

HUMANELY MANAGING CAT OVERPOPULATION SITES

Beth Gammie, RedRover Director of Field Services



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© RedRover
PO Box 188890
Sacramento, CA 95818
Phone 916.429.2457 • Email info@redrover.org

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Introduction

We've all seen situations where cat populations are growing out of control—sites by the dumpster of a fast food restaurant, around hotels, in neighborhoods, or other places. You may notice a bevy of kittens playing, or just large numbers of cats hanging out. Within a short time, the number of cats can become unmanageable.

This leads to a lot of suffering for the cats and kittens. Many kittens fall victim to disease or predators and don't make it to adulthood. The ones who live to adulthood face living in the elements and a constant search for food. Worse yet, when a cat population is growing unchecked in such a site, it becomes a nuisance to many who encounter it, and this can lead to acts of cruelty and violence.

When faced with cat overpopulation sites, local jurisdictions such as cities and counties often become overwhelmed and see no humane way out of the situation. We've all heard of instances around the country where officials trap and kill existing cat colonies that have grown out of control. This is heartbreaking to those who love the cats, and unwittingly reinforces the idea that mass trapping and killing is the only way to solve this problem.

This manual offers another approach. There is a way to humanely solve the problem of a growing numbers of cats at an outdoor site that cannot support such a population. We know—we've done it, and done it in such a way that all those involved walked away feeling the problem was solved in a way that took care of their concerns.

Our approach is twofold: 1) to bring all interested parties together to humanely resolve cat hoarding/overpopulation situations in a way that everyone involved can live with and gets to zero cat population humanely over time, and 2) to create and execute a realistic plan that will actually solve the overpopulation at the site. How to do this is described in this manual.

Chapter

1

Collaboration is Key

The key to successfully solving cat overpopulation sites is to work with all the affected parties and groups to develop a plan that meets everyone's needs. These situations affect many people, organizations, and governmental agencies and jurisdictions—and to resolve the problem without bringing to the table everyone who is impacted and cares is to ask for disaster. Some of the most difficult and challenging work in the entire project—onboarding all interested parties to develop a realistic plan—takes place here.

A. Identify the Interested Parties

Although each situation is different, here is a good start for a list of who to work with on developing your plan:

- Cat rescue groups
- Bird and wildlife groups
- Animal Control
- The landowner(s) of site on which cats live or roam
- Health Department
- Local residents living near the site
- Business owners impacted by the situation
- City/County political officials—city/county commission
- Local shelter/humane society

B. Understand Each Group's/Party's Interests

The key in working with all these groups is to *seek to understand how the situation impacts them and what their interests are*. Understanding each group's interests/needs is absolutely key for the plan to work. Each group's interest will be different, although some interests may overlap. For example, the cat rescue groups' primary interest will be the cats' safety and welfare. The City Commission (or equivalent local governing body) will likely be more focused on human health and constituent satisfaction than on cat welfare. Animal Control may be more focused on its agency demands—for example, how many calls it gets about the cats. The local shelter may be worried it will have to find homes for these cats. Business owners may be focused on how the cat situation is driving away customers or traffic to their businesses. The landowner of the site may be worried about being saddled with the costs of the operation, responsibility for the cats' care, the land's resale value, or about the liability of having people on site to conduct the operation.

Every group involved has legitimate interests in how the situation is resolved and deserves to have their interests incorporated into the solution. You have a much better chance of actually helping the cats involved if you internalize this and happily embrace it as a guiding principle. Resist the temptation to demonize any of the groups/people who have different interests and who might not even care about the cats. In times of difficulty, remember: *The groups involved do not even have to like cats to accept a solution that actually helps the cats.*

Another important point: work hard to understand their underlying *interests*, rather than getting stuck on their *positions*.¹ A person's interests are the things they are truly concerned about, while the position they take is how they think they will get there. For example, a public health official's interest in this situation will likely be to protect public health; but the position they may bring to the table is to trap and remove all the cats. If you focus on the position you will get hung up—oftentimes positions actually conflict. But if you focus on their interests (protect public health) and offer *other* ways to accomplish this, you may get to a solution that serves both your needs. Remember—interests often overlap or at least do not conflict.

¹ A great how-to manual of this approach is in *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Without Giving In* (Fisher and Ury, 1991).

Finally, remember that you will likely need to do a lot of educating about community cats, TNR, how cat colonies work (including the vacuum effect) to persuade parties that simply trapping and removing the cats at issue won't work, and how targeted TNR can bring an overpopulation site down to zero cats over time. (See our [Resources](#) page for excellent articles and information you can use in your education efforts.)

C. Use Disaster Response Principles

We advocate treating this situation as the man-made disaster that it is, and use disaster response principles, most notably the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS is a management system used throughout the United States in managing human and animal disasters. These situations are complex with many moving parts—ICS helps you organize the planning and actual operation to help the cats.

In a nutshell, ICS breaks down the complex task into bite-sized pieces and assigns a single person to be in charge of the whole operation (the Incident Commander) and single Lead to manage each of the component pieces. We'll get to organization in more detail later, but for now understand that each important component will have a Lead, and the operation itself will have someone in charge, called an Incident Command or IC. Within ICS, each person involved will have a particular role and responsibilities, and it is important that they do their assigned role and don't take on other duties.

Using ICS to plan and carry out your operation will help you ensure that each important piece is planned for and executed well; it is an invaluable tool to bring some order to such a complex situation with many moving parts.

Treating the situation as the disaster that it is will also play a part in placement, funding, and in recruiting groups to help.

Develop a Realistic Plan – Overview

The plan you develop will be tailored to the specific situation you are dealing with—including the parties involved, the laws and ordinances, law enforcement, and Animal Control issues, as well as the particular cat colonies and rescue groups involved. However, we want to share a general plan/approach that can get a site down to zero cats (over time) in a way that everyone can live with and which will humanely solve the problem. In a nutshell, the general approach we advocate is to:

- Trap all the cats and kittens.
- Spay/Neuter, vaccinate, microchip, and medically treat everyone (within appropriate age and health guidelines).
- Placement—friendly adult cats removed from the site are placed in homes via cat rescues; kittens go to foster homes via cat rescue groups; and un-friendlies or hard to adopt cats go to barn homes/“working cat” programs. Only the remaining non-adoptable, non-placed cats are returned to site.

For the cats returned to the site, an after-care program is established to ensure:

- Maintenance trapping continues to trap newcomer cats and any missed cats from original trapping.
- A medical fund is established to provide medical care to the remaining cats.
- An appropriate feeding plan is established.

There is a lot to each of these components, but the overall plan is that the cats are all spayed/neutered, and then placed appropriately—with hopefully most of the cats not returning to the site. For those returned to the site, there will be feeding and medical care provided. Just as importantly, maintenance trapping will continue to ensure that the population will naturally decline. For many sites, given the natural lifespan of outdoor cats, a site can get to or near zero cats within five years.

The benefits of this plan are obvious—the cat population on site is immediately reduced by placing kittens and adult cats in good homes (via cat rescue groups). Cats that are not adoptable or not placeable in homes are placed into barn homes, or working cat programs where they are fed and cared for outside. If there are more of these cats than there are barn home placements (a likely situation), then some of the cats will be returned to site. However, the cat population on site will continue to decline, humanely, through natural attrition and old age.

The drawback may be that some cats are returned to the site, and this may make it hard for some groups to embrace this aspect of the plan right away. However, all of the groups and affected parties may have to compromise on some aspect of what they want. For some of the affected parties, the compromise here might be the timeframe—they may want the cats gone now. But an immediate reduction in population now, a continuing reduction, and getting to zero within 5 years may be a solution they can live with.

It may take some education and work to show parties that this is the best approach. People are not always familiar with the research around the “vacuum effect”—how when a population of cats is removed from an area, other cats move in. Trapping and killing all cats won’t solve their problem. Rather, having a population of sterile cats on site actually prevents this from happening.

Another helpful factor to bring to the table is that the parties involved really do not want to be associated with a mass cat euthanasia. City and county commissions and businesses worry about the publicity and backlash—especially when there is a humane solution that results in immediate reduction along with continuing and humane decline in cat numbers. Other agencies that may see mass euthanasia may actually find it cheaper to participate in this solution rather than trap and kill. For example, in our operation in Pennsylvania, local Animal Control officials would have had to follow the local ordinance that required appropriate euthanasia and disposal of the cats on site—and to do this for the 300 plus cats would have cost over \$30,000. When faced with tight budgets, taking on a costly and unpopular

course of action (trap and kill) just did not make sense when there was another, cheaper solution available.

Develop a Realistic Plan – Operations

Planning and conducting the actual operations to successfully trap, spay/neuter, temporarily shelter, find homes for, and possibly return some of the cats to the site is quite complex. This is an operation with many moving parts, and this is where ICS comes in to help make this manageable.

The main sections of the operation (for planning and executing purposes) and their tasks are:

- Trapping and transport—trap the cats and transport to the temporary shelter, transport cats to and from the spay/neuter clinic, and release any that will be returned to the site.
- Temporary sheltering—setting up and operating a temporary shelter to house the cats pre- and post-surgery.
- Veterinary medical care—the spay/neutering, vaccinating, and medical treatment at the clinic, as well as providing medical care to cats in the temporary shelter.
- Logistics—ensuring material supplies for all aspects of the operation.
- Security—ensuring that the trapping and sheltering operations are secure from vandalism and sabotage.
- Assessment and placement—before a single cat is trapped, this section does extensive outreach to find placement for kittens and

adoptable adult cats; also conducts proper assessment of the cats to assess their adoptability/socialization to make sure kittens and cats are placed appropriately.

