6 Tools to Conquer Crowding in Animal Shelters

Crowding is a serious concern in animal shelters and should not be taken lightly. It is a direct cause of compromised physical and behavioral health and welfare in shelter animals. Embracing these 6 tools can help any organization stay within its capacity and increase opportunities for positive outcomes!

- **Identify a population manager**. This person is the key to maintaining the population within the shelter's capacity for humane care. They are responsible for tracking daily population numbers, tracking length of stay by species and age, ensuring prompt evaluation and movement of animals to the appropriate location, planning co-housing of compatible animals (if necessary), investigating increases in daily population, and participating in daily rounds.

- **Perform shelter population rounds**. The rounds team physically evaluates each shelter animal daily, asking (and answering): Who are you? How are you? Are you where you should be? Do you need something today? Do you need something to be scheduled? The team should include representatives from operations, medical, and behavioral care teams, along with the population manager. Personnel from adoption or animal placement teams and an executive management team member should also be periodically included.

- **Embrace fast-track adoptions**. Identify animals likely to be adopted very quickly (i.e., puppies, kittens, small breed dogs, etc.) at intake and move them to the front of the line for spay-neuter, behavior evaluations, etc., to ensure they get out as quickly as possible.

- **Ensure timely transfer to placement partners**. Know your transfer organizations and foster homes and what they are good at. Identify animals who are good candidates for transfer or foster care and get them there as soon as possible – ideally, before they ever enter the shelter. (Check out the Field to Foster training & resources.) Registering rescue partners as foster groups may help make this a smooth process.

- **Institute a policy of "open selection."** Allow all animals in the shelter, even those in their legal stray holding period, to be seen by the public and pet placement partners. Interested parties can indicate which animal they want, and they can be prepared to leave as soon as their holding period is over. First-come, first-serve – don't hold out for a "better" option that may never come!

- **Divert intake whenever possible.** Many programs can support people and animals without the animals coming to the shelter. Some examples shelters have found successful include: institute a spay-neuter and return to owner program, develop a behavior counseling service, encourage owner rehoming of unwanted pets, limit owner relinquishment to times when space is readily available, schedule owner relinquishments, encourage caregivers to keep litters until they are 8 weeks old, institute robust community cat programs, etc. The possibilities are endless!