

Sessions & Breakouts

Below is the current full agenda. Check back often for updates to speakers and sessions!

You'll leave inspired, energized, and equipped with cutting-edge knowledge and practical strategies to take lifesaving to the next level for dogs and cats in your community.

Breakout sessions will last 60 minutes, and new for 2026, each session will be presented in one of the following three formats:

- **Listen and learn:** A lecture-style session focusing on key concepts and foundational knowledge
- **Conversation:** A conversation-based session where attendees explore common challenges together, aiming at solutions that can benefit everyone
- **Workshop:** An interactive, hands-on session where attendees develop practical solutions and actionable plans in real time

Once registered, you can build your own schedule within the event app. The app will launch the week prior to conference.

Sessions can be filtered by the level of learning the content is designed for, but you are welcome to select any session:

- **Beginner:** An individual who is just starting in animal welfare or is new to the topic or program being discussed. The person has limited experience and is eager to learn more.
- **Intermediate:** Someone with moderate experience in the topic or program who is interested to explore deeper strategies and troubleshooting beyond the basic "how to."
- **Advanced:** A professional with many years of experience in the topic or program, ready to explore detailed methodologies, nuanced techniques, and complex problem-solving approaches to enhance their expertise and practical application.

All Dates
5/6-5/9

Wednesday
5/6

Thursday
5/7

Friday
5/8

Saturday
5/9

Filters

 Search

May 6, 2026

5:00 PM MT

Registration and App Help Desk open

5:30 PM MT

The Hub open - Welcome Reception

New this year, join us for the opening night of the Hub, where we'll kick off the conference with a welcome reception. You'll enjoy drinks and hors d'oeuvres in a fun, relaxed atmosphere and explore the Hub, where throughout the conference, you

[view more](#)

May 7, 2026

7:15 AM MT

Breakfast - Thursday

7:45 AM MT

Registration, Information, and App Help Desk open

8:30 AM MT

Opening General Session

General Session



Julie Castle
Chief Executive Officer
Best Friends Animal Society

9:50 AM MT

5 Effective Ways to Level Up Your Rescue Group

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE

One Tail at a Time grew from a small volunteer-run gig into one of Chicago's most respected animal rescue groups, supporting thousands of animals each year with a healthy budget and full staff. In this listen-and-learn session, you'll hear

[view more](#)



Heather Owen
Executive Director
One Tail at a Time

Fundraising

Rescue Operations...

Volunteer Programs

Foster Programs

Marketing and Co...

AI for Good: Understanding How AI Can Accelerate Your Mission

Workshop Breako...

251 F | Shelter Pet Data Champions

AI is everywhere. We're here to cut through the noise and help you investigate one thing: how you and your team can use artificial intelligence responsibly and effectively to save more pets. In this workshop, we'll cover how to navigate the

[view more](#)



Bethany Heins
Director, Shelter Collaborative
Best Friends Animal Society



Amy Starnes
Principal, Growth Initiatives
Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation

Organizational Cul...

AI Insights

Leadership

Building Humane Euthanasia Policies

Workshop Breako...

253 AB

One single high-profile incident became the catalyst for a transparent, evidence-based euthanasia policy that restored public trust and drove measurable outcomes at Denton Animal Services near Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas. This workshop, led by the

[view more](#)



Nikki Sassenus
 Director of Animal Services
 City of Denton

Innovation | Organizational Cul... | Change Managem... | Shelter Operations... | Leadership

How to Confront the Growing Veterinary Care Shortage

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF | RACE / Data Champions

We have an urgent situation: More animals are entering our shelters intact while the availability of veterinarians, technicians, and surgical slots are dropping. The pandemic accelerated these trends, leaving millions of unspayed and unneutered

[view more](#)



Dr. Julie Levy
 Director, Shelter Medicine Program at University of Florida
 University of Florida

Removing Barriers... | Shelter Operations... | Shelter Medicine

How to Create Successful, Compassionate Transitions

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC | RACE Approved

Want to lead shelter transitions with compassion and skill? This listen-and-learn session will demonstrate what creates lasting and successful change, whether you're launching a new program, updating protocols, or restructuring teams. By combining

[view more](#)



Becca Boronat
 Veterinarian, National Shelter Med...
 Best Friends Animal Society



Erin Katrube
 Director, National Veterinary Prog...
 Best Friends Animal Society

Organizational Cul... | Staff Development | Removing Barriers... | Shelter Operations... | Shelter Medicine

Show Them the ROI: Make the Financial Case for Lifesaving

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Shelter leaders are driven by a mission to save lives, but every lifesaving program depends on one essential resource: funding. Whether you're preparing for a city council meeting, pitching to a major donor, or negotiating a municipal contract,

