesn't work. List available community cat resources like low-cost spay/neuter, trap banks and trapping assistance. Point out ways to deter cats from entering property, such as motion-activated sprinklers and cat-proof fencing. Hand out the brochure to anyone who has questions about your community cat-related programs, including return-to-field. A sample brochure is included in **Appendix 3**.

Finally, decide what to name your program. Return-to-field or shelter-neuter-return are terms that might work for internal purposes, but not convey what you want to the public. Rather than use terms of art unique to the animal welfare field, choose a title that readily conveys a positive approach to addressing outdoor cats. "Community Cat Management," "Community Cat Wellness" and "Healthy Cats, Healthy Community" are just a few ideas to get you started.

STAFF MESSAGING

In shelters where euthanasia of community cats was previously the norm, return-to-field can pose a challenge to the core beliefs of staff members. While many may welcome the change, others may feel they are being judged and told what they had been doing—euthanizing healthy cats—was wrong and they were somehow at fault. Some may fear cats will be abused if they are placed back into situations where they are unwanted. Some may oppose releasing cats in certain climates or during certain seasons. Yet others may consider it unethical or poor policy for cats to be put back outdoors under any circumstances.

Transparency and open dialogue can help address these concerns. Explain why the change is being made. Emphasize that moving in a new direction is not a judgment on the past. Experience, learning and trying to improve inevitably lead to new practices. Acknowledge that return-to-field involves a degree of risk, but if there is a reasonable opportunity for a good outcome, putting a cat back where she was thriving is preferable to ending her life. Invite questions and allow misgivings to be expressed. Remain firm that RTF is the new policy and that fact is not open to debate.

Sometimes people need to hear from those they relate to best before they are open to new ideas. For example, some animal control officers may be more accepting of return-to-field if they hear from another ACO who has participated in a successful RTF program. Seek out relevant professionals with RTF experience and invite them to speak to staff.

Once the program is underway, any doubts may begin to dissipate and negative attitudes change. It can be transformative for staff to witness the consistent release of cats who previously had little chance of leaving the shelter alive. Allow time for this transition. However, if it becomes apparent certain staff will likely never be comfortable or supportive and are undermining the program, you'll need to consider whether to part ways.

STAFF TRAINING

Having clear and comprehensive standard operating procedures will facilitate staff training. This handbook can be used as a starting point for drafting SOPs on gathering information on intake,

assessing eligibility, housing, releases and other major elements of your RTF program. You can also seek advice from other shelter officials with return-to-field experience.

As your program evolves, you may want to adapt your protocols. If cage space becomes more available, you could choose to hold more friendly cats for adoption rather than releasing them, especially young, easily socialized kittens or adults you believe will do better in a traditional home than an outdoor environment. The time of year may also require adjustments to SOPs. Procedures that work well during winter months when cat intake is at its lowest, such as giving RTF cats an extra day of recovery time, may not be possible in the middle of the spring kitten season when the volume of cats coming in is at its peak.

With respect to the crucial first step of gathering information, have staff practice client interviews. Start by writing down typical scenarios staff may encounter when a client, often referred to as a "finder," comes in to surrender a community cat. For example, one scenario could be a finder who for two weeks observed a cat entering his backyard in the morning and using his flowerbed as a litter box. The cat is healthy but the finder doesn't know who feeds the cat. There are other community cats in the neighborhood as well and he has brought in a few in the past. He doesn't like the idea of the cat being returned and becomes angry at the suggestion.

One staff member can role play the finder while another does the interview. The interviewer should try to gain background information on the cat and the cat's circumstances while also offering solutions to the finder's concerns, like deterrents and the mitigating effects of spay/neuter on nuisance behavior. Afterward, discuss how the interview went and what, if anything, could have been done differently to reach a positive outcome. Emphasize the importance of obtaining all possible background info and how it will influence later steps in the RTF process. Much more about interviewing is discussed in **Chapter 4 (Interviewing the finder)**.

Staff can also practice determining a cat's eligibility for return-to-field. Have staff consider and discuss hypothetical situations, such as those set forth in **Appendix 4**. Ask staff to decide whether the cat in question should be returned to field and explain why or why not. See **Chapter 5 (Assessing eligibility)** for more on the factors to weigh when making these assessments.

LOCAL LAWS

Because cats are often released without identifying a caretaker who will take responsibility for the cat's care, a common legal concern is whether return-to-field violates abandonment laws. Much will depend on the wording of the specific statute or ordinance

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that applies to your jurisdiction, so you should consult a local attorney or humane law enforcement officer. When evaluating the issue, consider that return-to-field places healthy cats back in their familiar territory where, as evidenced by body condition and general well-being, they were thriving. This is far different from typical situations of abandonment, such as an owner who moves away and leaves a pet cat behind with no provision for food or water, or someone who removes a cat from her home or known territory and dumps her somewhere completely unfamiliar to the cat.

You may also need to consider laws on mandatory holding periods. If your shelter is required to hold a cat for a specific amount of time before any disposition can take place, this may increase the length of time between intake and release. While this could slow the pace of your program, it does not have to prevent it. At some point, if you are subject to stray holding periods, you may decide to try and have the law changed. In Arizona, legislation was passed to modify the required hold time specifically for return-to-field cats. The law now provides, in relevant part, "Any impounded cat that is eligible for a sterilization program and that will be returned to the vicinity where the cat was originally captured may be exempted from the mandatory holding period required by this subsection. For the purposes of this subsection, 'eligible' means a cat that is living outdoors, lacks discernible identification, is of sound health and possesses its claws." (Arizona Revised Statutes, sec. 11-1013(c).) There may be other laws peculiar to your jurisdiction which could affect return-to-field. A thorough review of all applicable laws will help prepare for—or avoid—possible future issues.

3. Intake

SCHEDULED ADMISSIONS VS. WALK-IN

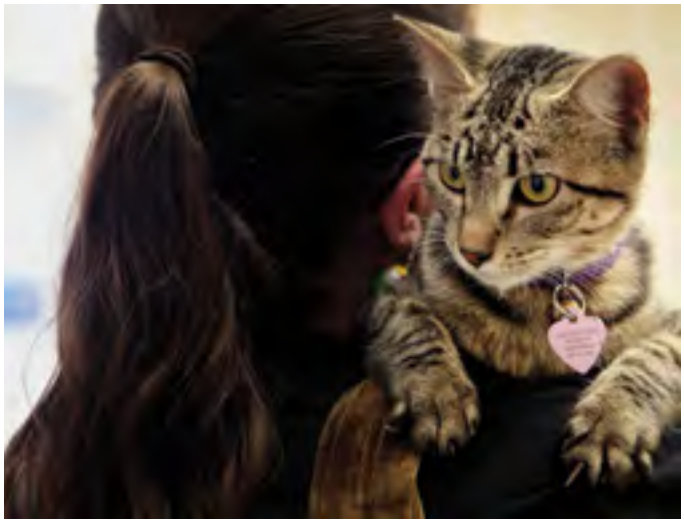
As detailed in **Chapter 4 (Interviewing the finder)**, the initial contact with the person bringing in a community cat is a critical stage in the return-to-field process. The information learned—including where the cat is from, why the finder is bringing him in and the cat's known history—will determine the ultimate outcome. If a citizen can bring a community cat to your shelter during public hours without prior notice, an interview will need to occur at the time of the finder's arrival.

If instead you schedule admissions for community cats, the gathering of information can begin when the appointment is made. During the conversation, the interviewer can identify problems and offer solutions that will prevent impoundment. For example, if the finder indicates the cat is ear-tipped, a trip to the shelter or a spay/neuter clinic may be avoided entirely. Or if the finder wants to bring the cat in for fear of cold winter conditions, offering to provide a winter shelter or instructions on how to build a simple one might take care of the concern. If the finder complains about nuisance behavior, such as yowling at night, or wants to avoid another litter, offering low cost spay/neuter or a referral to a local TNR group may be what's needed. Simply talking about community cats in general and how they are best handled may make some citizens comfortable about leaving them in their neighborhoods.

If scheduling takes place well ahead of the actual appointment, it may be possible to scout the finder's neighborhood before the cat's arrival to learn more about the cat's circumstances and suitability for return-to-field, assuming the finder has not already provided this information. Canvassing the block and speaking with other residents could be done by a staff member, a partner agency or, if she is cooperative, the finder herself. Flyers indicating what local services are available for community cats, both for those who are feeding and want them around and those who would rather they were removed, could be distributed. If available, an animal control officer could be dispatched to provide information on available services. While on the scene, the officer could try to learn more about cat-related issues in the area.

IDENTIFYING LOST PET CATS

Every cat presented at intake should be checked for identification tags and scanned for a microchip. Cats with microchips or wearing collars with ID tags should be at least temporarily diverted from the return-to-field program and placed on stray hold while an attempt is made to track down the owner, per your lost pet protocols. Staff should also search reports of lost cats to see if there is a match. If the owner is not found during the stray hold period, return-to-field is a valid option. Consider that the reclaim rate for lost cats at shelters is a mere 2 percent nationwide and that the vast majority of lost cats never travel more than a few blocks from where they started. One study found that cats are 13 times more likely to be reunited with their families if they don't go to the shelter (Lord, Wittum, Ferketich, Funk and Rajala-Schultz, 2007). Given these realities, putting these cats back where they were found gives them their best chance of making their way home or returning to the new home they've found outdoors.



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INTAKE

EAR-TIPPED CATS

Often concerned citizens are not aware an ear-tipped cat is fixed and has already been through a TNR or RTF program. If someone brings a healthy, ear-tipped cat to your facility, take the opportunity to explain what this means. If the cat clearly appears healthy and the finder is amenable, consider asking the person to simply return the cat to where he was found. A finder willing to do this may be someone who mistakenly believed the cat needed to be fixed or, because the cat was outdoors, rescued. You can still gather information on the cat (see **Chapter 4**), enter the info in your database and update the cat's vaccinations. Collecting this data will allow you to determine now or in the future whether the cat has come to your facility multiple times. For options on what to do with repeat feline customers, see **Chapter 9 (Post-return)**.

KEEPING TRACK OF RTF CATS

Like all animals entering a shelter, RTF cats need to be tracked as they move through the system. Upon intake, each cat should be entered into the shelter's software system and assigned a unique ID number. Some agencies place collars on the cats with the ID numbers written on them. This approach increases the certainty a cat will always be correctly identified but has drawbacks. Because many RTF cats will be fractious, skilled handlers will be required to put the collar on, take it off and, potentially, restrain the cat when the ID number must be read. If collars are used, include in your SOPs that a check is done to make sure the collar has been removed prior to the cat being released.

For RTF cats, an alternative to collars is to clearly label the trap or cage the cat is held in. Care must be taken to maintain identification when a cat is taken out of the trap or cage for surgery. Attaching a collar, tag or piece of duct tape with the ID number to the cat while the cat is unconscious can be effective. One method is the use of manila tags fastened to traps with rubber bands. The tag, printed with a description of the cat, colony location and other relevant info, follows the cat from her trap, into surgery (attached to the cat's leg) and back to the trap again. Tags allow you to quickly match the description of a given cat with the trap's occupant.

Paperwork that follows the cat through the shelter is also needed. Basic info on a one-page document could include labeling the cat as return-to-field, the cat's ID number, a description of the cat (markings, gender and estimated age), a color photo, intake date, location of origin and any relevant notes, such as whether a finder is hostile or friendly. An example of a tracking form created by the Maui Humane Society can be found in **Appendix 5**. Photos don't need to be fancy—cell phone images are fine—but should be clear and printed in color. When cats have similar markings, like a row of identically-striped brown tabbies—some lighter, some darker—eyes in shades of green and yellow and an array of pinkish noses, black and white photos may not reflect these distinctions.

Most shelter software programs will allow you to print out various "kennel cards" or other forms that will auto-populate with this information. The document can also record data collected at each stage of the RTF process, such as evaluation at intake (body condition score, weight), non-surgical medical treatment (vaccines, microchip number), surgery (ear-tip, pregnancy, lactating) and return (when, by whom). Enter this additional information in the cat's electronic record as well.

If RTF cats are housed in cages, the kennel card and/or tracking form should be attached to the front of the cage and updated as necessary. If the cats are kept in traps, zip-tie a plastic sleeve to the front of the trap and insert the form. Whether to use cages or traps is discussed in **Chapter 6 (Housing)**.

The spay/neuter clinic, if it is separate from the shelter, may also have its own paperwork requirements. Make sure someone is tasked with filling out any needed forms before surgery. The paperwork should be placed either with the cat or where forms are kept for other shelter animals being transported to the clinic.

VACCINATION PROTOCOLS

Vaccination upon intake is recommended for most shelter animals. However, the protocol to follow with RTF cats may depend on where they are held and for how long. If they are housed among the general cat population, it makes sense to follow your normal protocol for cats entering the facility. If RTF cats are kept separate and their length of stay is relatively short, then giving any vaccines during surgery may be simpler and more efficient. Waiting until surgery when the cat is unconscious might also be safer for staff when dealing with an animal who is fractious and difficult to handle.

OPPOSITE PAGE: NEIGHBORHOOD CATS; THIS PAGE: KATHY MILANI/THE HSUS

4. Interviewing the finder

Whether a finder brings a cat to the shelter or first calls to schedule an appointment, the initial point of contact may present the best opportunity for obtaining critical information about the cat and his circumstances. Taking a few minutes to ask questions can save time later trying to track down a finder for more details. It could also potentially save the cat's life—you can only return a cat if you know where he came from.

LOCATION OF ORIGIN

The first question to ask, before any discussion about the cat's condition, circumstances or the possibility the cat will be returned, is where the cat was captured or otherwise found. This is the most vital piece of information for your program's success and you will want to pay particular attention to collecting it. The accuracy of the address provided should be confirmed while the finder is still present, either in-person or on the phone. Do not wait until you are ready to return the cat to verify the address. If there is any mistake, the one chance to correct it—and save the cat's life—may be while the finder is there. Later, you may not be able to reach the finder, he may not call back, etc.

In the beginning of your RTF program, your staff may not be used to recording the address in the kind of detail required and immediately confirming it, so it is important to have them understand how important this is. If staff do not learn that an address is invalid until after a finder has left the facility, they may be able to call the finder later to clarify. But if the finder cannot be located, perhaps because he left a false contact number or simply won't respond, return-to-field may not be possible and the cat could end up euthanized for lack of an alternative.

INTERVIEWING THE FINDER

Be sure to distinguish, when questioning the finder, between the finder's address and the address where the cat was found. They may be the same, but often are not. Clearly delineate the two types of addresses both on your stray cat intake form (discussed below) and in your shelter's database. Creating separate fields in the database will make it easier later to map locations of RTF cats.

Most of the time, a cat's location of origin will be an exact street address, such as 345 Elm Avenue. Sometimes, however, a finder may only have a vague idea of where they found the cat, such as when a finder was driving or walking through an unfamiliar area, spotted the cat and picked her up. A cross-street, intersection or landmark can help pinpoint where the cat was found. Prompt for more information if given only a general area like "near the mall"—was the cat found in a nearby neighborhood or was he actually found in the mall parking lot? Narrow the location as precisely as possible, such as next to the green dumpster outside the mall food court or two blocks north of the main mall entrance by a bright blue house. If your staff isn't familiar with the geography of your full jurisdiction, encourage them to use online maps to verify location information reported by the finder. This can also help the finder retrace their driving route so that they can provide a more accurate description. A good way for staff to determine if enough detail has been given is to ask, "Is the information provided enough for me to feel confident I would be putting the cat back where she lives?" Specific details describing locations in more depth should also be recorded for cats brought in by animal control officers, because a different person may end up returning the cat.

Confirm the street name with the finder, spelling it out if necessary, as some names can sound similar (Morris Street versus Morse Street). Or there may be streets in your area with the same names but different designations (Oakwood Drive versus Oakwood Street). If your municipality is divided into sections, each with the same street names, be sure to include the sections when noting the addresses (16th Street NE versus 16th Street NW).

Once the correct address is known, explore whether there are any other details that would be helpful for someone returning the cat. If the location of origin is a large intersection, note which corner the cat was found on. This is especially important if having to cross the street would likely put the cat in danger. The same thing is true if the release location is a busy block with no exact street address—find out from which side of the road the cat was captured. Front of address (FOA) or rear of address (ROA) notations can be important for residences or other buildings where there is no direct access from the front to the back. If the address is a large property, such as a condominium complex or shopping center, try to identify what part of the property the cat came from.

When you enter the found address in your database, make sure it is an address that can be mapped (enter the closest mappable address, if necessary) and include the zip code. Enter other details about the location of origin as an additional note and not in the same field that will be used for mapping ("1234 Main Street," not "front porch of 1234 Main Street"). This will save time cleaning up your data when you're ready to assess the impact of your program through mapping. The use of data to measure progress is discussed further in **Chapter 11 (Impact)**.

FINDER INFO

After the location of where the cat was found is determined and recorded, the next pieces of information will be the finder's name and contact information. Having this will allow you to follow up, if necessary, to learn more about the cat in question or the cat situation in the neighborhood in general. Consider requesting some type of identification to verify the finder's address, such as a driver's license. As noted in the previous section, avoid confusing the finder's address with where the cat originated.

THE STRAY CAT INTAKE FORM

For purposes of determining a cat's suitability for return-to-field, it's helpful to document what prompted the finder to bring the cat in or contact you about him in the first place. Recording the finder's observations about this cat and any others in the area may also prove useful. Creating a stray cat intake form will greatly aid in collecting this key information (see sample forms in **Appendix 6**).

The staff person doing the intake or scheduling an intake appointment should use the form to interview the finder and record responses. Once complete, verify the answers with the finder and confirm correct spelling of the finder's name and address and the accuracy of any phone numbers. The information on the form can then be entered into your database and shared with other relevant staff.

Items to cover on the stray cat intake form, in addition to the cat's location of origin and the finder's contact info, include the following:

Why the finder is bringing the cat in or calling about the cat

Citizens may bring a community cat to a local shelter, or plan to bring one, for a variety of reasons. They may believe they're rescuing the cat from danger, such as the risk of being hit by a car or from harsh weather conditions over the next few days. Or someone may be hoping to rid his property of a nuisance—a cat who sprays urine, lies on porch furniture or buries feces in the garden. It's also possible, as your RTF program becomes more widely known, that a finder is looking to access free spay/neuter services

and wants the cat returned. Knowing the finder's motivation will help you decide whether to return the cat and what other interventions, if any, to pursue.

The finder's observations about the cat

What is the finder's relationship to the cat? Has she been feeding the cat on a regular basis? If so, for how long? If not, is someone else in the area feeding? Ask how long the finder has seen the cat in her area, how the cat behaves towards people (fearful or trusting?) or any information the finder has on anyone who she knows has been feeding. Does the cat appear injured or ill? Describe the cat's behavior prior to capture—did she come and go at regular times, appear one day and never leave, approach the finder for affection or keep her distance?

If a finder believes the cat was abandoned, find out why. Often a person may conclude a cat was dumped simply because the cat is friendly. Ask the finder for additional information, such as whether they witnessed the abandonment or know that the cat's owner recently moved away or was evicted. Did the cat appear after a local landlord sent a notice to tenants regarding a no-pets policy? The more information you can gain about the cat's behavior and circumstances, the better you'll be able to judge whether the cat was recently abandoned and should not be returned. Making this decision is discussed further in **Chapter 5 (Assessing eligibility)**.

The finder's observations about the location

Determine whether the finder is aware of any conditions at the location where the cat was found that would make it unsafe for the cat to return, such as a major construction project. Has the finder observed other cats and kittens in the area? A single cat brought in may be one of many. Gather any additional information, including where and when the cats are typically seen, an estimate on how many there are, whether any of the cats are ear-tipped and whether the feeder is known.

The finder's interest in TNR or providing further care

Is the finder willing to feed and provide shelter for the cat if she is returned? Is she willing and able to assist if the cat needs additional medical care or housing for a longer than normal recuperation period? Would the finder be interested in learning more about TNR and available TNR-related services?

A person willing to take action for this one cat may be willing to take action for additional cats. Provide the finder with information on trap-neuter-return options for any remaining cats. This could include low-cost spay/neuter services or training and trap loans, whether through programs you offer or as a referral to a partner TNR organization. This expands your agency's capacity while engaging your community in being part of the solution to cat overpopulation.

If the finder isn't willing or able to assist (or even if they are), share what information you can with your local TNR group so they can address the cats as they're able. This is discussed further in **Chapter 9 (Post-return)**.

If the finder is seeking help for a sick or injured cat, the intake interview is a good time to assess whether that person can assist with the cat's recovery. After being treated by your veterinarian, will they be willing and able to hold the cat while she convalesces? Some cats may come in with minor injuries or conditions that require an extended recovery period beyond what your agency is typically able to provide. Yet these cats will be able to resume living outdoors once they are healed. Knowing whether the finder is able to house the cat during this time can help you determine your course of action. Sometimes the community member will be willing to help but lacks the needed equipment to care for the cat during the recovery period. A supply bank of cages, crates, feral cat dens, etc. can help bridge this gap.

Administrative information

On the stray cat intake form, record (a) the microchip number, if found, (b) the date the cat was brought in, (c) the name of the staff member filling out the intake form, and (d) the identification number assigned to the cat.

WHAT IF THE CAT IS PART OF A MANAGED COLONY OR A SECRET PET?

Community cat caretakers in your area are certain to quickly learn about your new RTF program. Once they are confident cats will be returned, they may start bringing in their own colony cats for free spay/neuter through the program, something you'll learn during the interview. This demonstrates you've built trust with your constituents, and that's a good thing. Ideally, you can direct these people to schedule their surgeries in advance through an available TNR program.

A less common occurrence will be a finder who presents his own pet cat as a stray. If you suspect this may be the case during the intake interview, explain that all cats going through the return-to-field program will be ear-tipped. If the finder still wants to proceed, don't be overly concerned that he is angling to get a free sterilization surgery. While there may be a few people who take advantage of your program in this manner, fixing these cats and returning them to their finders may prevent more community cats from being born, which is one goal of return-to-field. A large number

INTERVIEWING THE FINDER

of people trying to slip their owned cats through the program may signify the need for more accessible spay/neuter services in the community. Consider using any resources freed up by RTF for that purpose.

COMMUNICATING RTF WITH FINDERS

Before you launch your program, decide how much you want to inform finders during intake about your return-to-field program and in what form. There is no one correct way to go about it—much will depend on how your community reacts to the change in policy and how comfortable your staff is with discussing it. The one universal rule that seems to apply is to first make sure you collect essential information, especially the cat's location of origin and the finder's contact info, before bringing up the topic of return-to-field.

