

How to Support Trap-Neuter-Return in Your Community without Doing It All



About Alley Cat Allies

Alley Cat Allies is the only national nonprofit dedicated exclusively to the protection and humane treatment of all cats.

For 25 years, Alley Cat Allies has led the movement to save cats' lives. With advocacy, education, and grassroots organizing, we champion innovative programs and policies that serve communities and save cats. Since our founding in 1990, we have popularized Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the only humane and effective approach to community cats. Before Alley Cat Allies, TNR was virtually unknown in America, and no local governments supported it. Today, a growing list of more than 500 municipalities has officially embraced TNR.

Alley Cat Allies has changed how all cats are treated—pet, stray, feral, and each cat in between. We advocate for a variety of progressive policies to protect cats, including the transformation of the American animal shelter system, which still routinely kills 70 percent of all cats who enter.

Thanks to our more than half a million supporters and countless advocates, Alley Cat Allies works in hundreds of communities each year. To learn more about how we save cats' lives, visit www.alleycat.org.

Shelter Series

This resource is one in a series for shelters and animal control, and was developed by Bonney Brown and Diane Blankenburg of Humane Network.

How to Support Trap-Neuter-Return in Your Community without Doing It All

A guide to help you support TNR in the community without taking on the role of creating and operating the entire program.

Introduction

A growing number of animal services agencies across the country are adopting Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) or Shelter/Neuter/Return (SNR—where outdoor cats arriving at animal services are neutered and returned) as the most humane and effective approaches to managing cat populations increasingly referred to as “community cats.”

While many animal services agencies have essentially adopted the entire program, from having their officers trap cats to neutering them in their own clinic and officers returning them in the field, others see the benefits and want to embrace a TNR and/or an SNR program, but are not able to put that same level of resources into it. If that describes your agency, this guide is for you!

“We can’t do it all, but we want to do something.”

There are many options and combinations of approaches your agency could take to support TNR without doing everything. Many of the options have very little cost associated with them. In fact, endorsing TNR reduces animal control costs substantially.

Below are some suggested approaches you can consider for your agency.

Endorse TNR Publically

Make a public statement, such as adopting and publishing a Feral Cat Protection Policy on your website, which simply explains that your agency will no longer impound un-socialized community cats. Instead of impounding community cats, you can re-route them to TNR programs in your community. (More on finding organizations to partner with below.)

Your policy can be as simple as stating:

“[Name of shelter] no longer impounds healthy feral cats brought to the shelter and no longer traps

healthy feral cats for impoundment. Feral cats are not socialized to people and are therefore not adoptable. Instead of impoundment, [Name of shelter] promotes Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) for feral cats. Through TNR, feral cats are humanely trapped, vaccinated and spayed/neutered by a veterinarian, eartipped for identification, and returned to their outdoor home. This has proven to be the most effective and humane method of handling outdoor cat populations.”

Some organizations like to add a further explanation. Something like:

“Although it may not be obvious, community cats are actually not homeless. Community cats are domestic animals, but just like the squirrels, chipmunks, and sparrows we see every day, their home is outdoors.”

How can you get the word out about your new policy?

You can post your new policy on your website, create a brochure, write a news release and/or share examples of success stories on your Facebook page.

Train staff to recommend TNR

The staff that answers the phone in dispatch and works at your shelter’s front desk and surrender room, as well as field officers, can each make a huge difference by guiding citizens toward TNR. Train staff to ask questions about why the person is having a problem with the cat(s). This way they can efficiently and effectively address their situation. For example, perhaps a cat is digging in the garden and providing a list of humane deterrents can solve their problem. (Some agencies loan or provide deterrents.) Perhaps the individual is concerned about the well-being of the cats and can be reassured that TNR is the most humane approach and can then be directed to local TNR resources.

Partner with other groups

Finding, partnering with, and supporting other groups can be an easy and effective way to quickly adopt TNR as your agency’s official policy.

What kind of agencies could you partner with?

Your local Humane Society, SPCA or other non-profit animal welfare groups, TNR groups, local spay/neuter clinics, and cat rescue organizations are potential partners. Additionally or alternatively, you may be able to find veterinarians in your community who are willing to offer reduced rates for spaying and neutering community cats.

Need help finding local agencies and volunteers that help people establish TNR?

The Alley Cat Allies Feral Friends Network can help connect you with local groups that support TNR and individuals practicing TNR in your area. (Numbers of network members vary by region.)

What kind of partnerships may be possible?

Partnering with several different groups gives you the most flexibility, but it’s possible to have a great



program working with a single group. It may be a local TNR group that will handle calls and help people through the process from start to finish. It may be a spay/neuter clinic (a private or a non-profit clinic) that will provide very low-cost spay/neuter surgeries, vaccinations and eartipping. Some organizations may be able to provide volunteers to directly help senior citizens and others actually trap cats for TNR.