[view more](#)



Whitney Bollinger
 Director, Strategy & Network Oper...
 Best Friends Animal Society



Steven Martinez
 Executive Director
 York County SPCA

Fundraising | Removing Barriers... | Shelter Operations... | Leadership | Technology

Your Best Bets for Successful Big Dog Outcomes

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC | Shelter Pet Data Champions

The stakes are high for big dogs at your shelter. And as every card player knows, high stakes make for huge opportunities to win. This listen-and-learn session provides game-changing strategies for increasing live outcomes for large dogs. Learn how

[view more](#)



Dr. Casey Miller
 Chief Veterinary Officer
 The Animal Foundation



Terran Tull
 Chief Operating Officer
 The Animal Foundation

- Innovation
- Removing Barriers...
- Shelter Operations...
- Large Dogs
- Dog-Specific Lifesa...

11:10 AM MT

Featured


How Unconventional Partnerships Can Change Your World

Listen-and-learn B...


251 ABC

This listen-and-learn session dives into the unlikely yet powerful partnership between a private veterinary practice and a North Minneapolis-based nonprofit working to keep pets with their families. Together, they've redefined what "access to

[view more](#)



William Frahm-Gilles
 Owner/Medical Director & Director...
 Access Veterinary Care & University o...



Shannon Glenn
 Executive Director
 My Pit Bull is Family

Keeping Pets with ... Access to Care Coalition Building


Animal Services Officers as Return-to-Home Specialists

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC

In this listen-and-learn session, we'll feature practical tips to turn animal services field operations into proactive, community-focused programs. We'll dive into using tools like geographic information systems and address-based tech to ensure that the

[view more](#)



Ashley Huynh
 Animal Control Supervisor
 Friendswood Animal Services

- Managed Intake
- Return-to-Home Pr...
- Field Services
- AI Insights


How Struggle Creates Resilience in Animal Welfare

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE

Compassion fatigue, burnout, and emotional overwhelm are common in our field — but so are strength, purpose, and growth. This listen-and-learn session challenges the usual view that shielding others from hardship is always a kindness.

[view more](#)



Brittany Thorn
 Executive Director, L.A. Lifesaving Center
 Best Friends Animal Society

- Organizational Cul...
- Staff Development
- Leadership

How to Harness Volunteer Power for Good

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF

At Lucky Dog Animal Rescue, we've learned through 16 years' experience how to integrate our staff and our amazing volunteers. Many rescue groups and shelters rely heavily on volunteers as essential to getting things done. But do those

[view more](#)



Mirah Horowitz
Chief Executive Officer
 Lucky Dog Animal Rescue / Rural Humane

Organizational Cul... Shelter Operations... Rescue Operations... Volunteer Programs Community Engag...

Lost No More: How to Get Pets Home Pronto

Workshop Breako...

251 F | Presented by Petco Love

This interactive workshop focuses on one goal: getting lost pets home faster. We'll show you how having strong internal protocols really does boost your return-to-home results. We will walk you through what happens from the moment a lost pet

[view more](#)



Gina Knepp
Senior Specialist - Engagement & O...
 Petco Love



Nick Walton
Senior Manager of National Shelte...
 Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation Organizational Cul... Return-to-Home Pr... Technology AI Insights

My Opinion About the Term 'No-Kill' Doesn't Matter (and Yours Probably Doesn't Either)

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF

No-kill language often leaves people on both sides defensive. Many gravitate to the term; others find it divisive or confusing. But while the industry argues about the language, the general public has embraced it — which leaves us with the quandary:

[view more](#)



Brent Toellner
Senior Director, National Programs
 Best Friends Animal Society

Adoptions Managed Intake Return-to-Home Pr... Shelter Operations... Community Engag...

Using the Four Rights Framework

Workshop Breako...

253 AB | RACE Approved

The Four Rights framework, borrowed and revised from the human healthcare field, focuses on wholistic well-being for the animals in our care: providing the right care, in the right place, at the right time, to the right outcome. These are the four

[view more](#)



Cynthia Karsten
Outreach Veterinarian
 UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program

Keeping Pets with ... Organizational Cul... Shelter Operations... Access to Care Animal Care

12:15 PM MT

The Hub open - Thursday

Come to The Hub for lunch, networking, and to check out exhibitors.

1:00 PM MT

Inclusion, Collaboration, and Transparency: Let's Hear Every Voice

Belonging and Incl...

150 EF

The future of animal welfare depends on how we break down existing barriers and build real trust. This tabletop conversation explores ways to foster inclusion and collaboration within your own organization and across shelters, rescue

[view more](#)

2:15 PM MT

Featured


Shelter Math Made Easy: Gain Confidence With Your Data

Workshop Breako...


