



## CHAPTER 5

# Coalition-Building

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**Coalition-building is a key component in a community’s effort to save more animal lives and sustain those lifesaving efforts for years to come.** There are many complex animal issues that cause local shelters to fill up with homeless pets, and no shelter can tackle all of the elements on their own without support. To stop the killing of healthy pets in animal shelters, animal welfare organizations need the help of non-shelter stakeholders — adopters, donors, volunteers and, yes, other animal welfare groups. That’s why coalitions are needed to reduce the number of animals entering shelters and increase the number who leave alive.

## Defining a common goal

The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences defines a coalition as “the denotation for a group formed when two or more persons, factions, states, political parties, militaries, etc., agree to work together temporarily in a partnership to achieve a common goal.” All coalition members need to know what they are working toward, so defining the common goal is the first step in building a coalition. Most animal lovers, from community activists to shelter staff, want the same thing: to save more animals. If a group of organizations can agree on a common goal, they are in a good position to create a coalition.

Los Angeles and Portland, Oregon, are two cities that created coalitions for the purpose of working together to save homeless pets. Los Angeles, like almost every community at one time or another, faced extreme challenges that contributed to the city’s low save rate. Approximately 56,000 cats and dogs were entering the shelter system each year. In 2011, the year before the NKLA Coalition was launched, more than 18,000 dogs and cats were killed in L.A. city shelters, a save rate of only 58 percent. It was obvious that a 90 percent

save rate would only be reached if many community stakeholders and rescue groups in Los Angeles were committed to working together toward this shared goal. So, the NKLA Coalition was formed in 2012 with the goal of achieving a save rate of 90 percent for all cats and dogs entering the six city shelters by the end of 2017.

In Portland, 10 of the city's largest animal welfare groups formed the Animal Shelter Alliance of Portland (ASAP) in 2006. ASAP's goal is to save all the adoptable and treatable pets in its region, while providing humane alternatives for free-roaming cats. In the past nine years, ASAP has reduced euthanasia in Portland's shelters by 90 percent and now saves 95 percent of cats and dogs as a result.<sup>1</sup>

## Identifying and recruiting coalition members

Once a common goal is defined, the next step is identifying groups that believe in that goal and want to work together to achieve it. Best Friends Animal Society had experience with coalition-building in the organization's home state of Utah, so that model was used to create the NKLA Coalition in Los Angeles. To establish the beginnings of the coalition, Best Friends assembled a steering committee whose members included representatives from the city shelter system, Los Angeles Animal Services (LAAS), and six other influential dog, cat or spay/neuter organizations based in L.A.

It was important for Best Friends to find not only influential rescue groups to be on the committee, but also groups with varying ideas and attitudes, in order to develop an understanding of the range of viewpoints, processes, limitations and challenges. The initial meetings were tense, with many past gripes and complaints being aired, but all of the groups wanted change, so they agreed to work together to form the NKLA Coalition and take on the task of increasing the save rate to 90 percent within five years.

By selecting a few influential, diverse members to create the core of a coalition, the lead organization can utilize each of those relationships to grow the coalition to the membership size desired or needed to achieve the coalition's goal. Generally, the more groups who are involved with the coalition, the more opportunity there is for generating awareness of the goal, sharing work and resources, and getting the attention of the public.

Once the NKLA Coalition's membership grew from one group to eight, meetings were set up to recruit other members. Representatives of the initial eight members met with repre-

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representatives from other rescue groups, told them about the coalition and gave them the opportunity to join. The NKLA Coalition officially launched in April 2012 with a membership of 35 Los Angeles–based animal organizations. Today, the NKLA Coalition includes more than 120 organizations, and it continues to grow.

## Using data to increase lifesaving

Most communities face myriad obstacles in increasing the number of lives saved and then sustaining the lifesaving over the long term. One of the most important tools for achieving those goals is an accurate data reporting structure to measure progress. For a coalition to be effective, all members must collect and be transparent about their data.

