

Creating Safe, Humane Communities for People and Pets

You can help save cats and dogs in your community by working with your city council or other legislative body to pass a no-kill resolution. Resolutions officially confirm government bodies' support of a particular issue, making a no-kill resolution a great way to garner political support for saving animals' lives. Best Friends Animal Society believes that no-kill resolutions are one way to help achieve no-kill nationwide by 2025. Implementing effective resolutions and ordinances at the local level is an important part of creating and sustaining community-wide no-kill. Taking time to assess existing legislation and identify areas of improvement is a critical first step. The following guidelines will help you develop an understanding of no-kill and offer you a road map for passing a no-kill resolution.

Understanding no-kill

What it means to be a no-kill community

A no-kill community is one that acts on the belief that every healthy, adoptable dog and healthy cat should be saved, and that its focus should be on saving as many lives as possible through pet adoption, spay/neuter, trap-neuter-return and other community support programs rather than achieving a specific numerical outcome.

With that said, we understand the importance of having a quantitative benchmark that communities can use as a goal. Saving 90 percent or more of the animals who enter shelters is the **current benchmark for no-kill**. This means that for a community to be considered “no-kill,” all of its shelters and animal welfare facilities responsible for animal control intake must be saving 90 percent or more, collectively, of the animals who enter their system.

What “no-kill” doesn’t mean

“No-kill” has become an emotionally and politically charged term for many people, which is why it’s imperative that, as a no-kill advocate, you understand what no-kill **doesn’t** mean.

“No-kill” does **not** mean that:

- Shelters that haven’t reached no-kill, and their employees, are willing killers
- Dangerous or sick animals will be released into the community
- Shelters will start warehousing animals indefinitely

Each community is collectively responsible for its decisions regarding homeless animals and for creating safe, humane environments for the people and pets who live in them.

Key terms

Before you can properly assess operations in a particular shelter, you need to know how certain terms are defined and used.

Healthy or treatable animals: This segment of the animal population includes those who are fully healthy and behaviorally sound around people and other animals. It also includes animals with behavioral and medical issues that can be addressed and/or managed, such as (but not limited to):

- Ringworm
- Heartworm
- Resource guarding
- Upper respiratory infection
- Ear infection
- Leash and barrier reactivity
- Mange
- Dental disease
- Anxiety
- Need for limb amputation
- Urinary tract infection

Unhealthy/untreatable animals: This category includes dogs with severe behavioral challenges or dogs and cats with medical issues who are irremediably suffering with no possibility of a positive outcome.

Euthanasia: Defined purely as an act of mercy, euthanasia should be reserved for dogs and cats who have irredeemable medical situations and are experiencing serious and irreversible reduction in quality of life, or dogs whose behavior obstacles make them unsuitable for rehabilitation.

Killing: The definition of “killing” is ending the life of an animal who is healthy or treatable (either medically or behaviorally) as a means of creating space for incoming animals in a shelter or for other considerations.

Steps for pursuing a no-kill resolution in your community

Do your research

Before you do anything else, you need to develop a sense of the community you’re in and who the key players are. So, your first step is to research the current state of animal welfare in your community. How many shelters are there? How many cats and dogs enter the shelter(s) and how many leave alive?

Then, attend a handful of city commission or council meetings to get your bearings. Learn who the movers and shakers are on the city council and approach them on an individual basis to find out where they stand on animal welfare. Keep in mind that meeting dates and agendas change frequently, so you’ll need to obtain schedules ahead of time and be vigilant about checking for updates. Also, be aware that as a community member and stakeholder, you have the right to speak at public meetings.

Reach out to representatives

Communication from voters — personal meetings, phone calls, letters, emails — have a huge impact on the decisions made by public officials. Contact your representatives to gain their support for passing a no-kill resolution in your community.

Here are some suggested actions and guidelines:

- Find contact information for council or board members on your city or county website, through a phone call to the city or county clerk’s office, or through the [League of Women Voters](#).
- Start with a phone call. Most of the time, phone calls are the most effective means for communicating with public officials about specific issues. Set up an in-person meeting, or just discuss the issue on the phone.
- Send a personal letter to relevant government officials such as council members, the mayor and the city or county attorney. Be sure to proofread your letter and consider asking a friend or advocacy colleague for feedback before sending it.
- Encourage fellow community members and like-minded organizations to contact officials as well, and even distribute flyers. Include basic information about the proposed no-kill resolution, along with relevant contact information.
- Attend city council and/or board meetings and speak about the goal of creating a no-kill community.

