

Expanding Foster Practices Guide

June 2026 | Foster Forward Challenge

You registered for the Foster Forward Challenge and agreed to implement at least one (or more!) new practice(s) from June 1-30, 2026.

Review the challenge steps, requirements, and resources below to support your new lifesaving practice(s) and maximize engagement from your community. Need additional support? Complete this [contact form](#) and a member of our network team will reach out to you shortly.

Ready. Set. Challenge!

Getting ready for the challenge? We recommend following these steps — but if this approach doesn't work for your organization, that's okay! Do your pre-challenge preparation the way that works for you. [We're here if you need support.](#)

1. **Create a plan:** Create a plan to implement your new foster practice(s)
2. **Get buy-in:** Discuss with staff, volunteers, and any other stakeholders and get them excited about the Challenge, possible grant, and what this could mean for your org! Having a hard time securing buy-in? Sometimes positioning a new change or program as a pilot can help you secure buy-in with your community. Pilots often feel less intimidating because they're time bound and it's clear that if they're not successful, they can be undone. Our hope is that whatever you call these changes, you'll see an increase in lifesaving and decide to keep the changes and programs in place long-term.
3. **Communicate:** Use the Foster Marketing and Communications Guide (coming soon to [the challenge webpage](#)) to inform the community about these changes.
4. **Track your data:** Make note of your June 2025 foster data so you can set your goal to beat last year's numbers.
5. **It's challenge time:** June 1, get going and save more lives! We're here to support you along the way.

Foster Challenge Requirements

Organizations that meet the minimum challenge requirements are guaranteed a \$1,000 grant. The top 5 organizations with the greatest percentage of improvement in total animals fostered will receive a \$10,000 grant instead. To be grant eligible, your organization must:

- Be a rescue or no-kill private shelter without a government contract
- Be a [Best Friends Network Partner](#)
- Provide monthly 2025 and 2026 data through June 2026 in [Shelter Pet Data Alliance \(SPDA\)](#) by July 13, 2026
- Demonstrate at least a 1% improvement in dogs and/or cats fostered in June 2026 compared to June 2025
- Implement at least one (or more!) of the following practices the entire month of June 2026

Foster Challenge Practices & Resources

Increase recruitment:

- **Host pop-up foster orientation events**

Host pop-up foster orientation events, offered virtually or in person, to quickly engage and onboard new foster parents.

[Creating an Online Orientation for Animal Foster Care Volunteers](#)

[Foster Programs Training Playbook](#)

[Community-Based Foster Program Town Hall](#)

- **Implement multilingual foster applications and support**

Implement multilingual foster applications and provide your customer service staff with electronic translator devices (we can provide recommendations to help you find a high-quality translation device for your organization, but will not purchase this device for you).

[Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging](#)

[Success Story: Bernalillo County Animal Care and Resource Center](#)

[The Best Friends Podcast Ep. 82: Expanding our reach with multilingual marketing](#)

[Reaching Hispanic/Latino communities to save more pets](#)

- **Offer same-day fostering opportunities**

If you require a waiting period (such as 24 hours) for fosters to pick up a pet, suspend that practice in June. Allow fosters to pick up a foster pet immediately and take home a pet the same day they start the foster process. Allow unaltered pets to be sent into foster homes with a signed agreement and/or voucher to bring the pets back for spay/neuter surgery.

- **Eliminate home checks and landlord checks for fosters**

Implement a conversation-based foster process and remove common barriers to fostering such as fence requirements, landlord checks, home visits, references, etc.

[Roadblock-free Operations](#)

[Leveling the Field: How to Remove Barriers for Underrepresented Communities and Their Pets](#)

[Place More Pets Now With These Easy Changes](#)

Help high-need pets:

- **Offer specialized foster training and programming for high-need pet populations**

Provide foster training and structured support designed to equip foster parents with the skills and resources needed to successfully care for high-need pet populations. You can

also partner with your local shelter to establish a “Foster on Deck” system to proactively line up foster placements for at-risk or long-stay animals.

[Neonatal Kitten Toolkit](#)

[Success Story: Gateway Pet Guardians Unicorn Foster Squad](#)

[Getting past “the ringworm stigma”](#)

These practices remove bottlenecks by including your fosters in your adoption processes:

- **Allow fosters to market foster animals and facilitate meet & greets**
Empower foster parents to actively market their foster animals and coordinate meet-and-greet opportunities to accelerate adoption opportunities.

[7 ways to promote foster pets](#)

- **Allow fosters to process adoptions completely**
Enable fosters to oversee and finalize adoptions directly, creating a faster, more efficient path to placement.

[Empowering Fosters to Assist in the Adoptions Process](#)

[New Data Finding: Foster Programs Boost Adoptions by 20 Percentage Points](#)

Try a new kind of program:

- **Create a virtual foster program for pet marketing**
Create a virtual foster program that engages remote volunteers, especially those unable to foster in person, to promote animals and increase visibility for adoption.

[7 ways to promote foster pets](#)

[Increasing adoptions through effective marketing](#)

[From Kennels to Clicks: What Marketing Strategies Actually Drive Adoptions](#)

- **Start a short-term foster or foster-to-adopt program**
Launch a foster-to-adopt program that allows potential adopters to host animals in their homes before finalizing adoption. You can also introduce short-term fostering opportunities, such as day trips or weekend sleepovers, to provide animals with enrichment while expanding foster engagement.

[Short-term Fostering Panel](#)

- **Help finders foster their pets while they seek the owner (must partner with the local municipal shelter to implement)**

Partner with your local shelter to support a finder to foster program that asks community members to hold onto a pet for at least two days after being found, while searching for their home. These programs have been proven an effective solution for communities to efficiently reunite lost pets with their families, engaging the community that loves pets and wants to help, while freeing up valuable shelter resources for the pets who need it most.

[Friendly Finder Playbook](#)

[Empowering Neonatal Kitten Finders to Foster This Kitten Season](#)

Challenge Specific Recommendations

These are some add-ons participants are also encouraged but not required to do:

- Ask your shelter how you can be of greatest impact with transfers by diversifying your foster population and pulling at-risk animals.
- Use foster recruitment marketing materials 4 times.
- Share fostering resources online.

Additional Resources

Use the resources below to implement changes and save more lives.

- [Manual: Dog Foster Care](#)
- [Manual: Cat Foster Care](#)
- [Playbook: Foster Programs](#)
- [Webinar: Place More Pets Now with these Easy Changes](#) – Piloting open adoption and foster practices.
- [Podcast: Removing Lifesaving Barriers](#) – Includes advice for getting stakeholder buy-in.

Get inspired:

- [Rescue Roadblock Pledge Participants Share Their Successes](#) – Success stories from rescues reducing barriers to adoption
- [Municipal shelters share strategies for increased adoptions in 2022](#) – Insights from municipal shelters
- [Should you or shouldn't you change your adoption fees?](#) – Success stories from organizations who've reduced or waived adoption fees
- [Expanding your walls: Maximize lifesaving with a community-based foster program](#) – Maximize lifesaving with a community-based foster program