With respect to what to say, one possibility is not to mention the program at all. Once the finder hands over the cat, it is entirely up to your shelter to determine the cat's outcome. You have no obligation to discuss this with the finder ahead of time. Some shelters have found not saying anything at intake saves time arguing with finders opposed to the cats being returned and is less stressful for staff. However, this approach forgoes the opportunity to engage citizens and persuade them to support your program. It may also result in people being surprised and reacting poorly when they see the same cat back in their neighborhood.

On the other extreme, there are shelters that have adopted an approach of full transparency, verbally informing a finder of all possible outcomes, including adoption, transfer, euthanasia and return-to-field. Taking this tack has advantages. It gives you a chance to explain why RTF is the new policy: because it may be the best outcome for the cat and helps reduce euthanasia and overcrowding at the shelter, and because the old policy of euthanizing community cats has proven ineffective. Having this discussion makes it possible to recruit finders to the spay/neuter cause; some finders may even offer to pick up the cats themselves after they've been sterilized or they may ask for more info on local TNR resources. Also, if you talk about RTF at intake or when a finder first calls, there will be no surprises when your driver pulls up and releases the cats back, reducing the chances of confrontation. For specific talking points that can be used either at intake or with anyone calling about a free-roaming cat, see the return-to-field Q&A in **Appendix 7**.

A middle ground between no mention and full disclosure upfront is to list return-to-field as a possible outcome in your surrender form, defined as the return of the cat to his original location following spay/neuter, ear-tipping and vaccination. Any discussion about return-to-field would then only occur if the finder reads the form and asks about it. Similarly, your plan could be not to mention RTF during the interview of the finder unless he realizes from the questioning that the cat might be coming back. At that point, a fuller discussion could take place.

COMPLAINT MITIGATION

As noted, many finders bring cats in because they consider them a nuisance and do not want them around. Often their concerns are valid. Understandably, these people will not be happy about the possibility of the cat being returned if they don't believe the situation will change. Be prepared to discuss people's issues and how they can be resolved without getting rid of the cat. Being respectful and making an effort to help can greatly influence finders' attitudes toward your organization and may increase their level of tolerance for any cats who are returned.

If the finder is complaining about noxious odors, explain this is usually caused by unaltered male cats spraying a mixture of urine and testosterone to mark their territories. A week or two after the cat is neutered, testosterone is no longer in his system and the odor is eliminated. If the problem is cats yowling or fighting late at night, this is mating behavior, which also stops after spay/neuter.

Other concerns may center on the presence of a cat or cats on the finder's property, whether this involves defecating in the yard, digging in the vegetable garden, jumping on the car or scratching lawn furniture. Employing deterrents will often take care of these types of problems. A motion-activated sprinkler will shoot out a spray of water whenever a cat approaches while an ultrasonic device will emit a high-pitched sound audible to and annoying to cats only. Barriers to digging and defecating in gardens can be employed, such as Cat-Scat mats, plastic forks with their tines turned up or river rocks. Removing items that attract cats, such as dense shrubbery or dark hiding places, can help. If the cat's caretaker is known, working with her to change feeding spots or times can also reduce the cat's unwanted presence at the finder's home. Learn more about various ways to keep cats away from gardens and yards by visiting the Neighborhood Cats website[5].

Have brochures on hand that list solutions to common cat-related complaints. Alley Cat Allies' brochure, *How to Live with Cats*, is a good resource to share.[6] Establish a loan program for motion-activated sprinklers and ultrasonic devices to assist complainants unwilling or unable to buy the items themselves. Some situations may require a site visit and more hands-on solutions. In these cases, refer the complainant to someone who can provide more in-depth consultation, such as an officer, other staff member, volunteer or partner TNR group. This should be done before the cat is returned or soon afterward to prevent additional complaints.

CARETAKER SUPPORT

There will be finders who bring in cats or call to schedule intake appointments not because they dislike the cats, but out of concern for their well-being. A citizen may scoop up a cat when the temperature dips, fearing it is "too cold" for the cat outdoors. Another may feed a stray cat a can of tuna and then, when the cat keeps coming back for more, worry the cat has no other food source. A concerned finder may feel better about the cat returning if she can assist by providing additional support. This could involve providing cat food, winter shelters (or instructions on how to build one) or a referral to a local community cat group. It may also help to educate finders about community cats, a subject they may not know well. Have available a brochure that explains TNR and why the best outcome for most community cats is being spayed or neutered and remaining in their outdoor homes.

Being proactive about caretaker training and support can prevent cats from coming to the shelter in the first place. For example, an animal control officer responding to a nuisance complaint or a staff member returning a cat may have an opportunity to mitigate the situation in the field. A ramshackle encampment of makeshift shelters deemed unsightly by a homeowners association could be replaced by a tidier set of shelters offered by your organization. Guidance on when, where, what and how much to feed can help caretakers maintain a sanitary feeding area and avoid conflicts with neighbors or local wildlife. A wealth of information on community cat caretaking best practices can be found in the Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook (available as a free download at *neighborhoodcats.org*). Assisting in these ways demonstrates to the community that your organization cares about the welfare of the cats you are returning outdoors.

OPPOSITE PAGE: ED LALLO/THE HSUS

[1] *neighborhoodcats.org/how-to-tnr/colony-care/keeping-cats-out-of-gardens-and-yards-2*
[2] *alleycat.org/community-cat-care/humane-deterrents*

5. Assessing eligibility

WHO DECIDES?

From the outset of your program, you'll need to determine who will be responsible for deciding which cats will be returned to field. One possibility is to leave the decision to the staff member who interviews the finder and processes the intake. You might create a position for a community cat coordinator who reviews all relevant information after it's been collected. You could set up a team to collectively decide. Or you could use some combination of these approaches.

If eligibility is initially determined by staff conducting finder interviews, then gathering of information as discussed in **Chapter 4** and deciding if the cat should be placed in your RTF program are taking place at the same time. As a staff member is learning about the cat and her circumstances from the finder, she is simultaneously evaluating whether return-to-field is appropriate. In addition to the finder interview, staff should perform a basic visual health check, examining body condition, quality of the coat, brightness and clearness of the eyes and any obvious signs of illness or injury.

Having the same staff person interview finders and evaluate RTF eligibility has the benefit of streamlining the RTF process, making it faster and more efficient. Arrangements for spay/neuter surgery and appropriate housing can be made immediately, as soon as the cat is in the shelter. A goal for any RTF program should be to limit the cat's length of stay to what is necessary to provide humane care, including performing spay/neuter surgery and allowing for sufficient recovery time. This minimizes stress on the cats, reduces shelter crowding and lessens the spread of disease.

One possible disadvantage is that the tasks of interviewing finders and assessing cats may be performed by multiple staff members at your facility. This could result in inconsistent decisions, with one staff person ruling out RTF while another, in similar circumstances, deciding a cat is eligible. Standardizing eligibility criteria as much as possible in your SOPs, as well as running periodic staff meetings to compare notes and discuss eligibility decisions, can help minimize inconsistency.

When RTF eligibility decisions are made at the time of intake or during a finder interview, inevitably there will be times when new information surfaces while the cat is still in your care. An unknown medical condition might be discovered during a full medical exam or surgery. A seemingly feral cat may calm down and reveal his friendly nature. There needs to be a process in place for collecting and evaluating new information that could potentially change the initial RTF decision. Consider designating a staff person to perform the role of receiving reports of new facts and re-visiting whether a cat is still eligible.

Instead of making eligibility decisions, staff who interview finders and admit cats could instead simply flag potential RTF candidates. A separate staff person assigned the job of community cat

OPPOSITE PAGE: KRISTA RAKOVAN FOR THE HSUS

coordinator, return-to-field program director or the like would later review all information gathered about the cat by shelter personnel—whether from the finder interview, a medical check or behavior assessment—and make the call. Advantages to having one decision-maker include consistent application of eligibility criteria, a clear line of responsibility for RTF decisions and, if a person with experience working with community cats is assigned the role, the benefit of that expertise being applied to all program cats. Preferably, eligibility decisions would be made by the program coordinator as soon as possible after the cat is admitted. If you opt for this approach, have a plan for how to proceed on the coordinator's days off or other times away from the shelter. Possibly a second person could be assigned as a backup.

Having a team or committee select RTF cats is another option. Again, staff conducting interviews of finders or responsible for admitting cats could flag candidates. Team members might include representatives from your admissions, medical, adoption and community cat programs. A team approach would ensure input from individuals with varied expertise and might result in more in-depth evaluations. The main disadvantage would be the added time needed for holding meetings and reaching consensus. If the volume of cats being handled is high or staff time is already short, using a team approach may not be practical.

TAKING A HOLISTIC VIEW

Several factors can be considered when determining eligibility for return-to-field, including medical condition; behavior and temperament; age; and the circumstances at the location where the cat was found. These factors are discussed in detail in the following sections. Which of these factors are relevant and how much weight to give each will depend on the particular cat, her situation and what works for your program. Often the best approach is to consider all criteria together, not make each a separate and independent requirement. Looking at the big picture, it's possible weakness in one criterion might be offset by strength in another. For example, a feral kitten may be younger than you would prefer to release, but the colony site is a quiet street where a known caretaker has been feeding for years, making it relatively safe to return the cat despite her age. Looking at qualification factors holistically, rather than taking a "check the boxes" approach, could result in more lives saved.

Once you've decided on specific eligibility criteria, include them in your SOPs, but be flexible and willing to adjust as conditions change. If your shelter is typically crowded during the spring and summer due to kitten season, you might place more friendly cats in your RTF program during those seasons than you would in the fall and winter when intake slows and there is more space. As your experience with RTF grows, you may become more comfortable releasing cats at locations you at first thought were too risky. Adaptive management can be the key to a successful program.

MEDICAL CONDITION

A cat's good health at the time of intake, especially if there is no indication he was recently abandoned, strongly suggests he was doing just fine in his territory. Good body condition, a clean and glossy coat, eyes and nose clear of discharge and no signs of ailments or injuries show the cat was thriving yesterday when captured and will likely continue to do so tomorrow after being returned. You may not be able to identify the cat's food source and shelter, but she clearly has that figured out. On the other hand, if a cat is significantly underweight or seriously ill, putting the cat back into the same circumstances she came from becomes much more questionable.

How long a cat has been observed prior to being impounded may influence the assessment of whether she is thriving. This is particularly relevant to sociable cats who may have been recently lost or abandoned. For example, if a finder has seen a friendly cat around for only a day or two, her good health may be due to only recently having been in a home, not from having a regular outdoor food source. On the other hand, if the cat has been observed for at least a few weeks and is in good health, the conclusion that she is thriving in her environment rests on firmer ground. This is why it's important to ask during the finder interview how long the cat has been seen in the area.

A cat does not necessarily have to be in perfect health before it's appropriate to consider him for return-to-field. If a cat has an upper respiratory infection, but is fit enough for spay/neuter surgery, your veterinarian may consider it medically acceptable to release him. Even more severe illness or injury does not have to rule out RTF if capacity for treatment exists prior to release and it can be ascertained that the cat's condition was not due to an inability to thrive at his location. For example, a cat with a known, reliable caretaker who has suffered an injury to his tail would likely do well if returned following treatment. For a list of common ailments of community cats that can be treated and facilitate returns, see "Optional medical care" in **Chapter 7 (Surgery)**.

When long-term treatment and recuperation is required, there may be concerns over whether too much time will pass to safely return a cat. An adult cat can be treated for weeks or even months and still recall his old territory. Kittens are more of a challenge because the younger they are, the less time they can be away from their territory and mother before it becomes unsafe to put them back outdoors. In colder climates, community cats need to be out-

doors as autumn changes to winter in order for their winter coats to grow in. If a sick or injured cat is held indoors for treatment and misses the change of seasons, he should not be released until winter is over and temperatures rise.

Include in your SOPs any medical conditions that you decide will disqualify a cat from your program. Examples might include cats who are declawed, blind or missing a limb. Consider though not making disqualification automatic. Instead leave room to assess whether the cat had been doing well in her outdoor home despite her disability. While it might seem a cat without claws would struggle to survive, perhaps a particular declawed feline has been observed in her neighborhood for years and is in good health when presented. You might make an exception in her case.

BEHAVIOR/TEMPERAMENT

A cat's behavior and temperament may be the decisive factors in determining whether to include him in your return-to-field program. A cat who avoids contact, tries to flee, or growls, hisses or acts aggressively when approached is likely not an adoption candidate and probably will not do well in a shelter setting. Some seemingly feral cats may only be frightened at first and later calm down and turn out to be tame, but for the rest who are feral, return-to-field may be the only available live outcome.

How to handle cats who are friendly and have no behavioral issues may depend on your shelter's philosophy toward community cats. Some agencies believe that if cats are thriving outdoors they should be returned there—friendly or not—and that resources that would have been spent on rehoming them should be devoted to other animals who lack any good outcomes. Other shelters consider it part of their mission to remove adoptable cats from the streets whenever they can and find them new, more traditional homes.

It may be your shelter's capacity for care that determines what you do with potentially adoptable community cats. If there is space, you have the option of holding onto them with the goal of rehoming. If there is no room, return-to-field offers a live outcome. Keep in mind that a sociable community cat may be loved and welcomed back by local residents. It's also possible that a friendly "community cat" is actually someone's pet who was allowed to roam without identification. If a friendly cat was doing well outside, returning her to the same situation is a reasonable choice.

If a friendly outdoor cat is held by the shelter for adoption, it may be discovered later that the cat has behavioral issues which make placement challenging or inadvisable. Perhaps the cat ended up outside because of persistent litter box issues—rehoming her could result in the cat being put outside again or even euthanized. As discussed in the previous section, if an issue is not identified right away, there will likely still be time to return an adult cat to his former territory. With kittens the window of opportunity will be shorter, especially if there is no identified caretaker at the site of release.

With a friendly cat found outdoors, a legitimate concern may be whether the cat is truly a community cat or instead is an abandoned pet who will do poorly if placed back outside and who should not be returned to field. Often there are clues that the interview with the finder—as well as a medical exam—can provide. If the cat is sociable but in poor health, as evidenced by being sick, noticeably underweight or infested with fleas or other parasites, she obviously was not a community cat thriving in her environment and more likely was dumped. The trickier problem is a friendly cat who appears in good health. Is she healthy because she is a community cat with adequate resources for food and shelter, or because she was living in a home and was only recently abandoned? An understanding of the different behaviors of a community cat versus an abandoned pet, and the details gained during the finder interview, can help answer this question.

How long was the cat seen in the area prior to capture? A cat who has been around for months is not a new arrival, per se, whereas a cat never seen before might be. Was the cat observed freely roaming the area, like he belonged there, or was he frozen in one spot, afraid to move? A cat who confidently comes and goes knows his territory, whereas a cat who is too frightened to move likely does not. Did the cat show signs of distress, like crying out

and darting around, as though he needed help, or was he sitting on the sidewalk quietly going about his normal business? Was the finder from the neighborhood where the cat was found, giving her a firmer basis for knowing whether the cat should be rescued, or was she only passing through an area, spotted a cat she knew nothing about and picked him up? In the end you will have to make your best judgment. If your shelter lacks capacity to hold a cat and not being returned to field means being euthanized, a good rule of thumb may be to assume a cat was not abandoned absent specific facts pointing to the opposite conclusion.

AGE

Currently, RTF programs vary widely on the minimum age for eligible cats. Some will release any kitten who weighs enough to be spayed or neutered, which can be as young as six weeks. Others will not return kittens under the age of six months. Still others do not have a minimum age but make case-by-case decisions on how safe the circumstances are at the return site. For example, if kittens can be returned at the same time as their mother, a program might bring the whole family back regardless of the litter's age. Or if there is a known caretaker willing to feed and monitor, young kittens may be returned who might not have been otherwise.

By the time they're six weeks old most kittens are agile, eat well on their own and keep themselves clean, so if they have an easily accessible food source and shelter, they can manage independently of their mother. In contrast, unweaned kittens are completely dependent on their mother for food and protection and cannot be safely released unless she's with them.

Capacity for care can play a major role in determining age eligibility. If your shelter has capacity for housing or fostering kittens, and the ability to socialize and medically treat them if necessary, you may choose not to release kittens under a certain age, whether eight weeks, four months, six months, etc. If capacity is lacking year-round or during certain seasons, you may decide that when kittens come in healthy, their best opportunity for a good outcome is putting them right back where they came from as soon as possible. Decide what your age requirements are and write them into your RTF SOPs, understanding the guidelines may change as your program develops.

Another consideration may be how many cats are already in the neighborhood. Would returning a litter of kittens and potentially adding three, four or five more cats make the overall situation untenable? The optics of returning kittens may also be a factor. Will you draw accusations of being inhumane by those who don't understand or agree with your policy, and are you prepared to deal with that potential criticism? Finally, when kittens, as well as friendly adults, are held for adoptive placement rather than routed through RTF, this reduces the size of the local community cat population. If population reduction is one of your organization's goals, it makes sense to keep kittens and friendly adults to the extent your capacity for care allows.

CIRCUMSTANCES AT THE RETURN LOCATION

Whether to place a cat in your return-to-field program may depend in part on the situation where the cat was found. If conditions are too dangerous or otherwise precarious, that could be disqualifying. However, it would be unrealistic to limit return-to-field only to what are believed to be risk-free areas. Just about anywhere outdoor cats, live there may be risks, such as traffic, predators, harsh climate or hostile neighbors. Yet for the most part community cats thrive in their environments. For a location to be so dangerous it is disqualifying for RTF, there should be risks well beyond the norm.

RTF might not be appropriate in a major construction zone or if a structure where the cat shelters is about to be demolished, such as an abandoned house or garage. But before deciding RTF is not possible, consider whether there are any solutions. If there is a known caretaker at a construction site, explore whether feeding and sheltering spots can be gradually shifted out of the danger zone. If demolition is imminent, perhaps the cats can be temporarily housed and then returned to the area after the work is done.

Another instance when RTF might be challenging is when a feeder is about to or already has permanently moved away. Keep in mind that community cats are adept at finding new food sources. Unless the location is extremely isolated, there's a good chance the cats will be absorbed into surrounding residential or commercial areas and find food. In addition, community cats often have multiple feeders, even though any one feeder may believe she is the only provider.

Hostility toward the cats may be another factor affecting the degree of risk at a given location. Some hostility is common, including when a finder brings a cat in because he did not want her or any other cats around. There's a good chance this kind of finder will not be pleased at having the cats returned, but that alone should not bar a cat from return-to-field. The vast majority of citizens will not become violent and attempt to harm the animal by engaging in what is likely criminal behavior. To date, efforts to track what happens to RTF cats by some programs, through the use of microchips, have not turned up any evidence of widespread abuse. It's always helpful to try to find out what it is about the cat's behavior which is bothersome to the finder and then try to address it. For more details, see the section "Complaint mitigation" in **Chapter 4.**

Return-to-field may become inadvisable if a threat of serious harm

is made. Even then, that threat needs to be carefully assessed to determine its credibility. If someone threatens to shoot or poison cats if they are returned, research whether humane law enforcement has a history with this person. Have there been unexplained deaths connected to this person or reports of past abuse? Does the person present as calm and rational or on edge and potentially violent? Would a short talk between the individual and a humane law enforcement officer take care of the problem? In the end, it's a judgment call. When euthanasia will be the outcome if RTF is rejected, it makes sense to require some type of corroboration that the risk is real and not base the decision solely on a verbal threat or expression of anger.

There may be specific addresses or locations in your community where allegations of animal abuse are under investigation or where harm to cats is known to have occurred in the recent past. Coordinate with humane law enforcement to identify these sites and share them with your return-to-field staff. A map for internal purposes only or a regular print-out could be distributed.

Some areas may be off limits for reasons other than potential risks to the cats and should be designated as such in your SOPs. Property managed for the protection of wildlife, like a bird sanctuary, may be inappropriate for return-to-field if bringing a cat back will create an imminent risk of harm to that wildlife. This is especially true if the species being protected is vulnerable to cats and listed under federal or state law as rare, threatened, endangered or of special concern. If possible, work with local wildlife agencies to identify these locations. If cats have been a long-term presence at any of these sites despite years of trap and remove efforts, consider trying to work with wildlife authorities on a better long-term cat management plan. It's possible TNR might be part of that solution. You can learn more about navigating cat-wildlife conflicts by visiting *animalsheltering.org/catsandwildlife*.

KRISTA RAKOVAN/THE HSUS

6. Housing

WHERE TO HOLD RTF CATS

If a community cat is impounded one day, fixed the next and then released the following day, total confinement time may be no more than 48 to 72 hours. If a mandatory hold period is in place, the time a cat is confined may increase accordingly. Where to hold the cats during the return-to-field process is a key decision.

Ideally, if the cats are held at the shelter, they will be housed apart from your general cat population. This will reduce overcrowding, stress for the cats and spread of disease. A room or enclosed space dedicated only to community cats is best. Barring that, keep the cats as separate from the rest of the shelter's cat population as possible, whether off to the side, in their own bank of cages or however some separation can be gained. Avoid housing the cats too close to dog kennels—exposing them to the up-close sound and smell of dogs will add to their stress. Likewise, don't stash traps with cats in hallways or pathways where dogs are walked or there is a lot of foot traffic.

Because their confinement time is short, cats can be housed in traps instead of cages, as discussed later in this chapter. Traps take up less room than cages, making it possible to use a smaller space for your holding area. The room or enclosure where the cats are kept needs to be secure, meaning no open doors, windows or other openings through which a loose cat or kitten could escape, and no access by anyone besides shelter staff. It also needs to be protected from the weather, including rain, snow or high wind. In colder climates, when temperatures drop, heating will be necessary. When temperatures rise, a cooling system may be required, whether air conditioners, ceiling fans or floor fans.

The holding space should also be large enough to hold the necessary number of cats and still allow for staff or volunteers to move about. To estimate what your average daily number of RTF cats may be, look at your past year's intake data and calculate how many admitted cats might have been eligible for return-to-field. Keep in mind that average daily rates will vary seasonally; you'll need to have enough space to accommodate those busier periods.

If intake, spay/neuter surgery and post-surgical recuperation will all take place at the same facility or campus, only one holding area may be necessary. Try to select a space close to admissions, a short walk to the spay/neuter clinic and adjacent to a parking area where cats can be loaded into a transport vehicle for return. When possible, don't house cats where they would have to be carried long distances or up and down stairs.

If your program will involve multiple agencies or facilities located some distance apart, multiple holding spaces may be needed. One example is if cats are admitted at the shelter and held overnight. The next morning, they're transported to an outside spay/neuter clinic. A partner group that does the releases then picks up the cats from the clinic and holds them for 24 hours at their own facility. Holding spaces will be needed by both the shelter and the partner group.