Propose possible language

Public officials are often incredibly busy and they’re approached frequently with great ideas about a huge range of issues. So, it’s best to be prepared with proposed language for a no-kill resolution. Best Friends has drafted a model no-kill resolution (see below) that is concise and positive. You can use it as a starting point, and then customize it for your own needs. We can also help you draft issue-specific language based on your community’s particular needs.

Example language for a no-kill resolution

WHEREAS, the official goal of *[fill in jurisdiction]* is to save the lives of all of the healthy, adoptable dogs and healthy cats in the possession of the *[fill in name of municipal shelter and/or municipal agency]*; and

WHEREAS, a no-kill community is generally considered as saving 90 percent or more of the cats and dogs coming through the sheltering system; and

WHEREAS the residents of *[fill in jurisdiction]* want to help bring about positive change for the dogs and cats in the care and possession of the *[fill in name of municipal shelter and/or municipal agency]*; and

WHEREAS, there are positive changes that can be made to increase lifesaving at the *[fill in name of municipal shelter and/or municipal agency]* in order to save all of the adoptable and healthy dogs and healthy cats in its care and possession; NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE *[city council or other legislative body]*:

1. That the *[fill in jurisdiction]* saves the lives of all healthy and adoptable dogs and healthy cats at the *[fill in name of municipal shelter and/or municipal agency]* no later than *[December 31, 2025 or earlier]*; and
2. That the *[city/town/county/other manager/administrator/other]* works, in collaboration with individuals and organizations in the area, to develop a comprehensive plan to reach this goal and present that plan to the *[fill in with name of legislative body]* no later than *[fill in date: no more than 90 days after the date of enacting this resolution]*.

Spread the word

Local media outlets will likely be interested in what you're proposing in the community. Here are some ideas for attracting media coverage to educate the community and garner support:

- Send letters or emails outlining your proposed resolution to the editors of local newspapers and websites, and highlight the progress you've made.
- Provide relevant background material on the issue ahead of time to any media representative who contacts you for an interview.
- Prepare a simple, clear set of talking points for yourself. If a number of people are involved in your efforts, select one person as the media spokesperson and make sure that person is articulate and can speak accurately and concisely about the issue. Ideally, your spokesperson should be a member of the community.
- Consider bringing along a carefully selected ambassador dog or cat. Ambassador animals should be well-behaved and relaxed in hectic, unfamiliar public environments. They should also be clean, well-groomed and appear as friendly and approachable as possible. For dogs, this means no choke chains, chain leashes, prong collars or similar equipment. Instead, use brightly colored collars, bandanas and bow ties. (For a great example of an ambassador animal making a difference with legislators, [check out Captain Cowpants](#) mixing it up at the capitol building in Salt Lake City, Utah.)

When it comes to grassroots advocacy, social media is a powerful tool. You can quickly generate awareness and support with posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Google+ and similar platforms. Start a Facebook page or a website specifically to organize the community, and use it to keep members up-to-date about what's happening and how they can help.

Another idea is to create an online petition via a site like Change.org or Care2.com. Keep in mind that you'll need to supplement your online petition with personal correspondence to increase your effectiveness.

Keep these things in mind

If you want to help your community get to no-kill, you have to respect and work with others who may have different perspectives. Here are a couple tips:

- DON'T use heartwarming stories about your individual pets or vague descriptions of the human-animal bond to make your argument.
- DO focus on shared community values, quality of life for people and their pets, fiscal accountability and public safety.

Successfully persuading others is all about finding common ground and highlighting mutual interests. Try using the positive economic impact of a no-kill community as an advocacy tool when talking with local businesses and other stakeholders.

More emotional pleas and anecdotes can be reserved for your arguments in select cases. Here's an example: "Our community can do better than killing innocent kittens and puppies. Our goal should be a safe and humane community for all pets and people, and pursuing no-kill would directly improve overall quality of life and support our shared values."

