

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Action Item	Approximate Time Required	Templates and Resources	Impact
Pre-Implementation Planning			
Collect and discuss your organization's data on outcomes for different types of pets	45 minutes or more	Learn more about foster data here. See more resources in our Foundations of Foster Programming Collection .	This will enable your organization to determine which populations of pets need foster care the most (neonatal kittens, big dogs, etc.) so that you can build your program based on this.
Create a list of goals and/or a pilot for your program's expansion based on the data; create a timeline for achieving them	45 minutes or more	See resources in our Foundations of Foster Programming Resource Collection .	This will help give your organization a strategy for expanding and improving your program. It will also help you to break up tasks into meaningful goals that can be achieved easily.
If needed, create a proposal or pilot for the foster program and get approval, if required.	90 minutes or more	Learn how to pilot a program in this MU course	It is considered a national best practice for animal services to have a foster program. Foster programs are crucial for lifesaving.
Create Standard Operating Procedures for the foster program or its pilot	30 minutes or more	See resources in the Foster Program Management Collection .	This will enable your shelter or rescue organization to run the foster program safely and efficiently.
Create a job description for your foster coordinator	30 minutes or more	Job description for a foster coordinator at a foster-centric shelter	This will enable the foster coordinator and your organization to be clear on the responsibilities for these jobs.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Create a budget for the program			This will enable you to estimate the costs of implementing the program and help to make sure you have the funding you need.
If needed, figure out where funding for medical care for pets in foster will come from. For example: -Grants -Request increase medical budget, if needed -Consider process for transferring pets with medical issues to rescue	40 minutes or more	See document below, Grant Sources for Medical Funding. See more medical resources in our Foster Medical Support Collection .	This will assist your organization in finding the funding to provide medical care for foster pets.
If needed, compare local emergency veterinarians; research them; decide on 3-4 in different areas to contract with; contract with them if needed.	2 hrs. or more	See our spreadsheet template for making veterinary clinic comparisons. Read this article about relationships between animal welfare groups and veterinarians. See more medical resources in our Foster Medical Support Collection .	Many shelter- and rescue-operated clinics do not have the capacity to provide medical care after hours or in the event of an emergency. Contracting with one or several emergency veterinarians will enable your organization to provide emergency medical care on an as-needed basis.
Determine the processes for fosters whose pets need medical care for spay and neuter of pets in foster care	30 minutes or more	See more medical resources in our Foster Medical Support Collection .	Having a policy for medical care will make it easy and efficient for your foster caregivers to get veterinary care for their foster pet and will clarify the process for spay and neuter of foster pets.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Create medical processes for pets in foster homes (scheduling and tracking medical vaccines and preventatives, making appointments, handling emergencies, etc.)	15 minutes or more, daily or weekly	Scheduling apps like Acuity and Fullslate (see this 6 minute video) may be helpful. See more resources in our Foster Medical Support Collection .	This will help to ensure that all of the pets in your organization are vaccinated on time and medical needs are met. The time this will take depends on your process for medical scheduling and appointments, the number of current fosters and how much of the medical process (giving vaccines, attending appointments, etc.) is the responsibility of the foster coordinator.
Create foster sign-up process and form; get approval if needed	30 minutes or more	You can use this sign-up form as a template. See more resources in our Foster Caregiver Onboarding Collection	The sign-up form and agreement will provide information on potential foster applicants and a legal framework for the responsibilities and requirements of foster caregivers and your organization. The manual will provide foster caregivers with an understanding of program basics, what to expect, their roles and their responsibilities.
Create foster agreement or edit from template; get approval if required	20 minutes or more	You can use this agreement as a template. See more resources in our Foster Caregiver Onboarding Collection	This will provide a legal framework for the responsibilities and requirements of foster caregivers and your organization. Having this document reviewed by a lawyer is recommended, as applicable laws vary by state and locality.
Create foster manual or edit from template; get approval if required	1 hour or more	You can use this manual as a template. See more resources in our Foster Caregiver Onboarding Collection	This will provide foster caregivers with an understanding of program basics, what to expect, their roles and their responsibilities.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Start volunteer & foster Facebook group or other method of communication	30 minutes or more	This blog has some great ideas for increasing engagement. See more resources in our Foster Caregiver Recruitment Collection .	This will enable your shelter or rescue to learn more about the animals in your care. It can make posting on social media much less time-intensive, as photos, videos, stories and bios can often be copied, edited and posted to your organization's main page.
Purchase or request supplies, if needed: - Martingale collars - Harnesses - Leashes - Crates - Etc.	20 minutes or more	Consider creating an Amazon wish list , or asking for donations of specific items. 'Adopt me' vests and supply bags can even be made by members of your community! See more in our Foundations of Foster Programming Resource Collection .	Having foster supplies available to foster caregivers will help to increase safety and make it easier for people to foster.
Create foster emergency phone line and decide how it will be staffed	20 minutes or more	Google Voice is an option for this. See more resources in our Foster Medical Support Collection .	This will enable your foster coordinator(s) to respond to any foster-related emergencies in a timely manner.
Edit job description for foster assistant; recruit and train foster assistants	2 hours or more	See resources in the Foster Program Management Collection .	Creating a specific job description will make the qualifications for responsibilities associated with the foster mentor/volunteer job clear. Foster mentors/volunteers will help the foster program run more efficiently, saving the foster coordinator's time and allowing more pets to be placed into foster.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Create your year-round, comprehensive foster recruitment plan	20 minutes or more	See this comprehensive foster recruitment plan , this MU course and this webcast . More resources in our Foster Caregiver Recruitment Collection	This will ensure that your organization has consistent messaging about foster and is following a plan that will help expand the foster program. You can begin by letting volunteers know that you're looking for fosters and ask them to speak with one family member or friend and tell them about the program. Recruitment for new foster caregivers should be ongoing in order to keep the program strong.