253 AB | Shelter Pet Data Champions

This interactive workshop transforms data anxiety into data confidence through hands-on practice with your own numbers, whether you're a brick-and-mortar shelter or foster-based rescue group. First, we will cover relevant data definitions, giving

[view more](#)



Jon Davis
Manager, Shelter and Community ...
Best Friends Animal Society



Sally Heins-Limberty
Director, Data Acquisition and Part...
Best Friends Animal Society


Shelter Operations... Rescue Operations... Technology

AI With Intention: Expand Your Reach and Keep Your Authentic Voice

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE

AI can be a powerful tool to engage more supporters, energize volunteers, and get more pets adopted. But it's important to use it thoughtfully. In this listen-and-learn session, you'll learn how (and how not) to use AI as a smart, strategic tool in your communications and fundraising tool belt while maintaining trust, authenticity, and intentionality.



Sue Citro
Chief Experience Officer
Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation AI Insights Marketing and Co...

Clearing Intake Bottlenecks 1.0: Practical Strategies

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC | RACE Approved

The first 48 hours in a shelter are critical for every animal. In this small window of time, we have to focus on protecting them from disease and initiating a plan to move them out of the shelter. This is especially true for animals with medical conditions

[view more](#)



Jordana Moerbe
Director of Lifesaving Partnerships and Medical Care
Austin Pets Alive!

Removing Barriers... Shelter Operations... Shelter Medicine Animal Care AI Insights


Does Managed Intake Open Doors or Ignore Community?

Conversation Brea...


151 DEF

Managed intake is a lifesaving evolution in animal sheltering, but does it leave pets and people behind? This session delivers an honest dialogue about one of the most debated shifts in animal welfare today. We'll explore how managed intake, when

[view more](#)



Tawny Hammond
National Advisor of No-Kill Advanc...
Best Friends Animal Society



Alisha Vianello
Executive Director
Gateway Pet Guardians

Managed Intake | Keeping Pets with ... | Removing Barriers... | Return-to-Home Pr... | Community Engag...

From Adversaries to Allies: Partnering Up to Save Lives

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC

In North Carolina, the dust flew when two dedicated animal welfare adversaries met, disagreed, laid all their cards out on the table — and no shots were fired! In fact, their constructive showdown led the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, to approve a

[view more](#)



Josh Fisher
Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Animal Care ...



Kelsey Joseph
Board Member
Friends of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Ani...

Shelter/Rescue Col... | Organizational Cul... | Advocacy | Leadership | Volunteer Programs

To Keep Pets and People Together, Design Pet-Inclusive Communities

Workshop Breako...

251 F

Housing insecurity is one of the most persistent yet least understood barriers to lifesaving progress. Every day, families are forced to surrender beloved pets because they can't find affordable, pet-inclusive housing. This hands-on workshop gives you

[view more](#)



Kelsey Gilmore-Futeral
Senior Manager, Legislative Attorn...
Best Friends Animal Society



Kathleen Murphy
Senior Campaign Strategist
Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation | Return-to-Home Pr... | Advocacy | Coalition Building | Community Engag...

Using Neonatal Vaccinations Before 4 Weeks Old

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF | RACE Approved

The single best way to protect neonatal and juvenile animals from infectious disease is to care for them in an environment where exposure to disease is low. And we all know how hard those environments can be to find. Unfortunately, many young

[view more](#)



Kate Hurley
Program Advisor
UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program

Shelter Medicine | Foster Programs | Animal Care

3:35 PM MT

Big Dogs, Bigger Successes: Secrets for Winning Big Dog Adoptions

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF | Shelter Pet Data Champions

This listen-and-learn session delivers the secrets of crafting captivating dog profiles that truly resonate with potential adopters. Millions of people turn to online platforms each month, seeking their perfect companion. But what truly drives

[view more](#)



April Huntsman
Senior Director
Adopt a Pet



Jen Zhao
Principal Product Designer
Adopt a Pet

Adoptions | Large Dogs | Dog-Specific Lifesa...

Clearing Intake Bottlenecks 2.0: Advanced Strategies

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC | RACE Approved

This listen-and-learn session is tailored for intermediate-to-advanced shelter professionals who already have effective vaccination policies, strong intake and medical-management protocols, and clear communication workflows with staff and

[view more](#)



Jordana Moerbe
Director of Lifesaving Partnerships and Medical Care
Austin Pets Alive!

Removing Barriers...