KEEPING CATS IN TRAPS

Besides saving space, traps have other advantages over cages when it comes to housing community cats. They cost less per unit than stainless steel cages and have multiple uses (trapping, housing and transporting). From a safety perspective, there is much less chance of escape or injury when using traps. With cages, cats must be regularly moved in and out for cleaning purposes, which can be challenging with ferals. With traps, the cats exit only for surgery—after being anesthetized—and when released back outside.

Sometimes the initial reaction of those new to the idea of housing community cats in traps is that it is inhumane because of the limited amount of space. In fact, the experience of TNR and RTF programs which use traps for housing is universally that the cats do

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HOUSING

well. When confined, feral cats strongly prefer tight, dark spaces. In a cage, they will hide in or under whatever is available, whether a piece of newspaper, a brown bag, a carrier or a box, and not move. In a trap kept covered by a sheet or towel, they end up actually having more usable space and usually relax within a day.

For friendly community cats who can be easily handled, a cage is not as much of a concern with respect to safety issues. Unlike ferals, tame cats may enjoy the extra space of a cage. But they too quickly adjust to being confined in a trap and are fine if held in one for a few days. It can also be hard to tell at first if a cat is friendly or feral, so putting all the cats in traps makes drawing that distinction unnecessary for purposes of housing. If any cat needs to be held considerably longer than normal, perhaps due to illness or injury, then a cage may be preferable.

Types of traps and other equipment

A trap for housing a community cat should have a sliding rear door. As explained below, this makes it possible to access the trap from both ends when feeding and cleaning. The recommended minimum length is 30 inches, which is enough for the cats to remain comfortable.

Another key piece of equipment is a trap divider, also known as a trap isolator. These look like short pitchforks and are used to section a cat off on one end of the trap while the door at the other end is opened to feed and clean. Many trap manufacturers offer their own brand of trap divider, but most did not intend for their dividers to be used in the manner described here. Two brands strong enough to be safely used for these purposes are Tru-Catch (Model TD-2) and Tomahawk (Model TD12NC). They can be purchased online from their respective manufacturers and will work with any normal wire-mesh trap.

Placing traps on tables will make the physical work of caring for the cats faster and easier. Six-foot craft tables work well and can usually hold six or seven traps side by side. If space in your holding area is limited, some or all traps can be kept on racks or shelving, though this will mean having to lift and move traps on and off the shelves when feeding/cleaning. Purchasing metal racks with wheels, such as restaurant shelving, may prove convenient when moving cats around. If neither tables nor racks are available, the traps can be put on the floor. Raise the traps slightly off the floor by placing them on top of rows of two-by-fours.

Whether traps are kept on tables, racks or the ground, cover the surfaces. With tables and racks, use an inexpensive, absorbable material that will catch any waste escaping the traps, especially urine. Contractor paper (large rolls can be found at home improvement stores), craft paper or newspaper are possibilities. These materials can be easily rolled up, thrown out and replaced as they become dirty. If traps are kept on the floor and it cannot be easily cleaned, cover the ground with a plastic drop cloth at least 3 millimeters thick.

At all times, traps containing cats should be individually covered with a sheet or large towel. This calms the cats and makes them feel more secure. To allow for ventilation, you can leave the ends uncovered, but the top and sides of the trap should always be draped. If you know two or more cats are closely bonded, like a mother and her kitten, position their traps next to each other and arrange their coverings so they can see each other through the sides.

List of equipment and supplies

The following is a list of the equipment and supplies needed to care for community cats in traps. The methods for doing this will be described next.

- Traps (30” minimum length with sliding rear door).
- Trap dividers (one or two).
- Tables and/or metal racks of shelving.
- Sheets or large towels to cover trap (one per trap).
- Clothes pins (for holding sheets and towels in place).
- Contractor paper, craft paper or newspaper (for lining tables or shelving).
- Newspaper (for lining the bottom of traps).
- Latex or non-latex gloves.
- Paper food trays, French fry plates, nacho plates or similar (for food).
- Cat food (wet and/or dry).
- Paper towels.
- Spray bottle with accelerated hydrogen peroxide or bleach solution.
- [Optional] Water cups/bowls.
- [Optional] Plastic drop cloth 3 millimeters thick for lining the floor.

How to feed and clean cats in traps

To safely care for cats confined in traps, follow the steps below.[7]

1. Start at the front door of the trap. Get the cat to move to the opposite end by folding the sheet back, exposing the front of the trap and leaving only the rear covered (ferals tend to move from light to dark).
2. Section the cat off by inserting two dividers, back to back, through the top of the trap. Angle the dividers away from you (the tops of the dividers are closer to you, and the bottoms are closer to the cat). Alternatively, you can use only one divider by inserting it through one side of the trap and out the other side or, if the trap is elevated, through the top and extending the prongs out the bottom.
3. Open the front door and line the trap floor up to the dividers or divider with newspaper. Remove any dirty paper first. At all times, keep an eye on the cat and keep your hands out of scratching range.
4. Close the front door, check that it's locked, then remove the dividers and re-cover the front end of the trap.
5. Go to the rear door and shift the cat to the front by pulling the sheet back and uncovering the rear end.
6. Section the cat off with one or two dividers as described in step 2.
7. Open the rear door and line the floor up to the dividers with newspaper, removing any dirty paper first and keeping your hands out of harm's way.
8. Place wet food with extra water mixed in just inside the rear door. Or use dry food with a little wet food for those cats who won't eat only wet.
9. Close and lock the rear door, double-checking that it's been secured, then remove the dividers and re-cover the rear end of the trap.

The cats will use the newspaper as litter, often shredding it to cover their waste. It should be replaced twice daily. If waste spills out of the traps, replace the paper covering the table or shelf where the traps are kept. As an alternative to lining the trap floor with newspaper,

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[7] *A short demonstration video of the method can be viewed at the Neighborhood Cats website:* neighborhoodcats.org/how-to-tnr/trapping/caring-for-cats-in-traps

elevate the traps slightly off the surface they're resting on and leave the metal floor exposed. Don't insert paper or any other lining. In this way, the trap will stay clean as urine and solid waste fall through the bottom. Be sure to have some type of absorbable material on the surface below the traps if you use this method.

The reason two dividers are recommended if you are inserting them through the top of the trap is because occasionally a cat is strong or frantic enough to either push through the side of a divider or knock the bottom of one divider forward and up. This is practically impossible when two dividers are inserted back to back. The alternative of using one divider, either through the sides or from above and through the bottom, is also secure, provided the ends of the prongs are sticking well out the side or bottom of the trap.

Separate water cups are optional—often the cats will knock them over. You may find adding extra water to canned food will be sufficient. If you do put water in its own container, make sure the container has a broad, flat surface so it won't tip over easily. If you use nacho trays, you can put the water where the nachos dip is supposed to go and wet or dry cat food in the nachos section.

Disease prevention

While most community cats are healthy, it's always a good idea to adhere to good disease prevention protocols just in case. Traps should be cleaned and disinfected after cats are released, along with other items like tables, shelves and trap dividers—see "Cleaning your equipment" in **Chapter 9** for protocols. Those responsible for feeding and cleaning cats in traps are advised to use latex gloves and, if available, disposable gowns. If the same staffer is caring for other shelter cats, either before or after the RTF cats, she should take steps to avoid cross-contamination. Wash hands and change into fresh latex gloves and gowns before caring for the next group of felines. Anyone who will be interacting with pets at home directly after working with RTF cats should also be mindful of disease prevention protocols.

KEEPING CATS IN CAGES

If you decide to house RTF cats in cages, it's highly recommended you use feral cat dens. A den is a kind of carrier that is box-like in shape and has two doors. The front door is clear or tinted plexiglass and slides up and down. The guillotine-style front door makes it easier to transfer a cat into the den from a trap with a sliding rear door or transfer cage with a sliding front door. To do a transfer, the sliding door of the den is lined up with the sliding door of the trap or transfer cage and both doors are lifted at the same time, and then closed after the cat goes into the den. A cat, especially a feral, can be encouraged to move from a trap or transfer cage into the den by uncovering the trap or cage. To prevent escapes, make sure the trap or transfer cage and the den have no space between them and neither shifts during the transfer.

Dens also have a round, porthole-style side door. The door tilts up into an open position and down into a closed one. This side door makes it possible to safely move feral cats in and out of cages. Once the cat is in the den, it can be placed inside a cage. Then, with the cage door shut, you can reach into the cage with a broomstick handle or the equivalent and tilt the side door of the den up and into the open position where it is left. To take the cat out of the cage, first encourage the cat to go into the den through the open side door. With ferals this is usually fairly easy as they naturally go to hide when someone approaches or makes a loud sound or sudden movement. When the cat is in the den, reach through the cage door again with a broomstick handle and tilt the side door closed. Now the den can be taken out and the cage cleaned.

Feral cats will spend a great deal of time inside the den, so it's tempting to place a towel or some other type of bedding inside the den before the cat is transferred into it. The problem is it won't be possible to safely remove the bedding later if it becomes dirty, perhaps from being urinated on. The better practice is to only leave bedding in the cage outside the den.

If feral cat dens are not available, be sure to include something in the cage where a cat can hide, like a small cardboard box or regular carrier. Having a hiding spot is crucial for reducing a cat's stress.

7. Surgery

ARRANGING SURGERIES

To minimize length of stay, community cats designated for return-to-field should be sent for spay/neuter surgery as soon as possible, preferably the next day after impoundment. This reduces stress on the cat and the chance of developing a stress-related illness, lessens overcrowding in the shelter and lowers both costs and the amount of staff time needed to care for RTF cats.

If your jurisdiction has a mandatory stray holding period, you may be able to have a cat altered during this time and at least hasten the RTF process to that extent. Check your local laws or speak with an attorney to determine if this is allowed.

Clinics

If your shelter has a spay/neuter clinic on-site, that might be the most efficient and cost-effective location for your return-to-field cats to be fixed. Other options include working with a private, full-service veterinary clinic or, if one is operating in your area, a high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter clinic which specializes in these types of surgeries. You may also find it necessary and, in some cases advantageous, to use a combination of these resources. If you use multiple providers, establish protocols on significant issues that will apply to all clinics. For example, all cats will be ear-tipped, all will receive certain kinds of vaccines, etc. The goal is not to micromanage every detail, but to make the protocols as similar as practical. A good reference for yourself and any clinics you use is the *Association of Shelter Veterinarians' 2016 Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs* (Griffin et al., 2016).

Transport

If an off-site clinic is used, transport may take place the day before surgery or the morning of, depending on the clinic's procedures. Cats should be transported in traps or transport cages and remain covered at all times with a sheet or towel. Veterinary staff can easily tranquilize a cat through the wire mesh openings of a trap or transfer cage and will not have to first reach in to pull the animal out, avoiding staff injury and escaped cats. For this reason, avoid using carriers. Except during their surgeries, the cats should stay in the traps or transport cages while at the clinic and not be transferred into regular cages. This reduces stress for the cats and clinic staff and also decreases the potential for escapes and staff injury.

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SURGERY

Scheduling

Scheduling RTF cats for surgery can be challenging given the unpredictability of when the cats will be brought in. Flexibility by your spay/neuter provider, whether in-house or out, will greatly help manage this. Over time, if you track a variety of data, trends will emerge that make it possible to better predict the flow and facilitate scheduling.

What data to track will depend on the circumstances in your community. Historical data can be examined for the volume of cats who would have been eligible for return-to-field. You can break down this past data, as well as current statistics, by the day of the week, the season of the year and even type of weather. For example, you may find that on days when temperatures dip below freezing, intake of community cats also drops as citizens are less inclined to trap or drive to your facility. Or, if there is more trapping activity on weekends, you might find Mondays are the highest day of the week for community cat intake.

Communication

Maintaining good communication between your shelter and spay/neuter provider is important not only for scheduling. Medical issues may be recognized only after a cat is sedated. Timely communication regarding what course of treatment to pursue, if any, could be critical. If the shelter staff has concerns based on observations made before the cat was brought for surgery—perhaps breathing abnormalities, loose stool or excessive drinking or urinating—sharing these concerns with your provider may result in surgery being canceled, delayed or performed in a safer manner. Making your spay/neuter provider a partner in the RTF process through open and thorough communication will ultimately benefit the cats.

Payment

When surgeries are billed by an outside clinic, payment should be made promptly and fully. It's important to be particularly sensitive to this because it's likely the clinic will occasionally lose business due to over- or under-booking of RTF cats. It's also unfortunate when rescue groups do not pay their invoices in full or on time. Being a good client, in contrast, will help your shelter reap the benefits of a healthy, long-term relationship with your clinic.

PRE-SURGICAL CARE

In accordance with instructions from your clinic, food should be withheld from the cats prior to surgery. For adult cats, this usually starts the night before. For kittens, who may need to eat closer to the time of surgery, consult your veterinarian for when to remove all food. Wherever the cats are housed, you'll need to have access to them in order to remove or provide food as instructed.

Prior to full sedation for surgery, veterinary staff will normally perform as complete a medical evaluation as reasonably possible. Observations of body condition and general demeanor may also be recorded. If any medical concerns have been noted earlier by the finder at intake or shelter staff during the cat's stay, they need to be shared with clinic staff by this point. Examples of finder concerns include that the cat started limping a month ago or had been dropping food out of her mouth in recent weeks and seemed to be losing weight. These will help guide veterinary staff in what to look for during the pre-surgical exam.

If it is determined anesthesia would be unsafe and additional care is needed, the cat will be rejected for surgery that day. You should have a plan in place for when this occurs. Perhaps the cat will be moved back to the holding space at the shelter or to a foster home for treatment. It's also possible veterinary staff will discover a condition which does not preclude spay/neuter surgery, but will require additional care afterward, before the cat can be released. Be sure there is a process in place for the clinic to communicate this information to your staff in a timely way. This will allow you to start making plans as soon as possible for the cat's post-operative care.

On rare occasion, a serious medical issue that cannot be treated will be discovered either during the pre-surgery exam or while the cat is in surgery. An example would be the discovery of a large abdominal mass believed to be cancerous. In such a situation, immediate euthanasia while the cat is still under sedation might be the kindest option. Considering that these decisions would need to be made while the cat is still under anesthesia, clear protocols on how to proceed and obtain any necessary permission, such as from a known caretaker, should be set ahead of time.

STANDARD MEDICAL CARE

Knowledge of community cats and their unique medical needs varies among clinics and depends largely on their experience. If clinic staff have worked extensively with community cats in the past, they will likely require little supervision. But if you're using a clinic with little or no experience, they may need more direction, at least in the beginning. In that case, your RTF program staff will be the experts and should be responsible for deciding, with input from the clinic, what medical care to provide.

Standard minimum medical treatment for all return-to-field cats includes spay or neuter and ear-tipping. In addition, where rabies vaccinations are required by law, they should always be part of standard care as well.

KATIE CAMPBELL

Spay/neuter

The normal procedure for female cats is ovo-hysterectomy, involving removal of both the ovaries and uterus. For males, castration—removal of the testicles—is the norm. These procedures not only prevent reproduction, but also reduce or eliminate most nuisance-related behaviors caused by reproductive hormones. Depending on the experience and skill level of your veterinarian, healthy kittens as small as one and a half to two pounds (approximately six to eight weeks of age) can be safely altered. If your veterinarian is unfamiliar with advanced spay/neuter techniques, a wealth of training materials, including video instruction, is available from the ASPCA Spay/Neuter Alliance (*aspca.org/humane-alliance*).

Your program will likely encounter some male community cats who are monorchid (one testicle undescended into the scrotal sack) or cryptorchid, (both testicles undescended.) Surgically removing an undescended testicle is a lengthier, more complicated procedure than an ordinary neuter. For adults, one option is to leave it in place, knowing the cat will be unable to reproduce as long as any descended testicle is removed. However, the undescended testicle will still produce testosterone, making it likely males with retained testicles will continue to engage in typical nuisance behavior, including attempted mating, spraying and territorial fighting. Because of this, many programs elect to remove any undescended testicle despite the procedure being more extensive.

For a young male kitten who is monorchid or cryptorchid, deciding how to proceed requires a careful evaluation of available resources. In some kittens, the testicle or testicles may descend in time, so returning a kitten to the field with a retained testicle is not advisable. Instead, the choice should be between the more invasive neuter procedure or housing the kitten for a few weeks to see if the testicle descends as the kitten matures. If it does, a normal neuter can be performed and, if it doesn't, the more invasive surgery will be needed. The problem is that if a young kitten is housed for too many weeks, returning him to his original location may no longer be humane. If too much time passes, the kitten will lose familiarity with his territory, not learn necessary survival skills from his mother and generally be unsuited for a life outdoors. In the case where a monorchid or cryptorchid kitten has been housed for too long to return-to-field, adoption becomes the only humane live outcome available.

With female community cats who are sexually mature, many will be at different stages of the breeding cycle when brought for surgery. An adult female may be in heat, pregnant, postpartum or actively lactating. Experienced community cat programs typically spay females at all these stages. For a lactating female who will be returned to field in the hope she will continue nursing her kittens, one option is to perform a flank spay rather than using the standard midline technique. With a flank spay, incisions are made along the side of the abdomen rather than down the middle. This has the advantage of less of the cat's weight falling along the incision line and less irritation to the wound from kneading kittens. If your veterinarian is unfamiliar with flank spays, lactating females can still be safely fixed used a midline spay.

In all spay surgeries involving community cats, the use of absorbable suture material is recommended as well as the stitching technique known as subcutaneous simple interrupted suturing. Absorbable sutures eliminate the need for a return visit to remove them, which is essential for community cats and especially RTF cats who may not have an identified caretaker. Using subcutaneous simple interrupted suturing will prevent the cat from pulling at the stitches and prematurely removing all of them with one pull. Best practice for the spay or neuter procedure also includes proper levels of both pre- and post-operative analgesics as recommended in *The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' 2016 Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs* (Griffin et al., 2016)

There may be times, while a female cat is being prepped for surgery, that she is observed to have what might be a spay scar on the mid-line of her abdomen. Whether to simply ear-tip the cat at that point and go no further with the spay surgery is something you'll have to decide in consultation with your veterinarian. Keep in mind that releasing an ear-tipped cat who is not actually sterile could obviously have a negative impact on your program in the future. If the scar does not clearly establish that a spay was already performed, it might be wise to continue with the surgery.

Rabies vaccination

Many jurisdictions require rabies vaccination of all cats. For the good standing of your program, compliance is important. Even in

jurisdictions where rabies vaccination is not legally mandated, it may still be a good idea. Research whether rabies is known to be present in your area. Is there rabies in the raccoon, skunk, bat, fox or other wildlife population? Are community cats likely to come into contact with these animals? If yes, vaccinating RTF cats may not only protect the cats but have public health benefits and offer more reason, from a policy perspective, for local officials and others to support your program.

Where rabies vaccination is required, a cat must usually be a minimum age when the first shot is administered in order for the vaccination to be considered compliant. Typically, this is three or four months old. Community cat programs have long wrestled with what to do with kittens who will be returned back outside but are younger than this minimum. On the one hand, it may be a real issue whether a kitten less than the minimum legal age can be properly licensed as having been vaccinated. On the other hand, the spay or neuter surgery may present the only opportunity in the cat's life to give the vaccine. How to balance these considerations is something each RTF program will need to decide. One option is to administer the rabies vaccination but not issue a certificate validating it as a legal inoculation.

Ear-tipping

In all TNR and RTF programs there is a need to clearly and permanently identify community cats who have been sterilized. This prevents unnecessary re-trapping and surgery. The preferred method is ear-tipping—the removal of approximately ¼ inch off the tip of one ear, usually the left, in a straight line cut. Notching—the removal of a triangular or circular piece of the ear, either on the tip or the side of the pinna—is largely disfavored due to the difficulty of distinguishing this mark from a fighting wound. Other methods, such as tattoos or tags, have proven too difficult to see at a distance or otherwise ineffective.

Whether to tip the left or right ear should depend on what the predominant practice already is in your area. Consistency is more important than which ear is chosen. Occasionally, a program will tip one ear for females and the other for males. This practice has dubious value given gender is relatively unimportant once a cat is sterilized. The potential costs of this varied approach include lost time and confusion for the clinic, especially a high-volume clinic which relies on maximum efficiency. Another issue with alternating which ear is tipped by gender is potential misidentification of a cat's sterilized status by trappers, caretakers or others who may not think to check both ears.

OPTIONAL MEDICAL CARE

If resources are available, RTF programs could consider providing medical treatment beyond the standard minimum, especially if the additional treatments offer significant benefits. Cost and ease of application may be factors in determining what optional care to offer. In addition to benefiting the felines, extra care can raise morale and increase support for your program among staff, volunteers and caretakers who deeply care about the cats.

Simple treatments that can be performed at the time of the spay or neuter surgery include giving a FVRCP vaccine, treating for fleas and ear mites, and deworming. The FVRCP vaccine is relatively inexpensive and one dose alone has been shown to raise protective titers in community cats (Fischer et al., 2007). If resources are available but limited, a good compromise is prioritizing the FVRCP vaccine for kittens and cats less than one year of age, the group most susceptible to panleukopenia.

For fleas, cost-effective topical treatments are widely available. While the benefit may be short-lived, it will at least help the cat avoid struggling with flea infestation while recuperating from surgery. Some flea products also treat for ear mites, although standalone products are available. Again, while the protection provided may last no more than a month, relief from mites is a definite positive for the cat. Deworming medication may be included in a flea treatment product as well or can be applied separately. Including a single dose of dewormer in a cat's first post-surgery meal is one inexpensive way to administer the medication.

Parasites are practically everywhere in the environment and healthy outdoor cats can be expected to carry a tolerable amount of fleas and internal parasites. When the load becomes excessive and the cat is heavily infested, there may be other issues at play that need attention. Perhaps is the cat has an infection of some kind or immune disorder. Chronically poor nutrition from an inadequate diet may be a factor. If health issues underlying a heavy infestation can be discovered and addressed, the cat's natural abil-

ity to manage parasites will return, giving her relief beyond the one month afforded by topical treatment.

While a high percentage of community cats enter spay/neuter clinics in good health, more complex medical issues may be uncovered during the pre-surgical exam or spay or neuter procedure (Wallace & Levy, 2006). How to proceed will depend on available resources and the cat's prognosis. Questions to consider include: When and where will the procedure be performed? How much will it cost and are there any shelter partners who can assist with funding? Where will the cat be housed during treatment and recuperation? What happens if, after care is provided, the cat has a special need and cannot be returned to field—will the cat be a viable adoption candidate or will the cat's quality of life be too low to justify any kind of placement? And who will make these decisions? Anticipating these issues ahead of time will facilitate the kind of rapid decision-making often required when a serious medical condition is discovered.

