



The NATIONAL FEDERATION of HUMANE SOCIETIES

Companion Animal Transport Programs -- Best Practices

Overview

The National Federation of Humane Societies (NFHS) has identified animal transfer programs as one of the key strategies to achieving its 2020 Vision to find a home for every healthy and treatable animal on a nationwide basis by the year 2020. Animal transfer at its most basic level is a supply and demand equation. We believe however, that there is much more to consider when establishing a successful transfer program that benefits communities, adopters, over-crowded source shelters, destination shelters and most importantly, companion animals.

Potential Barrier to Transfer Programs.

Animal transport can be an important component in reaching the goal of the 2020 Vision but there are several over-arching issues that could significantly impede our ability to transfer animals. Many state veterinarians have a serious concern about animals being moved across state borders without proper health certificates and the required vaccinations. Local authorities are concerned about unscreened animals that may pose a public health or safety risk entering their jurisdictions. Several states are proposing licensing programs for all organizations participating in transferring animals as a means of regulating the practice and some jurisdictions have even discussed regulation to stop transfers altogether.

It is incumbent on all organizations working to alleviate pet overpopulation to insure that all stakeholder concerns are adequately monitored and addressed if transfer programs are to be a widely accepted tool in our effort to find homes for all healthy and treatable animals. To this end, the NFHS encourages collaboration among all stakeholders to provide input for our efforts to promote the best practices which will ensure the safe and effective transfer of animals between organizations. Animal transfer is an important tool in reducing pet overpopulation but if we are not vigilant and don't guard against abuses, the industry could potentially lose this valuable tool.

Finding the Right Partner.

Philosophically, participating agencies must weigh the implications of animal transport carefully and find the right balance for their organization and community. Some of the key questions to be answered are:

1. Does transporting animals into a community consume resources which could be used to home local animals with special needs?
2. Does the potential to save more lives take precedence over local animal placement?
3. What programs are provided to help source communities break the cycle of overpopulation?
4. Can broadening the mix of available animals bring more adopters to the shelter?
5. Does a transfer program provide a greater opportunity to educate both source and destination communities of the need for caring homes?
6. What role can transport play for cats?
7. What obligation does the destination shelter have in assuring that the root causes of pet overpopulation are being adequately addressed in the source community?
8. Should transfer partners be local, regional or long-distance?

Clearly, this is much more than just supply and demand. Shelter resources, community attitudes and the humane mission of participants all impact the decision to establish transfer programs. Ultimately we all strive to show that every life has meaning and value.

Key Elements.

The Best Practices committee of the NFHS has worked for a number of months on creating the guidelines you see. We have sought to engage state veterinarians, source and destination agencies and third party facilitators in collaborating on and influencing this output. We have identified 4 key elements that we feel are crucial to all transport programs.

The NFHS believes that in all transfer programs there are several key components that must drive all decisions relating to transfers. These are:

- A. Public health and safety must be the primary concern;

- B. All transfer agencies must be registered 501-C-3 agencies or be a municipal agency;
- C. All participants must be committed to abiding by all local, state and federal regulations;
- D. Humane standards of care must be afforded to every animal being transported.

General Requirements for Source (Shipping) and Destination (Receiving) Shelters:

1. Source and Destination shelters should establish a solid working relationship, both for philosophical alignment and ongoing communication. The agencies should have general agreement about the types of medical and behavioral evaluations that are important to each organization.
2. Source and receiving shelters must have 501 c (3) or pending status, or be a municipal agency.
3. Throughout the process, effort should be made to enhance Source shelter standards. In particular the Receiving and Source shelters should work together to create a plan for addressing the overpopulation issue in the community of origin. Ultimately, the Source shelter should benefit from the transport partnership.
4. The Receiving shelter must:
 - a. Have a community demand for adopters for dogs and puppies.
 - b. Not euthanize animals of the species being transferred for time or space.
 - c. Have a strong infrastructure to receive large groups of animals.
5. There should be a designated coordinator at both ends of the transport. This is essential; the role of the coordinator is to:
 - a. Organize timing, number, and types of dogs and puppies.
 - b. Evaluate any health or behavior considerations.
 - c. Maintain good communication between the agencies.
6. Prior to each transport, develop a transport census:
 - a. Source shelter should share lists with photographs of animals being considered for transport.

- b. When the final transport list is generated, the description and history of the animals should include: physical description, intake date, reason for surrender, health and behavior status, and any other available information.
 - c. Transport coordinators should develop a mutually acceptable protocol and timeframe for approving the animals who will be transported.
- 7. All animals scheduled for interstate transport must travel with a valid health certificate and be transported in accordance with state laws.
- 8. Sick animals are not eligible for transport.
- 9. Each animal should be treated with dignity and respect throughout the process.

Land Transport.

The following Transport Guidelines are recommended for land transport.

