

Top Technology Tools for Shelters During a Disaster

Prepared by Angie Embree (Best Friends Animal Society), Lars Rabbe (Maddie's Fund),
Greg Lucas (ShelterLuv) and David Meyer (Adopt-a-Pet.com)

Below is a list of tools that are available at any time but have proven to be particularly useful to shelter workers and volunteers during times of disaster.

Data sharing

These are all free data sharing tools that can be used by staff internally or to communicate with the public.



Google Drive: Google provides free cloud-based tools such as Google Docs and Google Sheets that are simple to use for anyone familiar with programs such as Word or Excel. Anyone with an internet connection can access shared documents or spreadsheets from any computer or smartphone, and multiple people can be editing the same document at the same time. Everyone can see each other's edits and comments in real time, and permissions can be adjusted so that documents are public or private, and certain people may edit even if others can only view. This is particularly useful for real-time updating of spreadsheets or other documents to track supplies, volunteer assignments, donation needs, etc.



Facebook: It seems obvious, but it is worth repeating that Facebook can be a good way to share information, especially in dedicated Facebook Groups. Those groups can be made public or private, can be named specifically for the disaster at hand (such as Redwood County Flood Pet Rescue) and can become a clearinghouse of information. Do recognize that for groups open to the public, anyone can comment so information provided by the public may not be correct and should be corroborated. But groups are a great way to spread information, including what or how to donate, and how to volunteer.



Zello: Zello is an app that works on all major smartphone operating systems and allows you to join real-time group discussions just like a walkie-talkie. The discussions (called channels) can be private and by invitation only, or public, and the public can be allowed to speak or allowed to just listen. This is useful when coordinating actual rescue efforts and multiple people need to hear what is being said and make comments as needed. It allows staff to take breaks or even go home, but continue to monitor communications in real time. It is better than a walkie-talkie in that it has no limit to its range and literally thousands of people can listen in or join a channel from anywhere. The disadvantage is that it requires users to have an internet connection (via cell phone or WiFi), which is not always available on the ground during a disaster situation.

Lost-and-found tools

Make sure you are sharing your stray hold data with the following lost-and-found tools to ensure that owners searching for their pets using technology have the best chance of finding them, especially if a pet may have been moved from one shelter to another.

Petango.com: Has lost/found data from all shelters using PetPoint.

PetHarbor.com: Has lost/found data from all shelters using Chameleon.

Finding Rover: Uses facial recognition technology to match images of lost pets with pets in shelters.

VetsPlusMore: Uses facial recognition technology to match images of lost pets with pets in shelters.

HelpingLostPets.com

PetFBI.com

NextDoor.com: This is a Facebook-type app that allows people in a neighborhood to connect. NextDoor allows government shelters to post, so that animals found in a particular neighborhood can be posted to that neighborhood, which helps get the animal identified by the owner, friends and neighbors.

Online vet consultation

This is particularly helpful when pet owners, shelters or rescue groups can't get to their regular veterinarian because of transportation or other issues caused by the disaster.

VetsPlusMore: In addition to having a lost-and-found function, this app allows real-time access to a vet 24/7 via video, text or phone call.

PetCoach.co: Gives online access to real-time vet advice.

Assistance with transport

Doobert.com: This is a platform that facilitates transport of animals all over the country. Doobert has tens of thousands of volunteers already signed up to do transport, so all you have to do is know where you want to transport and Doobert volunteers will sign up for legs of the transport.

Email accounts

Dedicated email accounts to filter disaster-related calls for service and offers to help are always a good idea. You will need someone monitoring these accounts.