Prioritize foster on your website	20 minutes or more	Website best practices for organizations interested in expanding foster programs	Follow the steps listed to ensure that anyone visiting your website knows that foster caregivers are needed and valued. Making it easy for potential fosters to learn more about the program and sign up will increase their likelihood of signing up.
Make all of your volunteers and staff fosters automatically (at least for the types of pets they are already trained to handle at the shelter).	No time to several hours	See more resources in our Foster Caregiver Onboarding Collection	This will remove a barrier (extra training) for the people who already know and love your organization's pets to taking them home, enabling your foster program to grow more quickly. You may need to alter volunteer orientations, send out the foster manual or post foster information and manual in your internal group.
Create a way to train your fosters and ensure it is easy for them to access	20 minutes or more	See resources in our Foster Caregiver Training and Support Collection .	Research shows that being provided with adequate training is critical for foster retention.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Create foster onboarding process; remove as many barriers to fostering as you can	45 minutes or more	Check out this 10 minute video of one shelter's onboarding process See more in our Foster Caregiver Onboarding Resource Collection	This will help foster caregivers to understand the program's requirements and rules. Foster caregivers can be onboarded on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Keeping the amount of time from foster application to onboarding as low as possible will help ensure that you don't lose any potential foster caregivers due to the length of the wait. Making it easy to foster will make it possible for more people to participate.
Create a way to track the data for your foster program.	1 hour or more	See resources in our Foundations of Foster Programming Collection.	Tracking data will help you get a better understanding of information about your foster program and how successful it is (which pets are being fostered, for how long, by whom, etc.)
Create process for matchmaking between current fosters and the pets who need them	15 minutes or more, as often as every day	Learn about successful strategies in our Foster Plea Survey. See examples using: • Facebook • Website • Trello • Click-up See more in our Foster Caregiver Recruitment Resource Collection.	Part of your foster coordinator's ongoing duties will be making current fosters aware of the pets who need foster care. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as email, website listing, phone call, etc. It can include lists of pets needing foster or asking a caregiver personally to take home a particular pet. Our foster plea survey found that the organizations with the highest volume foster programs are sending more individual foster pleas, more often.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Create a foster profile form that caregivers can use to send in information on their foster pets; troubleshoot the process for sending the forms out to fosters and for recording the information they report in your files.	30 minutes or more	Learn about ways to structure this process in this webcast and this document See more resources in our Marketing Pets from Foster Homes Collection	It will be easy for foster caregivers to report the information that you need on foster pets' behavior in the home. Collecting information on a timely basis will help to ensure that your organization has accurate behavioral and medical records and marketing material for every pet.
Create the process for organizing the photos, videos and information on pets that the foster caregivers send in and placing them in the shelter software and on social media	30 minutes or more	Learn about ways to structure this process in this webcast and this document See more resources in our Marketing Pets from Foster Homes Collection	Updating pets' online profiles in a timely manner and regularly featuring them in communications like social media, newsletters and more will help them to get adopted more quickly. Getting volunteer support and/or automation for this process is highly recommended, especially for larger organizations.
Create the process for fosters adopting pets out of their homes	30 minutes or more	See resources in our Adoption from Foster Homes Collection .	This will make it possible for pets to go to foster homes and not need to come back to the shelter. Research has shown that pets adopted from foster homes are less likely to be returned than those adopted directly from the shelter.
Create your foster resource page/information center	20 minutes or more	See examples: • El Paso Animal Services • KC Pet Project • Peninsula Regional Animal Shelter See more resources in our Foster Caregiver Training and Support Collection .	Fosters will have all the background information they need to foster successfully, including behavior, medical and marketing information. This will save the foster staff/volunteers time answering questions.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Ongoing Tasks			
Train foster caregivers	10 minutes or more	See this online orientation and this orientation video (14 min.). See more resources in our Foster Caregiver Training and Support Collection .	One of the most important factors in foster retention is whether the fosters feel as if they were adequately trained. Providing fosters with training doesn't need to be time-consuming or logistically complicated. Many organizations are putting it online, where it can be accessed 24 hours a day and/or providing training on-the-spot using a checklist to ensure major concepts are adequately covered. Don't forget to train fosters in marketing their foster pets, how to complete the adoption process, how to run meet and greets and your organization's adoption philosophy, if needed.
Touch base with fosters regularly, and respond to those who email and call with questions or concerns	30 minutes or more per day	See our Foster Caregiver Engagement and Appreciation and Foster Caregiver Training and Support Collections	This will go a long way toward making your foster caregivers feel supported and has an effect on foster retention. Automating as much of this as you can (creating templates for frequently asked questions, setting up auto check-ins, etc.) is highly recommended.
Create a regular schedule for foster 'rounds'	30 min. or more per week	See this 25 minute video . See resources in the Foster Program Management Collection .	This will enable you to look at each foster pet individually, support foster caregivers and make sure pets don't fall through the cracks.
Work foster care into 30% or more of your organization's main page	20 min. or more per week	Foster Friday everyday! Creating a community culture that values pet fostering (blog)	This will help to normalize foster care in your community and help potential fosters get more comfortable with the concept.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