What is the best way to structure the partnership?

It could be as simple as a verbal agreement, but for a larger program it's usually best to write up a Memorandum of Understanding between the parties. It does not need to be fancy or complicated; a simple letter that outlines who has agreed to do what, signed by both parties, will often be sufficient.

Provide resources for community members and groups that are helping cats

Perhaps you can offer a meeting room free of charge, provide some low-cost or free spay/neuter surgeries for cats, or lend traps to the local groups with which you are working. It may not cost you much and yet have a real value to your partner agencies. One animal control agency in Nevada allowed the local TNR group to use their surgical suite for TNR two days a week.

Change policies

As part of your new Feral Cat Protection Policy, end the practice of lending traps for trap and removal of outdoor cats (and of course, your humane officers should stop trapping these cats for citizens). If you lend traps to citizens, be sure that they are using the traps for TNR. (The Appendix includes a few examples from animal control departments that lend traps for TNR only. In fact, this can be a valuable service so long as it is monitored and trappers are counseled.)

Recognize eartipping of community cats

Eartipping is an effective and universally accepted method to identify a spayed/neutered and vaccinated feral cat. It is the removal of the tip of a cat's ear (approximately 3/8 inch and usually the left ear, giving the ear a flat rather than pointed appearance). Train your staff to watch for eartipped cats—both in the field and at the shelter. Work with one of your partner groups to get these cats back to their home turf. If an eartipped cat appears to be injured, a local TNR group may be willing to provide veterinary care for the cat.

Review your local ordinances to be sure they are TNR friendly

A growing number of communities are endorsing TNR and SNR (sometimes called Feral Freedom) as

the official method of managing outdoor cat populations. While having TNR in the local codes is not essential for a successful program, it is a good idea to ensure that there are no barriers to TNR in your codes or ordinances. If there are, you will want to change them. You can find suitable language in the helpful guide listed in the appendix.

“There’s no TNR program in our community”

In that case, and assuming that you cannot create a TNR program within your agency, you can help get the ball rolling to create an independent, volunteer-run program within your community.

There are a few different ways you can go about making this happen:

- Try asking your partner organizations to take on this important project.
- Reach out to a TNR organization outside of your community but within your state and preferably within driving distance from your community. Talk with them and ask them if they would be willing to help get a similar effort launched in your community. You might invite them to come and help you host a public meeting and make a presentation. (You can usually find an organization to work with through the Feral Friends Network.)
- You could also recruit a small group of cat-loving volunteers by hosting your own community meeting and then help these individuals launch a community TNR group. There is a helpful guide in the Appendix on hosting a community cat workshop.

Appendix



List of Resources

[Sample Feral Cat Protection Policies](#)

Stanislaus County Department of Animal Services

www.stanislausanimalservices.com/community-cat.shtm

Kanawha-Charleston Humane Association

www.adoptcharleston.com

Facebook Example:

Spartanburg Animal Control does a great job of highlighting the lifesaving work of their officers and the TNR efforts: www.facebook.com/spartanburganimalservices?ref=br_tf

[Training staff to talk about TNR](#)

How to Help Feral Cats—At Step-by-Step Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return:

www.alleycat.org/document.doc?id=461

Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift in Community Cat Management Webinar

Dr. Kate Hurley of the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program at the College of Veterinary Medicine:

www.maddiesfund.org/Maddies_Institute/Webcasts/Making_the_Case_for_Community_Cats_Part_One.html

[Humane deterrents](#)

How to Live with Cats in Your Neighborhood:

www.alleycat.org/Deterrents

Two samples pages from Animal Control Department websites offering humane deterrents:

Keeping Cats Out of Gardens: Multnomah County Animal Services:

www.multcopets.org/keeping-cats-out-gardens

Common Outdoor Cat Nuisance Solutions: Lee County Domestic Animal Services:

www.leegov.com/animalservices/Documents/tnrnuisancesolutionsrev1-30-15.doc

[Trap-loan program](#)

How to Start a Trap Depot:

www.alleycat.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=1468

Two examples from animal services websites:

BARC Animal Shelter & Adoptions:

www.houstontx.gov/barc/fctp_what_barcelona_provides.php

San Jose Animal Care & Service (CA):

www.sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?NID=2382

Partnerships

Feral Friends Network:

www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=444

San Antonio Animal Services:

www.sanantonio.gov/AnimalCare/WhatWeDoServices/OutdoorCatsTNR.aspx

San Antonio Feral Cat Coalition:

www.sanantonioferalcats.org/

Helping to create a new TNR organization

Helping Cats in Your Community Workshop:

www.alleycat.org/workshop

Ordinances and policies

Trap-Neuter-Return Ordinances and Policies in the United States:

www.alleycat.org/document.doc?id=639&erid=0