

## HOW TO ADOPT NONLETHAL CONTROL FOR STRAY AND FERAL CATS AT YOUR SHELTER OR ANIMAL SERVICES FACILITY



# REDUCE YOUR EUTHANASIA RATE

**Alley Cat Allies (ACA)** frequently hears from animal control and animal shelter personnel who want both to control their feral cat population and to stop killing healthy animals, but need assistance to implement this change.

ACA has developed these guidelines to help municipal agencies and private shelters implement **Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)**, an effective, nonlethal process to control and reduce outdoor cat populations over the long term.

### THE TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN PROCESS ENTAILS

- Trapping and adopting out stray (tame) cats and sociable kittens. This alone often results in an immediate 50 percent decrease in the outdoor cat population.
- Trapping feral cats (cats that cannot be tamed or adopted); sterilizing, vaccinating, and ear-tipping (for identification) healthy cats; euthanizing cats that are unhealthy or injured beyond recovery.
- Returning healthy, sterilized feral cats to the locations where they were trapped, after which volunteers provide food, water, and clean, unobtrusive shelters, and monitor the health of the colony.

### TNR RESULTS IN

- Healthy but gradually diminishing cat colonies.
- Substantial budgetary savings. Resources previously spent responding to complaints and trapping, sheltering, and euthanizing cats can be reallocated to more aggressive adoption and outreach programs.
- An immediate reduction in complaints about behaviors associated with unsterilized cats, including spraying, caterwauling, fighting, roaming, and breeding.
- Positive public reactions, media exposure, and support from the community at large.
- Ongoing commitment and participation by staff and volunteers.

Detailed information about all aspects of TNR are available online at [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org) and [www.pets911.com](http://www.pets911.com).

### SEVEN STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN

There are seven parts to implementing a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program at your animal services facility. They do not have to occur in sequence.

#### 1. Be realistic about what can be achieved at the start.

Changing how a jurisdiction treats feral cats may have to be done in stages. Figure out what you can realistically accomplish. Frequently, the best approach is to propose a pilot project—a test of sorts, that can be small (or large) enough to ensure success. The Atlantic City (NJ) Boardwalk Cats are a pilot project (albeit a large one) for Atlantic City. In other jurisdictions, pilot TNR projects have encompassed no more than one or two neighborhoods.

What's important is to start a TNR project that you can be certain will succeed. Success breeds success. Support for future, larger TNR programs will stem from your initial effort.

## 2. Gather statistics.

**Statistics are the invaluable measure of progress.** Collect accurate, ongoing facts and figures initially to determine the scope of the outdoor cat population and then to track the impact TNR is having on your community in both the short- and long-term.

Start by documenting where you are now, then update these statistics at regular intervals (at least once a month).

- How many cat-related complaint calls do you receive per month?
- What are the specific complaints (noise, smell, kittens, sick animals)?
- How many cats do you pick up/accept at your shelter per month?
- Are the unapproachable cats that arrive at your shelter categorized as “stray” or “feral”? How is this determined?
- Do you temperament test these animals? How do you temperament test?
- Are all cats checked for eartips (the international standard for identifying a cat as belonging to a managed feral cat colony)? If not, why?
- Are all cats scanned for microchips? If not, why?
- How many cats do you adopt out per month?
- How many cats do you euthanize per month?
- How many people visit your shelter each month looking for animals to adopt?
- How much of your budget is spent to pick up, hold, and euthanize stray or feral cats? How much do these procedures cost per cat?
- How much does it cost your facility to spay or neuter one male cat? One female cat? Average per cat?

## 3. Inform the public of your new policy toward feral cats.

**Begin responding to cat-related complaint calls by providing information about nonlethal control for stray and feral cats.** Tell callers that to better fulfill your shelter or animal control duties, your agency has begun working on a long-term plan to reduce the feral cat population through Trap-Neuter-Return.

Briefly explain that, rather than picking up/accepting stray and feral cats for euthanasia, the new TNR policy utilizes sterilization and return, which will keep the population from growing and reduce it over time. Tell them you can provide tools and, if necessary, assistance to perform TNR.

**Be aware that some of these people will want the cats to “go someplace else”** after they have been trapped. Make sure callers know up front that you will only trap cats in their area with the understanding that feral cats will be returned to the same location and cared for by them, if the location is deemed safe.

If it is appropriate, **ask the caller if he or she would volunteer** to help get feral cats in the community sterilized and cared for. Emphasize that there are many different roles for volunteers.

If a caller is not interested in volunteering but simply wants the problem solved, address the specific problem. ACA offers numerous factsheets and articles on many subjects to help solve most feral cat related issues. See the list of important resources below. It will be useful to have these materials on hand. You can read directly from sections of these documents while you have the caller on the phone or offer to send information by mail. ACA materials can also be found online at [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org) and [www.pets911.com](http://www.pets911.com).