The following is a list of common medical issues that may be found during examination or surgery of community cats:

- **Mouth:** Exposed tooth roots, broken or fractured teeth, abscesses, gingivitis/stomatitis, growths or tumors.
- **Eyes:** Missing globe, ruptured globe, corneal scarring either new or long-standing, conjunctivitis, entropion.
- **Nose:** Signs of discharge suggestive of an upper respiratory infection.
- **Ears:** Ear mites, infection, growths or tumors such as polyps (which may appear in ear, nose or throat), aural hematomas.
- **Skin:** Superficial wounds, often on base of back of ear, wounds due to fighting or traumatic injury, hair loss due to heavy flea infestation or sensitivity to fleas, ringworm, bacterial infections.
- **Limbs and tail:** Fractures either new or long-standing, missing limbs, wounds due to fighting or traumatic injury, degloved tail.
- **Internal/body condition:** Dehydrated, underweight or emaciated, overweight or obese, loose stools of varying degrees, blood in urine, pyometra.

Treatment for some of these conditions is straightforward and it may be possible to perform the procedures while the cat is sedated for spay or neuter, such as an enucleation, wound debridement or thorough ear cleaning for a cat with ear mites. Other conditions may benefit from further diagnostics or medical care. As is so often true with community cats, the desire to pursue further treatment must be weighed against the resources available to provide that care.

TESTING

Most RTF and TNR programs do not regularly test community cats for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) or feline leukemia virus (FeLV). Exceptions are made when cats are symptomatic and testing would assist in diagnosing the condition, or when cats are possible adoption candidates.

There are many reasons for limiting testing. One is cost—scarce resources are considered better spent on fixing more cats and returning them to their outdoor homes as quickly as possible. This is more central to the mission of RTF programs than disease control, especially considering that any other colony cats have likely already been exposed. But even assuming disease control is a goal, neutering eliminates the primary modes of transmission of both viruses, including mating, fighting related to mating and the birth of vulnerable kittens. In this way, spay/neuter can protect other cats from FIV and FeLV as well or better than testing all admitted cats and culling the ones with positive results.

Another reason for not testing all community cats is the questionable reliability of the snap tests commonly used: These tests are meant to screen for more in-depth laboratory testing, not as final determinations. Following the full testing protocol—a screening test followed by lab work—is impractical for community cat programs from a time and resource perspective. Finally, not testing also spares the lives of cats who, although they may have FIV or FeLV, are asymptomatic and may continue to enjoy a good quality of life for many years to come.

MICROCHIPS

While some RTF programs currently microchip the cats they return, there is no consensus in the field on this practice. Often the rationale for microchipping is the desire to see if fears of widespread abandonment or abuse bear out following launch of a new RTF program. To date, no agency has reported such findings and some that were microchipping have stopped.

If an RTF cat is re-impounded at a later date, the microchip will link the cat to any records held by the shelter. Information gained may include the fact that the cat was returned to field in the past, who trapped the cat previously, where the cat lived when the microchip

OPPOSITE PAGE: KATIE CAMPBELL; THIS PAGE: THE FUND FOR ANIMALS VOLUNTEER DANIEL

was inserted and any vaccination history. Each RTF program will need to determine whether the benefits of having this information justify the expense. Also note that the address on the microchip may not match the address where a repeat RTF cat was re-trapped. Further investigation will be required to determine to which address the cat should now be returned. If no new info turns up to help make this determination, it's usually best to put the cat back in his most recent territory.

You may consider including microchips in your standard treatment for the benefits they may have as your community cat programs evolve. For example, you may not start out tracking any welfare metrics for the cats after they're returned. But later, you may decide such data would be useful for determining how well the cats are faring. For more on measuring impact, see **Chapter 11**.

LENGTH OF RECOVERY TIME

Following routine spay or neuter procedures, as well as pregnant and cryptorchid surgeries, cats can be safely returned to field the following day. The cats should be held overnight to allow the anesthesia drugs to cycle completely out of their bodies. Releasing any sooner could impair a cat's ability to maintain a proper body temperature, avoid hazards like passing cars and defend himself from predators.

Some RTF programs hold female cats for an additional day because the spay surgery is more invasive. Holding longer than 48 hours after surgery should be reserved for special cases requiring longer recuperation periods. The longer a cat is held rather than returned, the greater the chance the cat will become dehydrated, malnourished or fall ill from the stress of confinement. Longer recovery periods also require more staff time for providing care and might complicate use of limited space.

Your program may not have the capacity to transport cats for returns on a daily basis, at least at the outset. Perhaps a driver and vehicle are available only two or three times a week. If that's the case, try to stick as close as possible to optimal recovery times.

Nursing mothers

During surgery, it may be discovered that a female has recently given birth and is lactating. Somewhere in her territory, kittens may be waiting for her. Your spay/neuter surgeon should be able to tell, with reasonable accuracy, how postpartum the cat is. Especially if neonates are involved, the kittens' survival may depend on their mother's swift return. As a consequence, some RTF programs will fast-track the mother's return. Some will give drugs which reverse the anesthesia and return the cat the same day or evening as surgery, assuming she appears bright and alert. Others will hasten the return by releasing early the next morning. For a fast-track return to be effective, good communication between veterinary providers and staff or partners who will perform the release is essential. Set up an alert system, perhaps using email or texts, to let all involved know when a cat's return is being accelerated.

There are other RTF programs that take a different approach. They prioritize the mother's recovery ahead of the potential reunion. Weighing what is known—that the mother had surgery and needs time to get over the sedation and trauma— against the possibility of waiting kittens, they do not release lactating cats early. The rationale is that, given the high mortality rates among neonates, the slight added delay in the mother's return may not be a significant factor in whether the kittens survive or not. There are practical benefits, too. Not changing scheduled returns at the last minute may allow for more efficient use of staff and volunteer time. When colony caretakers are involved in the RTF program, less focus on the possibility of kittens being harmed when the mother is trapped can mean more caretakers bringing in female cats to be spayed, ultimately resulting in fewer litters born.

If the kittens were brought in with their lactating mother and the plan is to release them with her, they can be housed separately while their mom is undergoing surgery. Afterward, when she is sufficiently awake, the kittens can be reunited with her for some quiet bonding time. All can then be released the next day.

8. Returns

WHO DOES THE RETURNS?

There is a range of personnel choices for filling the role of bringing cats back to their outdoor homes. Some shelters tap their own staff or ACOs to do returns. Others turn to partner organizations, volunteers or colony caretakers. The decision depends on the resources available and a consideration of the pluses and minuses inherent in each choice. See **Chapter 10 (Personnel)** for a thorough look at the options and advantages and disadvantages involved.

TO BE SEEN OR NOT TO BE SEEN

The goal for all RTF programs is to reach the point when returns are routinely performed in an open and transparent manner. If you take a "proud and loud" approach, having members of the public observe releases is not a problem but an opportunity to educate further on the appropriate care of community cats. Return-to-field is a progressive and lifesaving program and, in the end, there is nothing to hide.

However, as discussed in **Chapter 2** with respect to community messaging, an important decision when you first launch your return-to-field program is how high or low a profile to have in the early stages. Do you want to start out of the gate with a strong message that spaying and neutering then returning community cats is the new policy? Or would you rather lie low and minimize potential confrontation until you've built up a track record of success? Regardless of whether you launch loudly or quietly, at any point during your program there may be individual cases that call for less noticeable releases, based on conversations had at intake and whether the finder is anticipating the cat's return.

The choice you make between transparent and discreet releases will influence how you go about doing returns. If you opt to stay under the radar, you'll probably want to steer clear of transport vehicles emblazoned with your logo and oversized photos of cats. A plain, unmarked SUV or other suitable vehicle would be a better fit. Conversely, if you want to build public awareness and engagement, an unmarked van is a missed opportunity. If you're going big and bold, wrap your vehicle in a way that lets people know at a glance who you are and how they can reach you. If you're using the cars of volunteers or a normally unmarked vehicle used for other purposes besides RTF, consider attaching magnetic signs. For added impact, outfit your RTF staff in colorful caps or T-shirts with appropriate messaging.

OPPOSITE PAGE: DANIELLE BAYS; THIS PAGE: NEIGHBORHOOD CATS

RETURNS

If you opt for a low-key approach, be aware that your activities—cats being turned loose outdoors from an unmarked vehicle—may mistakenly be interpreted as abandonment by chance observers. Would-be good Samaritans may even take down your vehicle's license plate number and call authorities. Outfitting your field staff in caps or T-shirts with your shelter's name and logo can help prevent these misunderstandings. It can also help—in case citizens call your shelter to report your RTF transporters are "abandoning" cats—to have a short statement prepared that explains what was really happening and why.

The level of attention you want to bring to your program can also influence the mechanics of releasing cats. Do you as a matter of course drive right up to the return address in broad daylight, plunk your trap on the sidewalk and let him go? Or do you want to minimize encounters with local residents or passersby, in which case you need to be more strategic? As touched upon in the relevant sections of this chapter, factors like time of day, proximity to where the cat was found and how the actual release is done can influence how open or discreet a return will be.

WEATHER

Outdoor cats are accustomed to all sorts of weather, so you don't have to wait for a perfect, cloudless day to send them on their way. If they're healthy and raring to go, light rain or a dusting of snow won't faze them. It's extreme weather you want to avoid, like heavy rain or snow, stormy conditions with high wind, thunder and lightning, and severe cold and high heat. The cats have already been stressed by their confinement, surgery and disruption to their routines. Sending them home in bad weather can compound that stress. A downpour may prevent them from venturing out for food just when they need to be eating regularly and regaining strength. Noisy thunderclaps can spook cats who are already on edge, possibly causing them to bolt from their familiar territory (for the same reason, it's best to refrain from doing returns on July 4, New Year's Eve or any other extra-noisy dates). Help pave the way for a smooth return by keeping an eye on the forecast and if particularly inclement weather arrives or is imminent, avoid releasing cats until conditions improve. Exceptions would be barn cats, factory cats or others with ready access to ample indoor space who won't be affected by weather extremes.

How cold is too cold to release? There's no hard and fast answer but in general, if temperatures have dropped sharply since the day a particular cat was trapped, or become frigid enough for water and wet food to quickly freeze, it's reasonable to wait until the cold snap passes before bringing a cat back. At the other end of the spectrum, how hot is too hot? Despite high temperatures, you can still return cats on sweltering dog days, just aim to release them in the morning before the mercury climbs or wait until the cooler evening hours to let them go.

A word of caution about delayed returns: While holding cats during spells of severe weather is a good way to keep them safe, the practice isn't risk-free. As noted earlier, the longer a community cat is confined, the greater the chance she will develop an upper respiratory infection or other ailment as a direct result of stress and exposure to other animals in the shelter or clinic, potentially making her unfit for release. So while it's important to offer protection from dangerous elements, it's equally essential to return cats to their colonies as soon as conditions make it safe to do so.

TIME OF DAY

What part of the day a cat is returned can have a significant impact on how safe the release will be. As just mentioned, it is better on hot days to release earlier or later in the day, when temperatures are coolest. If an area is highly trafficked, like a mall or busy intersection, waiting until nighttime when the area is quiet will minimize risks from vehicles or people blocking the cat's path. If you are trying to do a return without being noticed, the lower visibility of nighttime offers obvious advantages, plus in most areas there are usually fewer people out and about after dark. The main disadvantage at night is that you can't see much, either. If you're not familiar with the area where the release is taking place, you might easily miss nearby hazards such as a gulch, a tall fence that could impede the cat's path home or a dog running loose in a yard. Darkness can also make it hard to locate alternative release sites if you're uncomfortable with the original one for any reason.

Weekend versus weekday is another timing issue. Industrial or commercial areas are typically much more active during the regular work week than on weekends. As a result, it may be safer to return the cat on a weekend. In residential neighborhoods, usually more people will be at work on weekdays and home on Saturdays and Sundays. If you're trying to be discreet, release cats in residential areas during normal working hours. However, keep in mind it will be better overall for the efficiency of your program and the health of the cat to release her when she is ready to go rather than hold her for extra days so you can release on a weekday instead of a weekend or vice versa.

When cats are returned will also depend on the availability of staff, partners or volunteers to do the transports. Perhaps the organization you're partnering with can only do returns two days per week. Possibly you're depending on volunteers with day jobs of their own, so all returns must be done in the evening. Within the scheduling limits you're facing, make the best choices you can to keep returns safe and advance how transparent you want to be.

PROXIMITY

Cats are territorial by nature and form powerful attachments to the places they call home. Within their home range, they will know every inch, landmark and boundary. In most suburban or urban settings, adult cats and kittens older than 16 weeks of age will have a range of at least a block or two. In rural or more open areas, their range is likely to be larger. Provided you release the cat near where he was caught, he will know where he is and be able to locate his original sources of food and shelter. While it is ideal, there is no need to release older kittens and adults at the exact address of record, so you can be strategic about selecting the spot. If there are any concerns, you can release a few buildings down on the next block over—just behind the finder's house—or at another close location.

With kittens less than 16 weeks old, their known territory is going to be much smaller than with adults or teens. The best-case scenario would be to hand young kittens directly to their caretaker. If that cannot be arranged, they should be brought back as close to their starting point as possible. Letting them go even slightly further afield can put them at risk of becoming disoriented or lost.

While proximity to the cat's territory is critical for any RTF release, it is not enough if there are any dangerous obstacles or conditions blocking the way back to where the cat belongs. For example, if the return location is listed as the intersection of two busy streets, you need to know on which corner to do the release so the cat will not have to cross heavy traffic. To determine this, try to get an exact street address where the cat was found or, as discussed earlier, consider doing the release at night when traffic is light. In general, assess whether there are any potential manmade or natural barriers to the cat's territory at the planned release location. If there are, adjust the time of release, choose another spot or try to get more information to help make a better selection.

Viewing your destination in advance can go a long way toward picking the optimal spot for release. Satellite maps are the best and fastest way to do this. If you have a smartphone, you can use an app like Google Maps or Apple Maps. If you're using a desktop, open Google Search (*google.com*) in your browser, enter the address where the cat was found in the search box and add the word "map." When the map appears, either on your smartphone or desktop, click on "satellite view." Zoom in and out as necessary and explore the area around the return address. You'll learn a wealth of detailed information about your target area, including whether the neighborhood is residential or commercial and whether the street is busy and crowded or quiet with lots of open space. You can see if there's an empty lot nearby or another spot you consider suitable. The maps will help you choose a Plan B release location if your first choice doesn't work out for some reason. For the few minutes involved, advance scouting in this way can prove invaluable.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PROPERTY

Who owns the land you're releasing the cat on and what right you have to be on it are important considerations when selecting a

return spot. A misstep that leads to claims of trespassing can have serious consequences for both the person doing the release and your RTF program.

Is it ever OK to return cats on privately owned land? Or is it better to let them go only on public property where you have an undisputed right to be present? What about "gray areas" that are a mix of public and private? It's important to recognize there's a lot riding on each drop-off site you choose.

The rule should be clear for releasing on strictly private property, like the driveway of a single family residence or the grounds of a factory: Unless you have permission to enter, keep out! Going onto someone else's property without their consent may be committing the crime of trespassing. The offense may be even more serious in some jurisdictions if the area you enter is enclosed in some manner, such as with a fence. And even if you don't see them, be aware there may be security cameras (or a homeowner with a cell phone camera) close by, capturing your every move. So, no slipping into back yards or through side gates "just for a minute." To best protect your staff, cats and agency, maintain a firm policy of staying off what is clearly private property.

Of course, many if not most RTF cats will originate from private locations. This is rarely a problem for releases because much of the land bordering private property is usually publicly owned, including sidewalks, curbs or streets. If you can find a suitable public spot to release a cat so she can make her way home easily, she'll be fine and your program will be protected.

Harder questions are posed by "gray areas," locations that are privately owned but allow public access. Examples include the parking lots of shopping centers, malls, big-box businesses, restaurants, condominium complexes and movie theatres. Will entering these lots and releasing cats on the grounds without prior authorization put your transporter or program at risk? Consult with your organization's or community's animal control agency for guidance.

Issues with gray areas can be avoided if you have permission from the property owner or manager to enter the premises. The best time to obtain this approval may be at intake when you have an opportunity in-person to explain your program and its benefits. If approval is not forthcoming, consider releasing cats on public property bordering gray areas, unless that would be unsafe for the cat. Use satellite maps, as described in the previous section, to scout for a nearby public spot.

PRE-RETURN CHECKLIST

The cats have been spayed and neutered and had a chance to recover. The weather is good, the forecast is clear and the timing is right. You're almost ready to hit the road with the cats! But before you load the traps into your unmarked vehicle or tastefully branded one, run down a list of safety checks for each RTF cat. The brief investment of time before leaving the holding space will allow you to catch and correct last-minute problems and ensure everything goes as smoothly as possible.

Below are suggested items for your checklist. You may want to modify some or add new ones that work for your program. To best protect the cats, be sure to go down your list every time for every cat!

Medical approval

Some RTF programs rely on veterinary staff to perform a final visual check confirming a cat is medically fit for return. Others use staff experienced with cats who know when to call for professional help. Those doing final checks should look at each cat closely to make sure they're bright, alert and responsive. Any signs of discharge in the trap, like blood or bloody urine, should be noted. Sometimes a trace amount of blood may be observed on the newspaper lining a trap, especially if the cat had surgery the previous day or is a large tom (big males are more likely to seep a little blood and serum

after being castrated). If the cat looks otherwise normal, all is probably well. If any more than a few drops of blood are observed, this should always be called to the attention of a doctor or vet tech. The same goes for any cat who seems at all lethargic, shows symptoms of upper respiratory infection (runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes, audible breathing), has diarrhea or in any other way appears abnormal. Some symptoms—such as diarrhea—can be the result of stress, but veterinary staff should make the call and decide if the cat is cleared for release. Once a cat has been cleared, the approval should be noted on the cat's record, along with the name or initials of the person signing off and the date.

Confirm identification

Obviously, the last thing you want is to mix up cats, resulting in the wrong ones going back to the wrong locations. Preventing this mix-up starts at intake when identification of the cat is first created. It might be a color photo on a form attached to the cat's trap, an ID collar or a manila tag (see "Keeping track of RTF cats" in **Chapter 3**.) Check the ID one last time before loading the cat into your vehicle. If using photos, be very mindful when there are cats with similar markings being returned at the same time. Look for distinguishing marks, different color eyes or varying ages to confirm who's who.

Remove any attached identification

If your program uses collars or any similar attached item to identify cats while they're in your care, make sure they've been removed. If they haven't, keep in mind that collar IDs are typically put on and removed while cats are under sedation. Removal can be tricky when they're fully alert, so have animal care staff assist if necessary.

Feral or friendly?

Every now and then a cat who seemed feral up until the time for release will let you know she was only frightened and now wants to be friends. If your program has a policy of keeping adoptable cats for foster or placement, watch out for the cat who steps forward in her trap, vocalizes and makes eye contact. Young kittens, even those who initially seem quite fierce, are the ones most likely to turn around.

Address check

Double check the address on each RTF cat's paperwork, even if this is normally done at intake. A simple search using Google Maps, Apple Maps or even just Google can reveal any errors or omissions that might have been missed. For example, your instructions may say a cat came from "10 Maple" in a given zip code. When you plug that address into a search, the results show there are both Maple Street and Maple Avenue in that zip. You'll need to verify which is correct. Similarly, a final check can catch bad addresses. If the cat was found at 123 Main Street, but someone accidentally entered the return location as 1123 Main Street, your address check may show the numbers on Main Street only go up to 500. Staff can then try to contact the finder to correct the error.

Scout for the best return site

While you're doing the address check is the perfect time to also do a virtual scout of the area where the cat will be returned. See "Proximity" earlier in this chapter for how to use satellite maps in this way.

Feeding

If your shelter releases kittens less than six months of age, give them a meal prior to returning them. That's important because you don't know what time of day they're usually able to access food and you don't want juveniles to potentially face long stretches without eating. It's fine, but not essential, to send adult cats off with a meal too, but keep portions modest to avoid car sickness on the way home.

Trap check

Make certain doors on traps, transfer cages or feral cat dens are locked so there's no chance of an escape before you reach your destination. If your dens don't have a lock on their side porthole door, secure them with duct tape. If you're using traps that can open if rolled over or on their side, such as Tru-Catch traps, use carabiners or other clips to lock the doors. Also check that all cats are covered to keep them calm during transport. If it's a hot day, adjust the coverings to ensure sufficient ventilation. If you know two cats are closely bonded, arrange their trap covers so they can see each other in transit.

OPPOSITE PAGE: ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES; THIS PAGE: ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES

RETURNS

Stay safe

For security's sake, it's a good idea if those doing the returns let shelter staff know where they're going before they head out and when they expect to be back. Having an emergency contact number, just in case, is also advisable. The buddy system is a good rule of thumb where resources allow for two individuals at a time to conduct the returns.

THE RELEASE

When you arrive at the site for a release, check the paperwork to make sure you have the correct cat and are at the right location. This is especially important if there are multiple cats in the vehicle going to various places. Also look around to ensure there are no obstacles that might impede the cat's path. Next, place the trap or den on the ground near your vehicle, pointing the door in the direction you want the cat to go. Remove the cover and unlock the door. Give the cat a minute to recognize her surroundings, and then calmly open the trap or den door and step aside so you're not blocking her exit.

Be sure to watch which way she runs; occasionally a cat will dash under your car, so you'll need to make sure she's moved on before driving away. Make note of which direction the cat heads—this may help with any future returns at the same site. If she makes a beeline for the other side of the road, there's a good chance she—and her colony-mates— live over there, not on the side where you let her go and where the original trapping may have taken place.

Involving caretakers

As discussed in **Chapter 10 (Personnel)**, some finders will be the caretakers of the community cats they bring to the shelter or will agree to become caretakers. Consider it a big plus whenever you can identify or enlist a caretaker! It means you have a partner in the community who can potentially help with the return process as well as provide for a cat's long-term well-being. Take advantage of that potential by asking the caretaker, at intake, if they'll come to pick up the cat after her surgery. That can save your staff time and benefit the cat because the caretaker will know exactly the right spot to release her. If pickup from the shelter or clinic isn't possible, the next best thing is for the caretaker to meet your team at the release location, thereby taking any guesswork out of choosing the optimal spot. The presence of someone known to her may also be calming and reassuring for the cat. Remember, though, this is not a case of "the more, the merrier." With or without the caretaker present, releases should always be done with as little fanfare as possible. If the caretaker will be there, remind them not to bring others along to watch.

Releasing nursing mothers

Returns involving nursing mothers can be one of an RTF program's biggest challenges. As covered in **Chapter 7 (Surgery)**, you may decide to return a lactating female sooner than usual, especially if she recently gave birth and may have neonate kittens waiting for her. As with all RTF cats, put Mom back close to where she was trapped. If kittens are waiting, she'll know where they are and will go to them.

