

## Foster Forward Challenge Marketing and Communications Guide June 2026 | Foster Forward Challenge

Fostering is one of the most powerful ways communities can save more pets — and one of the most impactful tools your organization has. When more people open their homes as foster caregivers, more pets get out of shelters, more lives are saved, and more adoption opportunities open up. Research shows you can boost adoptions by as much as 20 percentage points by expanding your foster programs and involving foster families with processing adoptions — and even more if you fully empower fosters!

The Foster Forward Challenge is aimed at helping you expand your foster programming to save more pets in your community, especially when collaborating with your local shelter. We'll support you every step of the way, with resources and toolkits to implement foster practices and communicate with your community!

This checklist includes content, resources, and tips to help you effectively communicate with both internal and external audiences. *Do you have questions or need more communications support? Reach out and let us know!*

### External Communication: Talking to the media and your community

- **Website:** Feature a prominent announcement or banner on the homepage to notify visitors about the Foster Forward Challenge and how they can get involved as a foster caregiver, with a link to your foster program page explaining the process and how to sign up. Include any updates to foster program hours, requirements, and available support.

Tip: Rather than using only a banner, consider also adding a permanent foster program explanation to your website's "How You Can Help" section. Use a banner when you launch, and keep a foster-specific page live year-round.

- **Social Media Platforms:** Create a dedicated announcement post on each social media platform you use to introduce the Foster Forward Challenge and invite community members to become foster caregivers. Keep the language in your posts messages welcoming, concise, and easy to understand. Consider utilizing both English and Spanish language assets, or an additional language that is most applicable to your community. Get some social media tips and tactics in our Digital Paws guide.

Use eye-catching visuals such as photos of pets in foster homes, short videos from foster caregivers, or engaging graphics to accompany the announcement. These visuals can be created in Canva, a free, intuitive design tool that enables users to create graphics, flyers, and more. Plus, you can promote your foster recruitment using our provided templates, found on the challenge page.

*Tip: Consider paid social media ads to expand your audience reach beyond your current network of followers and supporters! If you can add a few dollars, boost your posts for a simpler approach. You can start with as little as \$1 a day on Facebook and Instagram. Learn about the difference between paid ads and boosting posts in this Meta resource.*

- **Press Release:** We've created a customizable press release template (available here) about your participation in the Foster Forward Challenge for you to share. Issuing a press release to your local media before the challenge launches — 1–2 weeks before would be typical — helps you reach a broader audience beyond your organization's existing network, including potential foster caregivers, community members, and stakeholders.

You can also create and share press releases about your foster recruitment events, any new foster incentives, expanded foster support, and any other changes you want your community to know about and engage with.

- **Onsite Signage:** Consider making banners or signs that welcome and encourage community members to ask about fostering opportunities. Post them at the entrance to your building and in the adoption area. If you've expanded foster hours, be sure to update posted hours and include information at the front desk.

If you're making specific populations of pets available for fostering (such as pets with special medical needs, kittens, shy dogs, etc.), consider making small kennel tags that say "I Need a Foster Home!" for these pets.

- **Check Google Listing:** Ensure your hours are updated to reflect any changes.

*Tip: If you haven't claimed your organization on Google, use this guide to learn how!*

- **Update Third-Party Sites:** It's a smart idea to actively promote all available animals for adoption through Adopt a Pet and/or Petfinder. Pets in foster homes should remain actively listed as available for adoption.

*Tech tip: Double-check that foster pets are set to display publicly; depending on your shelter software, pets marked "in foster" may be hidden unless they're also marked as adoptable or visible. Confirm that your organization's "about" section and pet listings are up to date and accurate on Petfinder and Adopt a Pet, and any other third-party sites.*

*Tip: You can have your shelter management software automatically post pets to Adopt a Pet and Petfinder. Set up these automations to save time and get more pets seen — including those in foster homes!*

## Internal Communication: Talking to your staff, volunteers, and other internal stakeholders

- **Key Message:** What do you want your staff, volunteers, and other internal stakeholders to know about your participation in the Foster Forward Challenge? Develop a central message point to serve as consistency in communication, resonate with the intended audience, and effectively convey why and how you are growing your foster program.

You can pull messaging points about the importance and effectiveness of foster programs from a lot of sources including the Foster Forward Challenge web page, from the customizable challenge press release template, from this blog sharing the data behind foster programs, and from the materials on the Best Friends foster resources page.

- **Email and/or Newsletter Announcement:** Consider sending an email to staff, volunteers, current foster caregivers, and other internal stakeholders outlining the Foster Forward Challenge goals and any new programming or support you're offering. Include the reasons for and objectives of the initiative, key changes, and implementation timeline. Provide links to relevant documents and resources such as the Best Friends foster program resources, the Foster Forward Operational Guide, and this blog on the data supporting foster programs.
- **Flyer:** Create an internal announcement flyer that concisely summarizes the Foster Forward Challenge, emphasizing its benefits and your organization's commitment to saving more lives through fostering. Post in common staff areas, such as in the breakroom and on bulletin boards.
- **Training Sessions:** Host interactive training sessions where staff members and volunteers can learn how to talk about fostering with the public, answer common questions, and help potential foster caregivers get started. Use visual aids, case studies, and role-playing exercises to enhance understanding. Find foster program training resources here.
- **FAQ:** Compile a list of frequently asked questions about fostering, covering topics such as the foster process, what foster caregivers need to provide, how medical needs are handled, and how to transition a foster pet to adoption. This will serve as a reference for staff to ensure consistent understanding and communication throughout the organization. Here are sample foster FAQs for dogs and cats you can use as a model that your staff can reference.

