

Homeless and Feral Cat Population Control Tool Kit

Presented by Project Bay Cat Collaborators: City of Foster City, Homeless Cat Network and Sequoia Audubon Society
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If you have feral, stray or homeless cats in your area, this tool kit can help you determine the best course of action to humanely manage the colony to stabilize the population and care for the cats while also meeting the needs of others that are impacted by the cats' presence. Working together in a unique partnership, the City of Foster City, the Homeless Cat Network, and Sequoia Audubon Society joined forces to humanely address the growth of feral cat populations common to many communities. This Tool Kit was developed by the collaborators of Project Bay Cat for others who wish to take a similar plan of action to humanely achieve positive results. The Tool Kit is more of a hands-on implementation tool for you, rather than a case study for Project Bay Cat, although where applicable, we have included examples of our effort to demonstrate the application of key processes.

The following is a step-by-step plan, complete with a variety of online resources, which may help you in this effort. The collaborators of Project Bay Cat wish you the best of luck in your humane endeavors!

[1] ASSESS

The first step in the process is to assess the situation. In this section, you will answer many questions, such as how many homeless cats are there, do they live on public or private property, are they being cared for, do they impact people or other animals in any way, are there humane organizations that are already helping the cats? Here's how to keep an organized assessment of the information:

[a] Survey. First, take a survey of the situation. Use a tracking sheet, such as the template supplied by Alley Cat Allies at http://www.alleycat.org/resources_care.html#4 (see section "Taking Care of a Feral Cat Colony:" Feral Cat Colony Tracking System).

If the cats live on private land, such as on the property of a business, you may need to work with the landowner or business to get permission to establish a program. If the cats live on public lands, you may need to talk with City officials.

[b] Assess impact. By noting what, if anything, the cats affect in their living environment, will determine organizations to approach for your collaboration. Do they impact people? Do they impact wildlife? Do they impact the environment?

[c] Local humane organizations. Make a list of humane organizations in your area, such as ASPCA, Humane Society, and feline rescue groups. Contact each to see if they are already involved with the cats, and if not, if they can help. Following is a link to websites that can help you locate humane organizations in your area: <http://www.alleycat.org/orgs.html> and <http://www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/localnmhprograms/>



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[2] ORGANIZE AND COLLABORATE

In cases that involve a small number of cats that aren't having any impact to the environment, public lands, private facilities, people, other animals, etc., it may not be necessary to collaborate with other organizations in order to care for the cats and stabilize the population. In instances where impact exists, as it did for Project Bay Cat, here's a blueprint for organizing concerned parties and developing positive collaboration. This is directly modeled after the approach that the City of Foster City initiated for Project Bay Cat.

[a] Establish leadership for the collaboration. It's important to develop a framework for groups to come together, and a lead organization needs to create that framework. In the case of Project Bay Cat, the City of Foster City established a leadership role in the effort because they had received complaints about the cats and wanted to proactively address the concerns. Since the City is respected as an impartial party, people on both sides of the issue felt comfortable coming forward with ideas and concerns. In other communities, humane organizations have stepped forward to take the leadership role, which has also worked well. The important element is to establish a lead organization that takes responsibility for inviting collaboration, setting up meetings, and driving the initiative.

[b] Identify stakeholders, invite participation. For Project Bay Cat, Foster City provided an opportunity for people to self-identify and participate in the development of the effort and solution. They first contacted local humane organizations to ask if they'd like to participate, and held public meetings to invite others to get involved. At the time of the first meeting, Homeless Cat Network had identified itself as a stakeholder, and next, the Sequoia Audubon Society stepped forward to participate. Foster City welcomed any person or group that wanted to work with the City to develop solutions. Give key stakeholders every opportunity to participate and to partner with you.