On occasion, a finder will present your shelter not only with a nursing mother but with her litter of kittens as well. One option is to hold onto mom and babies until the kittens are old enough to eat on their own and no longer need to be with their mother. Then adopt out the kittens and fix and return Mom. But if this type of foster care is not available, then the mom should be spayed right away and the kittens returned with her (a spayed female can still nurse.)

Whatever the age of the kittens, it's always better to have the support and involvement of a caretaker who will feed the family and keep an eye on the kittens. Of course, this is often not the case, but it is still possible to do the release. With neonate kittens who are too young to move more than a very short distance, follow this protocol to increase the chance of a successful return:

If mom is spayed in the morning, then in the late afternoon or evening of the same day, place the mother with her neonate kittens in a crate, trap, feral cat den or other portable housing unit. This will give her time to re-bond with the kittens and resume nursing.

When you're ready to return the family, transport them in the same crate or unit. At the release site, locate the exact spot where the kittens were found if you have that information. If the original spot is inaccessible or unsafe (too near a storm drain, too out in the open and unprotected from weather, etc.), choose a spot as close to the original place as possible that is suitable. If you don't know precisely where the litter was picked up, select a spot at the return address that is safe.

Open the door of the crate. Don't be surprised or discouraged if the mother dashes off, leaving the kittens behind. Gently put the neonates back at the spot where they were originally found or where you've decided is best, then remove the crate and step well back. Ideally, wait until mom returns to move or care for her kittens. There's no way to predict how long that will take—the cat may return swiftly or may take up to 12 hours. Whenever possible, it's best to confirm the mom is back before leaving the site, so wait as long as you can. If you must leave, try to check again later.

If a mother is being returned with a litter of nursing kittens older than neonates and able to move around on their own, such as four-week olds, your job will be easier because the kittens are able to follow their mom upon release. As with neonates, after the mother has had a few hours to recover from surgery, allow mom and kittens some quiet bonding time in a crate or other suitable container. Keep the family together during transport back to their site. Let the family go at the exact spot where they were found—if that's known, safe and accessible—or the best alternative spot you can locate. Small kittens will have limited knowledge of their mother's territory, so as close as possible to the original place they were found is best. Release the kittens first, then Mom immediately afterwards. The kittens should follow their mother. If they don't, she should return soon to retrieve them. Try to check back within 12 to 24 hours to make sure there are no kitten stragglers. If there are, they may need to be re-trapped and kept in your care.

Quiet returns

If your program is in its early stages and you've decided to fly under the radar initially, or you have reason to believe an open release could provoke a confrontation, take steps to avoid unwanted attention. Use an unmarked vehicle, go at a quiet time of day and pick a spot out of view of a finder's address. If you prefer to go unobserved by anyone, not just the finder, look whether people are around as you approach the planned release spot. If so, are they passing through or more likely to remain in place, like someone working in the yard or sitting on the porch? If it does not appear you can act unseen, you can proceed with the release anyway and accept that observers may ask questions or express concern. Otherwise, stay and wait until no one is around, move to another suitable spot or hold onto the cat and come back later.

When doing a quiet release, you can use your vehicle to shield your activities from casual observers. If someone is standing in a yard on one side of the street, you can park on the other and set the trap down on the sidewalk. For more cover, open both passenger side doors and place the trap on the ground between them.

When extra speed and discretion are called for, you can do a "side door release" and let a cat go without ever taking the trap or den out of your vehicle. When loading the cat into your car or van, place the trap so its back door is facing the rear passenger door. At the release site, park right next to where you want to let the cat go. Open the vehicle's rear passenger door, unlock and uncover the trap, then pull it forward so its back end is slightly protruding out from the car. Give the cat a moment to get his bearings then open the trap door and step back. He should have no trouble jumping down and being on his way. You can use the same technique out the back of your vehicle if you have a rear lift door.

Note that side door releases should only be done with healthy adult cats who will be able to jump down easily and quickly recognize their territory once on the ground. They should never be used with kittens. If a cat seems confused and won't leave the trap, you'll need to place him on the ground.

Dealing with confrontation

Despite your best efforts, sooner or later you may come face to face with someone who's upset or angry you're returning cats to their neighborhood. If it happens, remain calm and polite. It's unsettling to be confronted by a hostile stranger but getting angry in turn and declaring you and the cats have every right to be there will only escalate the situation. Instead, recognize that you're a stranger to this individual, too. Perhaps the person doesn't understand what you're doing and why, but will be open to hearing you out. If he or she seems receptive, take time to have a conversation. Explain the cat is now altered, and sterilization is more effective population control than constantly removing new felines. Point out what a tipped ear means and how fixed cats are better neighbors. Ask if they're having any specific problems related to the cats—this is an opportunity to show you care and want to help. Many people just want to feel heard and have their complaints taken seriously. For example, if they're unhappy because their prized garden is being used as a litter box, suggest ways to deter cats from entering their property.

Be sure to keep a supply of flyers or brochures on hand that describe your community cat programs and provide contact information for your agency. These can be handed out to anyone who

OPPOSITE PAGE: MIKE MCFARLAND/THE HSUS

sees a return and enquires about the program. If possible, translate your written materials into local languages besides English that are widely used in your community.

If someone is openly threatening to you or the cats, do not attempt to engage with the person. Instead, offer them a brochure and tell them they can call your agency if they would like more information. Only give out your agency's contact info, never your personal information. If the cats have not already been released, put them back in your vehicle and leave the scene. Find an alternative release site where you won't be observed, come back later or re-assess whether this is an appropriate location for the cats. If uniformed animal control officers are part of your agency, they may be better able to release cats in these situations. In the unlikely event you are facing an imminent threat of harm to yourself or the cats, call 911 or another appropriate emergency contact in your area.

More tips

If you're returning multiple cats to one location, the process will be faster and safer for the cats if you have all of them ready to go at once rather than preparing and releasing one at a time. Place the traps (or dens) in a row on the ground with all doors facing the direction you want the cats to go. Then remove all the trap covers and unlock all the traps. Open the doors as close to simultaneously as you can. This will help the cats follow one another to safety.

If you're doing a return with a trap that lacks a rear door and the cat is fractious, it's wise to take special precautions to avoid getting bitten or scratched. When you're ready to release, take a trap divider and section the cat off towards the rear of the trap. Next lift the front door and prop it open by sliding a dowel or similar long, narrow object through the sides of the trap just below the raised door. Once the trap is in position for the release, remove the divider, allowing the cat to exit out the front.

Lastly, when returning a cat close to a busy street, don't assume she'll stay on the side where you let her go, even if that's where her capture occurred. Her food and shelter and where she normally hangs out may be on the opposite side and when you let her go, she may run in that direction. Generally, when it comes to high-trafficked locations, wait for quieter times when there is little or no activity.

9. Post-return

CLEANING YOUR EQUIPMENT

Proper sanitation is important to prevent transmission of disease and keep the cats in your program healthy. After each return, disinfect your traps, dens, dividers and other equipment used in caring for the cats. Also clean any cages, shelves, tables or other areas where the cats were held prior to their release. Vehicles used to transport the cats will need to be sanitized as well. Identify who is responsible for cleaning what. For instance, holding areas may fall to kennel staff while trap and vehicle cleaning is left to whoever is returning the cats.

Review your current cleaning protocol for your facility in general and determine if it is sufficient for your RTF program. Update as required, adding instructions on the proper cleaning of traps, if necessary. A trap cleaning protocol could include the following:

The first step is to remove solid materials, such as paper, food or feces, scrubbing the surfaces as needed to ensure there are no contaminants left behind. A hose, scrub brush and wash tub can all make this easier. If you don't have a wash tub big enough to accommodate your traps, be creative: A large trash can or a long under-bed storage container will also work.

Next, coat all surfaces with disinfectant, making sure to get the insides of your traps, including under the trip plates. Two good options for disinfectants are accelerated hydrogen peroxide (1:16 dilution) and household bleach with a 5.25% concentration of sodium hypochlorite (1:32 dilution).[8] These are both effective against ringworm as well as common viruses, although it is recommended you bump up your bleach dilution to 1:10 if ringworm is present. If using bleach to disinfect your traps, you'll need to rinse it off after letting it sit for at least ten minutes. Wearing personal protective clothing while cleaning will help minimize potential disease transmission as well as protect you from any harsh cleaners. Disposable gloves, disposable gowns, smocks or aprons, protective eyewear as well as long-sleeves and long pants are advised. Trap covers can be laundered with towels and other bedding used by your facility.

For holding areas with a revolving door of cats, you'll need to spot clean. If cats in traps are held on a shelving unit, those shelves should be cleaned when the traps are removed, be it for surgery or return. Designate areas that are clean for newly arriving cats. Apply the same principle to vehicles if you are both dropping off and picking up cats on the same run.

Further information on disinfectants and effective cleaning protocols can be found in the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters* (Smith-Blackmore et al., 2010) and the *Sanitation in Animal Shelters* information sheet from the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program.[9]

OPPOSITE PAGE: NEIGHBORHOOD CATS; THIS PAGE: NEIGHBORHOOD CATS

[8] *ASPCA's Shelter Disinfectant Quick Reference:* aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/shelterdisinfectantposter.pdf

[9] *UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program, Sanitation in Animal Shelters (2015)* shelter medicine.com/library/resources/sanitation-in-animal-shelters

POST-RETURN

UPDATING YOUR DATABASE

Once a cat is returned to field, an outcome needs to be entered on the cat's record in your database. Exactly how you do this will depend on what shelter software you're using.

Return-to-field should be a distinct outcome type, just like adoption and return to owner, so you can track the number of RTF cats specifically. Don't include it as a subset of return to owner or transferring out to another organization; to most accurately reflect what happens to cats in your care, keep all these outcome types clean and distinct. You will likely have to create a custom outcome type for return-to-field. You may need to contact the software's tech support, but when it comes to analyzing your data later, you'll be glad you did. In addition, consider creating subsets of the RTF type to further break down your data. Some subsets to consider (although the naming convention can be modified to match your own vernacular):

- RTF/ACO pick-up: cats trapped by officers.
- RTF/Public drop off: cats brought to you by members of the public.
- RTF/Already tipped: cats who are already altered and ear-tipped.
- RTF/TNR: Cats who are brought in AND returned by their finders.
- TNR: If your organization also does proactive TNR in addition to RTF, you may want to track that separately.

Depending on your database, you may be able to track source (for example, ACO versus public) in a separate field. If so, some of these subtypes may not be needed to sort your data. This is discussed further in **Chapter 11 (Impact)**.

While entering the outcome, check that the cat's record is up-to-date and accurate. Make sure medical information has been entered as well as any microchip numbers. Note the date and time of the release and add any new notes about the release site, caretaker, finder or other residents encountered during the return. This may seem like busywork to staff, as the cat is no longer in your care, but this information could be important if there is an issue in the future. If you receive additional calls about cats in that area or need to verify a rabies vaccination history, you'll know who to contact.

Wait until the cat has been released to finalize the outcome and make the cat inactive in your database, but then do so in as timely a manner as possible. A cat who has been returned but remains active in your database can cause confusion. You might have staff frantically looking for a cat who is happily back home, or a person may see the cat listed on your public-facing found animals list and think she might be theirs. When creating a protocol for entering

outcomes, consider whether staff or volunteers returning cats have the required access to add an outcome for the cat in the database—or whether they need to alert a staff member who does.

FOLLOW-UP OUTREACH

If the caretaker of an RTF cat has been identified and was not present at the release, you may provide notification the cat has returned, assuming that has not been done already. A simple phone call or a note on their door will let them know that if they are feeding the cat, they should start putting food out again. If the finder was not actively caring for the cat but was amenable to her returning, you may decide to also let that person know she is back. With both caretakers and cooperative finders, let them know who to contact should a problem arise, particularly if the cat is not thriving post-return. For finders who oppose returning cats, you might opt to not provide any post-release notice.

FOLLOW-UP TRAPPING

In many cases, a cat brought into the shelter by a finder will be only one of many community cats in that area. This can be confirmed by asking the finder upon intake whether she is aware of other free-roaming cats in her neighborhood and by observations made by your transporter when the cat is released. If other cats are known to be present, consider your options for being proactive about getting them fixed. Doing so could reduce the number of cats being brought in for return-to-field, prevent additional complaint calls from community members and stop more cats from being born at that location.

Develop a protocol for communicating relevant information to those who can assist. This could include your own community cat program staff, animal control officers or outside organizations or volunteers who perform TNR. You could keep it simple and share copies of your stray cat intake form, including notes about additional cats, their estimated number and, if disclosure does not violate your confidentiality policies, contact information for the finder for any follow-up. You could also employ a more complex system, such as a shared Google spreadsheet, a Google map that can be updated in real time, or whatever software program serving a similar function is allowed in your agency (see **Appendix 8** for a sample spreadsheet). In general, coordinating your return-to-field program with the trap-neuter-return work of local groups can avoid duplication of efforts and give the community greater assistance.

If the finder or other person who originally contacted you about the cats indicated they were willing to assist in a TNR project, follow up and see what arrangements can be made to involve them. This expands your agency's capacity while engaging your community in being part of the solution.

CATS WHO AREN'T THRIVING

While the vast majority of cats who were healthy on intake will do well once returned to the same location, some cats may need to be reassessed if they are reported to be doing poorly once returned. You'll want to be prepared and have protocols in place for situations where the finder or another resident in the area notifies you of a sick or injured cat who was recently returned. A cat who is lethargic and not eating in the days after being returned outdoors may have a complication from the surgery, such as an infected incision, or be showing signs of an underlying illness triggered by the stress of confinement and surgery. It's possible the assessment made at intake was mistaken and the cat was an abandoned pet, not a community cat, and now cannot find adequate food or shelter. These situations should be carefully evaluated and, when necessary, efforts should be made to re-trap the cats so they can either be treated and released or directed to an alternative outcome.

FINDER WANTS TO ADOPT CAT

There is no reason to object if the finder wants to either adopt a cat who has been returned or find the cat a new home. Many cats used to living outdoors present as fractious and unmanageable when confined in a shelter, making them hard, if not impossible, to adopt out. Yet some of these same cats may be social and confident on their home turf and will eventually join the 32% of pet cats adopted as strays directly from the street (APPA, 2018). You can support the finder in his efforts to adopt by sharing medical records and providing information on how to update contact information for any microchip.

REPEAT CUSTOMERS

On occasion, a finder may bring in the same cat or kitten more than once. When this happens, try to find out what exactly is the problem the finder is having with the cat's presence. Have there been repeated complaints that have gone unresolved? Knowing this might give you an opportunity to address the issue (see "Complaint mitigation" in **Chapter 4**.) Sometimes there may be nothing you can do; the trapping might be the result of a dispute between two neighbors which no amount of intervention on your part will settle.

If the complaint or situation causing the multiple impounds cannot be resolved, you'll need to assess anew whether return-to-field is appropriate, taking into account any new information from or about the finder, any changes at the RTF site, the cat's behavior and her body condition and health. Provided you continue to conclude return-to-field is the best available outcome, there is no need to place an arbitrary limit on how many times a cat can be returned to the same location.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES; NEIGHBORHOOD CATS

10. Personnel

OUTSOURCING

While much of your return-to-field program will likely be managed and executed by shelter staff, there may be opportunities to include others in the process, especially with respect to surgery, returns and post-return activities. Whether to place responsibility for any of these stages in outside hands will largely depend on available resources and the need for assistance.

Spay/neuter procedures may be delegated to an outside facility if the shelter lacks an in-house clinic with the needed capacity or chooses not to use their own clinic for return-to-field. If outside veterinary providers are used, the shelter can deal with them directly or contract with another agency, such as a local TNR group, to take custody of RTF cats after intake and arrange the spay/neuter themselves. A contractual arrangement of this kind may have the advantage of having the cats' care overseen by experienced community cat experts. Typically, when custody is transferred after intake, the partner group will also hold the cats post-surgery and perform the releases.

Returning cats back to their original locations is the part of an RTF program most often delegated to outside agencies or individuals. Limited staff resources may make using a partner group to shuttle the cats back to their homes throughout the community an attractive option. If the partner has a TNR program, allowing them to perform releases may facilitate post-return trapping of other cats at the release sites. If they observe or are aware of more community cats, they could scout for feeders or caretakers and schedule a future trapping. This type of targeted approach—attempting to get the rest of the cats fixed where an RTF cat has been released—could potentially lower intake of more RTF cats from those locations.

In some programs, formal custody of the cats is first transferred to the group or individual. This arrangement may be preferable if the shelter wants to distance itself from the actual return-to-field and not technically be responsible for the releases. A shelter may want to do this because it faces legal constraints on allowable outcomes for cats, but other agencies or individuals do not. Or a shelter may be worried, at least initially, about negative reactions by the community or even donors at putting cats back outside rather than in traditional adoptive homes. Giving custody of the cats to a partner and letting them (willingly) shoulder the responsibility might mitigate this concern. An animal control agency may also partner with another group because it lacks the capacity to do the necessary public outreach or because RTF fits more efficiently with a different organization already engaged in TNR.

TYPES OF PERSONNEL

Staff

Ideally, the day-to-day running of an RTF program would be delegated to a staff position focused on community cats in general and return-to-field specifically. Having one person responsible for the overall program can provide consistency in the use of SOPs, prevent inadvertent gaps in care and management, and make it simple for other staff and partners to know with whom to communicate. Sample job descriptions for RTF positions can be found in **Appendices 9** and **10**. Depending on the size of the program, both a coordinator and one or more staff with exclusively hands-on and clerical responsibilities, like care of confined cats, transporting and updating records, may be needed.

But while it can be advantageous, a dedicated staff position is not a necessity for launching return-to-field. Different parts of the process can be allocated to existing staff members if there is at least one person with some oversight responsibility. When selecting who plays what role, consider the need at certain points in the RTF process to interact with the public, whether at intake, in the field or answering inquiries. If advocating what will be a new approach to community cats and their well-being may pose a challenge for some staff members, avoid assigning them public-facing tasks.

Animal Control Officers can be an important part of the success of an RTF program. They are likely the ones on staff who will respond to calls about sick or injured community cats. When possible, these cats can be rehabilitated, altered and returned to their outdoor homes. ACOs can also perform releases. This could allow the offi-

OPPOSITE PAGE: SKATHY MILAN/THE HSUS

cers to identify additional community cats needing to be altered at the return site and answer questions citizens in the area may have about return-to-field.

In some communities, ACOs will trap intact cats for the purpose of bringing them to the shelter to be sterilized and later returned to their original sites. The trapping may occur in response to a complaint or a citizen requesting assistance in getting a colony of intact cats fixed. While this could be considered TNR activity, because the cats are brought to the shelter, altered and returned to where they were found, it could also be thought of as a form of RTF.

Volunteers

Volunteers can be helpful in many ways, including feeding and cleaning confined cats, transporting cats to and from the spay/neuter clinic or returning them back to their home territories. However, selection of volunteers for specific RTF tasks should be carefully considered. If a volunteer will be doing returns, is she known to exercise good judgment? She may be faced with determining whether entry to a certain location will be trespassing or not. If a hostile confrontation occurs, will she be calm and handle it well? If a volunteer will be caring for the cats, is he someone who will adhere to procedures designed for his and the cats' safety? Are there sections of the community, such as high crime areas, where you would not be comfortable sending any volunteer? In the end, using volunteers can be a tremendous resource—if they are the right match.

Caretakers

Return-to-field programs operate, for the most part, without known caretakers in the picture. The essence of a return-to-field is the determination that, even in the absence of an identified caretaker, a cat who is thriving in an outdoor environment should be sterilized and returned there rather than euthanized. But there are exceptions. Sometimes people will bring cats to shelters not because they want them gone, but because they want them fixed. Such individuals may not be able to afford to have their colony cats spayed and neutered or may be unfamiliar with local free or low-cost veterinary resources. These caretakers may be closely bonded to their cats and consider them beloved members of the neighborhood. By supplying the needed spay/neuter surgeries for the responsible parties, your shelter's return-to-field services are essentially filling the role of a trap-neuter-return program.

On occasion a finder will bring in cats indeed wanting them gone but will change his mind when informed by intake staff about RTF and its long-term benefits. The possibility that a cat may be euthanized if not returned also may persuade some finders to agree to the cat coming back. Some "converted" finders may even commit to providing food and shelter.

Caretakers of free-roaming cats should always be provided with copies of medical records for their colonies. The information may be needed if a cat needs to be re-trapped at some future date for veterinary treatment, or if it ever becomes necessary to show proof the cat was fixed and vaccinated against rabies. At minimum, the records should show a cat's sex, estimated age, date of spay/neuter surgery and date and type of rabies vaccine administered, if any. Ideally, the medical record will also include a photo of the cat, additional vaccinations (such as FVRCP), along with the type and date administered, and any other veterinary treatment provided.

If microchipping is part of an RTF program's protocol, the type of chip used, chip number and possibly the corresponding ID tag should then be part of the cat's record. Some shelters list themselves as the default registrant for every microchipped cat; others transfer registration to caretakers whenever possible. If your RTF program uses microchips, you'll need to decide how to manage registration when a cat has an identified caretaker. In all cases, keep a copy of the complete veterinary record for your files and give one to the caretaker.

Partner agencies

There can be a lot of advantages to your RTF program from partnering with outside organizations. Nonetheless, the risks and benefits of working closely with another agency should be carefully evaluated. Will the partnership enhance your shelter's public image as you launch a new program or take away from it? Given your inability to monitor their day-to-day work, can your partners be trusted to act responsibly and exercise good judgment? Is the group capable of sustaining a partnership, the success or failure of which will directly impact your shelter and the animals housed there? Will the partner group be taking on a critical task, like returns, which the shelter lacks the resources to handle itself? Answering these questions will help you decide whether to collaborate. If the decision is to move ahead, a well-crafted memorandum of understanding that spells out expectations and responsibilities will help manage the relationship. For sample MOUs, see **Appendices 11** and **12**.

If TNR organizations are active in your community, collaboration may make sense completely apart from your RTF program. A TNR group may be able to do follow-up trapping if requested, have useful information about locations where a disproportionate number of RTF cats originate from, provide caretaker training and more. Working on community cat issues as a team rather than separately and in isolation can create a culture where tremendous synergy develops, propelling both programs to successes they would not have attained without each other.

BRYAN MITCHELL/AP IMAGES

11. Impact

Measuring impact with valid metrics is essential for any important program. Analyzing your data and how it changes over time will help you determine if you're meeting your goals and whether to continue, end or modify an existing program. It can help pinpoint areas of strength and where to make improvements. Data, if it does legitimately show impact, can be persuasive in gaining the support of government officials, your organization's leadership and others who may be influential. It can also be invaluable when applying for grants and to demonstrate to funders you used their money to make a real difference.

