



## **Lost Dog Intake Management Process**

Not every found dog is best served by entering the animal shelter, but many are. This process will show you how to determine the best solution for every dog and the person who found them. This process is designed with three concepts in mind: asking the finder to help, accepting if the answer is no, and giving lots of support when the answer is yes. If using this process can keep just 25% of found dogs in homes instead of in the shelter, there will be a significant positive impact on your shelter and community.

This document outlines the process to implement a consent-based form of intake management. Managing the flow of dogs into the shelter and providing case management support to keep dogs in homes when possible relies on willing and able lost dog finders.

### **The basics of lost dog intake management**

1. Update your website. Many websites still instruct the public to bring dogs to the shelter instead of helping to get them home. Your website should empower lost dog finders to help get them home as the first step.
2. Join the [Petco Love Lost](#) and upload pets into their facial recognition technology database. This is a free, fast way to identify every pet and it allows lost pet finders to get dogs home without involving the animal shelter. Consider using PLL instead of internal lost and found reporting just like [Pima Animal Care Center](#) does.
3. Send all adopted and reclaimed dogs home with collars and tags that have owner information. Collars and tags are a visual symbol to finders that someone loves and owns the found dog. [Pethub](#) offers an affordable, customizable option using QR codes!
4. Microchip every pet that comes into contact with animal services for any reason and register the microchips at the time of implant.

### **What is the new role of the Good Samaritan?**

There are lots of ways Good Samaritans can help, but we often only tell them to bring the dog to the shelter. Make sure your community knows all the ways they can help, and which ones are preferred. You can invite the finder to hold the dog, for either a short, defined period of time or until the dog is returned home or the stray hold expires. You can ask the finder to take steps like flyering and posting on social media. If you're asking finders to do something other than bring dogs to the shelter, it's important to tell them why you need their help. We've taught people that being a Good Samaritan means showing up at our door with found dogs, so a new message will require ongoing, proactive communication.

### **The found dog intake management process flow**

Your organization should make sure the public can get lost dogs home without physically coming to the shelter. This means your website should be easy to navigate and provide all necessary



information and guidelines. In addition, your organization should have a way for the public to call and speak to someone rather than bringing a found dog to the shelter. The vast majority of lost dog finders can get lost dogs home without coming to the shelter, but we have to do our part to make this possible.

1. The shelter staff member greets the finder and thanks them for helping a lost dog
2. Lost dog finders are invited to learn about [the lost dog reunification process](#) and complete the [lost dog finder pre-intake survey](#)
3. The counselor reviews the information and looks for any red flags
  - a. Dog is sick, injured, or has another urgent medical need
  - b. Finder reported aggression or other public safety risk
  - c. Possible cruelty or neglect involved
4. If there are no red flags, the staff member discusses the possible options with the finder. The goal is to engage the finder to work with the shelter to get the dog home. This can even mean the finder leaves the dog at the shelter but agrees to post them on social media and/or hang flyers where the dog was found. If needed, the shelter should assist with creating flyers.
5. The counseling process may take up to 10 minutes and the volunteer or staff member should discuss the following:
  - a. What? The options available to the finder for holding, fostering, or leaving the dog
  - b. Why? Dogs may have a better chance to get home if they stay in their neighborhood and holding a dog, even for a short time, helps the shelter reduce the overall number of dogs in care, which means less illness and euthanasia for impounded dogs.
  - c. How? The finder selects an option and the counselor explains how it works.

### **What found dog finders need**

- ☐ Dog food and supplies including crate, leash and collar, ID tag, bowls, and treats or enrichment items. These can be delivered by the shelter or the finder can pick them up.
- ☐ Directory of 24-hour locations to have the dog scanned for a microchip.
- ☐ A reliable emergency contact email address and/or phone number
- ☐ Lost [pet reunification instruction sheet](#) and relevant information including expiration date of stray hold and intake appointment time and date if one is made
- ☐ An [FAQ](#) document or online resource
- ☐ As a bonus, offer a thank you note or a gift from the shelter - may include a pet store gift card or free adoption certificate or even dog treats



### **What factors contribute to successful intake management?**

1. Staff and volunteers receive consistent onboarding and training in case management and how the lost dog intake management system works
2. Everyone in the organization is engaged in getting lost dogs home
3. The shelter consistently communicates how the lost dog intake system works, why it's in place, and the outcomes of the practice.
4. There is a way for finders and fosters to reliably and quickly get in touch with a decision-maker at the shelter.
5. The shelter has a feedback form to formally register concerns and complaints about the process.
6. The shelter has a policy on the length of time of a stray hold served outside the shelter and this should be shared widely and publicly.

**Review** [Possible scenarios - problems and solutions](#)

**Practice** [Role play exercises for staff and volunteers](#)

**Take a Quiz** [Test your learning by taking this brief quiz](#)

### **Measuring outcomes**

Measuring your success is imperative because you need to know what is and is not working.

Track your return to owner (RTO) rate month over month and look for changing trends. For example, "In October of 2020, we returned 25% of lost dogs. In October of 2021, we returned 27% of lost dogs. In October of 2022, we returned 32% of lost dogs."

Second, look at other factors including overall intake, length-of-stay, and live outcomes because these will likely be positively impacted when you begin to manage lost and stray dog intake differently.

### **Finder-to-foster**

In some communities, the shelter must legally retain custody of the dog through the stray hold period. If the dog is physically present at the shelter, they should immediately receive vaccines, flea and tick preventatives, and a quick exam and then fostered back to the finder if the shelter has the ability to do this. The finder can either hold the dog for a defined period of time or agree to hold the dog until it is reclaimed or the stray hold period has expired.



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