- Public Information Officer/communications—deals with communicating with the public (via regular and social media) on the operation, approving releases by individual agencies, and ensuring that rumors and misinformation are quickly corrected.
- Aftercare—responsible for developing and carrying out the aftercare plan for cats released back to the site—including maintenance trapping, medical care, and feeding program

A. Trap and transportation

This section includes identifying the colonies on site, working with the feeders/owners, conducting the trapping, assigning animal ID numbers, and transporting trapped cats to the temporary shelter

Lead: Trap Lead

The success of the trap and transport section of the operation is determined before a single trap is ever placed on site. Careful inventorying of the cats on site, working with any people who are currently feeding the cats, and identifying all the pockets or colonies of cats on a site is essential. One positive aspect of including current feeders into the planning process is that they are much more likely to cooperate in helping to locate all the cats on site, identify good trapping sites, and also identify pregnant cats and litters of kittens.

The main components of a successful plan for trapping are:

1. Get an accurate count or estimate of the number of cats and kittens on site.
2. Identify the physical locations of colonies, and make an overall trapping plan by dividing the site into sections (for larger sites) and identifying good trapping sites.
3. Plan how many days of trapping are needed—based on cat numbers and geographic size.

4. Obtain (borrow and/or buy) enough humane traps to conduct operations—knowing that once a cat is trapped, that trap is taken out of operation for at least 2-4 days.
5. Based on the geographical area you are trapping, form trapping teams with enough people on each team to prepare, drop, and pick up traps in a section.
6. Make a trapping schedule.
7. Based on the geographic size and numbers of cats, obtain (borrow or rent) vans to transport trapped cats to the temporary shelter.
8. Set up a paperwork system to track every trap dropped at a site, assign animal ID numbers in the field to trapped cats, and affix this information to the trap.
9. Communicate with the temporary shelter to let them know of incoming transports of trapped cats.

We'll discuss each of these in turn. There are many great resources on each of these components, and the [list of such resources](#) can be found on page 49.

1. Get an accurate count of the number of cats and kittens on site

This is an essential first step for planning the trapping operation; it is also crucial for the success of the overall operation—without knowing how many cats and kittens are on site you won't likely have enough placement on hand, or have planned for enough spay/neuter capacity at the clinic(s) you are working with. While you might be tempted to just wing it, or in some way rush this process—don't! So much depends on this part that you will set yourself up for success by getting the numbers right.

It is sometimes hard to get a good count of cats on site. It is essential to walk the property and hang out there, and to talk with all those who may feed the cats. Find out when the caretakers feed, and come with them if possible when they feed. Spend hours on site (sitting out of sight, or in a parked car), keep records of the cats you count on multiple visits, mark colony areas on a map, and you'll begin to get a good estimate of the number of cats.

2. Identify the physical locations of colonies, and make an overall trapping plan by dividing the site into sections (for larger sites) and identifying good trapping sites

Depending on how large the geographic area is, you will likely need to divide your site into sections (label them A, B, C, etc.), and treat each section as a mini-site. Even a site with a small number of acres should be sectioned off this way. This makes the trapping manageable; but more importantly, it helps ensure that any cats returned to the site are released to the exact location where they were trapped. For example, if all the “A” cats are at the north end of the property, the chance that cat A-27 gets released somewhere else on the property is reduced. (We’ll talk more about release later—but know that dividing the site into sections is very helpful for safe returns.)

Within each of these sections, identify good trapping sites and record them on a map of the area. Obviously, the places where feeders feed the cats currently are the best trapping sites. Also, plan to trap within roaming range of the feeding sites. The feeders can let you know where the cats and kittens hang out; if you don’t have a feeder giving you this information, you’ll need to spend more time on site scouting this out. The time you spend doing this before the operation begins will pay huge dividends when the operation starts. You do not want the first time you think about trapping sites to be the first day of trapping—when you have clinic space reserved, empty cages waiting at the temporary shelter, and a load of volunteers ready to lay traps.

3. Plan how many days of trapping are needed—based on cat numbers and geographic size

There is no magic formula to answer the question of how many days you should trap given a certain number of cats on site, but you can make some good estimates. Understand that the temporary shelter will be set up to receive the cats after they are trapped, and to house the cats post-surgery. Therefore, cats won’t be released into the trapping areas until the trapping is completed—this helps prevent the problem of trapping just spayed/neutered cats. The idea is to trap until every cat and kitten is removed from the site—or to get as close to 90% as possible.

At Core Creek Park, in Pennsylvania, we planned trapping for a 1200-acre park with an estimated population of 300 cats and kittens. In this instance, we planned to have trapping for 10 straight days at this huge site—and we basically trapped for 10 days within each section. We needed to do that in order to reach the 90-100% trapped range, and it worked.

At smaller sites, such as at an apartment complex or behind a grocery store, you could plan on trapping for five days straight—understanding that you will get a good majority of the cats the first three days, then have a couple additional days to focus on the crafty hard to trap cats.

If you are going to err towards any side, do it towards having more trapping days than you might actually need. This is because you will have lined up so many resources to make this operation work, and its success depends on getting 90% or more of the cats trapped and sterilized. You may run into problems, weather might be bad, there may be more cats on site than you estimated—and having more days than you think you might need provides a good buffer to ensure you actually do get everyone trapped.

4. Obtain (borrow and/or buy) enough humane traps to conduct operations—knowing that once a cat is trapped, that trap is taken out of operation for at least 2-4 days

A good rule of thumb is having 2-3 traps for every cat you need to trap. Examples of good humane traps to use are those built by Tru Catch (<https://www.trucatchtraps.com>) or Havahart (www.havahart.com), or something similar work best. Humane societies, animal control agencies, and rescue groups may have stocks of traps that they are willing to lend you. (It is crucial that you assign someone to track all the borrowed traps, make sure they are identified by who lent them, and return every borrowed trap in excellent condition.)

Make sure you have enough traps on hand to support the trapping needs—the rest of the operation depends on having a steady flow of trapped cats into the shelter and to spay/neuter, and you don't want to hold things up by not having enough traps.

5. Based on the geographical area you are trapping, form trapping teams with enough people on each team to prepare, drop, and pick up traps in a section

The Trap Lead will develop the actual trapping plan, identifying how many people are on a trapping team, how many trapping teams there will be, and who will be assigned to what section of the site.

A trapping team consists of at least three people and a van (to transport traps to the site, and to transport cats in traps to the shelter). Each team will have a Recorder who is responsible for the paperwork, and the other two (or more) bait the traps and set them out at the trapping sites.

6. Make a trapping schedule

This is done by the Trap Lead, and literally includes the days/times trapping occurs and which team traps on each day/night (by section), throughout the entire operation. Be realistic about the number of volunteer trappers you will have. Also, do not plan on leaving traps on site overnight without having security on hand to watch the traps. Unfortunately in TNR operations, traps are sometimes vandalized and/or stolen. Worse, cats left in traps overnight are subject to acts of cruelty. Since the trapping operation may be known to the public, those who would commit acts of cruelty on trapped cats are able to do so unless you can have someone watch the traps. We don't necessarily advocate this approach. What often works better is simply pulling all the traps late in the evening and resume trapping the next day.

7. Based on the geographic size and numbers of cats, obtain (borrow or rent) vans to transport trapped cats to the temporary shelter

It is very helpful for each trapping team to have their own assigned van to take traps to the trapping site and to transport trapped cats to the temporary shelter. Some humane societies and rescue groups have their own vans that they would bring to the operation. It is possible to rent cargo vans from U-Haul as well. It is possible, with great coordination and communication, to have just one van on a larger site—with large numbers of traps dropped off in different sections, and the individual teams walking them to trap sites. In this scenario, the van driver would float among the teams and manage just the transportation.

8. Set up a paperwork system to track every trap dropped at a site, assign animal ID numbers in the field to trapped cats, and affix this information to the trap (See the [Resources](#) section for examples of all the forms you may need—Trapping Log, Trap Card, Trapping Instructions, Animal ID Numbering Convention.)

Having an easy to use and understand paperwork system is essential for the trapping and safe return of any cats back to the site. Additionally, it is essential to prevent the tragedy of leaving a baited trap on site and losing track of it—resulting in a cat or wild animal being trapped and dying in it without food or water. Finally, if the exact location is not accurately recorded and affixed to the trap (and follows the cat through the entire operation), then you will not be able to return the cat to the exact location it was trapped. This cat has survived by identifying food and shelter; by returning the cat to a different location than where it has lived and survived you risk its life. Anyone

who has released a cat to see it totally bewildered by where it is knows this is heartbreaking and understands the importance of this tracking.

In any trapping operation, redundancies must be built into the system to prevent these tragedies. Remember—those who are trapping in the field will become exhausted, sleep deprived, and need a clear way to track both the traps and the trapped cats. This is why a single person is assigned to be the Recorder—and he or she does not assist in trapping. All the Recorder does is ensure that this essential paperwork is accurately completed as the trapping occurs.