It's best to decide how you will measure the impact of your RTF program before it launches. In doing so, consider why you're starting return-to-field. Your goals likely include lower euthanasia, lower intake and fewer complaints. What metrics can you use to demonstrate that RTF is achieving these goals? The first step is to assess where you are now, at the very beginning of the program.

BASELINE DATA

To measure impact, you'll need to collect baseline data which can then be used as a comparison to future results. The baseline period should extend at least one year prior to the start of your RTF program. Intake and euthanasia rates are common metrics in animal sheltering and so should be easy to gather. If you're using a shelter software program, you're also likely partitioning data by other factors, such as intake type (owner surrender, stray, etc.). Examine what data you currently collect and how, then make any needed changes.[10] At a minimum, you'll want basic intake and outcome data for cats and specifically cats classified as strays.

You may also want to create a baseline and then track going forward the number of calls related to stray cats that you receive from the public. Probably you have calls coming in to multiple points of contact, such as animal control dispatch and your general customer service desk. A "call" can be defined to include an email or even a Facebook message. Consolidate tracking calls as much as

[10] *A great resource for this is Every Nose Counts, Using Metrics in Animal Shelters by Dr. Janet M. Scarlett, Dr. Michael J. Greenberg and Dr. Tiva Hoshizaki (2017)*

possible so that you have a full picture of the situation. To better understand how the public is communicating with you, break down the types of contacts (calls, emails, social media, etc.). Your shelter software program may have a module to track calls. If not, use a simple spreadsheet, such as the sample in **Appendix 8**, to collect this information. It may feel like busywork to your staff, but it can be very revealing. You can see how much staff time is spent on cat-related calls and whether you're allocating enough resources to the task. Because every caller is a constituent and potential voter, your elected officials may be interested in the results. And, of course, calls may demonstrate the impact of your RTF work.

Tracking whether a call is a complaint or a request for assistance can be informative, although it may be difficult at times to distinguish the two. A resident who calls to complain about stray cats in their yard may change his tune when learning about RTF and end up asking to borrow traps so he can bring in more cats to be fixed. Nonetheless, for many calls it will be clear whether someone wants the cats gone (complaint) or likes having them around and wants help (request for assistance). So categorize them as best you can. Trying to assign more weight to calls about large colonies than calls about single cats is not necessary. This data set is less about the cats than it is about people in the community and what their concerns are. You may have three people call about the same cat, but each of those calls should be logged separately.

Bonus points if you can partition your data, whether it's intake, euthanasia, calls or any other metric, by the address or at least the zip code where the cat originated. Looking at your data geographically, whether on a spreadsheet sorted by zip codes or addresses plotted on a map, will show where hot spots exist. You can then focus on at-risk animals in those areas. Data broken down by zip code is also often required for grant proposals and reports, reflecting the growing recognition that concentrating limited resources to specific areas, often referred to as "targeting," can have a greater impact than a more diffuse approach.

If possible, also partition your data by whether cats are adults or kittens (usually defined as less than five or six months of age).

MONITORING PROGRESS

Once you have your baseline data, you're in a position to evaluate the success of your RTF program in achieving its goals. Three metrics previously mentioned—euthanasia, intake and calls—can be assessed as follows:

Euthanasia

This is where you should see an immediate impact because cats who would have been euthanized under your previous policy are now afforded a live outcome. Look at the absolute number of cats being euthanized as well as what percentage of all outcomes is euthanasia, then compare those to your baseline. Also examine trends across different categories—all cats, stray cats, healthy cats, etc. Are you seeing a decline in the euthanasia of healthy strays—the cats specifically targeted by RTF? Are you seeing drops in euthanasia of non-RTF cats as well? By housing RTF cats separately and moving them through the program as quickly as possible, you decrease the density of cats in your shelter. This in turn can reduce illness and be a factor in reducing euthanasia of cats who are not part of the RTF program. If you're not seeing a decline in non-RTF cat euthanasia, are there adjustments you can make to try to gain that benefit?

Intake

Calculate the annual change in the number of cats received by your organization. Look at both the overall total as well as the number of cats categorized as strays. As was discussed in **Chapter 1 (Policy)**, don't be surprised if this number initially rises. As citizens come to see RTF as a resource for helping the free-roaming cats they care for, they may bring them to the shelter for sterilization and vaccination. Other citizens may now see the shelter as a safe place for cats and be more inclined to surrender them. If intake does rise, consider taking steps to address this, like diverting citizens to TNR programs or putting out more information on what to do if someone finds a litter of kittens. Explore whether other factors, like increased shelter hours, are influencing the rise in intake. Also recognize that for intake to drop, it may require complementary programs that are specifically aimed at reducing the number of cats in need, like low-cost spay/neuter for pets, behavioral counseling or TNR.

Calls

Look for trends in the number of calls about stray or free-roaming cats, as well as in the type of calls. Is the volume of calls more or less? Is the nature of the calls changing so that you're getting fewer complaints and more requests for assistance? As the public views your agency as a resource for cats and not a place where cats are routinely euthanized, citizens may be more likely to call for help. If you do receive fewer complaints, calculate what this means in terms of direct cost savings, like officers spending less field time responding to these calls. What fewer complaints means in terms of dollars can go a long way with government officials funding your agency.

Number of RTF cats

One data point that is not going to be indicative of progress by

itself is the number of cats going through your return-to-field program (those assigned an RTF outcome). Increasing the volume of RTF cats is not itself a goal, like increasing adoptions. Instead, it is a measure of the level of intervention. While the number of RTF cats won't tell you if your program is working, it can be useful for planning purposes.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Looking at your data can help identify kinks in the system. For example, compare the number of cats flagged as RTF candidates at intake versus how many cats have RTF as an outcome. If a meaningful percentage is being rejected from the program, you'll want to find out why, especially if the declined cats are mostly being euthanized. Are your assessment protocols too strict or is additional training required for intake staff? Other examples include comparing the total number of stray cats being admitted to the number selected for return-to-field. Again, is the number lower than expected? Also examine the length of stay for your RTF cats and identify any bottlenecks that delay getting these cats back home as quickly as possible.

USING MAPS

Make sure the found location field in your database is in the form of a mappable address with a zip code. Even if your shelter software does not include a mapping feature, you can export the data to a program that does, including Google Maps.[11] The address where an RTF cat was found does more than ensure that cat can be returned home; as mentioned earlier, it can help you determine trends and hot spots. Look at where the cats are coming from. Are the locations dispersed across town or concentrated in a few neighborhoods? If you see a concentration of intakes coming from one area, is that a chronic issue that may warrant further investigation and targeted interventions?

If your agency also maps TNR colonies separately from your RTF program, you can benefit by comparing the map of TNR activity with the one of RTF found locations. Are there known TNR colonies near where a cluster of RTF cats are coming in? You might be able to contact the caretakers to see if there are any issues which you can help resolve. Perhaps you can recruit them to do more TNR in those areas. If a finder brings in an ear-tipped cat and you can locate a nearby colony, the caretaker may be able to come and reclaim him.

ADDITIONAL SHELTER AND COMMUNITY IMPACTS

A deeper dive into your shelter data, past and present, may reveal other trends that appear to coincide with your RTF program, especially if no other major changes in operations have been made since the program's launch. Here are some to consider:

Age at intake

You might think that with fewer intact adult cats roaming around your community, you'll have fewer kittens entering your facility. What does your data say?

Illness in shelter cats

Are the cats in your care now less likely to develop a URI? If so, does that contribute to a shorter length of stay? Consider the role of your RTF program in these vital shelter statistics.

Source

If your agency actively traps cats in the community, how many RTF cats were caught by an animal control officer or other member of your staff at the request of a community member? How many cats were brought in "over the counter" as public drop-offs? Looking at how these numbers change over time, or don't change, can provide insight into how the community is receiving your new policy, especially when you consider this data with other information you've gathered. A decline in public drop-offs, combined with a reduction in nuisance complaints, could mean the community has grown more accepting of free-roaming cats and is simply leaving them alone. It also might mean these cats are being diverted to a TNR program. A larger number of cats brought to the shelter by the public may indicate a willingness by those residents to participate in a TNR program. What the data is and how you interpret it could influence how staff resources are allocated.

Repeat customers

When cats who have already been returned to field come back to your shelter, red flags may go up. Although a few repeat customers may stick in your head, they may not be representative of the whole RTF population. Use your data to show whether this is really a phenomenon to be concerned about.

DOAs (dead on arrivals)

Skeptics of RTF and TNR programs believe returning cats to the streets will result in more cats having untimely deaths outdoors, leading them to believe the cats are better off euthanized at the shelter. Your data, however, may show otherwise. San Jose documented a 20 percent decline in dead cats picked up off the streets (Johnson & Cicirelli, 2014). If your shelter also retrieves dead cats from the roadways or has access to that information from another agency in your jurisdiction, look to see if the number of cats found deceased has changed. Even better if the data indicates whether

[11] *For a detailed discussion and further resources on GIS mapping and data collection, see the X Maps program information at ASPCA Pro:* aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-research-data/x-maps-spot-tools-gis

the cat had an ear-tip or not.

If your RTF cats have been microchipped, you'll be able to track how many, if any, are included in the DOA category. You'll also be able to see the original home of the cat, when the return happened and other pertinent details that will help you assess how cats are moving in your community after being returned.

Staff turnover

Another metric that may be valuable to track, as a way of measuring staff morale, is your rate of staff turnover. A high volume of healthy cats being euthanized at a shelter may be correlated to high turnover. If this lessens as your RTF program advances, it could be an indication of improved morale.

Community support

Does the community have a more favorable impression of your organization post-RTF launch? This can be hard to measure, so you may want to track your local media coverage, social media metrics, donations, volunteers and testimonials. Perhaps a donor mentioned your new program as a reason for giving. Even if you decide to launch your RTF program quietly and at some point encounter a degree of controversy from the public, once you can demonstrate results, you are likely to see positive impacts in the community.

WHAT TO DO WITH FREED-UP RESOURCES

Once your RTF program is consistently diverting cats from your shelter population, you may find yourself in a position to reallocate resources previously dedicated to tending to those cats. What to do with those funds and extra staff time?

With fewer cats now in your shelter, one knee-jerk reaction may be to use those resources to aid the dogs in your care. Be cautious about becoming too dog-centric. Historically, animal shelters have focused on dogs with the humane management of cats lagging far behind. This has contributed significantly to the situation we are in today, including our overpopulation of outdoor cats, which in turn has led to the deployment of RTF programs. Shifting even more resources from cats to dogs may perpetuate this reality and may be seen by both your staff and the public as prioritizing one species over another or as being stuck in the dog-centric past. Instead, there are a number of ways to use the freed-up resources to make a positive difference for cats.

A return-to-field program by itself is not going to solve all the challenges presented by community cats. A healthy and manageable cat population in your community is the greater goal and newly available resources can be allocated to help achieve this vision.

You can reinvest in your RTF program or implement programs targeting other vulnerable feline populations. Working cat relocation programs offer options for RTF cats who can't be returned to where they were found. A nursery or foster network for orphaned neonates is another option, as is an isolation room for cats with ringworm or other contagious but curable conditions.

As citizens grow to accept increased efforts to save the lives of community cats, there will be a greater number of people reaching out to the shelter when these same cats become sick, injured or reach the point where end-of-life decisions need to be made. "Fospice" programs, where elderly or terminally ill animals are placed in foster care homes designed to enrich their final days, are increasingly available for both dogs and cats.

Consider interventions to further decrease the number of cats needing your assistance. While we tend to categorize cats as one type or another—owned, stray, feral, community, abandoned, shelter—in truth they often move among these categories. As a result, interventions to help all these kinds of cats are necessary to affect the entire cat population you serve. This could mean targeted TNR, free or low-cost spay neuter for owned cats, outreach to landlords to promote cat-friendly housing or a comprehensive assistance program for underserved communities like the HSUS Pets for Life program.[12] Holding wellness clinics in underserved neighborhoods as part of a Pets for Life program is a great way to connect with community members and gather more information about outdoor cats in their areas.

[12] *Learn more about the Pets for Life model at* animalsheltering.org/programs/pets-for-life.

Conclusion

Return-to-field is an important program to have in our animal welfare tool chest. We long ago learned there is no one answer to address the plight of homeless animals, and multiple approaches and tactics are needed to find solutions. RTF will not solve all your cat problems, but it will provide a positive outcome for those healthy outdoor cats who end up in your facility.

If you pursue not only RTF, but also programs to address the source of RTF cats, you will reduce the number of unaltered, roaming cats in your community, lower your cat intake and end up with far fewer cats in need of a return-to-field program. How you chart a path to this overriding goal of fewer cats in need will depend on your resources and unique circumstances. A RTF program can be an excellent first step, letting you quickly and dramatically improve euthanasia numbers and free up resources.

Implementing return-to-field may be challenging at first, but with a little advance planning you can launch an effective program, integrate it into the existing operations of your organization and gain the support of your staff and community. If your protocols are strong, clear and guided by compassion, you'll find success and achieve what animal welfare is all about: saving lives.

If you used this handbook to implement a return-to-field program, please let us know.
Contact us at *cats@humanesociety.org*.

ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES

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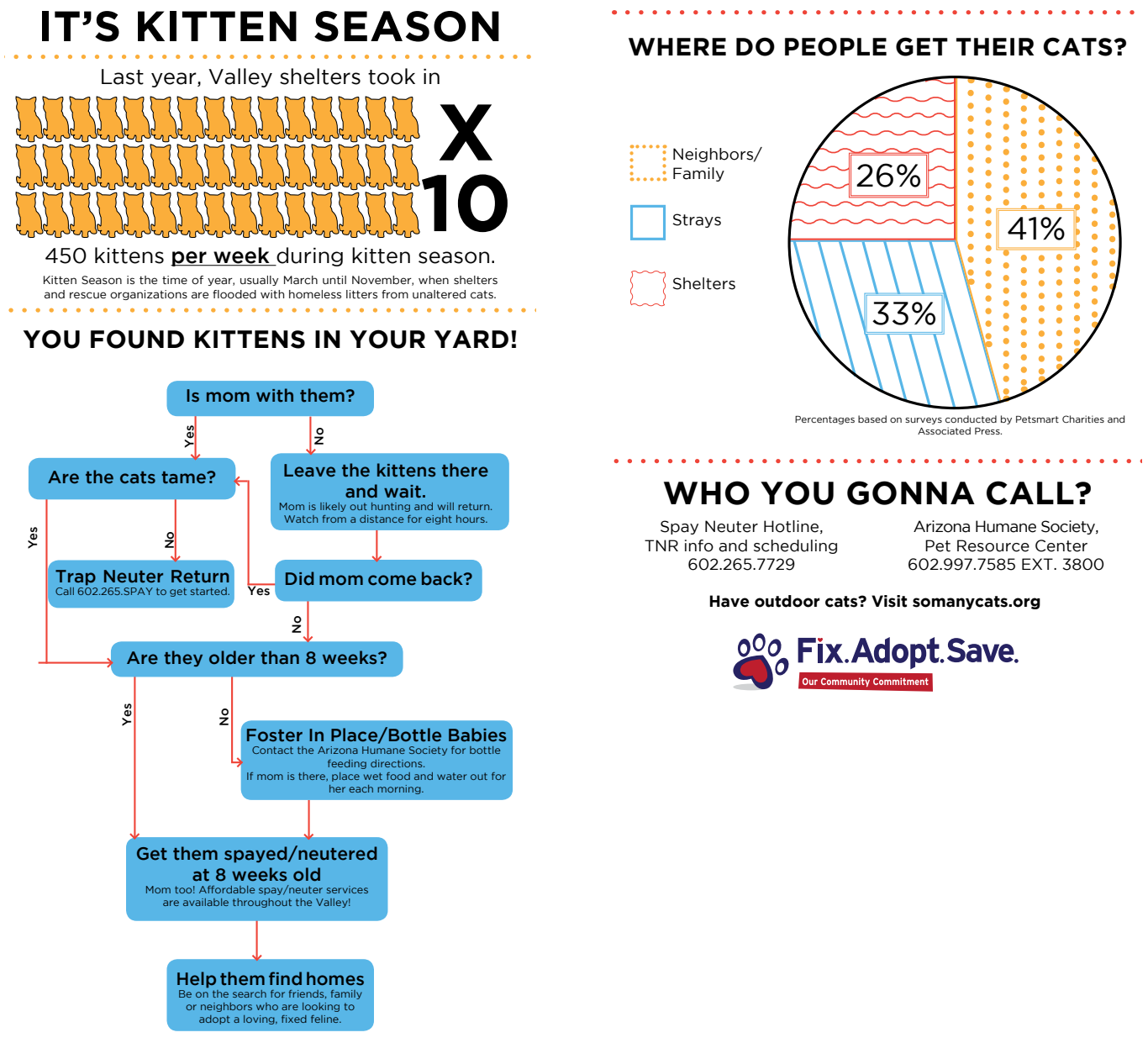
OPPOSITE PAGE: NICOLE MARIE THOMAS/THE HSUS

Appendices

APPENDIX 1. INFOGRAPHIC: WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND KITTENS

Courtesy of Arizona Humane Society



OPPOSITE PAGE: NEIGHBORHOOD CATS

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APPENDIX 2. EXAMPLE OF A RETURN-TO-FIELD POLICY STATEMENT

Courtesy of Maui Humane Society

MHS Policy on Healthy Community Cats

Every year, Maui Humane Society takes in thousands of community (free roaming, outdoor) cats brought to us by concerned citizens. The cats may be feral (wild), lost or abandoned strays, or pets belonging to unidentified owners. For many years, even decades, our policy was to euthanize these cats if they were not reclaimed or were unadoptable due to temperament or lack of space. This approach historically has failed to reduce the number of cats entering our shelter and there is no evidence it has reduced the population of outdoor cats in our Maui community. There are several reasons why removing cats from the environment and euthanizing them fails to impact their numbers on anything but a temporary basis:

- Not enough cats in an area are removed quickly enough to prevent their continued reproduction and population growth,
- The food and shelter that were available to removed cats remain in place and before long, new cats arrive to take advantage and fill the vacuum, and
- Many community members feed and care for outdoor cats and oppose their removal.

Where communities across the United States have seen success, as reflected by lower cat intake and fewer citizen complaints, there has been an active sterilization of community cats. No longer able to reproduce, the cats continue to fill a niche and prevent new, unaltered cats from taking over. Once fixed, the cats also roam less, make much less noise and do not create a foul odor when marking territory. They do continue to provide rodent control. If enough of the cats in a neighborhood are sterilized, their numbers will drop over time. This policy of managing community cats through sterilization is endorsed by The Humane Society of the United States, the ASPCA, Best Friends Animal Society and many other leading national animal welfare organizations.

In keeping with this progressive approach, Maui Humane Society no longer euthanizes healthy community cats due to lack of space or unsuitability for adoption. Instead, we practice a sterilization program. We spay or neuter the cat, tip the left ear, insert a microchip, vaccinate , administer deworming medication and return the cat to their original location. We are able to safely assume from the cat's healthy body condition that they are being fed and cared for by a community member. In addition to increasing the number of outdoor cats who are sterilized, our policy also reduces the overall population of cats on Maui. It also prevents the tragic euthanasia of pets who were captured while roaming and lack owner identification.

What if I don't want cats on my property?

There are many ways to keep unwanted cats or other animals out of your garden or yard, including motion-activated sprinklers and cat-proof fencing. For more information, please visit the Neighborhood Cats website at http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/how-to-tnr/colony-care/keeping-cats-out-of-gardens-and-yards-2 . Using deterrents is more effective for keeping your property cat-free than repeatedly trapping and removing cats.

Will returning the cats lead to increased cruelty and abandonment?

The experience of communities with these sterilization programs has been that returning healthy, fixed cats to their territories does not result in more acts of cruelty or abandonment. Citizens are generally law-abiding and harming a cat or releasing a cat at a new location where it cannot be assumed there is adequate food or sustenance are crimes under Hawaii's law. Also, as discussed, when a cat is sterilized, much of the behavior which people find annoying – noise, odor, fighting – is dramatically reduced.

Will returning cats harm wildlife?

We do not return cats to locations specifically managed for the preservation or protection of wildlife. Overall, reducing the outdoor cat population through sterilization will protect wildlife more than endlessly repeating the cycle of removing and euthanizing cats.

What can I do to help?

The more cats in an area who are fixed, the better the sterilization program works. If you are feeding outdoor cats who are unaltered, or if you are aware of them, please let us know. We can advise you how to safely capture them and bring them to our spay/neuter clinic, or we can arrange for our staff or volunteers to assist you.

Together, we can solve Maui's cat overpopulation crisis while respecting cats' lives and treating them as humanely as possible. Mahalo!

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 3. ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES' COMMUNITY CAT BROCHURE

Courtesy of Alley Cat Advocates

Alley Cat Advocates is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that has been making a positive difference for stray cats since 1999.

An Alley Cat Advocates volunteer awakens a cat after surgery.

Community Benefits

Because of Alley Cat Advocates' efforts, community cats are better neighbors:

- Fewer kittens are born.
- Males stop territorial spraying and fighting over females.
- Females stop calling for mates in the wee hours – and they are healthier because they don't have back-to-back litters of kittens.
- Community costs go down because there is less need for shelter care or euthanasia.

You Can Help!

- Volunteer
- Donate
- Call our hotline to schedule TNR for your community cats

Find out more at
alleycatadvocates.org
And like us on Facebook!

3044 Bardstown Rd., #204
Louisville KY 40205
(502) 634-8777

MAKING LOUISVILLE
THE SAFEST CITY
IN THE COUNTRY FOR
COMMUNITY CATS.

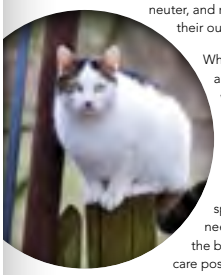
alleycatadvocates.org

OVER 40,000 CATS!

Since we began operation in 1999, Alley Cat Advocates has provided Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) services and excellent veterinary care to more than 40,000 cats in our area. Our goal is to decrease the community cat population in Louisville Metro, make the city safe for cats and make life better for cats and their neighbors.

What We Do

We work with people who take care of community cats to humanely trap, spay or neuter, and return them to their outdoor homes.



While the cats are with us, we give them vaccinations and flea, worm and ear mite treatment. If they have special medical needs, we provide the best veterinary care possible.

We also work in partnership with local animal service organizations to reduce the number of healthy animals being euthanized in shelters.

We speak up for community cats. Advocacy is an important part of our work.

