



# How To Help Shelters Be Warm & Friendly To Increase Adoption

## IT ALL STARTS AT THE ROAD

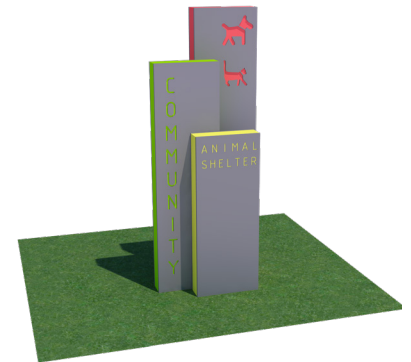
A shelter's road-side sign is their best advertising. Hopefully the shelter's location is such that at least hundreds if not thousands of people drive by every day. If the shelter's sign is warm and inviting or eye-catching and fun, people will want to come in to check out what the rest of the shelter is like. That may be to just "window shop," but if the rest of the shelter is as fun as the sign lead them to believe, then they may take a new pet home or want to spend more time there volunteering.

## WHERE DO I GO?

In this day and age of super busy lives with hectic schedules, no one wants to waste time. So when a potential adopter or volunteer lands themselves in a shelter's parking lot, they shouldn't have to waste time trying to figure out where to go and which door to go into. If the shelter has multiple entrances for staff, volunteers, clinics, owner surrenders and adoptions things can get a little confusing. Even if a front entrance is the fanciest door on the building and may seem clearly the obvious choice, add a welcoming sign indicating that this is the door people should come through.

## I'M HERE, NOW WHAT?

There is a reason why many stores have "greeters." If you have ever worked in retail, you will have been told that within seconds of a shopper walking through the door, someone should greet them. In a shelter that may be someone simply saying, "Be right with you, feel free to look at the kitties in our lobby, or if you want to go look at the dogs, they are right that way." As such, a shelter should be designed with that in mind. The reception desk should seem inviting, not scary or too governmental.



Pets make life better in countless ways. Yet in many places, there are barriers that make it hard to enjoy life with a pet. Let's make cities pet friendly, so everybody benefits.

Join the movement and get A Playbook for Pet-Friendly Cities: [BetterCitiesForPets.com](http://BetterCitiesForPets.com)



The staff that are stationed at the reception desk should be able to see the front door even if people are lined up at their desk. The lobby should have easy access to animals for people to "ooooo and ahhhhh" over while they wait for instruction or help. And above all else it should seem fun and inviting. Remember shelters are trying to help people find a new family member and that is going to people much more likely in a shopping setting rather than a governmental office setting. We also cannot stress enough customer service, customer service, customer service. It only takes once to make a bad impression be that the lobby's or the staff's first impression.

In a perfect world, shelters should have separate areas for Owner Surrenders and Adoptions. Those two groups of services are very different. The mood of an owner surrender or lost animal retrieval is different than the mood of an adoption, and as such, should be afforded separate space. In smaller shelters, creative divider walls or panels can be designed to afford a level of separation.

## NOW LET'S MEET THE PETS

In most cases, the first impressions of adoptable dogs will be in the kennels. Even though this needs to be a highly functional area, it's important to remember this also needs to be an inviting and cheerful space. Color is a simple way to improve the feel of a kennel area, and help prevent the sterile, utilitarian, and unwelcoming feel many kennels can have. Artwork is also an easy way to liven up the kennels, and can be made with durable materials to be able to withstand pressure washing and other sanitation processes. Another big improvement that can be made is to swap out any chain-link fencing for aluminum square tube type fencing; this change helps break down the "doggie jail" feeling some kennels can have.

Kennels are also a great opportunity to help train adoptable dogs. Quieting exercises can provide volunteers activities to do, and give opportunities for adoption families to interact with the dogs in an approachable, productive way. A simple addition of buckets of treats near the front of the kennels with appropriate signage is all that is needed. The signs will encourage visitors and volunteers to help train the dogs by call them to the front of the kennel and telling them to sit, without barking, upon which a treat can be given.

Turn-outs and play yards are also important additions to any shelter. Turn-outs allow the staff to rotate the dogs out of the kennels while cleaning, and gives the dogs a change of scenery and environment that helps increase enrichment. Play yards are typically larger areas that can have agility equipment, splash areas, and other enriching items. Play yards are a great tool to give dogs room to run and can help facilitate group play between dogs to help socialize them around other animals. Not only is this important for dog temperament and behavior, but it can also be an important step in the adoption process. Seeing a dog being able to appropriately behave in a group can break some of the large dog stereotypes an adopter might have, and show them temperaments that only a kennel cannot.



Meet and greet spaces are important for very similar reasons. Dogs will act more naturally and be more likely to show true personality outside of a kennel setting, so rooms or areas where adopters can interact with the dogs is important. These spaces don't have to be large; a smaller room can even encourage more interaction. This more casual setting is a great way to boost adoption rates and customer service. It only takes once to make a bad impression be that the lobby's or the staff's first impression.

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## WHAT ABOUT THE CATS?

Cats have similar needs to dogs in a shelter, but the space requirements and opportunities they provide of often very different. Presenting cats in cages is usually not adopter friendly. Cats do well in cat colonies or shared rooms that provide multiple levels, hideouts and enrichment; these components can be customized or built creatively to make a fun and exciting space for the cats, staff, volunteers, and potential adopters. These cat colonies, because of the creative designs and playful nature of cats, are great additions to a lobby or entry space. If there is not the option to include this space inside of an existing shelter a 'cattio' can be built outside to house the cat colonies. Just as with the dogs, meet and greet spaces are an important component of the adoption process for cats to allow more natural behaviors







## I'VE PICKED MY PET, NOW WHAT?

Once an individual or family has chosen their pet, the paperwork and processes to make it official can seem like a drag on the entire occasion. There are ways to streamline this process that can help make them feel more casual and enjoyable, while also making it more efficient for the staff. Adoption coordinators with portable tablets can provide information on any adoptable pet, and start to get information from adopters casually as they are meeting the potential pets. This can help replace most paperwork and formal interviews that needs to be done into a casual, organic conversation that can happen while adopters are playing with adoptable animals. At the end of a meet and greet, adopters can be ready to walk out the door with a new pet.

## VOLUNTEERS

*If everyone in the US between the ages of 10-70 volunteered at a shelter for one 8-hour day a year, it would be equivalent to every shelter in the US hiring 65 full-time employees.*

Volunteers are key assets to any shelter's success. Developing strategies to draw in, cultivate, and coordinate volunteers can greatly increase a shelter's capabilities and level of care. Hiring a full-time volunteer coordinator can seem expensive, but the payoff is well worth the investment. They can dedicate their time to gaining and managing volunteers that take much of the burden off staff, and multiply the investment of one salary into the work of many people. They will be able to help find companies in the community that might donate their staff for a day or a weekend to handle a big task, and help each volunteer find their niche to help at the shelter.

It's important to understand that everyone that volunteers brings some ability. There are tasks for anyone of any skill to help get involved with. Volunteers can help with training through quieting exercises, walking a dog on a lunch break, making enrichment items, playing with the animals, or helping with renovations like painting or even construction. Knowing what skills volunteers have, and helping them find something that is accessible and fits their schedule is the best way to make sure they have fun and are likely to return.