The basics of the paperwork the Recorder manages are the Trapping Log (tracking every trap that is set out and picked up) and the Trap Card (which is affixed to the trap after a cat is trapped, on which the Cat ID number is assigned and basic information filled out—such as color of cat, whether it is a cat or kitten—and which identifies obvious medical issues. Examples of both the Trapping Log and Trap Card are in the Appendix.

Trap Card—Affixed to the trap and records vital and specific location information as well as information on the cat:

Animal ID No. _____
Description/Color: _____
Zone: _____
Exact Location Trapped: _____ _____
_____ Male _____ Female
Wound/injury? Describe: _____ _____

Trapping Log—This log is kept by the Recorder and accurately lists every trap that is laid out on site, by trap number, and on it the Recorder identifies the exact location where it is put out. This step is essential to find and pick up every trap that is set out. Believe me—and instruct your trappers, too—that they will not be able to remember and find every trap in the dark when it comes time to pick them up, and the Trapping Log—with exact locations listed—will prove itself invaluable even though it takes a bit more time up front.

On site, the Recorder runs the show. Traps should not be laid until the Recorder lists them on the trap log, identifies the location where they are being placed, and verbally tells the trappers they can be placed. Likewise, a trapped cat should not be picked up from the site it was trapped until the Recorder has filled out the Trapping log and the Trap Card, and attached the Trap Card to the trap using a zip lock bag and zip tying it to the trap handle.

The operation must have a numbering convention that all the trapping teams must follow to keep the numbering consistent. We have suggested a convention that can be used (see Animal Numbering Convention in the [Resources](#) section), but any simple, logical convention could be created and used in your operation.

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(and the mother is unknown), then the kitten would just get a regular animal ID number, such as C-53 in the above example.

Only the Recorder should assign Cat ID numbers for the cats trapped by a team. When multiple people assign numbers within a section it is inevitable that mistakes will be made, some numbers assigned twice, etc.

It is important that everyone understand what the numbering convention means and explain it to the trappers. It is essential to have a written handout to give to every Recorder to refresh their memory in the field. It is very hard, if not impossible, to fix problems in assigned animal ID numbers, and dealing with these mistakes in the field will cause headaches down the road throughout the whole operation.

9. Communicate with the temporary shelter to let them know of incoming transports of trapped cats.

As soon as possible, someone from the trapping team should be assigned to call or text the Shelter Manager at the temporary shelter to give them a heads up on how many cats are arriving, along with their estimated time of arrival. This gives the shelter team a chance to get ready and adjust their work appropriately to be ready when the van arrives.

B. Temporary Shelter

This section of the operation sets up and operates the temporary shelter and provides daily care to the cats in traps (before spay/neuter surgery), as well as care for the cats after surgery until placement/release.

Lead: Shelter Manager

One component of our approach that makes it a bit different from other TNR operations is the use of a temporary shelter to care for the cats pre- and post-surgery. Cats come to the temporary shelter in the traps and are cared for until they go off to the clinic for surgery; they then return to the shelter post-surgery where they recover and stay as they are assessed for placement—until they are either placed with rescue groups or released back to the site.

One benefit of using a temporary shelter in this operation is that it keeps the trapped cats out of circulation until the trapping is completed—so the trapping teams do not end up re-trapping some cats already spayed/neutered in the operation. Additionally, it gives the cats more recovery time post-surgery. But the real benefit is that it allows for better placement evaluation as the cats have more time and space to relax after the stress of being trapped, so that evaluators can better assess whether the cat can be adopted into a home, or is a candidate for a barn home or return to site. Finally, there is a safe, comfy site for the cats to stay for rescue groups to come and look at the cats as they consider which ones they will take into their program for placement.

The component parts of temporary sheltering are:

1. Select an appropriate temporary shelter site
2. Plan for how you will staff the shelter
3. Plan for how you will supply the shelter
4. Select your Shelter Manager
5. Shelter Operations—intake from field, release to clinic, intake from clinic, release from shelter
6. Shelter Operations—daily care: trapped cats, cats in cages
7. Shelter Operations—medical care
8. Release cats to placement or return to site

1. Select an appropriate temporary shelter site

The basic requirements for a temporary shelter site are that it be climate controlled and have enough room for all the cats and material supplies (food, litter, bedding, etc.). (As mentioned before—see how important it is to get the number of cats right?) Additionally, it is helpful to have a separate room for a maternity ward (unless pregnant cats or cats with litters are going straight to foster—this is the preferable option) and two separate rooms for isolation wards. The cats should be housed in wire cages, and these should be double stacked—cutting the necessary floor space in half. Double-stacking also makes daily care and observation of the cats much easier. You will need to find out the measurements of the wire cages you'll be using (see section 3), and figure how many of them will fit side by side in a 50-foot row, or 100-foot row—to give you a ball

park estimate of the size you'll need. You'll be surprised how many cats, in double-stacked wire cages, can be housed in a small area. For example, our temporary shelter in Pennsylvania housed over 260 cats and was relatively small.

It is crucial that the building be heated or cooled, depending on the season. You will be sheltering cats still in cages and those recovering from surgery, and oppressive heat or freezing cold won't be good for them.

You'll need to find a space that has complete containment—meaning there are no open areas that go to the outside. You may have cats escape from cages, and you'll have no chance to get them back without complete containment. Additionally, it is best to avoid huge buildings in which an escaped cat would be hard to find or re-trap. Buildings with accessible attics, holes in drywall, etc. should be avoided for the same reason. When judging spaces, think: if a cat gets loose in here, will I be able to get them back?

The best shelter sites are those that have some smaller rooms with doors—these can be used for maternity wards, isolation wards (for URI cats, or if another disease strikes) and areas where scared cats can be housed away from the activity of the shelter.

Additionally, it is *extremely* helpful to have separate areas to house the cats who come to the shelter in traps and those that will be spending more time there in wire cages post-surgery. There really are essentially two different sheltering operations combined in one shelter. Having separate areas for each is in cutting down on stress (on the cats and the volunteers) because of the differing activities and schedules each section has. The cats in traps are housed at the shelter for a brief time (overnight—two days) prior to going to the clinic for surgery. It is possible to “construct” two separate shelter areas in one building. In our temporary shelter—which was one warehouse—we dropped a heavy tarp from ceiling to floor the entire length of the shelter to physically separate the areas.

You might be working with a city or county, and often they have available buildings or warehouses used for storage. Ask about borrowing one of these sites for the week or two weeks your operation is occurring. Other potential sites are warehouses, commercial real estate (such as office space), garages, and county fairgrounds. Open air arenas in fairgrounds should not be used because they aren't climate controlled and have no containment—rather, there are often smaller areas and buildings at fairgrounds that might be appropriate.

Finally, when you are choosing your temporary shelter site, make sure it has room to accommodate more cats than are estimated without resorting to triple-stacking cages, which is not recommended. Despite the Trapping Team's best efforts, they may underestimate the number of cats they will trap. Make sure you have a site that can house at least 25% more cats than expected so you'll be able to manage additional cats with relative ease.

2. Plan for how you will staff the shelter

You will need enough trained volunteers to ensure that you have enough people to set up the shelter, manage the flow of cats in and out, and provide for their daily care. Of course, everything will depend on the number of cats you expect to care for.

It is helpful to think of operations at the shelter as almost two different shelters—one for the cats in traps (coming to the shelter from the field), and the “regular” shelter for the cats coming from the spay/neuter clinic that will be housed in wire cages.

a. Staffing the shelter set up (1 day)

Under the direction of the Shelter Manager, a team of volunteers can ready a building and make a temporary shelter in a day or two—depending on the condition of the building and number of cats expected. It is important to lay down strong plastic sheeting on the entire floor area and up the walls as high as the cages will go, to protect the building and floor from cat urine during the operation.

It is crucial that the Shelter Manager have a prepared and detailed floor plan with the rows and sections laid out, so that he or she knows exactly how the shelter should be set up and that there is enough space.

The volunteers setting up the shelter do not need to be trained cat care volunteers, as long as they are able and willing to follow instructions. However, the work can be physically demanding—think of unloading and setting up a couple hundred cages, and having enough people on hand to help makes a huge difference.

b. Staffing the shelter—regular operations

As mentioned above, at least while the trapping is going on, you will have two shelter operations—those for the cats in traps, and those who are in wire cages post-surgery. Additionally, the shelter will have cats coming in and leaving from both parts of the shelter. Because of this, it is necessary to have enough staffing in both sections—it is conceivable that the in-trap section of the shelter could be receiving cats from the field, while the “regular” shelter has cats incoming from the spay/neuter clinic post-surgery.

Typically, you will have far fewer cats in the “in-trap” shelter, and can likely get by with two people staffing this section. This will likely be enough to manage intake (from the field) and exit (to the clinic) of the cats, as well as feeding and watering the cats in the traps.

For the cats in the “regular” shelter—those housed in wire cages after they have had spay/neuter surgery—a good rule of thumb is to have about three trained/experienced volunteers per 50 cages. This will give you enough staffing to feed twice a day, do light cage cleaning (less intrusion for the cats is better), keep the shelter clean, organize supplies, etc. Additionally, the shelter crew will be receiving cats on transports from the clinic (of cats in traps) and unloading these transports and transferring cats from traps to cages takes some time.