Shelter Medicine

Leadership

AI Insights

Creating Synergy Between the Dreamer and the Doer With 'Idea Flow'

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF

At The Bond Between in Minnetonka, Minnesota, we've addressed the biggest bottleneck to increasing nonprofit impact: us! As the executive director and the president, we've learned the hard way how to manage chaos without stifling innovation. In

[view more](#)



Rachel Mairose
Executive Director
The Bond Between



Tashina Schneider
President
The Bond Between

Organizational Cul...

Staff Development

Rescue Operations...

Leadership

AI Insights

Futuristic Animal Control: How New Technologies Aid Compassion Now

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC | Shelter Pet Data Champions

As communities evolve, so too must the systems that protect both animals and public safety. This lively listen-and-learn session explores the future of animal services through the lens of emerging technologies, such as GPS hot mapping, AI-driven

[view more](#)



Spencer Conover
Chief Operating Officer
National Animal Care & Control Association

Innovation

Organizational Cul...

Field Services

Community Engag...

Technology

How One Month's Effort Can Change Everything

Workshop Breako...

251 F

Short bursts of focused effort can bring huge returns in animal welfare. In 2024, the Best Friends Network team launched a series of month-long challenges designed to empower shelters and rescue groups to pilot some bold, simple practices to

[view more](#)



Katrina Ross
Executive Director
Aggieland Humane Society



Kasey Spain
Senior Manager, Network Engage...
Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation

Adoptions

Organizational Cul...

Removing Barriers...

Change Managem...

Pet-Inclusive Housing Solutions for Your Community

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Pet-related housing barriers are a leading cause of pet relinquishment, but these barriers are not insurmountable. This listen-and-learn session is about more than raising awareness — it's built for action. Whether you're a shelter or rescue

[view more](#)



Ross Barker
Director, Pet-Inclusive Housing Init...
Michelson Found Animals



Sara Maria Muriello
Pet-Inclusive Housing Initiative
Michelson Found Animals

Keeping Pets with ...

Removing Barriers...

Advocacy

Community Engag...

Stories Plus Data: Heartfelt, Funder-Focused Grant Proposals

Workshop Breako...

253 AB | Shelter Pet Data Champions

The most successful grant proposals rely on emotion and evidence — stories and data. Too often, proposals lean heavily on just one or the other. In this dynamic workshop, you'll learn how to craft compelling stories that help funders connect with

[view more](#)



Jordan Craig
Chief Operating Officer
Operation Kindness Humane Society



Cathy Rosenthal
Animal Welfare Communications C...
CathyRosenthal.com

Fundraising

Leadership

Marketing and Co...

May 8, 2026

7:15 AM MT

Breakfast - Friday

7:45 AM MT

Registration and Information open

8:30 AM MT

A Vibrant Systems Approach to Community Cat Health

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF | RACE / Data Champions

Community cat programming thrives when medicine, management, and community partnership align. In this listen-and-learn session, we'll explore how a systems-based approach that integrates medical care, population management, and community-

[view more](#)



Colleen Guilfoyle
National Shelter Medicine Veterinarian
Best Friends Animal Society

Keeping Pets with ...

Community Cats

Return-to-Home Pr...

Shelter Medicine

Cat-Specific Lifesa...

Budget-Conscious Strategies to Boost Animal Welfare and Positive Outcomes

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC

We all want to reduce stress, prevent behavioral decline, and support adoptability for the pets in our care. The good news? You don't need a large budget or a team of behavior specialists to make meaningful, lasting change. This powerful listen-and-

[view more](#)



Kiyoka Tamesue
Senior Manager of Training & Behavior
Best Friends Animal Society

Staff Development Behavior Dog-Specific Lifesa... Volunteer Programs Community Engag...

Lead With Compassion, Efficiency, and Accountability

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE

It's challenging to meet operational goals while maintaining a culture of empathy and care at your facility. In this listen-and-learn session, you'll learn how compassionate leadership can drive both emotional well-being and organizational

[view more](#)



Lawrence Nicolas
Chief Executive Officer
Jacksonville Humane Society

Organizational Cul... Staff Development Change Managem... Shelter Operations... Leadership

Love in Motion: How Transport Transforms Lives

Workshop Breako...

251 F

Moving animals requires far more than logistics; it's a profound act of connection, compassion, and healing. Every move changes lives, both animal and human. This practical, compelling workshop takes you behind the scenes with the Southwest

[view more](#)



Elaine Brown
Founder/CEO
Southwest Animal Transport Team



Colette Junod
President
Justice for Paws Animal Rescue

Innovation Shelter/Rescue Col... Transport Programs Removing Barriers... Rescue Operations...