## 4. Provide your community with the tools to perform TNR.

**Purchase a supply of traps to lend out to the public** with or without a refundable deposit. The number of traps needed depends upon how many cats your spay/neuter clinic can treat in one session. Learn how to use the traps; become familiar with trapping techniques. The ACA factsheet, "How to Choose a Trap," available on the ACA website ([www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)) compares various traps we recommend. Always have people borrowing traps sign a disclaimer stating that the traps will only be used for the purpose of nonlethal control and provide them with ACA's factsheet, "Humane Trapping Instructions for Feral Cats." Be sure to have borrowers practice setting the traps before they leave your facility.

**If your shelter has a clinic on site, offer free or low-cost spay and neuter for stray and feral cats.** Operation Catnip's manual, *Idealism in Action* (available for purchase from ACA), provides step-by-step instructions for running a high-volume spay/neuter clinic for stray and feral cats. Also refer to the ACA website for materials developed specifically for veterinarians.

**If your shelter does not have a clinic, enlist local veterinarians to provide free or low-cost spay/neuter for feral cats** (even if they only offer these services one day per month). You may have to subsidize expenses and/or purchase supplies used on spay days. You may offer to assist with paperwork and intake procedures. Contact ACA for a vet packet to present to local veterinarians to encourage them to participate.

**Ask animal control** (if separate from your facility) **to refer cat-related complaint calls to you.** Animal control may agree to bring the stray and feral cats they trap directly to your shelter. Try to establish at least an informal agreement with animal control to exchange information regularly about feral cat issues in your community.

**Recruit and train volunteers.** Successful communitywide TNR runs on volunteer power. Once you adopt nonlethal control for stray and feral cats, the community will respond positively. Encourage people who are already feeding outdoor cats to get involved in TNR. Train volunteers to assist people who cannot or will not trap, and/or to assist with foster care and on spay days. For help in recruiting volunteers, obtain a copy of *Volunteers: Getting Ready for Them, Finding Them, Keeping Them*, by Bonney Brown of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, distributed by ACA.

**Establish a foster care network** for tame strays and sociable kittens. Anyone fostering neonatal kittens must have *The Guidebook to Handraising Kittens*, by Susan Easterly (available for purchase from ACA).

## 5. Evaluate the success of your TNR program.

Using the statistics you have gathered, determine the impact TNR is having in your community.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Have cat-related complaint calls decreased each month?                | <input type="checkbox"/> Have there been other noticeable changes at your shelter? For example, has the number of visitors to the shelter increased? Has the number of animals adopted from the shelter on a weekly basis increased?* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Has your intake of feral cats decreased?                              |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Has the euthanasia rate for cats decreased?                           |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What has been the cost savings as a result of these changes, per cat? |   |

\*It has been observed that the rate of shelter visits and shelter adoptions increases when there is an active TNR program in the community. The specific reason for this is not known.

## 6. Arrange a meeting with local elected officials to demonstrate the benefits of TNR and the success (or projected success) of your (pilot) program.

This meeting will be a critical opportunity to build support for future expansion or funding, or both. Determine ahead of time exactly what you want to get from it.

- Arrange a presentation** at a city council meeting or other appropriate occasion, at which you will show ACA's ten-minute video, *The Humane Solution*, and briefly describe the development of your TNR program.
- Demonstrate the cost-savings** associated with TNR. Provide handouts with clear facts and figures.
- Emphasize other community benefits:**
  - fewer cat-related complaints
  - decreased feline euthanasia rates
- improved public relations and community approval
- increased investment by the community as volunteers
- Ask for what you want:** funds, greater support for your proactive TNR program, a pledge of future support from the officials present., or even a resolution in favor of TNR.
- Offer to respond** to questions or comments about the program either in the meeting or in person at a later date.

## 7. Track the success of your TNR program on an ongoing basis.

**Statistics—facts and figures—are the only objective measure of your success**, and they are the measure by which future funding and approvals will be judged. Accurate statistics will also help you to identify areas that need improvement and to adjust your program accordingly.

**You have undertaken a long-term goal.** The crisis of feline overpopulation will not be solved soon, but statistics will help you stay on track to meet your goals. **Be diligent about keeping your statistics.**

And please **keep Alley Cat Allies informed** of your progress, so we can share your success strategies with shelters that are just getting started with TNR.

### IMPORTANT RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH ALLEY CAT ALLIES

*The Humane Solution: Reducing Feral Cat Populations with Trap-Neuter-Return*, a 10-minute video documenting the process and success of TNR in cities nationwide.

*Trap-Neuter-Return: A Humane Approach to Feral Cat Control*, a 24-minute video demonstrating basic techniques of TNR.

"The ABC's of TNR" (factsheet)

"Humane Trapping Instructions For Feral Cats" (factsheet)

"Community Benefits of Feral Cats" (factsheet)

"How to Talk to Absolutely Anyone About TNR" (factsheet)

"How to Talk to Animal Control" (factsheet)

"Relocation: Guidelines for Safe Relocation of Feral Cats" (factsheet)

*The Stray Cat Handbook*, by Tamara Kreuz

*The Guidebook to Handraising Kittens*, by Susan Easterly