A good source of experienced volunteers is emergency animal response teams. These groups are used to sheltering animals in temporary emergency shelters. National groups such as RedRover, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the ASPCA, American Humane, and the Humane Society of the United States have volunteers who are experienced in emergency animal sheltering. Additionally, there are state and regional emergency response teams that are often eager for a chance to deploy and engage their volunteers.²

Another good source of volunteers to staff the temporary shelter is volunteers from rescue groups, shelters, and other animal welfare groups in your area. It is important to keep in mind that providing daily care in a temporary shelter is a bit different than taking care of your pet cat, or even volunteering at the local shelter. The shelter will be managed by the Shelter Manager, with the help of his or her Leads, and this group will be able to provide on-site training and orientation. This training and orientation could be required prior to volunteering at the shelter, and we recommend this approach—so that you have a good pool of volunteers to fill out the schedule for every day the shelter is operating.

We do not recommend putting a general call out for volunteers on Facebook or other social media. You really want to have more control over who comes into the shelter to work and have more familiarity with them before you let them in the door. You will not need huge numbers of people for the shelter; and it will improve operations if you are a bit more selective than letting anyone in the door to help, however well-intentioned they may be.

3. Plan for how you will supply the shelter

The main supply you will need is wire cages to house the cats after they come to the shelter from the clinic (remember, before surgery, the cats

² A list of state and regional animal response teams can be found here: <https://redrover.org/animal-response-teams>

are kept in the trap they were trapped in). If you are expecting 250 cats, you will need that number of wire cages; plus you'll want to have available an additional 60 or so (to give you that 25% cushion in case you trap more cats than expected).

We strongly recommend wire cages rather than the plastic airline crates or kennels. Remember that the cats will be living in these cages for several days, even up to a week or two. The wire cages are roomier and allow for volunteers, medical staff, and behaviorists to see the cat much better than the plastic kennels. This is important for their daily care as well as for their assessment for placement.

The best source for wire cages are the emergency animal response teams mentioned above—especially the state or regional teams. Additional sources are shelters, rescues, and animal control agencies. You will likely need to seek cages from a wide area, depending on how many you will need. As with the traps, you'll need to keep a log of this borrowed equipment and be very careful to tag and track every cage so that it can be returned to its owner after the operation is done.

Cages that are about 36" long are best (about the size for small dogs). This gives enough room for a litter box and room for the cat to move around. Larger cages, such as those 42" or longer, will work, but they take up more floor space and are also more difficult to remove cats from. Chances are you won't be able to be too choosy on the sizes of the wire cages you are able to borrow.

Start reaching out for these cages early—it takes a lot of calling and emailing to track down enough cages and arrange for transport to the temporary shelter.

Other supplies you'll need are food, newspapers or puppy pads, water bowls, litter and litter boxes.

Food—You'll want to have both dry and wet food on hand because you will have some cats with dental issues that can only eat wet food. Sources for food donations are local rescues and cat groups; additionally, Rescue Bank (which provides food to rescue organizations throughout the

United States) may be able to provide donated food:

<http://rescuebank.org/>

Bowls—In temporary sheltering we use disposable paper food trays, such as paper French fry trays, because they don't have to be washed (and also therefore won't spread disease).



Likewise, with cats, we can get small plastic cups from restaurant supply trays which provide the same benefit. These are relatively cheap, and you can get several hundred very easily.

Litter boxes—As with the bowls, disposable is the way to go with litter boxes. Any kind of small tray will work, such as aluminum trays you can get from restaurant supply stores, cardboard boxes, and the heavy cardboard litter boxes that are available.



When caring for hundreds of cats, or even fifty, the extra time and staffing needed to wash and disinfect litter boxes is often just not available—you would rather have your staff caring for the animals and keeping the shelter clean.

Litter—You'll need a good amount of litter to set up every litter box, but after that remember that the boxes will just be scooped or spot cleaned—the entire litter won't be dumped out every day. Still, you can go through a large amount of litter. Check with rescue groups or Rescue Bank—they provide litter in addition to food.

Newspaper/puppy pads—Newspaper works fine to line the bottom of the wire cage, and there are often good local supplies of newspapers. The local newspaper distributor may be happy to deliver loads of old papers; consider having a paper drive if this option isn't available.

Other supplies—You'll want, on hand at the shelter, cleaning supplies (spray bottles, Dawn soap, bleach) and also safety supplies (cat gloves, net for recapture), as well as a first aid kit for volunteers.

4. Select your Shelter Manager

A skilled Shelter Manager is an essential component for the success of the entire operation, and you need to have someone experienced in planning for and managing a cat shelter. The Shelter Manager oversees everything about the shelter operations, from selecting the site (or at least approving it), to how it will be set up, to establishing the daily care protocols, managing intake and release of cats, and managing overall operations. You must have someone experienced in doing this—there are simply too many moving parts for someone inexperienced to handle. In addition, the Shelter Manager should be a single person—a shelter cannot be run by committee.

If you do not have someone experienced in your group to take on this role, start doing outreach to emergency animal response groups in your area or your state. Regular shelter managers at brick and mortar shelters could do the job, but it would likely be hard for them to get away for 1-2 weeks for the time of your operation. The Shelter Manager position is a full-time position for the duration of the operation—it is not something that someone could manage part time. However, you could reach out to your local shelter—they may know of experienced people who might be available.

5. Shelter Operations—intakes and release out

Before getting to daily care of the cats, it is important to understand that a large part of shelter operations consists of the intake of cats and the release of cats. Unlike most cat shelters, this temporary shelter has a lot of movement of cats going in and out. Getting clear on this and planning for smooth intake and exit of cats is essential.

Each cat will go through:

- Intake—come to the shelter from the field in a trap
- Be sheltered overnight, up to two days, in the “trapped” section
- Exit—the shelter to the spay/neuter clinic
- Intake—return to the “regular” part of the shelter post-surgery
- Exit—for placement or release back to the site

Intake from Field

Cats will be transported to the shelter by the trapping team, and will arrive in the traps in which they were trapped. Attached to every trap will be a Ziploc bag, with the Trapping Card inside. This card will have the Cat ID number written on it, as well as a description of the animal, where it was trapped, and notes on any medical issues (wounds, URI indications, etc.).

The Shelter Manager (or their designate) will log in every cat on the Shelter Log—writing down the Cat ID number, description, medical issues, and location trapped onto the Shelter Log. An example Shelter Log form that you can use in your operation is in the [Resources](#) section at the end of this Manual.

Exit to Spay/Neuter Clinic

Within one to two days, these trapped cats will leave the temporary shelter for their spay/neuter surgery, and each one must be logged out. Checking a cat out of the shelter is a bit easier, since all the information has already been logged, and just the date of when they left and initials of who checked them out need to be filled in on the shelter log.

Intake to the Regular Shelter (Back from the Clinic)

Cats that went out to the clinic in the morning will, in most instances, return to the shelter that same afternoon/early evening. The cats must be checked back into the shelter on the Shelter Log, and then they are placed into their individual cage. The Shelter Manager will have planned, and will direct, where these incoming cats are placed (e.g. which rows, sections, etc.; whether a particular cat will go to medical isolation, maternity, or some other section).

Prior to the arrival of the first set of cats, it is helpful for the Shelter Manager to demonstrate how a pair of volunteers will take a cat in a trap and gently release it into its cage. Although the cats are a bit woozy from the anesthetic, the chance for escape is there, and each pair of volunteers must work together to patiently and safely get the cat from the trap to the cage. Although you will have many cats to unload, it is important to not rush the cats out of the traps and into the wire cages—this is when cats can get loose or injured in the process. Additionally, it is stressful on the cats, and scaring them can make it harder for them to relax later and be correctly identified as an adoptable cat.

This process will be repeated for every transport of cats from the clinic to the shelter and will occur for many days of the operations.

Exit to Placement or Return to Site

The last flow of cats in the sheltering operation is their release to rescue groups or an individual for placement, or a return to site (releasing back to the exact site they were trapped). The Shelter Manager (or their

designate) logs the exit from the shelter on the Shelter Log, recording their initials, the date, and who the cat was released to.

The actual transfer is a bit trickier, as the cat is taken from the cage and put in a carrier for transport to their new home. Many of the cats are still stressed and are not easily handled. When transferring a cat from the cage to carrier, it is important to keep the number of people around to a minimum, have all the doors closed, and have someone at the end of the row with a cat net handy. A simple option for cats too stressed to be handled is to transport them in their wire cages. This works best for the cats being transported the short distance to be returned to the site. It can also work for cats going to rescue groups, but 1) those cats are most likely handleable, and 2) you would need to make arrangements for the return of the wire cage.

6. Shelter Operations—daily care (in-trap cats and those in wire cages)

Cats need to be cared for (food, water, cleaning) in both the “trap” section of the shelter—the cats staged in the traps prior to surgery—and in the “regular” section of the shelter where the cats are living in wire cages until they are placed or returned to site.

Daily care—Trap Section: generally 8 a.m.—5 p.m.