A community cat is a stray or unowned cat who roams freely. Many are former pets who have been abandoned or lost. They have caretakers who provide food, shelter and loving concern, but their home is outdoors. There are far more community cats than there are indoor homes into which they can be adopted.

TNR is an effective, internationally recognized way of caring for community cats.

It works. One year after performing target TNR in one Louisville Metro zip code, cat intake to Louisville Metro Animal Services from that area went down by more than half.

Why is that cat missing the tip of her ear? That tipped ear is the universal symbol that a community cat has been spayed or neutered. Alley Cat Advocates eartips every cat who comes to us for spaying or neutering. It's a simple procedure that alleviates repeat trips to be spayed or neutered.

Make a tax-deductible donation.

Name:_____

Address/City/State/Zip:_____

Phone:_____

Email: _____

A one-time gift of:_____

Amount: $25 $50 $100 $500

A monthly gift of $_____by credit card

Name on Card: _____

Credit Card Account Number :

_____

Expiration Date: _____

Security Code:_____

Signature:_____

❑ My employer has a matching gift program.
Employer's name:

❑ Please send me planned giving information

Thank you for making Alley Cat Advocates and the cats we serve a part of your life.

Mail to: 3044 Bardstown Rd., #204
Louisville KY 40205
(502) 634-8777

Find our Wish List and more ways to give at
alleycatadvocates.org

APPENDIX 4. RETURN-TO-FIELD: HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS FOR STAFF TRAINING

How to use these hypotheticals

First read the "Facts" to your staff. Ask whether the cat should be admitted into your return-to-field program and have staff explain why or why not. Discuss what other information about the cat would be helpful to have. Then read the "Considerations" for that scenario and discuss further.

The term "finder" in these hypotheticals refers to the person who surrendered the cat to the shelter. All cats are unaltered when found and lack identification.

Case 1 (Leander)

Facts: The finder lives in an apartment complex with an inner courtyard that is not fully enclosed and is accessible from the street. For three days, he observed Leander hiding and shaking under an outside stairwell. He picked Leander up and brought him back to his apartment. For the next couple of days, Leander did well with the finder's dogs and other cats, showed affection to the finder and knew how to use a litterbox. Leander's coat had been dirty, but he cleaned himself up soon after being brought indoors. The finder tried knocking on doors in his building, but no one said they were missing Leander.

Considerations: A friendly cat found outdoors might be a sociable community cat or a pet allowed outside by his owner despite being unneutered. In either case, return-to-field would serve the cat well. If a community cat, he would be returned to his own territory. If a pet, he likely can find his own way home. Leander shows signs of being a pet, including letting the finder bring him inside, his comfort level indoors (as shown by his resumed grooming), his ability to get along with other animals and his use of a litter box. However, there were strong indications Leander would not find his way home if put back in the courtyard. He had already been under the stairwell for three days when the finder took him in. If he had his own home and knew how to get back to it, he probably would have left by then. In addition, he was doing poorly outside, hiding and shaking, and his coat was unclean.

Case 2 (Twilight)

Facts: Twilight jumped through an open window into the finder's living room and proceeded to make herself at home. She was friendly to the finder and in good health. Over the next day, the finder fed her and made up a little bed which Twilight slept in. When the finder decided to bring Twilight to the shelter, she tried to put her in a carrier. Twilight scratched her badly and the finder called animal control to come and get the cat.

Considerations: Cats are curious creatures and it's not unusual for the bolder among them to jump through an open window or run through an open door. Entering the finder's home does not by itself show Twilight was a former pet looking for a new home. Her good health means she could have been a cared-for community cat or a wandering pet who happened upon some food and a warm place to sleep, so decided to stay for at least a bit. Her aggressiveness when the finder tried to put her in a carrier is difficult to interpret. Did it reflect an unwillingness to ever be handled or moved, traits that might not serve her well in a shelter setting or as an adoption candidate? Or, combined with good body condition, did it point to a recently abandoned cat who wants to be friendly but is traumatized by loss of her home? More clues might be gained from observing how she responded to handling later in the shelter.

Case 3 (Keagan)

Facts: Keagan showed up one day on the finder's front porch. The finder put out some food and Keagan ate it all up right away. The cat backed away when the finder tried to pet him. For the next two weeks, at the same time each day, Keagan appeared on the finder's porch and the finder fed him. At the end of two weeks, the

finder was able to pet Keagan and decided to bring the cat to the shelter and gently pushed him into a carrier.

Considerations: Keagan's behavior is consistent with that of a community cat. Upon discovering a new food source in his territory, he made it part of his daily routine. As he got to know the person feeding him, he became friendlier and accepted handling. Notably, Keagan did not remain on the finder's porch after meals, but went about his business. If he was an abandoned or lost pet cat, it's likely he would have moved little or not at all from the finder's porch. Keagan's physical condition when first encountered could also be a clue to whether he should be an RTF catwas he in good shape, indicating he was already being cared for, or was he thin and sickly, showing he had not been thriving? How did he behave at the shelter—was he a sweetheart who could be adopted out or was he difficult to handle and fractious like a feral?

Case 4 (Luna)

Facts: The finder had observed Luna, a feral cat, in the neighborhood for over a year. Luna had been fed by the finder's neighbor, who moved away a few weeks earlier. There were other community cats in the area as well. Concerned Luna would starve, the finder trapped her.

Considerations: Community cats often have multiple food sources or are able to find new ones when old ones disappear. There were other cats in the finder's neighborhood and, unless the neighbor who moved had been feeding all of them, there were other food sources. Also, the neighbor had left a few weeks before. If Luna's body condition was good at the time of trapping, it meant she had discovered where to eat. On the other hand, if Luna was thin, flea-ridden and otherwise unwell, this would raise questions about her ability to thrive.

Case 5 (Blake)

Facts: A finder feeds a colony near her residence, including one of her favorites, Blake, a 1-year-old feral male. Recently, she overheard a neighbor complaining about the cats and threatening to poison them. Fearful, she trapped Blake and brought him in, believing it was the kindest thing to do. She planned to capture and surrender the other colony cats as well.

Considerations: In situations where there are multiple unaltered community cats, it is normal for neighborhood residents to be upset by their presence. The noise from mating and fighting, the smell from toms spraying, cats defecating in gardens or scratching lawn furniture or cars—all can result in a hostile attitude. People may make threats out of frustration with no intent of following through. The solution is TNR. Getting the cats fixed and showing angry neighbors how to keep cats off their properties would probably lower the level of hostility. Removing the cats would likely result in new cats eventually moving into the area and starting the cycle all over again. Fixing and returning Blake would be a start in the right direction. If the finder is persuaded TNR is worth a try, she may be willing to continue trapping for that purpose.

APPENDIX 5. EXAMPLE OF A RETURN-TO-FIELD TRACKING FORM

Courtesy of Maui Humane Society

maui humane society

Return to Field

Animal Number: A37792919
Age: 2 year(s)
Sex: Female
Altered: Yes
Black / Orange Tortoiseshell

Intake Date: 2/7/2018

Return to Field Location: 0000 W Kuiaha Road, HAIKU

Intake Evaluation Date:

FVRCP given: Yes No

Identification:

Microchip Tattoo Tipped None

S/N: Yes No Unknown

BCS (1-9): _____

Surgery Date:

FVRCP given: Yes No

Ivermectin given: Yes No

Convenia given: Yes No

Eartip: Done

Tattoo: Done

Approximate Weight:

Is the cat:

Pregnant Lactating In Heat

Pyometra Cryptorchid

Type of Surgery:

Flank Midline

Medical/Surgical Notes:

Microchip

☐ Approved for release
☐ Released
☐ Surgery entered
☐ Outcome entered

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 6. SAMPLE STRAY CAT INTAKE QUESTIONNAIRES

Courtesy of Louisville Metro Animal Services

CAT INTAKE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of person surrendering cat:_____

Address:_____

Phone:_____Date_____

1) Was this cat picked up at:

a. Your home Yes No Address_____

b. If No, please list address/cross street _____

c. Do you know who owns it/cares for it?_____

2) What is the reason for bringing the cat to us?_____

3) How long has the cat been living inside with you_____

4) How long has this cat been living outside in the neighborhood?_____

5) Do you know of any household where this cat spends(or has spent)sometime inside_____

6) Are you aware of any illness or injury this cat may have? _____
If yes, please describe:_____

7) Are you aware of any other cats in this neighborhood? _____
If yes, please describe including estimated number of cats and kittens:_____

8) Are you aware of anyone in the community who might be feeding or would be willing to feed outdoor cats? If yes, please list address or nearest intersection._____

9) If not, would you be willing to feed this cat when it comes back to your neighborhood after being spayed/neutered, vaccinated and ear tipped?_____

10) Any other information that may be helpful? _____

FOR ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY

Animal ID_____ Employee name_____

1.	Declawed, blind or deaf with no known caretaker	Yes	No
2.	Microchipped/ or identifying tag?	Yes	No
3.	Witnessed being abandoned or eviction set out?	Yes	No
4.	Injured or sick (does Vet staff need to be involved?)	Yes	No
5.	Under 2 lbs …enter weight_____	Yes	No
6.	Under 4 lbs with no known caretaker...enter weight_____	Yes	No

Place cats that receive all **"No's"** to the following questions in traps on the trap rack in the trailer. If all "No's" but cat is not of healthy weight, is sick or injured, place in kennels #21 through #29 in cat room until issue can be addressed . If "Yes" to any question, place cat in cat room

If Cat is to be released back into the community it goes to this address_____
This should match question #1

Kennel Supervisor approval_____ Date_____

Deputy Director approval_____ Date_____

Stray Cat Intake Questionnaire

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____
Street City State Zip Code

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Location where cat was found. ☐ **Front of address** ☐ **Rear of address** ☐ **Side of address**

Address: _____
Street City State Zip Code

If address is unknown, provide nearest cross streets and/or landmarks:

_____

Why are you bringing this cat to the shelter today?

If you have reason to believe this cat was abandoned, please provide any evidence you may have.

Please help us by answering the questions below.

1. How long have you been seeing this cat in the area? _____
2. Have you been feeding this cat regularly? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, for how long? _____
3. Are you aware of anyone else who may be feeding this cat regularly? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If so, provide address or location. _____
4. Does the cat appear to have any injuries or signs of illness? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If yes, please describe. _____
5. Is the location where the cat was found safe for cats to be outdoors? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If no, please describe. _____
6. Are you willing to continue to care for the cat if/when he is returned? ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. If the cat needs medical care, are you able to care for the cat during recovery? ☐ Yes ☐ No
8. Describe the cat's behavior:
9. Have you observed other stray cats in the area? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If yes, estimate how many adult cats _____ and how many kittens _____.
10. Please note any other information that may be helpful:

For administrative use only.

Animal ID number: _____ Animal name: _____

Microchip number: _____ Intake done by: _____

APPENDICES

Courtesy of The Animal Foundation

STRAY CAT INFORMATION FORM

Date: _____

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

ANIMAL INFORMATION

Would you like to adopt this pet, should it become available for adoption? ☐ YES ☐ NO

How did the cat respond when you found it? ☐ Outgoing/Friendly ☐ Timid ☐ Fearful ☐ Unsocialized to People

☐ Other _____

Was the cat around any other animals? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Has the cat shown signs of sickness or injury? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Address where cat was found (we need a **full address if possible, not just cross streets):**

_____ Zip Code: _____

Is the address provided an exact address or your best guess? ☐ Exact ☐ Best Guess

This address is (check all that apply):

☐ an alley ☐ an abandoned building ☐ a business ☐ a vacant lot
☐ a park ☐ a private residence ☐ an apartment complex
☐ other information about this location:

Do you know if this animal has nursing kittens? _____

Does the cat live indoors, outdoors, or both? _____

Do you know if anyone owns this cat? If so, who? _____

Have you seen any other cats or kittens near this address? About how many? Do you feel as though they are causing a nuisance on your block? Please include any other information you would like for us to know.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you know if anyone is or has recently been feeding and/or spaying/neutering these cats? If so, who?

_____

_____

_____

I understand that I am forfeiting this cat to the care of The Animal Foundation and that the following outcomes are possible for this animal: participation in the shelter/neuter/return program, adoption, transfer to a rescue group, or humane euthanasia if The Animal Foundation deems necessary.

Signature: _____

Do you want help with the cats in your community?

OR

Would **YOU** like to help?

In partnership with the Best Friends Community Cats Project, we may be able to assist you. Please fill out the below portion if interested.

☐ I want to learn how to trap, neuter and return cats.
☐ I want to learn how to build a cat shelter.
☐ I would like to volunteer to help the cats in my community.
☐ **I do not mind if a member of the Best Friends Community Cat Project contacts me for more information about the cats that I see in my community.**

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 7. COMMUNICATING WITH FINDERS: RETURN-TO-FIELD QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What if this is a lost pet?

Cats with identification tags or microchips will be held while we attempt to contact their owner. We also check to see if this cat is a match for one who was reported as lost. While we once thought bringing the cat to the shelter was the best way to make sure that cat got back home, we now know that very few—not even 5 percent—of cats are reunited with their families during stray hold periods. We also know that lost cats who don't come into the shelter are 13 times more likely to find their way back home than those who do. Most housecats are found within a three-house radius of where they escaped.

Isn't returning the cat the same as abandonment?

No. There is no cruel intent with RTF; rather, these cats are being returned to their outdoor homes, as their condition indicates they are in good health and were doing well prior to coming to the shelter. It is a myth that these cats are living on their own, as many of them have multiple residents providing food and often shelter as well. The sterilization and vaccination provided to them before their return help ensure their continued good health.

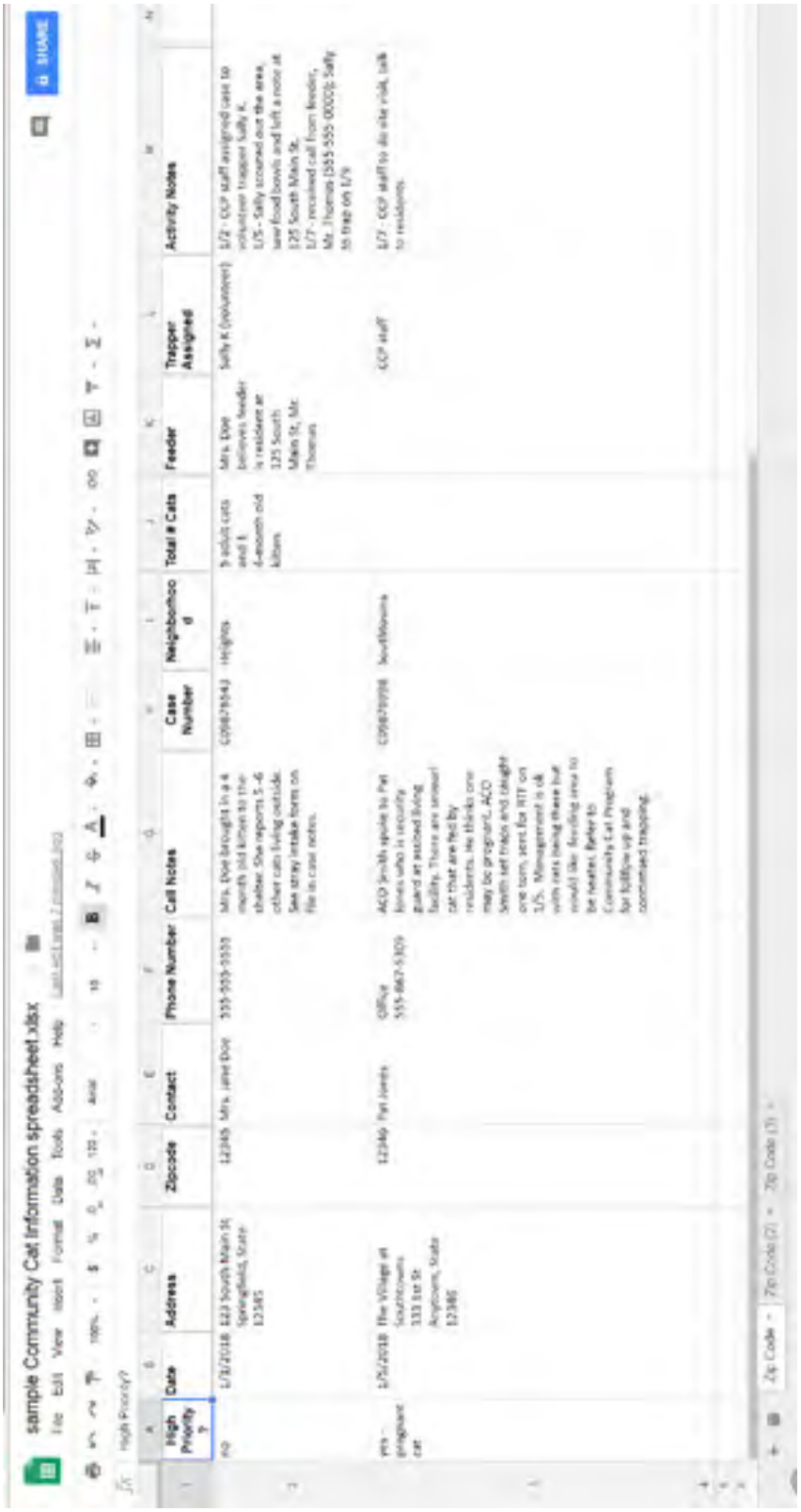
Won't neighbors continue to complain?

Many of the behaviors that can trigger nuisance complaints (e.g., spraying, fighting, etc.) are resolved through sterilization. Once cats have been spayed/neutered, the complaints often drop off considerably. If there are unresolved issues, various deterrents can be used to keep cats away from where they are not wanted. This information is available online or in available brochures.

Won't returning the cats harm wildlife?

Return-to-field is about returning cats to where they were found, not about *adding* cats to the environment or *adding* to the risk that wild animals may experience. The cats are already living in our community and the important thing is to stop them from reproducing. The number of cats impounded by shelters in most communities is tremendous, yet still too small to have any meaningful impact on predation by cats.

APPENDIX 8. SAMPLE SPREADSHEET: RTF ACTIVITY



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 9. EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION: COMMUNITY CAT COORDINATOR

Courtesy of Louisville Metro Animal Services

LOUISVILLE METRO GOVERNMENT
invites applications for the position of:

Community Cat Coordinator

SALARY: $14.43 /Hour

OPENING DATE: 01/27/17

CLOSING DATE: 02/07/17 11:59 PM

DESCRIPTION:

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS:
Leads all aspects of Louisville Metro Animal Services work regarding community cats and shelter cats
Coordinates with Animal Care, veterinary services, Animal Control staff and designated TNR partners in the community to proactively manage community cats sheltered by LMAS
Provides support for populations of community cats outside the shelter within LMAS jurisdiction

EXAMPLES OF DUTIES:

UNDER ADMINISTRATIVE SUPERVISION
Manages record keeping for impound of community cats utilizing Chameleon software
Transports community cats to KHS SNIP clinic for surgery
Returns newly altered community cats and ear-tipped impounded cats to their home neighborhoods
Works with Veterinary staff to return to healthy impounded community cats including supporting foster care initiatives during recovery
Maintains trap inventory log and keep traps clean and in working order
Identifies colonies throughout the community needing proactive TNR assistance
Educates residents about TNR, SNR, and the local ordinance related to these activities
Keeps track of active caretakers utilizing Chameleon
Provides advice and support to caretakers of community cats
Coordinates trapping efforts of Animal Control staff with Animal Control leadership
Assists with trapping efforts as needed
Provides monthly reports of all community cat related initiatives
Works to provide resources to owners who want to surrender their cats so they can keep them in their homes
Oversees specific cat volunteers to assist in all aspects of cat intake and outcomes
Works hand in hand with all LMAS departments, supervisors, and coordinators to assure the best possible outcome for our cats
Works with rescue organizations (specifically Alley Cat Advocates) and rescue coordinator to find placement for hard to adopt cats as well as the influx during kitten season
Performs related work

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS:

High School completion or its equivalent

WORK EXPERIENCE
One year of animal care or animal handling experience

EQUIVALENCY
An equivalent combination of education and experience may be substituted

OTHER MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS
Must wear personal protective equipment as mandated by OSHA
Must be available to work a varied schedule including evenings, holidays, and weekends
Must possess and maintain a valid driver's license

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS AND WORKING CONDITIONS
Meets regular and punctual attendance standards and any special needs of the position as determined by management, including mandatory overtime and performing related work

Must be able to sit for extended periods of time working at a computer, doing repetitive typing, arm and hand motions
Lifts and carries items weighing up to 50 pounds

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION:

Ability to communicate effectively both written and verbally
Knowledge of and proficiency with Microsoft Office Suite, internet, email and other software
Knowledge and experience with community cats and trapping cats, and knowledge about how to safely operate cat traps
Accurate record-keeping skills and ability to provide detailed data on various activities

---

APPLICATIONS MAY BE FILED ONLINE AT:
http://www.louisvilleky.gov/humanresources

517 Court Place
Louisville, KY 40202
(502) 574-3600

cynthia.doemer@louisvilleky.gov

Position #03143
COMMUNITY CAT COORDINATOR
LW

Community Cat Coordinator Supplemental Questionnaire

* 1. Do you have one year of animal care or animal handling experience?

❑ Yes ❑ No

* Required Question

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 10. EXAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION: COMMUNITY CAT TRAPPER

Courtesy of Alley Cat Advocates

Alley Cat Advocates
Job Description

Position Title: Trapping Specialist
Reports to: Trapping Services Manager
Location: Open/office
FLSA status: Non-Exempt, Full-time
Position Available: January 1, 2016
Salary: $14.00/hr; 40 hrs/wk
Sick Leave: 12 days/yr
Vacation Leave: 10 days/yr

Position Summary: The Trapping Specialist provides trapping, transportation, and outreach as it pertains to community cats. The Trapping Specialist provides on-site assessments and trapping and transport assistance for identified community cats and their caretakers. Under supervision of the Trapping Services Manager, the individual will work closely with Louisville Metro Animal Services personnel and will focus on Alley Cat Neighborhoods Project and Operation City Kitty areas of service.