- a. Transport vehicles must be cleaned and sanitized to industry standards prior to transport.
- b. Proper climate control must be maintained—the vehicle must be able to provide heat and or a/c to the animal housing areas and there must be sufficient air ventilation.
- c. Temperatures should not fall below 60° F or above 85° F. Thermometer must be placed in an area where kennels are located and be easily visible.
- d. Animals should be transported in separate enclosures (except in the case of litters) with solid, leak-proof bottoms and adequate bedding. Animals should be able to comfortably stand up, lie down and turn around.
- e. Ensure access to fresh water for every animal at breaks.
- f. At a minimum, stop every 4-6 hours in a safe area to perform a visual check and to clean transport kennels, feed, and water the animals.
- g. Puppies should be fed a small meal or snack every 4-6 hours.
- h. Adult dogs should be walked or exercised on trips longer than 8 hours.
- i. Maximum transport time to a kennel (intermediate or final destination shelter) should be no more than 12 hours.

- j. All trips should be made with a minimum of (2) drivers and sufficient personnel to appropriately handle and care for all animals.
- k. Driver and staff safety is of utmost concern. Drivers should travel with cell phones, maps, preferably GPS and emergency equipment.
- l. The organizations should have an agreed upon contingency plan to address weather, mechanical or other unexpected situations that may go awry during the transport.
- m. There must be appropriate Identification on each animal and its carrier during transport.

A Tiered Approach.

The NFHSs recognizes the varying level of resources available for shelters and rescue groups across the country. Therefore we have broken our recommendations into a three tiered approach, beginning with the most basic requirements and expanding to include additional requirements as resources of the partners allow.

While the level of resources is certainly important in determining how robust a transport program can be, we believe the critical relationship between the participating agencies combined with their joint expectations and their joint resource capabilities will ultimately determine which Tier level the transfer partnership is able to achieve.

Tier 1: Basic, minimum standards for transporting animals in a healthy and safe manner.

1. Public health is of primary concern in transport programs. The following medical considerations should be in place prior to transport; vaccines should be done on intake and in compliance with appropriate vaccine handling protocols.
 - a. Rabies vaccination administered by licensed veterinarian for all animals 16 weeks or older, or in compliance with state standards for the Source shelter, unless contraindicated for health reasons.
 - b. Conduct a visual exam to rule out the existence of bite wounds, open sores/wounds, runny eyes or runny nose, kennel cough, diarrhea, dermatitis or lethargy.

- c. If an animal has recently been spayed or neutered, there has been other surgery, or it is recuperating from other medical treatment, the animal should have at least 48 hours recovery time before transport. Surgery other than spay/neuter is not recommended prior to transport.
 - d. Each animal has a valid health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian.
2. Puppies should be at least 8 weeks old at time of transport unless they are being sent with their mother.
3. Each animal should pass the minimum behavior requirements; puppies and dogs should not exhibit aggression.
4. All animals must be identified with a tape collar or other tag at the source shelter, prior to transport. ID must also be included on the transport carrier for each animal.
5. Records must be shipped with the animals. These should be kept in individual, plastic or other waterproof sleeve, prior to transport. Records should include:
 - a. Health certificate
 - b. Intake form including vaccinations and medical records
6. All animals must be sterilized either by the Source shelter if possible or by the Destination shelter prior to adoption.

Tier 2: Moderate standards for transporting animals from source shelters with more than basic resources.

1. All Tier 1 Requirements should be in place.
2. Additional health requirements should include:
 - a. Perform a heartworm test and disclose results to Receiving shelter.
 - b. Bordatella vaccine (injectable or intra-nasal)
 - c. Inoculation with a minimum of parvo and distemper.
3. Dogs should receive a basic behavior assessment looking for aggression to people or animals or resource guarding.
4. Records should include:

- a. Behavior evaluation form
- b. Other information including the animal's history, photos, etc.
- c. Receiving shelter should keep written statistics that track the origin and disposition of all animals transported. Outcome statistics should be shared with the source shelter on an agreed to frequency.

Tier 3 Advanced standards for transporting animals from source shelters with supported resources.

1. All Tier 1 and Tier 2 Requirements should be in place.
2. The Medical exam should include:
 - a. A fecal exam. Deworm any positive animals and give a general dewormer to all animals prior to transport, regardless of fecal exam results
 - b. Application of flea and tick preventative (e.g. Revolution, Advantage Frontline or Advantage Multi.)
 - c. Parvovirus titer
3. Microchip each animal prior to transport.
4. More extensive Behavior assessments conducted prior to census creation and transport using a mutually acceptable assessment tool.
5. Conduct adoption follow-ups on all animals relocated/imported

Goals and Measurement of the Transfer Best Practice.

The NFHS's goals are;

- A. to assist and educate Source shelters in reducing pet overpopulation in their communities;
- B. to improve the quality of transfers that occur;
- C. to ensure that transfer programs are conducted in a manner which fully embraces and meet all local, state and federal regulations pertaining to public health and animal safety.
- D. to promote transfer best practices to achieve the above.

The NFHS believes it is important to monitor the use of these best practices and we propose to do this through surveys. Annually we will survey shelters to see;

1. Do they participate in animal transfers
2. If so, are they a Source or Destination agency
3. Have they heard of or read the NFHS's transfer best practice;
4. Did the organization adopt this best practice;
5. If they have adopted, at what Tier level;
6. The frequency of transfers and the number of animals transferred annually.