Cats that are trapped in the field are brought to the temporary shelter and “staged” here until they go off to the spay/neuter clinic. Obviously, cats cannot humanely be housed in traps very long. This is simply a temporary measure that facilitates the trapping, allowing for a good number of cats to be trapped and staged for a single transport to the clinic. **Cats should not be kept in traps for more than 72 hours, starting from the time they are trapped.** The space they have to move around is not sufficient for sheltering longer than this, and it is difficult to keep them clean and dry. Additionally, it is harder to observe their well-being and catch any medical problems that can easily arise. Keeping the time that cats are kept in traps as short as possible should be a key consideration in planning trapping, transport, and clinic schedules.

1. Feeding, watering, cleaning

While the cats are staged at the temporary shelter in traps, they need to be fed, watered, kept as clean and dry as possible, and their well-being carefully monitored.

Cats can be fed in traps by carefully lifting the trap's door just enough to slide in a food dish. These cats are very stressed, and sliding the food tray back away from the trap door is helpful, as some cats are too scared to venture forward. Cats quickly learn where the people enter from in any room, and typically hang out in a trap away from that area—so place the food away from that end of the trap, so the cat isn't forced to enter into this scarier territory to eat or drink. **It is very important to have experienced and responsible volunteers working in the trap section to prevent cats escaping from traps during feeding and cleaning.**

These cats should be fed wet food, with some additional water stirred in (use double food trays if needed) to ensure good hydration prior to surgery. They should of course be provided water.

Cleaning their living area in a trap is difficult, at best. Always keep in mind that this is a very temporary living situation, and know that you will not be able to keep the trap as clean as you would like—and know that this is ok. It is temporary. However, their living space must be kept dry so they are not sitting in water, urine, or feces. One way to do this is to lift the trap door, and slowly slide out the layer of newspaper or puppy pad they are on, and replace with fresh. In a pinch, you can also lay a thick layer of additional newspaper on top of what is already there—simply covering the soiled or wet areas. This provides in essence a clean, dry ground for them, and is enough to keep them comfortable for the short time they are in there.

Don't worry about keeping the trap spotless. If there are empty food trays or water bowls way in the back of the trap, it is fine to leave them in there.

If you do have the traps raised off the ground a couple inches (by resting on two by fours, etc.), you have to make sure the cats have a thick layer

of newspaper in the trap so they are not standing or sitting on the wire floor directly. (Although raising the traps up does allow the water and urine to drain, I don't like doing this simply for that reason.)

2. Monitoring the cats' well-being

Cats in traps will be covered most of the time with the trap covers they came in with. This helps reduce stress and the spread of infection. However, it is important that the Shelter Manager (or the Lead in this section) regularly look into each trap and observe how the cat is doing, and handle any developing medical issues. A small penlight can be used to get a good look at each cat—avoid using a full power flashlight since that causes unnecessary stress. Sometimes kittens are born in the trap, and if this happens the mama and kittens should be transferred immediately to foster or to the maternity ward; if the mama appears to be acting aggressively towards her kittens they must be removed immediately.

There is a fine line between giving the cats in traps their space and bothering them to observe—but they should be observed at least twice a day, including a final check right before you are leaving for the evening.

3. Preparing for clinic transport

a. Night before

It is very important that the Lead in the “trapped” cat section knows exactly which groups of cats are going to clinic the next day (as well as knowing how long each group of cats has been in traps). Standard surgery protocol requires that all food be removed from the traps by midnight of the day before surgery. In practice, this will be the evening before, as shelter staff won't be staying in the shelter that late. At the end of the evening, at least a couple hours after the last feeding, the food trays should be removed. Make sure to look at both ends of the trap, as sometimes food trays (or even the bait food) remain back there. Water should be left in the trap until the next morning when it can be pulled out prior to transport.

b. Morning of transport

On the morning a group of cats go to the clinic, all water bowls with water in them should be pulled. You can leave empty or tipped over bowls in the trap for transport—it causes no harm, speeds up the process, and avoids an unnecessary trap opening. This keeps the cats from getting wet with the inevitable tipping that would occur in loading and transport.

The last thing to be done is to zip tie both ends of the trap to prevent escape during transport. The traps can get jostled and may tip over. When this happens, if an openable door is not zip tied there is a chance a cat could escape during transit—and getting loose in unfamiliar territory is about the worst possible outcome for that cat. Take the time to zip tie the trap doors. Clinic staff should be notified ahead of time that the traps will come to them zip-tied. The transport team can easily cut these open with scissors after they reach the clinic.

Daily Care—Regular Shelter: generally from 8 a.m.—5 p.m.

This section of the shelter cares for the cats set up in wire cages after they return from the spay/neuter clinic. These cats are much easier to care for. The cages will be laid out in rows, with cages double stacked. There should be sheets draped across the top row of cages, to provide some security for the cats, and cardboard or sheets should be put between each of the cages, for the same reason. Each cat should be securely nestled in their wire cage. Additionally, a perch box or small cardboard box should be put in there to provide a hiding spot for these stressed cats. Finally, the cages should have toys and comfort items such as blankets.



The overall approach for daily care of these cats is “less is more”—the less noise and intrusion into their cage the better. Many of these cats may have had no contact with humans, and noise and having people around them is very stressful. In a very short time these cats have been trapped, transported, taken for spay/neuter, transported back, and are now living in a very strange (to them) environment. Cats that are stressed in shelters are much more likely to break out with upper respiratory infection (URIs) or other diseases. So, for the cats’ well-being, we try to take care of them while intruding into their space as little as possible. We work quietly and deliberately, and try to keep talking to a minimum among volunteers as much as possible. The daily operations of the shelter are loud and frenetic enough without adding to them.

The general schedule for the “regular” part of the shelter is as follows:

- 8 a.m. Shelter Manager does a walk-through of the shelter and lays eyes on every cat to identify any medical emergencies that need immediate response. He or she then briefs the daily care crew and assigns volunteers to sections
- 8:30-9:30 Feed and water only, then allow cats quiet time to eat, rest
- 9:30-Noon Spot clean cages
- Noon-3:00 Quiet time for cats
- 3:00 Prepare food for afternoon feeding
- 3:30/4 Afternoon feeding
- 4:00-5:00 Sweep up, empty trash, prepare for next day

1. Feed, watering, and cleaning

Generally, upon the start of the day we do a quick feed and water of the cats. This means that the cats are fed, and we make sure they have clean water to drink. Food is simply put into the cage in a paper tray, placed deeper into the cage in case the cat is scared to come to the front. Water is checked, and if the cat has clean water we move on to the next cage. If the water dish is dirty with litter, we dump it out, wipe with a paper towel, and refill. If the water bowl has feces or urine in it, we replace the bowl with a clean one. **Note: we aren't doing any cleaning at this point—we just feed and water.**

After this is done, we give the cats some quiet time, and keep volunteers out of the rows while the cats eat. Often, the cats are too stressed to eat while there are people in the rows. Volunteers should not try and socialize or walk through the rows while the cats are eating.

While the cats are eating, the teams/pairs are assigned by the Shelter Manager (or the Lead they designate), and pairs of volunteers are assigned to specific rows or sections for cleaning. Usually these are the same sections assigned for the quick feed and water. It is helpful to keep the same volunteers assigned to the same sections/rows for the entire time they are there (if possible) because the volunteers develop more familiarity with the cats and the working area, and are most likely to notice changes in the cats' condition.

Cage cleaning is essentially minimal spot-cleaning while the cat remains in the cage. In order to prevent the spread of disease, all volunteers should use latex gloves while cleaning, and change them after each cage. It's easiest to use a gloved hand to grab any clumps from the litter box. After that, all that needs to be done is to make sure the cage floor is dry and unsoiled. If there is spilled water, urine, or feces on the newspaper or puppy pad, it should be pulled out and replaced.

If the cage is clean and dry, but has litter on it, it is fine to leave as is. Don't worry about straightening things up, if newspaper is all messed up (in our eyes), the perch box at odd angles, etc.—this cat has just made

their room exactly how they want it! As long as it is clean and dry, this cage is done and you should move on to the next one.

The Shelter Manager (or their designated Lead) needs to train and manage volunteers in this spot cleaning approach. Inevitably there will be a volunteer or more who wants to clean each cage so that it is super clean. This actually is not good for the cats because it means 1) this is stressful to the cat—a person is in their space, messing around, for a longer period of time, and 2) increases the risk of a loose cat—the cat gets more stressed, and the cage door is open for a longer period of time. So, doing a super cleaning is actually counterproductive to good care for the cats. Volunteers should be gently reminded of this and the reasons why we do this more minimal spot-cleaning. If a volunteer isn't able to follow this method, they should not be part of the team providing daily care.

2. Daily care sheets

The cages should have been set up with a zip lock bag attached to the front of the cage to contain the cat's paperwork. An important part of that paperwork is the Daily Care Sheet. (An example of a Daily Care Sheet is in the [Resources](#) page).

Animal Daily Walking, Feeding and Cleaning Schedule

INTAKE NUMBER

RECORD (Note time)				
DATE	WALKED	FED	CAGE CLEANED	COMMENTS

- These daily care sheets record each cat's:
- food—what kind of food provided (wet or dry)
 - appetite—is the cat eating
 - output—urine, feces
 - areas of concern—diarrhea, bloody stool, sneezing, discharge from eyes or ears, injuries
 - behavior—hiding in back, comes to front of cage, etc.