Try to foster a positive and professional relationship with all community leaders and members from the start. Public officials do not respond well to angry phone calls, letters and emails, nor do they appreciate attempts to micromanage local operations and animal shelters. Keep things positive, respectful and focused on the broad policy issues at all times, including setting a good example for others via your social media posts.

For speaking engagements, here are a few tips:

- Dress and speak as you would for a job interview.
- Keep your tone respectful and polite.
- Familiarize yourself with the meeting protocols. (Who will be allowed to speak? For how long? What is the process to sign up?)
- Coordinate your group's speakers and plan what everyone will say ahead of time, and avoid repetitive comments. Keep the comments brief.
- Arrive early so that you can introduce yourself to the city council members before the meeting starts.
- After the meeting, thank them personally for listening to you.

Don't get discouraged

You may not succeed the first time you try to enact a no-kill resolution. Don't let it discourage you. Many of our most successful efforts have been preceded by initial failures and frustrations. If you want to enact real change, you need to be in this for the long haul. Take some time to regroup and do the following:

- Re-examine all efforts to learn where adjustments may need to be made and how strategy may need to be altered. Best Friends is happy to help.
- Intensify your outreach, including communications with officials.
- Keep going to city council meetings and speaking up. Double your efforts to encourage supporters to attend meetings with you and provide input.
- Support animal-friendly candidates in future elections and work to help them win. (If you represent a non-profit organization, be sure to research any laws or restrictions around supporting political candidates.)
- Attend political fundraisers and talk about the issues that matter to you.
- Consider running for public office yourself.

And when you finally do succeed, make sure to thank your public officials and fellow advocates. Send personal emails and letters, make phone calls and publish a message of gratitude in local newspapers.

What's next?

Once your community has passed a no-kill resolution, the next step is for strategic community partners to develop a detailed plan for achieving no-kill. This starts with gaining a thorough understanding of your community's current lifesaving performance, along with opportunities for improving that performance.

Perform a gap analysis

A gap analysis compares actual performance with desired performance. Doing a gap analysis should be a collaborative endeavor among multiple stakeholders, including shelter partners. It involves:

- Learning about the community's awareness of and historical action around shelter deaths and animal welfare.
- Working with local animal care and control agencies to understand how they operate in the community. What are their challenges?
- Identifying what populations of pets are at risk in the community. What is preventing certain animals from leaving the shelter alive?
- Finding out what resources currently exist in the community related to animal rescue, pet adoption, spay/neuter services and trap-neuter-return programs for community cats.
- Researching what resources and challenges currently exist for people who have or want pets. Are there any barriers to affordable veterinary care and training? Is pet adoption cost-prohibitive? Are certain segments of the community underserved compared to others?

A good gap analysis will help you develop a plan for prioritizing programs, setting goals and creating a road map to success. It's often best to start with easy changes and "quick wins" and then use your momentum and success to tackle the bigger problems. This is a fluid process that requires regular re-assessment on the path to sustaining no-kill.

If you want to find out more about how other municipalities have achieved no-kill, read some of Best Friends' [no-kill playbooks](#).

Seek out like-minded groups and individuals

Best Friends leads a network of more than 1,800 animal welfare partners across all 50 states, and most are eager to join forces with enthusiastic advocates in their communities. For help identifying partners in your area, you can reach out to the [Best Friends network specialist for your region](#) or to our advocacy team coordinator, A.J. Albrecht, at andreajoya@bestfriends.org.

In some cases, a shelter may not feel comfortable approaching or contradicting government officials for fear of putting their animal control contract at risk, or fear of political retaliation. So, it's important to acknowledge the concerns and needs of the organizations you partner with and never let the small bumps in the road discourage you from working toward your no-kill goal.

Contact Best Friends for support and resources

For more than a decade, Best Friends' advocacy team has been working at the city, state and federal levels to pursue responsible resolutions and ordinances that support our no-kill goal. We can help you assess your community's existing resolutions, craft an appropriate game plan and, in certain cases, even call public attention to your local issues using our advocacy alert network.

You can sign up to receive email updates on animal welfare legislation and pet laws that are specific to the area in which you live by visiting our online [Legislative Action Center](#). On the site, you will also find policy tools and resources related to pit bull terriers, community cats and puppy mill dogs.

For additional assistance, feel free to contact our advocacy team coordinator, A.J. Albrecht, at andreajoya@bestfriends.org.