social media posts and other communications		An example of a shelter that's doing this well is Memphis Animal Services. See more resources in our Foster Caregiver Recruitment Collection.	
Do 1-on-1 matchmaking between current fosters and the pets who need them	15 minutes or more, as often as every day	Learn about best practices in our Foster Plea Survey. Foster matchmaking- Rachel Jones's process (46 min. video) See examples using: • Facebook • Website • Trello • Click-up See more in our Foster Caregiver Recruitment Resource Collection.	Part of your foster coordinator's ongoing duties will be making current fosters aware of the pets who need foster care. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as email, website listing, phone call, etc. It can include lists of pets needing foster or asking a caregiver personally to take home a particular pet. Our foster plea survey found that the organizations with the highest volume foster programs are sending more individual foster pleas, more often.
Check pets in and out of foster homes	1 hour or more per week	Consider training adoptions and/or customer service staff or foster volunteers to assist with this task. See our Integrating Foster into the Whole Organization Collection and the Foster Program Management Collection.	This ensures that your organization always has an accurate record of where its pets are located. It includes collecting extra supplies and logging a pet back into your shelter software when the pet returns from foster. Consider training adoptions/customer service staff or foster volunteers to assist with all or part of this task.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Post calls for foster photos and stories on the internal group page or via another method	10 minutes every 1-2 weeks, or as needed	How to create a process for marketing pets from foster care See more resources in our Marketing Pets from Foster Homes Collection	This will remind your fosters that you need their help with marketing their foster pets. Getting marketing material from foster caregivers will help your organization save time on social media. Note that their expectations need to be set from the beginning about any required involvement in the marketing process.
Schedule medical vaccines and appointments	15 minutes or more, daily or weekly	See more resources in our Foster Medical Support Collection .	This ensures that all of the pets in your organization are vaccinated on time and as healthy as possible. The time this will take depends on your process for medical scheduling and appointments, the number of current fosters and how much of the medical process (giving vaccines, attending appointments, etc.) is the responsibility of the foster coordinator.
Monitor and engage with volunteer & foster Facebook group	15 minutes or more per day	This blog has some great ideas for increasing engagement; See more resources in our Marketing Pets from Foster Homes Collection	This will enable you to give support as soon as it is needed, post relevant marketing material to social media and target any issues as soon as possible. It may be advantageous to ask a trusted volunteer or two to assist with group moderation, either by becoming moderators or giving you a heads-up when they see something that needs your attention
Update and monitor the data on your program	20 minutes or more per week	Learn more about foster data here . See more resources in our Foundations of Foster Programming Collection .	This will enable you to see if your program is working efficiently enough to meet your needs and will help you to define areas that need improvement.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Plan a foster appreciation event once every year or more	2 hours or more	See resources in our Foster Caregiver Engagement and Appreciation	This will help you engage and retain foster caregivers.
Yearly, review foster policies and procedures to ensure that barriers are low and it is as easy to foster as it is to adopt.	2 hours or more	See the Fosters Welcome Checklist and this blog .	An important thing to know about barriers is that our system is set up to invite them in. In the same way you can't sweep your floor once and expect it to never get dirty again, you cannot get rid of a barrier and expect it will never reappear.

