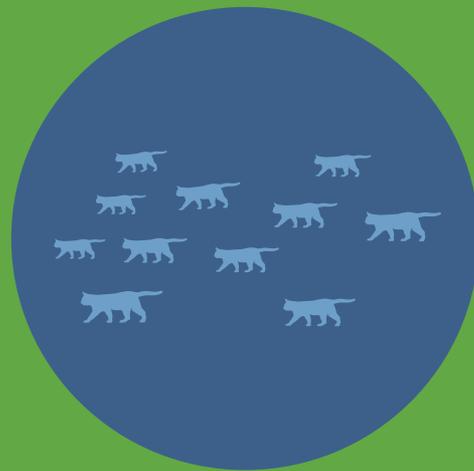




THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES

[ Pets for Life ]

PETSMART  
Charities



## xi Cats

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"People only see what they are prepared to see."  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

## XI Cats

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The more we understand public attitudes about cats, the more effective we can be in controlling their populations and increasing their overall welfare.



> Stray kitten dropped off at Tupelo-Lee Humane Society

Although both cats and dogs are viewed as the most typical and common pets in American households, there are differences between the two species—and differences between the human attitudes towards them. These attitudes factor into the animals' statuses in society and affect the way you conduct outreach for each species.

In recent years, animal care professionals have begun to research and strategize separately for dogs and cats. This is a critical move for our field. The differences between dogs and cats, which in some ways contribute to documented welfare problems, are also an important part of the solutions to those problems. The more we understand public attitudes about cats, the more effective we can be in controlling their populations and increasing their overall welfare.

The vast number of cats who enter and are euthanized in the U.S. shelter system and the millions more that live and reproduce outdoors, is an overwhelming problem that can be attributed (at least in part) to public attitudes about cats. Long-held myths and superstitions about cats, including assumptions

about their ability to fend for themselves without human care, have led to the current situation, where cat populations are not managed in an effective and humane way.

Providing spay/neuter to people with pet cats will be relatively easy because the owners usually don't question the benefits of spay/neuter. Refer to Chapter 8 for tips on responding and sharing information appropriately to the owners who want their cat to have "just one litter."

Sterilization is not the only critical cat welfare issue. Misunderstood behaviors, minor health problems, and unrealistic expectations can lead to bond-breaking conflicts between an owner and his or her cat. To help prevent this, your program must offer tools and information to help resolve conflicts before cats are cast out of the home or escape into the at-risk populations of outdoor cats. Providing information about basic health care, spay/neuter, and issues such as inappropriate scratching, litter box problems, and basic cat behavior is critical in preventing currently owned cats from becoming homeless.

The human-animal bond is easily broken when people assume that their cats' problems are unsolvable. In reality, most of these problems can usually be resolved with simple measures. Your program can repair and strengthen bonds and even prevent problems from occurring before the bond is damaged. Litter box issues and inappropriate scratching are commonly cited problems, and the attached tip sheets can help address these issues.

 [Scratching Post \[Tip Sheet\]](#)

 [Litter Box \[Tip Sheet\]](#)

 [HSUS Cat Answer Tool](#)

In some communities, a more significant problem is that of cats who are considered to be “community,” “free-roaming,” or “semi-owned.” Stray cats are lost or abandoned pet cats who can typically be adopted, whereas feral cats are typically considered unsocialized and unadoptable. Addressing this segment of the cat population can be a challenge because the perception that cats can fend for themselves and don’t need the same care and attention as dogs is very common. It’s often difficult to find the caretaker or decision maker for certain cats (if there is one at all) to provide assistance. The trust and relationships you build with community members through patience and understanding will be key to sterilizing these cats and preventing an endless cycle of reproduction.

There are estimates between six to more than 100 million community cats living in the U.S. The HSUS estimates the number of community cats between 30 and 40 million. It is estimated that only 2% of community cats are sterilized and that the remainder account for 80% of the kittens born each year [source: Levy, J.K. and P.C. Crawford, Humane strategies for controlling feral cat populations. J Am Vet Med Assoc, 2004. 225(9): p. 1354-60]. Thus, community cats are the most significant source of cat overpopulation in the U.S. and have a far greater impact on most shelters and rescues than pet cats. Preventing pet cats from becoming part of the community cat population is critical to reducing the number of cats on the streets and in shelters and rescues. Reducing the pervasiveness of cat reproduction in under-served communities can have a significant impact on both cat populations and is conducive to overall community animal health. For most of the community cats, the difficulty of locating human caregivers willing or

able to step in and provide spay/neuter often leads advocates towards trap/neuter/return programs, commonly referred to as TNR.

In your community of focus, you’ll most likely see a large number of unaltered community cats. Using the same outreach approach discussed in Chapter 7, successfully provides resources and spay/neuter for these cats. Remember that every community is unique, and therefore the attitudes toward free-roaming cats will be different in every community. By fully understanding your community, you’ll be in a good position to see what mix of TNR, low- or no-cost spay/neuter options, and cat owner support programs are needed to make your community a safe one for all cats.