Marketing Gap Analysis: Roadmap to Effective Community Marketing

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC | Presented by Petfinder

Do you want your everyday marketing efforts to have meaningful impact and increase your shelter's community engagement? This listen-and-learn session will show you how to utilize marketing gap analysis to reach more people. We'll

[view more](#)



Tim Fitzgerald
Marketing Strategist
Best Friends Animal Society



Darlene Pereda
Multicultural Marketing Strategist
Best Friends Animal Society

Adoptions Removing Barriers... Community Engag... Foster Programs Marketing and Co...

Pet Support Hubs Are the Best

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF

This conversation session covers how to meet the people in your community before their pets even enter the shelter system — because the shelters that are using this new approach are thriving. We'll explore how to transform your traditional animal

[view more](#)



Jill Henke
Operations Director
Gateway Pet Guardians

Keeping Pets with ... Access to Care Community Engag...

PR Foundations: Saving More Pets Through the Media

Workshop Breako...

253 AB | Presented by Petfinder

To build lasting trust and maximize your organization's impact, you need effective public relations (PR). This workshop will increase your communication skills by exploring the foundations of PR, including messaging, audience, clarity, consistency,

[view more](#)



Erinn O'Connor
Public Relations Strategist
Best Friends Animal Society



Natalie Perkins
Public Relations Strategist
Best Friends Animal Society

Shelter Operations...

Diversity, Equity, I...

Community Engag...

Marketing and Co...

9:50 AM MT

AI to the Rescue: See How Technology Is Helping Vulnerable Kittens

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Like many organizations, Two Hearts Kitten Rescue faced the intensive needs of neonatal kittens with very limited resources. They knew they couldn't go it alone. But with an assist from AI, they're using connected devices and automation to reimagine

[view more](#)



Evan Brown
Co-Founder
Two Hearts Kitten Rescue



Marc Peralta
Chief Program Officer
Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation

AI Insights

Cat-Specific Lifesa...

Technology

Compassion High: Elevating Workplace Culture and Leadership

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC

What if the key to a thriving, mission-driven organization isn't just what it does, but how it does it? In this listen-and-learn session, attendees will hear about the Richmond SPCA's Compassion High leadership development program. Created for

[view more](#)



Carol Anne Baker-Lajoie
Chief Advancement Officer
Richmond SPCA



Lisa Rivadeneira
Chief Operating Officer
Richmond SPCA

Organizational Cul...

Staff Development

Leadership

Get This Cat Off My Property or Else!

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF

You've taken the call. The frustrated resident. The roaming cat. The escalating threat. Now what? This fast-paced, conversation-driven session tackles real-world strategies for navigating outdoor cat complaints with confidence. From

[view more](#)



Nick Walton
Senior Manager of National Shelter Support
Best Friends Animal Society

Community Cats

Field Services

Community Engag...

La Cultura Buena: Connect With Latino Pet Lovers Through Marketing and PR

Workshop Breako...

253 AB | Presented by Petfinder

Building meaningful connections with diverse communities doesn't have to be complicated. It requires cultural understanding, intentional outreach, and authentic engagement. In this workshop, we'll share how Best Friends' work with

[view more](#)



Ivonne Aguilar
Marketing PR Specialist
Best Friends Animal Society



Yoselin Marshall
Multicultural Marketing Strategist
Best Friends Animal Society

Diversity, Equity, I...

Community Engag...

Marketing and Co...

Removing Invisible Barriers to Pet Adoptions

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC | RACE Approved

Shelter professionals all say they want to remove barriers to adoption, but how far are we really willing to go? It's easy to talk about open adoptions or flexible policies, but in this listen-and-learn session, we'll help you step up to the next level of

[view more](#)



Louiza Chan
Senior Strategist - South-Central R...
Best Friends Animal Society



Susan Stanford
Superintendent
Bossier City Animal Control

Adoptions

Change Managem...

Removing Barriers...

Shelter Operations...

Dog-Specific Lifesa...

True Magic: Partnerships Making Positive Outcomes

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE

In animal welfare, collaboration leads to lifesaving magic. This lively listen-and-learn session shows you how to welcome new partnerships to expand your reach. You'll hear from Fort Worth Animal Care and Control, a large municipal shelter, and

[view more](#)



David Maldonado
Director of Community Operations
Operation Kindness Humane Society



Anastasia Ramsey
Code Compliance Superintendent - ...
Fort Worth Animal Care and Control

Innovation

Keeping Pets with ...

Shelter/Rescue Col...

Removing Barriers...

Coalition Building

Using Data and a 'Wildly Important Goal' to Cut Length of Stay

Workshop Breako...

251 F | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Shelters everywhere collect data, but too often it sits on a computer spreadsheet without driving real change. This workshop will turn your numbers into action by showing you how to build a "wildly important goal" (WIG) focused on reducing length of

[view more](#)



Sarah Aguilar
Animal Services Director
Santa Barbara County Animal Services

Organizational Cul...