Essential Duties:

- Trap and transport cats in colonies identified through calls to hotline, grassroots presence in neighborhoods, Operation City Kitty returns, and ACA/MAS ride-alongs.
- Schedule spay/neuter appointments of cats being trapped through ACA's Quick Fix (typically at the KHS SNIP Clinic), through ACA's BIG FIX, and at other providers, making reminder calls and rescheduling, as needed.
- Assure efficient, timely response to caretakers with community cats needing trapping and/or transportation assistance.
- Educate residents about TNR in general, the Neighborhoods Project and Operation City Kitty specifically, and the local ordinance related to community cat issues
- Provide advice and support regarding colony management to caretakers before, during, and after the trapping process
- Refer caretakers to community resources for other companion animal needs, such as spay/neuter assistance, pet food, medical needs, behavior modification, etc. for owned pets
- Other duties as assigned

Education

- Undergraduate degree preferred

Experience

- Project management
- Volunteer or paid work in animal welfare
- Work with community cats (preferred); cats in general (required)

Skills

- Strong time management/organizational skills

Rev 10/20/15

- Strong problem solving skills
- Strong written and verbal skills
- Proficiency with Internet navigation, a variety of computer software applications (in particular Microsoft Office); proficiency with e-mail

Additional Information

- Local travel required
- Must occasionally lift and move up to 35 pounds
- Must be self-guided, requiring minimal supervision
- Must be able to work flexible hours, possibly including holidays, weekends, and late and early hours as needed
- Must be able to work in all weather conditions
- Must have current driver's license and a good driving record
- Must be at least 25 years of age

We desire a candidate who demonstrates outstanding inter-personal communication skills and the ability to work in a team environment or independently, with a high degree of integrity and accountability.

Rev 10/20/15

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 11. SAMPLE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING: MUNICIPAL SHELTER

Courtesy of Alley Cat Advocates/Louisville Metro Animal Services

AGREEMENT FOR SOLE SOURCE PURCHASE

THIS CONTRACT, made and entered into by and between the **LOUISVILLE/JEFFERSON COUNTY METRO GOVERNMENT**, by and through its **DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SERVICES**, herein referred to as **"METRO GOVERNMENT"**, and **ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES, INC.** with offices located at 3044 Bardstown Road, Number 204, Louisville, Kentucky 40205, herein referred to as **"CONTRACTOR"**,

WITNESSETH:

WHEREAS, the Metro Government wishes to purchase services regarding the care and management of community cats located within Metro Louisville; and

WHEREAS, the Contractor has been determined by the Metro Government to be a sole source to provide same;

NOW, THEREFORE, it is agreed by and between the parties hereto as follows:

I. SCOPE

A. Contractor shall, at the request of the Metro Government, provide the services described on Attachment A attached hereto and fully incorporated herein.

II. FEES AND COMPENSATION

A. The Metro Government shall pay Contractor **THREE THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTY THREE DOLLARS ($3,333.00)** per month. Total compensation payable to Contractor for services rendered pursuant to this Agreement, including out of pocket expenses, shall not exceed **FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS ($50,000.00)**.

B. Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the Metro Government, services shall be rendered and payment therefore shall be made at monthly intervals throughout the duration of this Agreement. Payment shall only be made pursuant to a detailed invoice presented monthly, which invoice shall indicate a descriptive accounting of the service provided under the contract during said month. If applicable, copies of invoices or receipts

for out-of-pocket expenses and other third party charges must be included with the Contractor's invoice when payment is requested. In the event payment is made in lump sum at the end of the service period, Contractor's final invoice shall indicate a descriptive accounting of service as described heretofore.

C. Contractor shall only be reimbursed out-of-pocket expenses if they are reasonable in amount and necessary to accomplish the scope of services of this contract. The Metro Government will not reimburse first class air fare, personal phone calls, short term parking expenses, or other premium type expenses. The Metro Government reserves the right to reduce or disallow expenses considered excessive or unnecessary under this contract.

D. Contractor, to the extent that it provides the same or related services to other parties agrees to pro-rate its billings and out-of-pocket expenses to the Metro Government which are of benefit to the other parties and to provide documentation to all parties to verify the pro-ration of such billings and expenses. In no event will the Metro Government pay bills or expenses which are considered to be double billing (i.e. billing two different parties for the same work or expense).

III. DURATION

A. This Agreement shall begin March 1, 2018 and shall continue through and including February 28, 2019.

B. This Agreement may be terminated by submitting sixty (60) days' written notice to the non-terminating party of such intent to terminate. This Agreement may also be terminated by any party, without notice to the non-terminating party, because of fraud, misappropriation, embezzlement or malfeasance or a party's failure to perform the duties required under this Agreement. A waiver by either party of a breach of this Agreement shall not operate or be construed as a waiver of any subsequent breach.

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C. In the event of termination, payment for services complete up to and including date of termination shall be based upon work completed at the rates identified in this Agreement. In the event that, during the term of this Agreement, the Metro Council fails to appropriate funds for the payment of the Metro Government's obligations under this Agreement, the Metro Government's rights and obligations herein shall terminate on the last day for which an appropriation has been made. The Metro Government shall deliver notice to Contractor of any such non-appropriation not later than 30 days after the Metro Government has knowledge that the appropriation has not been made.

IV. RECORDS-AUDIT

Contractor shall maintain during the course of the work, and retain not less than five years from the date of final payment on the contract, complete and accurate records of all of Contractor's costs which are chargeable to the Metro Government under this Agreement; and the Metro Government shall have the right, at any reasonable time, to inspect and audit those records by authorized representatives of its own or of any public accounting firm selected by it. The records to be thus maintained and retained by Contractor shall include (without limitation): (a) invoices for purchases receiving and issuing documents, and all the other unit inventory records for Contractor's stores stock or capital items, and (c) paid invoices and canceled checks for materials purchased and for subcontractors' and any other third parties' charges.

V. HOLD HARMLESS AND INDEMNIFICATION CLAUSE

Contractor shall indemnify, hold harmless, and defend the Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government, its elected and appointed officials, employees, agents and successors in interest from all claims, damages, losses and expenses including attorneys' fees, arising out of or resulting, directly or indirectly, from the Contractor's (or Contractor's subcontractors if any) performance or breach of the contract provided that such claim, damage, loss, or expense is (1) attributable to personal injury, bodily injury, sickness,

death or to injury to or destruction of property, including the loss of use resulting therefrom, or from negligent acts, errors or omissions and (2) not caused by the negligent act or omission of the Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government or its elected and appointed officials and employees acting within the scope of their employment. This Hold Harmless and Indemnification Clause shall in no way be limited by any financial responsibility or insurance requirements and shall survive the termination of this Contract.

VI. REPORTING OF INCOME

The compensation payable under this Agreement may be subject to federal, state and local taxation. Regulations of the Internal Revenue Service require the Metro Government to report all amounts in excess of $600.00 paid to non-corporate contractors. Contractor agrees to furnish the Metro Government with its taxpayer identification number (TIN) prior to the effective date of this Agreement. Contractor further agrees to provide such other information to the Metro Government as may be required by the IRS or the State Department of Revenue.

VII. GOVERNING LAW

This Agreement shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of Kentucky. In the event of any proceedings regarding this Agreement, the Parties agree that the venue shall be the state courts of Kentucky or the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Kentucky, Louisville Division. All parties expressly consent to personal jurisdiction and venue in such Court for the limited and sole purpose of proceedings relating to this Agreement or any rights or obligations arising thereunder. Service of process may be accomplished by following the procedures prescribed by law.

VIII. AUTHORITY

The Contractor, by execution of this Agreement, does hereby warrant and represent that it is qualified to do business in the State of Kentucky, has full right, power and authority to enter into this Agreement.

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IX. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to KRS 45A.455:

(1) It shall be a breach of ethical standards for any employee with procurement authority to participate directly in any proceeding or application; request for ruling or other determination; claim or controversy; or other particular matter pertaining to any contract, or subcontract, and any solicitation or proposal therefor, in which to his knowledge:

(a) He, or any member of his immediate family has a financial interest therein; or

(b) A business or organization in which he or any member of his immediate family has a financial interest as an officer, director, trustee, partner, or employee, is a party, or

(c) Any other person, business, or organization with whom he or any member of his immediate family is negotiating or has an arrangement concerning prospective employment is a party. Direct or indirect participation shall include but not be limited to involvement through decision, approval, disapproval, recommendation, preparation of any part of a purchase request, influencing the content of any specification or purchase standard, rendering of advice, investigation, auditing, or in any other advisory capacity.

(2) It shall be a breach of ethical standards for any person to offer, give, or agree to give any employee or former employee, or for any employee or former employee to solicit, demand, accept, or agree to accept from another person, a gratuity or an offer of employment, in connection with any decision, approval, disapproval, recommendation, preparation of any part of a purchase request, influencing the content of any specification or purchase standard, rendering of advice, investigation, auditing, or in any other advisory capacity in any proceeding or application, request for ruling or other determination, claim or controversy, or other particular matter, pertaining to any contract or subcontract and any solicitation or proposal therefor.

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(3) It is a breach of ethical standards for any payment, gratuity, or offer of employment to be made by or on behalf of a subcontractor under a contract to the prime contractor or higher tier subcontractor or any person associated therewith, as an inducement for the award of a subcontract or order.

(4) The prohibition against conflicts of interest and gratuities and kickbacks shall be conspicuously set forth in every local public agency written contract and solicitation therefor.

(5) It shall be a breach of ethical standards for any public employee or former employee knowingly to use confidential information for his actual or anticipated personal gain, or the actual or anticipated personal gain of any other person.

X. **ENTIRE AGREEMENT**

This Agreement constitutes the entire agreement and understanding of the parties with respect to the subject matter set forth herein and this Agreement supersedes any and all prior and contemporaneous oral or written agreements or understandings between the parties relative thereto. No representation, promise, inducement, or statement of intention has been made by the parties that is not embodied in this Agreement. This Agreement cannot be amended, modified, or supplemented in any respect except by a subsequent written agreement duly executed by all of the parties hereto.

XI. **SUCCESSORS**

This Agreement shall be binding upon and inure to the benefit of the parties hereto and their respective heirs, successors and assigns.

XII. **SEVERABILITY**

If any court of competent jurisdiction holds any provision of this Agreement unenforceable, such provision shall be modified to the extent required to make it enforceable, consistent with the spirit and intent of this Agreement. If such a provision

APPENDICES

cannot be so modified, the provision shall be deemed separable from the remaining provisions of this Agreement and shall not affect any other provision hereunder.

XIII. **COUNTERPARTS**

This Agreement may be executed in counterparts, in which case each executed counterpart shall be deemed an original and all executed counterparts shall constitute one and the same instrument.

XIV. **CALCULATION OF TIME** Unless otherwise indicated, when the performance or doing of any act, duty, matter, or payment is required hereunder and a period of time or duration for the fulfillment of doing thereof is prescribed and is fixed herein, the time shall be computed so as to exclude the first and include the last day of the prescribed or fixed period of time. For example, if on January 1, Contractor is directed to take action within ten (10) calendar days, the action must be completed no later than midnight, January 11.

XV. **CAPTIONS** The captions and headings of this Agreement are for convenience and reference purposes only and shall not affect in any way the meaning and interpretation of any provisions of this Agreement.

XVI. **VIOLATIONS OF AND COMPLIANCE WITH KENTUCKY LAWS** The Contractor shall reveal any final determination of a violation by the Contractor or subcontractor within the previous five (5) year period pursuant to KRS Chapters 136, 139, 141, 337, 338, 341 and 342 that apply to the Contractor or subcontractor. The Contractor shall be in continuous compliance with the provisions of KRS Chapters 136, 139, 141, 337, 338, 341 and 342 that apply to the Contractor or subcontractor for the duration of the contract.

WITNESS the agreement of the parties hereto by their signatures affixed hereon.

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY CONTINGENT UPON APPROVAL OF OF THE APPROPRIATION FOR THIS CONTRACT BY THE METRO COUNCIL

MICHAEL J. O'CONNELL
JEFFERSON COUNTY ATTORNEY

Date: 11-7-18

LOUISVILLE/JEFFERSON COUNTY METRO GOVERNMENT

JOEL NEAVEILL, DIRECTOR, PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Date:_____

ANIMAL SERVICES

OZZY GIBSON, DIRECTOR

Date: 11/26/18

ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES, INC.

By:_____

Title:_____

Date:_____

Taxpayer Identification No. (TIN):_____

Louisville/Jefferson County Revenue Commission Account No.:_____

Animal Services - Contract (Role Services) with Alley Cat Advocates Inc 012218.doc - (cr)

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APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT A

Community Cat Management

Objective: To offer citizens of our community – Louisville/Jefferson County - the easiest, most user friendly method of managing their interactions with community cats, whether those interactions be positive or negative, while simultaneously humanely reducing the number of community cats both sheltered at LMAS and living in our community at large.

In partnership with Louisville Metro Animal Services (LMAS), Alley Cat Advocates (ACA) agrees to provide the following TNR services on behalf of LMAS to the citizens of Louisville/Jefferson County:

TNR functions

Respond to contacts coming to LMAS regarding community cats in a timely manner

- *ACA agrees to respond to contacts in the order received be they contacts routed through LMAS or received directly by ACA.*
- *ACA agrees to respond to all contacts in the same timeframe regardless of having been routed through LMAS or received directly by ACA*
- *The Director of LMAS or his designee may, from time to time, request that a contact be addressed out of the order received.*

Provide assistance through education, referrals, trapping, deterrents, and spay/neuter appointments

- *ACA agrees to participate in joint public events (festivals, etc.) to introduce and further communicate the benefits of TNR when appropriate*
- *ACA agrees to refer citizens to appropriate local resources to best meet their TNR needs, including to other rescue groups for spay/neuter vouchers, for example, to assist in the cost of ACA scheduled surgeries*
- *ACA agrees to provide trapping services for citizens requesting this service*
- *ACA agrees to provide support, including deterrents when deemed appropriate, to citizens requesting removal of community cats*
- *ACA agrees to schedule spay/neuter surgery appointments for callers routed through LMAS in the same manner as done for calls received directly by ACA*

Complete necessary documentation, paperwork, and appointment setting

- *ACA agrees to provide LMAS needed documentation for statistical and data collection purposes for all calls received and surgeries scheduled*

Support work of trap distribution, cat check-in, surgical processes, rehab care and coordination

- *ACA agrees to provide traps, trap training, and needed paperwork to citizens scheduled for surgery through ACA*
- *ACA agrees to check-in cats scheduled for surgery*
- *ACA agrees to negotiate high quality surgeries and support, including vaccinations, with appropriate service providers*
- *ACA agrees to provide cats, regardless of source of contact, with after care following ACA standards of care*

In partnership with Louisville Metro Animal Services (LMAS), Alley Cat Advocates (ACA) agrees to support LMAS – through consultation regarding best practices, assistance in the development of processes and procedures, including training as requested - as LMAS provides the following RTF services to the citizens of Louisville/Jefferson County:

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RTF functions
Intake, Information gathering, Assessment, Housing, Surgery, Release, and Post-Release

- *LMAS is responsible for these aspects of RTF*

When a need for TNR is identified as a function of RTF – a caretaker with TNR needs is identified when a single community cat is impounded, for example –

- *ACA will respond to that information when received through the established method of sharing contacts with ACA and in the way documented above.*

General Partnership Requirements
To ensure quality service to citizens

- *ACA will supply caretaker location information when needed to LMAS*
- *LMAS will supply caretaker location information when needed to ACA*
- *ACA and LMAS will meet on a regular basis to ensure accountability and ultimate success of the partnership*

Both parties agree that this partnership can be voided, with or without cause, with 60 day notice

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 12. SAMPLE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING: SPAY/NEUTER CLINIC

Courtesy of Alley Cat Advocates/Kentucky Humane Society

Purpose of the Operating Agreement (OA)

This OA serves as the guidelines and ground rules to facilitate the partnership between Alley Cat Advocates (ACA) and Kentucky Humane Society (KHS) to work productively and efficiently together as regards the KHS S.N.I.P. Clinic. The OA is a living document effective October 1, 2017 thru September 30, 2018 and may be updated as the need arises throughout the partnership. Any updates will be discussed in monthly meetings and agreed upon by both ACA and KHS. Should either party wish to terminate the partnership/agreement, a minimum 30 day notice is required.

S.N.I.P. Clinic Services

- The S.N.I.P. Clinic will perform a maximum of 3,800 TNR surgeries for FY2017-2018. This number will be reviewed annually.
- All appointments are to be made through ACA.
- If additional surgery openings become available, Karen Little with ACA will be notified via email at Karen@alleycatadvocates.org, or designee.
    - SNIP will hold 75 appointments (an average of 15 appointments per day) for ACA TNR each working day, Monday-Friday. SNIP will make every effort to complete all surgeries for community cats the same day. Based on daily volume, public no show rates and number of community cats that arrive for surgery, SNIP may need to holdover community cats to the next day for surgery. In those instances, SNIP will holdover OCK cats by colonies. ACA will be notified in these cases.
- The responsible party (either ACA team member or caretaker) must pick up animals the same day if surgery is not performed (due to overflow or health concerns) by 9:30 p.m.

The SNIP Clinic will provide any reports available thru their computer software system; any additional reports will be performed by ACA. Friday- week's vouchers (Friday through Thursday) are available for pick up Friday night

Monday-excel report and link to the week's invoices sent to Karen Little, ACA

- Cats receiving surgery are released to the responsible party at scheduled time the following morning.
- Pricing will be $40 per cat from October 1, 2017 – December 31, 2017.
- Pricing will be $45 per cat from January 1, 2018 – September 30, 2018.

Intake

All cats for TNR surgeries must arrive at 9pm for check-in by ACA personnel, in traps, unless previous arrangements have been made through the S.N.I.P.Clinic.

- Cats must arrive in a trap.
- All admissions paperwork must be filled out entirely including responsible party's name and contact information (include emergency contact). Age of animal (under 5 months "kitten", over 5 months "adult"), and be signed by the responsible party.
- Indication needs to be made if someone different than the responsible party is to pick up the animal at discharge.
- ACA staff and volunteers will feed kittens 3 pounds and under the evening before surgery.

APPENDICES

Discharge

Group TNR discharge is held @ 8:30am, SNIP staff will review each cat's paperwork with the responsible party and address any specific instructions/concerns related to the sterilization or other noted health concerns. SNIP will provide written discharge instructions on each cat. Animals will be discharged to the responsible party at S.N.I.P. Clinic's side door.

- Line up outside the door (alternate plan for inclement weather).
- Hand paperwork to S.N.I.P. representative for retrieval of cat(s).
- With employee, the person picking up the cat(s) must positively identify them as theirs and sign for their receipt, along with the S.N.I.P. representative.

Communication

- Please see sections: "TNR Flowchart" (attached) as well as "TNR Surgical Protocols".
- ACA staff and volunteers arrive nightly to check on the cats and feed a small amount of food. For night of surgery medical concerns the following protocol is followed: ACA will call SNIP Lead Tech. If no answer ACA calls SNIP Veterinarian. If no answer ACA calls SNIP Director.
- Any organizational issue should be brought to the attention of the S.N.I.P. Clinic Director and Karen Little with ACA at 797-7643.
- Should an emergency arise (weather, natural disaster, building, staffing issues) that prevent our full surgery schedule from being completed, the S.N.I.P. Clinic will contact Karen Little with ACA at 797-7643 and make arrangements for rescheduling the surgeries as the situation permits. S.N.I.P. and ACA will determine the hold over load and work together on solution.

TNR Surgical Protocol

PRE-OP

- Gross exam (URI, ear- tip, sex, estimation of weight, general condition)
- Premedication

  Female- buprenorphine .01mg/kg

  Males- buprenorphine .01mg/kg (IM)

  Anesthetic induction Telazol (IM) 5mg/kg
- Anesthesia Maintenance 3% isoflurane and 2L/min O2 by mask

During constant anesthetic monitoring: (induction 1tech /2-3 animals, Prep: 1 tech/ 2 animals; Surgery: 1 vet and .25 tech; Recovery: 1 tech and one volunteer to max: 10 cats)

- bladder expressed on females
- Hemostat applied to left ear during surgical preparation
- Surgical site is clipped with 40 blade
- Site is aseptically prepared for surgery with chlorhexidine scrub and solution
- Female cats are transferred into the surgical suite and connected to a pulse oximeter and gas anesthetic, and monitored by circulating surgery assistant as well as surgeon.
- *See Emergency Protocol (attached)

SURGERY

- Either spay or neuter surgery is performed by licensed Veterinarian
- Ear tip is surgically removed, hemostat in place until animal starts moving in recovery.

PAGE 3

- *See Emergency Protocol (Attached)

POST-OP

- Buprenorphine .01mg/kg SC immediately post operation for pain
- under 6 months
- Ketoprofen 1mg/kg over 6 months
  (If Ketoprofen is unavailable, an equivalent NSAID is used)
- Vaccines given post-op
  EVRCP Right shoulder SC
  Rabies Right hind limb IM
- Flea preventative applied topically
  Revolution <5# .1 and > 5# .2cc
  Sugar supplement applied to gums at start of recovery.
- Heated rice bags and a heat mat are provided to combat hypothermia
- Fluids administered
  P3 (40+ days) IV catheter and Fluids 100-150cc LRS during surgery and through recovery
  all others SC ,<3# (25cc) 3-6# (50cc) 6-9 (75cc) 10+ (100cc)
- Cats under 5 lbs are placed back in traps with a towel as soon as the animal starts attempting to 'right' itself.
- They are checked by medical staff twice before the end of the day (once by a veterinarian and once by other medical staff). Any abnormalities are immediately addressed by medical staff.
- Towel is removed in the morning. If anything abnormal is noted on the towel or with animal, attention is brought to medical personnel immediately
- *See Emergency Protocol (Attached)
- ACA staff and volunteers feeds TNR cats that are to be released the next day at 9pm

Post Surgical Complications

All animals are checked following surgery and recovery for any abnormalities. If something is found, veterinary attention is brought to it immediately. All animals are checked again prior to staff leaving in the evening.

All animal incisions are checked in the morning prior to release, abnormalities are noted and veterinary attention sought as needed

Should an animal's incision look concerning to a caretaker, after release from the S.N.I.P. Clinic, they are welcome to call and schedule a re-check, free of charge, anytime during our business hours Monday-Friday 9am-5pm. If the issue is emergent in nature, or is outside our business hours, caretaker must make arrangements with Alley Cat Advocates or their own veterinarian for services.

Reviewed and approved by:

Karen Little, Alley Cat Advocates — Date: 10-1-17

Karen Koenig, Kentucky Humane Society — Date: 10-1-17

OPPOSITE PAGE: NEIGHBORHOOD CATS

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Our Promise

We fight the big fights to end suffering for all animals.

Together with millions of supporters, we take on puppy mills, factory farms, trophy hunts, animal testing and other cruel industries. With our affiliates, we rescue and care for thousands of animals every year through our animal rescue team's work and other hands-on animal care services.

We fight all forms of animal cruelty to achieve the vision behind our name: a humane society. And we can't do it without you.

The Return-to-Field Handbook was produced in collaboration with:

NEIGHBORHOODCATS
neighborhoodcats.org

ALLEY CAT ADVOCATES
alleycatadvocates.org

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

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