A great way to start identifying community cats and the caretakers of those cats is to ask everyone you meet during outreach and at community outreach events if they have other pets or if they are feeding outdoor cats. If you don’t ask people this question specifically, they often won’t think community cats are eligible for the services you have to offer.

TNR will quickly become an important part of your work (and can even serve as an ice breaker on the topic of spay/neuter in the community—some people are much more willing to talk about spay/neuter for a free roaming cat than for their inside dog, for example). However, TNR is a very time consuming process. If you are a TNR-specific program, the methods described in this toolkit will be extremely useful in making your work more effective and efficient. If you are not a TNR-specific organization, either recruit volunteers specifically for the TNR part of your work or identify and work closely with a TNR group. If you do the latter, be sure to share the information you learn from this toolkit and from your outreach.

 [TNR Volunteer Description](#)



> Group of outdoor cats in a neighborhood of focus in Baton Rouge, LA

Either your overall community outreach team or a TNR specific team can identify cats who need TNR (and their caretakers). If you are partnering with a separate organization to do the TNR or you establish a set of TNR specific volunteers, be sure to introduce these teams to the community. The general outreach team should do outreach with the TNR team a few times, showing them the lay of the land in the neighborhood, acquainting them with ambassadors in the community, and guaranteeing that they adhere to the same approach and philosophy. As with overall outreach, the TNR outreach team should be small, around 2–4 people.

The first step is to identify the cats' caregivers. You'll likely have to knock on many doors and talk to many people before you find the cats' caregivers. Be sure to fully explain TNR, ear tipping, and their benefits to the cats and the community. Don't be discouraged if some people are apprehensive about taking responsibility for the cats—many are afraid of getting in trouble or think they'll be fined or penalized for taking care of the cats. Dealing with pets' owners and community cats'

caregivers is similar—you have to earn their trust. As you continue in your work, treat people with respect, and stay true to your word, your good reputation will make your work easier.

Once you identify the caregiver, collect information from them. Be prepared—more than one person might care for certain cats and colonies of cats. In these cases, be sure to notify and work with all caregivers. At this point, explain the TNR process to the caregivers, obtain their permission, and answer any questions they may have.

If you have pre-set recurring surgery days for TNR, you can plan your outreach accordingly, ideally a week before the pre-set days. The more consistency you establish, the easier the process will be for you and the community. If you have set surgery days, let the cat caregivers know the next steps and the process leading up to the trapping and the surgery.



All of these clients should receive the regular spay/neuter follow-up process of reminder phone calls, home visits, and data collection. Contact the caregiver one to two days before the surgery to remind them to withhold food, except in special cases, such as young kittens, nursing mothers, and sick cats. This will likely be the most difficult part of the process because many people will feel uneasy about not feeding the cats, or you might not be able to reach every caregiver.

To increase your chances of success, talk to as many people in the area as possible, even those not identified as caregivers. Hang “Do Not Feed” signs on people’s doors and in the general area where the TNR will take place. In the beginning, you may find it useful to have the outreach team do outreach in the same area where the TNR team is working. If the teams work separately, the TNR team should be prepared to share information about pets in need with the outreach team. Have a system in place for this communication and information sharing.

#### [Do Not Feed Sign](#)

You have multiple options for the actual trapping; your selection should account for the human resources available for this part of the work. If caregivers will do the work, give them traps and an explanation for using them. Provide necessary supplies (e.g. newspaper, sheets/towels, canned food, etc.) Make sure the caregivers contact the TNR team by a specified time to let the team know how many cats have been caught, or have the TNR team contact the caregivers at a set time.

If the TNR team will do the trapping, let the caregivers and neighbors know when the team will show up to trap. Consider using “drop” traps for this part of the process. Some TNR teams find these traps more effective for catching a larger number of cats in a shorter amount of time, reducing the risk of traps disappearing, and removing the need to keep track of where traps are set.

One of the most important pieces of TNR work is providing transportation to and from the surgery. The TNR team should plan to transport all cats. When the cats are returned, make sure the caregivers know which cats are returning, what kind of after-care the cats need, and how they can return the cats to their normal feeding and care routines. Call caregivers three to four days later to check in, make plans for other cats who still need to be caught, and answer any questions. Depending on the number of cats in a given situation, you might need multiple visits to TNR all of the cats.

For more information on TNR best practices please visit:

 [Neighborhood Cats](#)

 [Alley Cat Allies Webinar](#)

 [PetSmart Charities Community Cat Information](#)

 [Community Cats Webinar Series](#)

 [Community Cat FAQs](#)

 [What to Do About Outdoor Cats](#)

 [Overview Caring for Feral Cats](#)