Staff Development

Shelter Operations...

Leadership

11:10 AM MT

Friday General Session

General Session



Holly Sizemore
 Chief Mission Officer
 Best Friends Animal Society

12:15 PM MT

The Hub open - Friday

Come to The Hub for lunch, networking, and to check out exhibitors.

1:00 PM MT

Why Inclusion Really Matters: Turn Welcoming Into Belonging

Belonging and Incl...

150 EF

Would you like to better serve everyone in your diverse community? Don't just open the doors; make sure you are connecting with the community. This conversation, led by Jacqueline Hernandez of Nebraska Humane Society and Sam White with Best

[view more](#)

2:15 PM MT

Featured


Rebuild Your Foster Program to Boost Care and Minimize Burnout

Workshop Breako...

251 F | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Feeling overwhelmed by an unmanageable foster roster? Struggling to keep caregivers engaged or streamline your onboarding? You're not alone, and there's a better way forward. In this workshop, we'll explore how the Society for the

[view more](#)



Michelle Misra
 Foster Program Manager
 SICSA Pet Adoption & Wellness Center

Innovation Shelter Operations... Foster Programs Technology Cat-Specific Lifesa...


Beyond Blame: Telling the Right Stories to Build a Better Future

Workshop Breako...


253 AB

Stories about pets and people are powerful, but not all stories move us in the right direction. Every day, headlines and social posts shape how we think about issues such as overwhelmed shelters, access to care, cruelty, and "responsible" pet

[view more](#)



Hanna Lentz
 Executive Director
 SPARC



Jillian Sergio
 Community Initiatives Manager
 SPARC

Innovation Keeping Pets with ... Access to Care Community Engag... Marketing and Co...

Fundraising in a Competitive World

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF

Where does the money come from? That's the major question as we build programs to provide for all the deserving pets in our care. Join two of Best Friends' experts in this conversation session that presents powerful fundraising approaches you

[view more](#)



Sarah Goldberg
Philanthropy Advisor
 Best Friends Animal Society



John Graves
Regional Strategist, East Region
 Best Friends Animal Society

Fundraising Removing Barriers... Community Engag... Marketing and Co...

Taking Large Dogs From Overlooked to Adopted

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE | Presented by Petfinder

Large dogs are often the most overlooked in shelters, but effective marketing can take them from ignored to in demand. Here in Mohave County, Arizona, we have boosted large-dog adoptions by 20%, and we want to share our proven strategies

[view more](#)



Jessica Gutmann
Senior Regional Strategist - Mount...
 Best Friends Animal Society



Nicole Mangiameli
Animal Shelter Manager
 Mohave County Animal Shelter

Innovation Adoptions Large Dogs Dog-Specific Lifesa... AI Insights

Taking Risks to Save Lives in Shelter Medicine

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC | RACE Approved

Playing it safe can sometimes cost lives in the world of animal sheltering. While traditional veterinary protocols offer structure and security, they can fall short when the urgent, ever-changing needs of vulnerable pets challenge your shelter.

[view more](#)



Erin Katrube
Director, National Veterinary Programs
 Best Friends Animal Society

Organizational Cul... Removing Barriers... Shelter Operations... Shelter Medicine

Using AI to Map Community Cats

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF | Shelter Pet Data Champions

What if messy, incomplete data could actually help you find more cats in need? In this listen-and-learn session, we'll share how a Utah County pilot project used AI to convert vague complaint records into mapped locations of community cats, giving

[view more](#)



Bart Battista
Senior Director - Facilities, Insuran...
 Best Friends Animal Society



Amy Kohlbecker
Executive Director, Salt Lake City
 Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation AI Insights Cat-Specific Lifesa... Technology

What Really Makes Community Cat Programs Work

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC | Shelter Pet Data Champions

This listen-and-learn session explores how to save more feline lives by using strategies from John D. Boone and Stacy LeBaron's United Spay Alliance 2025 report titled Free-Roaming Cat Management: A Funders' Guide to Better Impact. We'll

[view more](#)



Kelly Hines
Board President
T-Town TNR



Elaine Spencer
Project Ground Zero Coordinator
T-Town TNR

- Community Cats
- Removing Barriers...
- Access to Care
- Coalition Building
- Cat-Specific Lifesa...

3:35 PM MT

Featured

Open Doors: Removing Barriers to Lifesaving

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF

Many of our well-intended animal welfare policies create barriers limiting access for community members. We don't intend this, but it happens. Join Operation Kindness Humane Society and Charleston Animal Society in this important conversation

[view more](#)



Ed Jamison
President & CEO
Operation Kindness Humane Society



TyAnn Sumpter
Executive Director
SPCA of Brazoria County

- Adoptions
- Removing Barriers...
- Access to Care
- Foster Programs
- Community Engag...