## More Tips and Tools!

As you navigate growing your foster program and seek innovative ways to engage your community, use these resources for effective strategies and compelling storytelling ideas. Effective marketing is important in your journey to save lives by bringing greater awareness about the pets in your care, and connecting them with the people in your community who can give them a temporary — or sometimes permanent — home.

- **Reduce Barriers to Fostering:** Just as removing barriers helps more people adopt, a simple and welcoming fostering process will bring in more foster caregivers. Consider streamlining your foster application, offering flexible orientation options, and providing clear, easy-to-find information about what fostering involves and what support your organization provides.

*Tip: Ask your current foster caregivers what made them say yes — and what almost stopped them. Their answers will help you remove friction from your recruitment process.*

*Want to learn more? Maddie’s University has a free course dedicated specifically to this topic! If you get this right, your fosters are more likely to stick around, foster for you again, and share their positive experience with others. Do a deeper dive in the Foster Caregiver Onboarding course.*

- **Pre-Market Pets on Stray Hold:** You don’t have to wait until a pet’s stray hold is up to start thinking about foster placement. While you hope and try to find the pet’s original family, you can also start identifying potential foster caregivers for those pets in case they are not reclaimed. This will help you fast track some pets through your shelter and give them a head start.

*Tip: Use a sticker for the kennel card that lets community members know when the pet will be available for fostering or adoption. You can even include a scannable QR code that links to your foster sign-up page, or a form where someone can express interest in fostering that pet.*

- **Get Good Photos:** Often a potential foster caregiver’s first encounter with an available pet is online — whether they are browsing your website or scrolling through social media. Capturing great photos (and replacing intake photos) of the pets in your care can make a lifesaving difference. For tips on how to create web-worthy photos check out Hearts Speak’s Easy Tips for Great Shelter Pet Photos.
- **Market Pets in Foster Homes:** Sometimes when a pet goes to a foster home, they can have longer lengths of stay because the pet is considered to be “safe.” Empower your foster caregivers to begin marketing their foster pets to their network and community as soon as possible. This will more quickly support the pet’s transition from foster home to adoptive home, and can open the foster’s home to be able to take in another pet.

Maddie’s Fund®’s Foster Caregiver Marketing Guide and Best Friends Animal Society’s 10 Creative Ways to Promote a Foster Pet provide insights and tips on best practices for marketing foster pets. If possible, add a page to your website that foster caregivers can access with tips for marketing their foster pets. Here are some great examples:

- Muddy Paws Rescue: How to Market Your New Foster Dog for Adoption
- El Paso Animal Services: Foster Resources
- One Tail at a Time: Help Get Your Foster Adopted (available on their Foster Resources page)

- **Host Foster Recruitment Events:** Holding regular foster recruitment events (virtual or in-person!) will grow your pool of foster caregivers and reduce shelter crowding. Foster recruitment events provide a fun and welcoming experience for your community to learn about fostering and meet pets who need temporary homes.

*Tip: Consider partnering with a local shelter or rescue partner to host a mutually beneficial fostering event like the “Spot Tagging” events that Dallas Pets Alive and Dallas Animal Services co-host.*

- **Leverage the Power of Social Media:** Social media is a great tool to recruit foster caregivers, showcase pets available for fostering, and share foster success stories with your community! Aim for upbeat, happy content in your marketing. Find fun ways to market even your more hard-to-place pets. The community will be more likely to follow your page and interact with your posts and organization if they see positive posts showing them how they are making a difference.

*Tip: Don't forget to ask your staff, fosters, volunteers to reshare your content to increase the reach of your message.*

- **Collaborate with Community Partners and Businesses:** Some of your best resources can come from working with your neighbors. Connect with community leaders, influencers, residents, and businesses around you. Visit businesses in your area and ask them how you might be able to run a collaborative promotion. Is there a local coffee shop where you can host a foster information table? Is there a local restaurant that will put up signs about your foster program? Or a high school that has students who need volunteer hours and can help you spread the word?

Give your fosters access to as much as information as you can to reduce call and email volume. One way to do this is to provide them with a Foster Resources page on your website, like this one from Muddy Paws Rescue, which answers a lot of the common questions they might get.

- **Bonus: Share Success Stories with Local Media:** Local media love a feel-good story! As a follow-up to your press release, you can email local media outlets with a challenge “pitch,” sharing a heartwarming story about a specific pet/family who was impacted by your participation in the challenge. Including data about your participation helps, too! Get more info about how to pitch in this video from our Basic PR Strategies Playlist. Plus, check out this page for more basic local media tips.

*Tip: Build a media list of all the local media outlets, and keep this list updated so you're ready to go when it's time to share news!*