[c] Set a positive, productive tone with interest-based collaboration. Establishing a positive collaboration is essential, especially when stakeholders have differing goals. Make it clear that you're interested in collaboration; encourage all viewpoints and invite people to become part of the solution. Developing an interest-based collaboration will help you take all viewpoints into account and develop common goals, which will strengthen your solutions. Don't fall into the trap of "positions," which are collaboration impediments. Instead, focus on underlying interests. In the case of Project Bay Cat, the Sequoia Audubon Society's interest in protecting birds and their habitat is not in conflict with the Homeless Cat Network's interest in humanely managing the cat populations, but the proposed solutions needed to meet both of these interests as well as the City's interest in maintaining the appearance of the public property. Establishing a positive collaboration is essential, especially when stakeholders have differing goals. By conducting interest-based collaboration with each group, you will be able to identify common goals for your collective group to address, which will pave the way to develop positive, viable solutions to please all the members of your coalition. You might be surprised to find that many of the groups have overlapping interests, just as we did, even between cat and bird groups!

[d] Open forum. Have an open meeting to discuss the issues with people/organizations that are impacted by the cats. If you are a humane advocate, present scientific studies that prove the effectiveness of programs to trap, neuter, vaccinate and return feral and homeless cats, and present examples of other communities that have undertaken this effort. Alley Cat Allies has a number of resources that can help you in this effort, including tips for sound planning and effective negotiation, scientific studies, proven case studies, and information about how to talk with various entities and individuals to adopt humane programs. These resources can be found at the following web address: www.alleycat.org/resources_care.html#12 For other proven case studies, visit: www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/localnmhprograms/mpindex.cfm

[e] Create communication and distribution list. Keep everyone in the group informed. Once you've created a steering committee, distribute contact lists and share information with them by having regular meetings and sharing progress updates.

[f] Develop group objectives and implementation plan. Once the groups have determined the objectives, draw up an implementation plan that outlines which organizations will handle various aspects of the program, such as education, outreach, and cat management.

[g] Select project leaders. Select leaders to be responsible for various aspects of the program. Those individuals will be responsible for organizing the effort to implement tasks under their purview, and will provide progress reports for that area of effort.



[3] INVOLVE AND RECRUIT

To help implement your plan, you'll probably need help. Here are tips and helpful resources:

[a] Humane organizations. Chances are there are humane organizations in your area that are trained and experienced with trap/neuter/return efforts. Here is a place to look for help: <http://www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/about2.cfm>. If there aren't and you're interested in creating your own humane organization, here is information to help you build an effective organization: <http://www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/resourcelibrary/fororganizations.cfm>

[b] Veterinarians. Some caring veterinarians can be recruited to help provide low- to no-cost options to spay/neuter and vaccinate the homeless cats. Here is a resource to help you approach your local veterinarians: http://www.alleycat.org/resources_care.html#12 (click the resources under the heading "Information for your Veterinarian").

[c] Low- or no-cost spay/neuter. There may be other low- or no-cost spay/neuter services in your area. To find out, call SPAY/USA at 1-800-248-SPAY. Check the resource list at the bottom of this document for more spay/neuter resources.

[d] Feeders, trappers, fosters. Humane organizations often already have foster parents, feeders and trappers that can help with your effort. You can also recruit the public and those affected by the cats to help with the effort.

[e] Community volunteer organizations. Solicit help from scouting organizations, senior citizen groups, after-school programs, and other organizations that are interested in improving your community as a whole.

[4] IMPLEMENT

To implement the plan, you'll need to organize trappers, a system for the cats to be altered and vaccinated, foster parents to care for kittens born to unaltered adults, a process for adoption, and designed feedings.

[a] Trap/alter. First, determine where the cats will be spayed/neutered and their process for admitting cats. Next, initiate trapping efforts. Many local humane organizations have loan programs for humane traps, so check that option first. If you need to purchase humane traps, you can call Tomahawk Live Trap to order traps at 800-272-8727. For help with trapping instructions and tips, go to: http://www.alleycat.org/resources_care.html#12 and click on the trapping resource information.