When the cage is cleaned, the volunteer should fill out the Daily Care Sheet and return it to the cage bag. These records are invaluable to provide information on developing conditions, especially if a cat is not eating or not urinating/defecating—which can be life-threatening in a

short time. Despite the best efforts to keep the same volunteers caring for the same section of cats, the reality is that many different volunteers will care for a cat throughout its stay, and it is important to have a central place to record this important information.

Additionally, the behavioral information is very helpful during the placement process and in evaluating the cats.

3. Quiet time

Generally, unless the cats are being fed and watered or their cages cleaned, the Shelter Manager should ensure that the volunteers stay out of the rows and give the cats quiet time. Remember—these guys are super stressed, and having people around them (even those who LOVE them) is not comforting. Cats should never be taken out of their cages to cuddle or play with—it is likely not comforting to them and increases the chances of a cat getting loose. It is helpful to remind volunteers that the best gift they can give these cats is peace, quiet, and alone time.

3. Medical issues

An important part of providing daily care is appropriately identifying and handling medical issues. The daily care volunteers have the closest and most consistent contact with the cats and will notice if a cat is lethargic or in pain, or if there is any change in their condition.

If there is a significant medical situation, including a down cat (unconscious, or conscious but unable to get up), seizing cat, or significant bleeding, the Shelter Manager should be notified immediately. For other medical issues that are non-urgent but do need to be assessed by a veterinarian, it is important to have a notebook or whiteboard where the medical concerns can be collected for the veterinarian doing daily rounds. It is helpful to have a notebook per row, or couple rows, clearly labeled “Medical Concerns—Row ____” or section, etc. Volunteers should list in this notebook any cat with observable issues. It’s helpful to have headings in the notebook:

Row/Cage No.	Symptoms	Date	Volunteer’s Initials
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- Row and cage—where the cat is located
- Specific, observed symptoms—such as “limping on front right paw,” or “has not urinated in 3 days,” or “blood in stools”
- Date of observation
- The volunteer’s initials—in case the veterinarian has follow-up questions

It can also work to have a large whiteboard, with the same headings, placed in each section or row, for volunteers to write this information on.

C. Veterinary Medical Care

This section of operations is responsible for all things medical relating to the cats from the time of trapping until they are placed or released back to site. This includes managing any injuries or illnesses of cats in traps, overseeing the spay/neuter operations, and ensuring that cats receive appropriate medical care (including medication) at the shelter after surgery.

Lead: Medical Director

The Medical Director is responsible for identifying and/or developing the particular protocols that will be used to provide medical care to the cats during the operation. This includes:

- identifying where cats would go to for urgent care (pre- and post-surgery),
- identifying/developing the protocols for spay/neuter surgery, parasite treatment, wound treatment, microchipping, and any testing (Felv, FIV) to be performed
- identifying/developing, in conjunction with the Incident Commander, a euthanasia protocol—in what circumstances is euthanasia appropriate, and how should that decision be arrived at
- working with the spay/neuter clinics that are providing the surgery to ensure that the appropriate protocols are understood and followed

- ensuring that a veterinarian or veterinary technician does rounds at the temporary shelter every day that cats are housed there

1. Planning, protocols, and coordination

The Veterinary Medical Care section is extremely important and handles all aspects of medical care. The Medical Director is an important position and manages coordination of all this care. It is not possible to appropriately plan for the spay/neuter surgeries and care for these cats with only having a veterinarian on call or just available for questions, or to have different veterinarians handle particular days. It is important to have a Medical Director involved from the beginning to coordinate the different arenas that cats will receive care, to ensure that there is continuity of care, and to ensure that the agreed on protocols are followed, in essence, by multiple doctors and clinics.

The Medical Director will likely be involved from the beginning, when all the parties are brought together to develop the plan for the entire operation. Without assurances on the medical treatment the cats will receive, including how injuries and illnesses will be managed, it might not even be possible to get agreement among the parties. Those who care deeply about the cats will worry that there may be euthanasia for space (or lack of placement), and public health officials and Animal Control will want to know how cats with infections will be managed. Getting spay/neuter facilities involved will require them knowing up front what services and testing are expected; and groups taking cats for placement will need to know what vaccinations and tests will be performed.

The Veterinary Medical protocols need to be detailed and cover all the treatments the cats will receive. We advocate that the cats receive the following services:

- spay/neuter
- ear tipped
- Revolution or other external parasite treatment for fleas, ear mites, and deworming
- rabies vaccination

- FVRCP and FeLV vaccinations
- pain medication
- IV fluids as needed
- treatment sick or wounded cats will receive identified—wounds cleaned, broken limbs treated, eye injuries treated

An example of the Veterinary Medical Protocol developed for the Core Creek Cat Project is included in the [Resources](#) page. Many well thought out, high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter clinic protocols are available online, such as Operation Catnip's (<http://ocgainesville.org/clinic-operations/policies-and-protocols/>), and are listed on the Resources page.

Of course, the individual clinics used will have their own surgical protocols, and it is possible the Medical Director can review these protocols and suggest or require any changes as needed. Again, this coordination must occur, and the agreed on protocols must be written out before clinics sign on, to provide clarity during the operation.

2. Providing medical care pre- and post-surgery

The Medical Director ensures that there is a way to obtain timely medical advice and care as needed during trapping and sheltering. It is likely that the Trapping Team will encounter a wounded or ill cat in the trap, and they will need to be able to call for advice and know where they can take a cat for urgent care. Likewise, at the shelter, it is inevitable that cats will present as struggling with injuries or conditions, and shelter staff will also need to access advice and care.

It is possible to do this via having a schedule of veterinarians on call during operations—doctors that are able to take calls and provide needed information and advice. The Medical Director will identify nearby urgent care clinics, and arranged with them to provide care in medical emergencies.

For cats at the shelter, it is important that a veterinarian or experienced technician make rounds daily at the shelter to observe the cats' well-being and to treat cats as needed. Conditions may be developing that would

not necessarily warrant a trip to urgent care, but require a veterinarian or experienced technician to evaluate. Additionally, at least some cats will be on medication post-surgery, and while shelter staff can administer some of these meds, it would be helpful to have the daily doctor or tech available to medicate the hard-to-medicate cats.

D. Placement

This section is responsible for assessing the cats' behavior, and for finding appropriate placement for the friendly cats into forever homes (mainly via rescue groups), and for the feral or hardly socialized cats into barn home or working cat programs. This section also lines up foster homes for kittens found on site so they do not have to come into the temporary shelter at all.

Lead: Placement Lead

Clearly, the success of the entire operation depends on the work of the Placement section. It is crucial to those who see cats as a problem to know that as many cats as possible will be placed and not returned to the site. Those who care about the cats will want to know that if the cats are removed from the site, they are going into good homes where they will be loved. Finding placement for the cats on your site is challenging work because many rescues and shelters are already inundated with cats. However, there are some things about this operation that might make these cats a bit easier to place than in the usual circumstances.

Those of us who do animal disaster response work or rescue animals from cruelty conditions all know that these rescued animals become celebrities in their own right. This entire operation will become an inspiring event that causes rescues and others to go the extra mile to (appropriately) take on cats for foster and placement. With good publicity and communications (done by the Communications section) excitement will be generated by the extraordinary effort by so many to help this particular group of cats.

The Placement Lead must begin work long before the trapping begins to line up homes and placement for the cats. As soon as a ballpark number of cats are identified, outreach can begin. Think about looking state- or even region-wide for placement. The Placement Lead will consult with the Incident Commander and Medical Director to be clear on what treatment and testing will be provided to the cats they are looking to place—knowing that the cat was spayed/neutered, microchipped, and vaccinated will help find placement.

The Placement Lead should be someone skilled and experienced in finding cat placements. Additionally, he or she must have the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment for finding homes. The Placement Lead will develop a protocol to vet rescue groups, which should at a minimum include checking their 501(c)(3) status, running a Google search, and obtaining information on the number of cats in their program, length of stay, their adoption protocols, and generally ensuring that the cats they take will be placed into good homes. The Placement Lead will identify ahead of time potential placements, then facilitate on-site meetings between rescue groups and cats, and manage any additional questions or issues that may arise.

There are some novel ways to place these cats. For example, about seven weeks after the trapping operation we did at Core Creek Park, an adoption event was held for the approximately 100 newly born kittens that were removed from the site or born right after. This adoption event created excitement and interest for these kittens and dovetailed nicely with the positive media and communications that had occurred in the almost two months before.

Additionally, depending on the fundraising the operation has done, it might be possible to offer funding for each cat placed. However small the amount, additional funding, such as \$25 per cat, can help offset the rescue group's costs and enable them to take more cats. Likewise, it might be possible to partner with veterinarians in the area to offer a free initial visit to anyone adopting one of these cats—or to offer it to the participating rescues—which again might encourage adoptions for individuals or rescues. Try to be creative and think outside of the box. Understand that

this operation will generate enormous goodwill and will inspire people to want to help. Try to figure out ways to capitalize on this.

E. Logistics

This section is responsible for getting all the supplies for the operation—for obtaining them and managing their transport to wherever they are needed.