In Los Angeles, LAAS (the city shelter system) provides complete and comprehensive data to the NKLA Coalition and allows members to see all aspects of their work. This data is provided in a few different ways. Every two weeks, LAAS provides a complete intake

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and outcome data drop, which Best Friends, in turn, sorts and then reports the areas of success and opportunities for improvement to the rest of the coalition. LAAS also supplies a complete account of “noses in” (number of animals entering the shelter system) and “noses out” (number of animals leaving the system) on

its website for public transparency. Finally, LAAS supplies data on animal activity by each shelter and department, as well as the number of spay/neuter vouchers provided for the public, number of licenses sold, intake reasons, number of tickets given and other data.

As a result of LAAS’s data transparency, the NKLA Coalition is able to highlight areas of opportunity to help increase lifesaving and work as a team with LAAS to reach the 90 percent goal. For example, by examining the data, the coalition found out that cats — specifically, kittens — made up a majority of the deaths, even though thousands more dogs per year entered city shelters. In 2011, kittens comprised nearly 7,300 of the 23,000 deaths in L.A. city shelters. Having this data allowed the coalition to acknowledge the problem and come up with solutions. The coalition implemented outcome-based programming for willing rescue groups to pull underage kittens from LAAS and care for them until they are old enough to be spayed or neutered and then adopted. As a result of identifying and acting on this huge gap in lifesaving, LAAS has increased its kitten save rate from 23 percent in 2011 to 77 percent in 2017.

In contrast to the kitten issue, LAAS was fairly successful at adopting out dogs and returning lost dogs to their owners. In 2011, 71 percent of the dogs in the shelter system were being saved. The data revealed, though, that larger dogs were more at risk, so NKLA Coa-

lition members focused on strategies to increase positive outcomes for those dogs. By the end of 2017, the dog save rate was 92 percent.

This broad sharing of knowledge allows coalition members to understand the true needs of the city shelters, avoid duplicating work and focus on critical populations in order to improve the city-wide save rate effectively and efficiently.

Building a successful coalition and being transparent about data can also open up funding opportunities from well-known animal welfare organizations, such as Best Friends Animal Society, Maddie's Fund, Petco Foundation and PetSmart Charities. In addition, funding from public donors may increase, as it has for many members of the NKLA Coalition.

## Getting support from the city

A city can support coalitions through a few different methods, all of which are easy to implement and are successful at influencing the community's goal of ending the killing of homeless pets.

In a number of cities, including Austin, Texas, and Los Angeles, city government officials have passed no-kill resolutions reflecting the city's desire to see the end of killing animals to create space for incoming animals. These resolutions have specific language regarding the community's responsibility as a whole in reflecting this value and also encourage local organizations to work together — in other words, to form a coalition. Relatively easy to create and pass, these resolutions show a community's unity and determination to support lifesaving practices and its animal control agencies. (See [Appendix Q](#), "Progressive Animal Control Ordinances," for the text of the Los Angeles no-kill resolution.)

City officials or city managers have great influence in this matter, since they provide contracted money to private organizations to fulfill animal control services or directly oversee animal control agencies run by the municipality. In both of the cities mentioned above, government leaders take active roles in existing coalitions. In another city, Nashville, Tennessee, the municipal government has taken a direct leadership role in creating a city coalition to end the killing of animals in shelters. It's just one example of a government's direct participation in the leadership role of a coalition.

## Sustaining lifesaving success

While coalition-building is often a core strategy for communities to reach their lifesaving potential, it is also an essential component in sustaining that success. After communities reach their save rate goals, maintaining that level of performance is extremely challenging. That's why the responsibility for saving animal lives must be shared by the entire community, not just the coalition members.

A community that does not kill pets for population control is the result of a community supporting its shelter, building awareness of animal issues and acting on behalf of homeless pets, as well as the shelter embracing innovation, solving problems and instituting best practices to maintain lifesaving. While the shelter serves as a resource to the community, the community must also take part in maintaining a level of care and positive outcomes for animals who are healthy and deserving of another chance at a new life outside of the shelter.

In summary, it takes a village to create a lifesaving community and coalitions are a big part of that effort. Coalitions build alliances, comradery, support and understanding among organizations, so creating a coalition is an effective way to save more lives and maintain save rates as communities work toward resolving the issues that face homeless pets.

For details on how to start a coalition, see [Appendix C](#), “Animal Welfare Coalition-Building Action Kit.”

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### NOTE

1. The ASAP live release rate is available at [asapmetro.org/statistics/live-release-or-save-rate/](http://asapmetro.org/statistics/live-release-or-save-rate/).