[b] Foster/adoption. You may find kittens that are young enough to socialize and adopt out. If so, work with local humane organizations, which will most likely have an established program for fostering and adoptions. Also, check your local pet store; often times, stores will hold adoption fairs for humane organizations.

[c] Feeding. Building feeding stations will help protect the cats' food and water, and establish a clean, central place for feeding them. It's also important to establish a feeding schedule and organize feeders so that you can insure that the cats are being fed regularly, and to coordinate feeding and trapping efforts. There is a blueprint for easy-to-build feeding stations at: http://www.alleycat.org/resources_care.html#4 (look under heading "Taking Care of Feral Cat Colony, and click on Feral Cat Feeding Station)

[5] EDUCATE

If people see the cats or are impacted by them in any way, educate them about the program that you've developed, and once they learn about it, they may be a source of help. Here are ways to educate people about your program:

[a] Signs. If the cats live in a public area, discuss with your group if it's appropriate to develop signs that discuss the program, its objectives and how the public can help.

[b] Brochures/posters. Brochures and posters can be used to detail the program's goals, solicit help, and educate people about how to avoid the problem in the future (such as by encouraging spay/neuter of domestic animals, discouraging abandonment, etc).



[c] Local media. If the cats live in a highly visible area, approach the local press to highlight the program and its objectives.

[d] Community outreach. Educating the public can take many forms, from the distribution of fliers, to presenting information to schools, to being a guest speaker at local clubs and organizations. Along with your message about your trap/neuter/return efforts, it is also helpful to educate the public about the importance of spaying/neutering their domestic pets, and keeping cats indoors. Often times, unaltered domestic cats become stray cat and start feral colonies, so education can be a key way of preventing future feral cats.

[6] TRACK PROGRESS

Tracking progress is an essential element to effective colony management. Here are tools to help you do so:

[a] Tracking sheet. Keep a tracking sheet that details each cat, their alteration status, whether any kittens were rescued/adopted, and any other issues about the cats that may be pertinent. Here is a sample tracking sheet: http://www.alleycat.org/resources_care.html#4 (see section heading “Taking Care of Feral Cat Colony,” and “Feral Cat Colony Tracking System”)

[b] Regular updates. Provide your group with regular updates citing the number of cats that are altered, kittens rescued and adopted, number of unaltered cats, etc.

[7] RESOURCES LIST

Alley Cat Allies (www.alleycat.org)

The organization provides a comprehensive set of resources to help organize, strategize, and implement feral and homeless cat programs. “Alley Cat Allies, is a national nonprofit clearinghouse for information on feral and stray cats. For more than a decade Alley Cat Allies has advocated Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)—the most humane and effective method to reduce feral cat populations.” Here is a direct link to their resource library: <http://www.alleycat.org/resources.html>

Best Friends Animal Society (www.bestfriends.org)

Best Friends also has a number of online resources to help locate and/or build humane organizations to help animals. “Best Friends is working with you—and with humane groups all across the country—to bring about a time when there are No More Homeless Pets.” Here is a direct link to their resource library: <http://www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/resourcelibrary/>

Feline Rescue (http://www.felinerescue.net/strays_TTVAR_Kittens.htm)

This site has a variety of resources for effective trap-neuter-return programs.

Feral Cat Coalition (<http://www.feralcat.com>)

This San Diego-based spay/neuter initiative also offers lots of information and tips about starting a humane feral cat control effort.

Fix Our Ferals (www.fixourferals.org)

Fix Our Ferals serves Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, and offers free spay/neuter for feral cats and has altered more than 7,000 cats since it began in the late 1990s.

Peninsula Fix Our Ferals (<http://www.peninsulafixourferals.org/ourvets.html>)

Serving San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, this organization offers low-cost spay/neuter clinics. www.rescuers.com. This site will help you locate animal rescue groups in your area. ■



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