Lead: Logistics Manager

The Logistics Manager works with the other leads (mainly Trapping and Sheltering) to provide the supplies they need to do their work. (Some of the more specialized material needs, such as vaccines and medical supplies, would be handled by section leads, such as the Medical Director.) The Logistics Manager should communicate during the planning process to get specific information on the supplies (and in what amounts) that will be needed. He or she will then get to work figuring out who may be willing to donate these items; for those that can't be obtained by donation, it will be up to the Logistics Manager to get them at the cheapest prices and get them delivered when and where needed.

Keep in mind that this operation will be publicized and, if done well, will generate goodwill in the community. People and businesses will be inspired by all the groups coming together to help the cats and solve the problem. The Logistics Manager should capitalize on this and do outreach to find sources of free or at-cost supplies.

For example, the shelter will need a lot of newspaper to use for the cages; getting these from local news distributors shouldn't be a problem. Giving them clear amounts and timelines is essential so they can store up enough for when the operation begins. They have trucks—see if you can get them to deliver.

F. Security

Security of the cats, traps, and other equipment is essential. Unfortunately, there are some who will sabotage cat traps—either to “save” the cats from being trapped, or to commit acts of cruelty. At no point should trapped cats be left outside overnight. The same concern holds for the cats in the shelter; even those loaded in transport vehicles need to be kept secure until they are on their way. Likewise, the volunteers helping on the operation need to be kept safe.

Lead: Safety and Security Officer

The Safety and Security Officer is responsible for looking at the entire operation from the point of view of security of the cats and equipment, and safety of the volunteers. He or she needs to understand all the locations involved, the schedule of trapping, transport, and sheltering, and identify areas in which security is needed. On the various sites, such as at the shelter, the Safety and Security Officer should walk the premises and identify any safety issues (loose cords, wires, unsafe conditions) and remedy them as needed.

Depending on the jurisdiction involved, the Safety and Security Officer may be able to get animal control or other law enforcement officers to provide security as needed. For example, officers may be stationed near trapping sites (but far enough away so the cats aren’t frightened), to drive by the shelter overnight, or guard transport vehicles as needed.

At the Core Creek Operation, for example, we loaded up a transport rig at night for cats to go to the clinic in the morning. Because the transport had to leave at 6 am, it made sense to load up these 100 cats the night before. But we worried about their security—the doors locked, but we wanted to make sure vandals did not disturb the cats. The park police director graciously stayed overnight in a parked car watching the transport vehicle and making sure they were ok.

The Safety and Security Officer should work with local law enforcement and find out the best way for the Trapping Team or Sheltering Team to get help as needed, e.g. would it be best to call 911 or do something else?

Nearby hospitals and urgent care clinics should be identified, and this information given to the Trapping Lead and the Sheltering Lead.

G. Communications

It is essential to the success of the operation that you provide accurate and timely information to the public and all stakeholders about the operation. There will be a lot of interest once the operation begins, and there may be resistance from groups or people that oppose your efforts. Undoubtedly there will be rumors—especially about what will happen to the cats, their well-being, and whether cats are being returned to the site. The Communications section is responsible for gathering and providing accurate information, responding to rumors with accurate information, and keeping a civil and positive tone in all communications.

Lead: Public Information Officer (PIO)

The operation's PIO is the only person who releases information on behalf of the operation. However, it is important to remember that each organization usually has its own PIO—that person who is authorized to speak on behalf of it. So, the county or city you are working with will have its own PIO, the different groups helping on site will have their own PIO, etc. The PIO for the operation is your lead for Communications, and will need to work with the other PIOs to gather accurate information, share before review, and gain approval.

It is necessary to talk with the other PIOs before the operation begins to coordinate how information will be released to the press, and to decide what kind of information will be released via social media, and what kind of information and photos need approval before release.

For example, in the Core Creek Park operation, the county had its own PIO. In preparation for the operation, the operation's PIO worked with him to discuss the need to release information on the trapping, the cats in the shelter, and for the non-profit organizations to release information via their websites and social media. A streamline process was created for the county's PIO to quickly review any proposed releases of statements or images.

When choosing your PIO, you want someone who is experienced in communications and answering media requests. The PIO should be very familiar with social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter. Finally, the PIO should be committed to responding kindly and with civility to all manner of comments on social media. Some people might oppose the operation and post negative comments; others might be very frightened for the cats' future and may express this fear. It is essential to respond to any negativity with accurate information and without responding in kind. The PIO does not have to be a doormat for negative or cruel comments, but must never respond in kind—this only feeds the negativity, makes the entire operation look bad and unprofessional, and never helps the cats.

The PIO also needs to actively monitor social media to see if there is inaccurate information about the operation being posted, and to respond quickly and with necessary corrections. It does not take long before rumors gain traction on the internet, and a timely and calm response with accurate information can help prevent these situations.

H. Aftercare

While the trapping and spay/neuter action happens up front (and gains most of the attention), having a strong aftercare program is absolutely necessary for the success of your operation. Trapping, spay/neutering, and placing the cats is only half the battle—if you end up releasing *any* cats back to the site, you must have an aftercare program.

The aftercare program involves:

- Maintenance trapping—of new cats or cats that you missed in initial trapping
- Medical care—observing whether any cats on site are sick or injured
- Appropriate feeding practices—making sure the cats are fed without negatively attracting wildlife

Without an aftercare program you won't reach your goal of humanely reducing the cat population to zero over time (and this almost always will be your goal, and is likely the only goal that a city, county, or other governmental agency will agree to). This is because unsterilized cats may move into the territory and begin reproducing; additionally, unless you have trapped 100% of the cats you will have some fertile females still on site.

1. Maintenance trapping

This involves having the feeders or other volunteers from your program regularly go on site and actively look for cats that are not ear-tipped. Specific information (location, cat description, where they hang out, etc.) is collected to gain an idea of the fertile cats still on site. Regular trapping should take place until the cats are trapped. This maintenance continues on site to ensure that any newcomers are quickly trapped and spayed/neutered before reproducing.

2. Medical care

Along with looking for unear-tipped cats, the feeders or volunteers should actively look for cats that appear sick, injured, or otherwise not doing well. These cats should be trapped and taken in for medical care. This ensures the cats on site do not live with prolonged suffering from conditions that could be treated.

3. Appropriate feeding

It is important that a regular feeding schedule be established and maintained on site. This ensures that the cats get good nutrition; but it also keeps wildlife problems from getting out of hand due to overfeeding of the cats. Feeding should be done on site once a day, and at a regular time and place(s). The cats will learn the feeding schedule and come to the feeding spot(s) to eat. The cats should be fed, and then the food picked up. Food should not be left out more than two hours. In this way, the cats have plenty of time to eat, but the feeding does not attract wildlife and result in their own population explosion.

4. Shelter

Providing shelter from the cold and elements is important. Exactly what that shelter is depends on the climate, but some kind of shelter provides the cats with protection from the elements. Work with the landowner to see what they will allow on site. For example, in Core Creek, we were able to have wood cat houses built by local prison inmates. The design of the houses fit in to the park very well, and the park authorities allowed around 50 of these on site. They provided shelter from the cold and rain.

Conclusion

There is a way to humanely manage situations in which the cat population on a site is exploding, and this manual provides a blueprint. It provides a complete, collaborative solution that sterilizes all the cats on site, places as many as possible in homes or barn homes, then returns the unadoptable cats to the site. If you have 80-90% of the cats sterilized, the population will naturally reduce to zero over time due to attrition.

The operation to do this is complex, with many parts, and requires collaboration among groups and agencies that may not often work together. But it is doable, and what a miracle it brings to the cats! Additionally, the relationships that are made through the effort remain in place, and lead to greater cooperation on behalf of these cats and other animal welfare situations that may come up in the future. Local government and people in the community will be thrilled to see the problem solved and the cats being taken care of.

This project is worth the effort, and we hope this manual provides you the information you need. If you want to brainstorm or need additional advice, please contact us at:

Beth Gammie
Director of Field Services
RedRover
bgammie@RedRover.org

Denise Bash
Animal Lifeline
info@animallifelinepa.org

Resources

Trapping Forms

- Trapping Log
- Trapping Log and Tracking Instructions
- Animal Numbering Convention
- One Trap Card
- Trap Card (3 on a sheet—to cut for cards)
- Trapping Authorization Form

Sheltering Forms

- Intake Form
- Shelter Log
- Sign—I am at the vet
- Sign—I am getting spayed/neutered
- Medical Treatment Form

Negotiation and Problem-Solving

- Getting to Yes: Negotiating Without Giving In (Fisher and Ury, 1991)

Trapping Information

- Trapping Guide: <http://ocgainesville.org/assets/2016/09/OC-Trapping-Guide.pdf>
- Guide to TNR and Colony Care: http://aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR_workshop_handbook_3.pdf
- Best Friends-Trapping Protocols: <http://bestfriends.org/resources/trapping-protocols>

High Quality-High Volume Spay-Neuter

- Operation Catnip Protocols for high volume/high quality spay/neuter

- Description of clinic stations: <http://ocgainesville.org/clinic-stations/>
- Clinic Operations Policies and Protocols: <http://ocgainesville.org/clinic-operations/>
- Downloadable Forms and Documents: <http://ocgainesville.org/tnr-clinic-model/adopt-our-clinic-model/clinic-model-forms-documents/>