Crafting Animal Laws That Build Community and Save Lives

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF

This brass-tacks listen-and-learn session will give you firsthand insights into how existing laws succeed — or fail — in protecting animals and communities. We'll equip you with practical tools to advocate for effective, humane, and equitable

[view more](#)



Kirsten Gregory
Legislative Affairs Director & Gene...
Pasado's Safe Haven



Sarah Hock
Executive Director
Joint Animal Services

- Field Services
- Advocacy
- Diversity, Equity, I...
- Leadership
- Coalition Building

From 'Rescue Police' to Joyful Sanity: Let's All Have a Good Laugh

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC

Animal welfare people are a special kind of crazy. The good kind of crazy. The "I canceled dinner plans because my foster dog sneezed weird" kind. But sometimes our passion turns us into judges, gatekeepers, and adoption application bouncers. In

[view more](#)



Shelley Delahoussaye
Animal Shelter Manager
Lafayette Animal Shelter & Care Cent...



Hilary Detillier
Director
Lafourche Parish Animal Shelter

- Organizational Cul...
- Change Managem...
- Removing Barriers...
- Diversity, Equity, I...
- Marketing and Co...

Inclusive Listening That Bridges Community Divides

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE

Every lifesaving effort begins and ends with communication. In the dizzying, emotional world of animal welfare, how we speak, listen, and connect matters. Will our teams and communities thrive or fracture? This empowering listen-and-learn

[view more](#)



Eve Bañuelos
 CEO and Founder
 Pups Without Borders



Dawn Binion-Stewart
 Director, Culture, Inclusion & Lear...
 Best Friends Animal Society

Staff Development | Diversity, Equity, L... | Coalition Building | Community Engag... | Marketing and Co...

Same Small Space, Great New Vibes

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC | Presented by Petfinder

Transform your adoption space into an inviting, barrier-free experience that connects people with pets and saves more lives. This listen-and-learn session explores how to increase adoptions within your shelter by rethinking visitors' journeys, breaking

[view more](#)



Marlan Roberts
 Executive Director
 Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation | Adoptions | Diversity, Equity, L...

Using Shelter Pet Data Alliance to Drive Lifesaving Progress

Workshop Breako...

251 F | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Every shelter and rescue group has data, but the real magic happens when you turn that data into decisions that save more lives. In this interactive, hands-on workshop, we'll explore how to use Shelter Pet Data Alliance (SPDA) tools to identify your

[view more](#)



Maureen Gillespie
 Data Scientist
 Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation | Staff Development | Shelter Operations... | Technology

Why Behavioral Support Is the Foundation of Canine Lifesaving

Workshop Breako...

253 AB | RACE Approved

Entering even the most well-resourced shelters can trigger profound stress in dogs. Within just 48 hours, cortisol levels double in 80% of kenneled dogs. Often, their behavioral challenges are a natural response to an unnatural environment.

[view more](#)



Louiza Chan
 Senior Strategist - South-Central R...
 Best Friends Animal Society



Brittany Fleming
 Consultant
 Save the Unicorns

Adoptions | Removing Barriers... | Behavior | Large Dogs | Foster Programs

May 9, 2026

7:15 AM MT

Breakfast - Saturday

7:45 AM MT

Registration and Information open

8:30 AM MT

Don't Ignore the Data — Crunch It to Save Lives

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC | RACE / Data Champions

Using data isn't about becoming a "math person" — it's about making informed decisions that amplify your lifesaving work. We get it; animal welfare leaders are stretched thin, and data can often feel like just another thing to manage. But when data

[view more](#)



Michelle Dunivan
Sr. Director, Insights & Analytics
Best Friends Animal Society



Steven Martinez
Executive Director
York County SPCA

Shelter Operations... Leadership Technology

Honest Shelters Earn Public Trust

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Asking your community for help — and daring to be vulnerable about where your shelter needs help — can be a real challenge. For many shelter leaders, transparency remains a scary proposition thanks to the abundance of freely expressed

[view more](#)



Meaghan Colville
Shelter Director
Cincinnati Animal CARE



Audra Michael
Director
Pinal County Animal Care and Control

Change Managem... Leadership Community Engag...