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

Practices for Increasing Foster Retention

- Welcome and respect volunteers
- Provide fosters with ample training and resources
 - Training should be easy to access, such as online or on-the-spot training
 - Have a central location where fosters can learn more about fostering, such as a [foster resource page](#) on your website
- Assign volunteers to tasks that match their skills
 - Ensure that fosters have the support needed to foster the animal they take home
 - Give experienced, trustworthy foster caregivers the opportunity to become foster mentors or help with the program in other ways
- Provide opportunities to share experiences with other volunteers
 - Create a volunteer & foster social media group where they can share stories and get support
 - Consider hosting 'happy hours' or other social events
 - Let volunteers know how they can work as teams to support pets in foster homes
- Support new volunteers
 - Ensure that fosters have adequate support to provide care for the pets they take home
 - Consider training foster mentors that new fosters can call on for advice and support
- Communication
 - Regularly communicate with foster caregivers
 - Respond to questions and inquiries promptly
- Recognize volunteers

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

- Host a volunteer and foster appreciation event once a year and give out awards
- Post shout-outs on your internal social media page to fosters and volunteers who have gone above and beyond the call of duty
- Thank them in person often
- Solicit [feedback about the program](#) once a year or more

Foster Program Plan

Goals

- Create a foster-centric culture with a high number of active foster caregivers per capita (add estimated goal)
- Create awareness in (your community) about (your organization)'s need for foster caregivers and the pets who need foster care

Objectives/Desired Outcomes

- Care for our pets in a way that's best for their wellbeing
- Increase our live release rate
- Increase our number of foster caregivers
- Increase the amount and quality of marketing material that our foster caregivers supply us with
- Increase page likes and engagement on social media by using new, exciting content that highlights pets in foster care

Target Audiences

- Current foster caregivers
- Supporters, staff and volunteers
- Residents of (your community)
- Supporters of shelters, rescues and animal welfare organizations locally and within (state)

Key Messages

- Being cared for in a foster home is best for pets' wellbeing
- Becoming a foster caregiver is easy
- In order to save more pets' lives, we need more foster caregivers for all types of pets
- Our community believes in foster care and is supportive of the needs of homeless pets

Foster Care Program Creation and Implementation

Realistic Program Preview

- We'll teach fosters everything they need to know

Strategies

- See [Comprehensive Recruitment Plan](#)

Tools/Opportunities

- Ask our foster families and volunteers for help:
 - Marketing foster pets for adoption
 - Recruiting new foster caregivers
- Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) and other communications, such as volunteer newsletters and annual reports to highlight your foster program and to market foster animals and events
 - Work foster care into our communications at least once per day
 - Tell foster pets' stories often
- Our website
- Flyers, e-flyers, events and promotions
- Local, state and national conferences

Measurement

- Increases in live outcomes due to foster placement
- Increase in number of active fosters
- Increases in number of pets who have been in some form of foster care
- Decrease in the total length of stay for pets who have been in foster care