Sheltering

- Best Friends-Housing Cats and Kittens: <http://bestfriends.org/resources/housing-cats-and-kittens>
- Alley Cat Allies Neonatal Kitten Care: <https://www.alleycat.org/community-cat-care/caring-for-neonatal-kittens/>
- How to Tell a Kitten's Age: <http://www.aspcapro.org/resource/shelter-health-animal-care/telling-kittens-age-4-steps>
- The Kitten Lady--Caring for kittens: <http://www.kittenlady.org/savekittens>

Community Cats

- Dr. Levy and Hurley--Community Cats: <https://vetmed-maddie.sites.medinfo.ufl.edu/files/2014/07/New-Paradigms-for-Shelters-and-Community-Cats.pdf>
- Operation Catnip reference page: <http://ocgainesville.org/saving-community-cats/>
 - Operation Catnip Forms and Documents: <http://ocgainesville.org/tnr-clinic-model/adopt-our-clinic-model/clinic-model-forms-documents/> This resource page has downloadable forms and documents, including resources/forms for trapping, clinic operations, cat caregiver guidance, and volunteer forms. A very useful resource page!
- Best Friends—Community Cat Program Handbook—downloadable, complete handbook on community cats: <http://bestfriends.org/resources/why-community-cat-programs>
- Guide to TNR and Colony Care: http://aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR_workshop_handbook.3.pdf

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Trapping Log and Tracking

These instructions and procedures are very important for us to keep track of the cats we trap and ensure that we return them to the location they were trapped. *Please follow these instructions to the letter, and if you aren't sure, ask your trapping team leader.* It can get hectic out in the field, and each trapping pair should have someone assigned to filling out the trapping log and making sure all the trap signs and cards are filled out.

Dropping a Trap

- Ziploc bag is zip-tied to the cage handles
- Line the bottom with newspapers or puppy pads
- Bait the trap
- Neon-green trap sign enclosed, folded in half
- Trapping log—record every trap number and location where a trap is left before you leave that site.

Picking a Trap Up

- When we check the traps in the morning, the traps will either be empty, or have an animal inside.
- **If empty**—record E on the trapping log under the “Empty (E) or Cat Description” column
- **If a non-cat animal is inside**—release it, and record it on the trapping log as E (empty)
- **If a cat is inside:**
 - Look inside to see if the cat is ear-tipped or notched. If the cat is ear-tipped or notched, it has already been spayed/neutered. Release the cat from the trap.
 - If the cat is not ear-tipped, and **before you pick up the trap and load it into the van**, record on the Trapping Log a description of the cat under the “Empty (E) or Cat Description Column”
 - Additionally, if the cat is not ear-tipped, write the following information on an index card, and put the index card into the Ziploc bag attached to the trap:
 - Address the cat was trapped
 - Trap number
 - Cat description
 - Your initials
 - On the top right corner of the card, indicate your team (A, B, or C)
 - If you notice the cat has symptoms of upper respiratory infection (URI), such as runny nose, watery eyes, ear/nose discharge, write **URI** in large letters on the top left corner of the card.
- When all this is done, load the trap with the cat in it into the van

Taking the Cat Into the Temporary Shelter

- Every cat has to be logged in by the Shelter Lead before it can enter the shelter—*please do not take the traps into the shelter until you meet with the Shelter Lead and she has them logged in*
- The Shelter Lead will look to see if a cat has URI on its card—if so, it will be sheltered in the isolation area in the shelter.

Releasing a Cat—this is a critical point, and it is essential that you have a person tasked with recordkeeping and ensuring the cat is released at the correct location, and that all the cats trapped from a particular location are actually returned. This person is the Return Master.

- When picking up cats from the shelter on Sunday morning, meet with the Shelter Lead before removing any cat—she will need to log the cat out before it can be removed.
- Refer to Trapping Logs (Thursday and Friday) to make sure you know exactly how many and which cats are being released at a particular address. Group all those cats together in the van for release
- When releasing a cat or cats at a site, the Return Master will verify the number of cats and trap numbers of the cats to be released. No cat should be released until the Return Master gives the ok.
- Record on the Trapping Log the release date and the initials of the person who released the cat.

Numbering Convention For Large-Scale TNR

General

Zone—number Starting with -01 *within each zone*, continuing sequentially through all the days of trapping in that zone.

Ex. Zone A cats would be numbered **A-01, A-02, A-03...**

Ex. Zone B would start with **B-01, B-02, B-03.....**

Ex. Zone C would start with **C-01, C-02, C-03....**

If at the end of the first day of trapping in Zone A trapped 47 cats, then the next day's numbering would *start* at A-48

It is very important to have only one person assigning Animal ID numbers in a zone so that the team doesn't assign the same number to 2 different cats. Additionally, it is important when a new shift takes over to know exactly what the last number assigned was within its zone, so it knows which number to start with.

Kittens

Each kitten should be assigned its own Animal ID number as follows:

- If the kitten is trapped or caught with its mother, then each kitten's ID number is tied to the mother's number: Mother Cat Number K1, Mother Cat Number K2, Mother Cat Number K3....
Ex. if the mother cat is C-52, then her 2 kittens would be **C-52K1, C-52K2**.

Note: since the kitten's number is tied to the mom's, the K numbers assigned always start with K1 and end with the number of kittens in that litter, ex. with 5 kittens, the last kitten numbered would be K5. Then, the next litter with a mother would start over with that mother's ID number, followed by K1, K2, etc.

- If the kitten is trapped without its mother, and the mother is unknown, then the kitten gets a regular ID Number as an adult would: Zone-next sequential number. Ex. D-77

Animal ID No. _____

Description/Color: _____

Zone: _____

Exact Location Trapped: _____

_____ Male _____ Female

Wound/injury? Describe: _____

Animal ID No. _____

Description/Color: _____

Zone: _____

Exact Location Trapped: _____

_____ Male _____ Female

Wound/injury? Describe: _____

Animal ID No. _____

Description/Color: _____

Zone: _____

Exact Location Trapped: _____

_____ Male _____ Female

Wound/injury? Describe: _____

Animal ID No. _____

Description/Color: _____

Zone: _____

Exact Location Trapped: _____

_____ Male _____ Female

Wound/injury? Describe: _____

Stray/Feral Trap Authorization and Medical Waiver Form

I/we hereby authorize (name of organization), its volunteer trappers and agent access to my property for the purpose of humanely trapping the cats/kittens that may reside thereon. I/we agree that the cats/kittens will be returned to the property where they were trapped following sterilization surgery and medical treatment (TNR) as deemed appropriate by the veterinary team. I/we agree understand that stray/feral (community) cats face risks during handling, anesthesia, and surgery and I/we agree to hold (name of organization), their staff, volunteers, and facilities harmless for any complications, injury, escape, or death.

Address of the Property where trapping will occur:

_____ City _____

Please provide a brief description of the cats known to reside on the property:

Name of Property Owner _____

Address of Owner _____

Phone (cell) _____ (home/work) _____

Email _____

Signature of Property Owner

Date

Signature of Trapping Coordinator

Date

Intake Form

Date: _____ Time: _____ am/pm Transporter _____

Animal ID # _____ Zone Trapped In: _____

Location Trapped: _____

Animal Description

Species	Breed	Color/Markings	Gender	Known ID
<input type="checkbox"/> Cat	<input type="checkbox"/> DSH	<input type="checkbox"/> Black _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Collar
<input type="checkbox"/> Kitten (under 6 months)	<input type="checkbox"/> DLH	<input type="checkbox"/> Orange _____		<input type="checkbox"/> ID Tag
	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> White _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> License: _____
		<input type="checkbox"/> Tabby _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Rabies: _____
		<input type="checkbox"/> Calico		<input type="checkbox"/> Microchip: _____
		<input type="checkbox"/> Torti		<input type="checkbox"/> Tattoo: _____
		<input type="checkbox"/> _____		

Behavior: <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly <input type="checkbox"/> Shy/Cautious/ Fearful <input type="checkbox"/> Fractious <input type="checkbox"/> Biter/Bite Hold Notes/comments: _____
--

Animal Health Status: <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Medical <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Care Advised <input type="checkbox"/> Stable <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant <input type="checkbox"/> Deceased Notes/comments: _____
--

Spay/Neuter/Exam: Date: _____ Clinic: _____ Other Treatment: Date: _____ Clinic: _____ Veterinarian: Dr. _____

Disposition

<input type="checkbox"/> Placed with Rescue <input type="checkbox"/> Released Back to Park <input type="checkbox"/> Euthanized <input type="checkbox"/> Deceased (complete section that applies) <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter/Rescue Group: _____ Name (person released to): _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Released to Park Date: _____ Person Released to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Deceased/euthanized (explain): _____
--

Final Behavior: <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly <input type="checkbox"/> Shy/Cautious/ Fearful <input type="checkbox"/> Fractious <input type="checkbox"/> Biter/Bite Hold Notes/comments: _____
--

Shelter Log

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

I am at the vet facility
so they can watch me
more closely.

Thank you for taking
care of me

**I am out getting
spayed/neutered
today**

I will be back

Medication Form

Animal ID Number: _____

Male _____ Female _____

Weight _____

DateTime

Medication/Treatment

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.