Maximizing Care for Shelters With Limited Access to Veterinarians

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC

We want to help you fully meet the veterinary needs of the animals in your care. Shelters without full-time veterinary coverage might feel like they have to leave critical medical decisions to an already overstretched staff. But this difficult, heart-

[view more](#)



Becca Boronat
Veterinarian, National Shelter Med...
Best Friends Animal Society



Melanie Lyons
Manager, National Shelter Medicine
Best Friends Animal Society

Staff Development Removing Barriers... Shelter Medicine Animal Care

Real Talk About Animal Control Work

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF

Step into a no-slides, no-filter, fully interactive discussion led by National Animal Care & Control Association (NACA) leadership. This conversation session invites officers, supervisors, and leaders to unpack the real-world challenges facing the

[view more](#)



Jerrica Owen
Chief Executive Officer
National Animal Care & Control Assoc...



Mike Wheeler
Director
Cabot Animal Support Services

Keeping Pets with ... Field Services Return-to-Home Pr... Diversity, Equity, I... Community Engag...

Reimagine Your Adoption Process to Connect With New Adopters

Workshop Breako...

253 AB | Presented by Petfinder

How can you stand out as the go-to destination for pet adoption? Let's explore the many exciting steps that will spark growth in your adoption numbers. This workshop delivers practical solutions that modernize the adoption process and go beyond

[view more](#)



Jenifer Reed
Senior Manager, Education & Enga...
Human Animal Support Services (HAS...



Kenya Wiggin
Adoptions Manager
The Animal Foundation

Innovation Adoptions Removing Barriers... Shelter Operations... Community Engag...

Reimagining Shelters as Community Launchpads

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE

In Knoxville, Tennessee, we've learned to make our shelter a launchpad for support and empowerment. We all know animal shelters shouldn't be dumping grounds. Join this listen-and-learn session to see how we redefined the role of the animal

[view more](#)



Janet Testerman
CEO
Young-Williams Animal Center

Keeping Pets with ... Managed Intake Return-to-Home Pr... Change Managem... Community Engag...

The No-Kill Shift: Helping Your Whole Community Embrace Lifesaving

Workshop Breako...

251 F | Presented by Petfinder

No-kill animal shelters are just one component of a no-kill community. Saving lives becomes much more accessible when the entire community contributes. Come hear how Best Friends' director of legislation and campaign strategy and a Best Friends

[view more](#)



Kelsey Gilmore-Futeral
Senior Manager, Legislative Attorn...
Best Friends Animal Society



Eric Swafford
Director, Legislation and Campaig...
Best Friends Animal Society

Managed Intake Removing Barriers... Shelter Operations... Leadership Community Engag...

9:50 AM MT

Build a Thriving Adoption and Foster Plan to Boost Rural Lifesaving

Workshop Breako...

253 AB

In this hands-on workshop, you won't just hear about a rural lifesaving plan — you'll start building your own. We'll use real foster and adoption program templates, recruitment scripts, onboarding forms, and rescue group outreach techniques to

[view more](#)



Laura Clark
Director
Colleton County Animal Services



Sherri Plemons
Strategist, Shelter Engagement
Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation Adoptions Removing Barriers... Foster Programs Community Engag...

Creating Equity Between Transfer Partners

Listen-and-learn B...

251 DE

Shelters and rescue groups juggle many daily challenges while transfer programs try to adapt. This listen-and-learn session delivers a framework for building and maintaining a mutually beneficial transfer program that streamlines the efficiency and

[view more](#)



Heather Hall
 Director
 One Tail at a Time - West Texas



Juli Zagrans
 Executive Director
 One Tail at a Time - PDX

Shelter/Rescue Col... Transport Programs Dog-Specific Lifesa... Marketing and Co...

For Effective Managed Intake, Community Is Key

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC

Let's change things up a bit for the good of our animals. For decades, the standard message to the public has been: If you find a lost pet or need to rehome your pet, go to the shelter. But shelters can be very stressful environments for pets. We

[view more](#)



Brent Toellner
 Senior Director, National Programs
 Best Friends Animal Society



Misty Valenta
 Director
 Williamson County Regional Animal S...

Keeping Pets with ... Managed Intake Return-to-Home Pr... Community Engag...

Handling the Gray Areas: A Data Quality Discussion

Conversation Brea...

151 DEF | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Should you record that dog's age as 2 or use an age bucket like 1-3 years? Is it better to wait for complete data or make decisions based on what you already know? When is estimation valid, and when does it cross into fiction? These aren't

[view more](#)



Jessica Arias
 Director, Animal Services
 Burlington Animal Services



Michelle Dunivan
 Sr. Director, Insights & Analytics
 Best Friends Animal Society

Shelter Operations... Leadership Technology

How to Stay on Manager Island: The Rookie Manager's Survival Guide

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC | RACE Approved

Stepping into a managerial role is both exciting and challenging. But new managers often make common missteps: assuming they must have all the answers, struggling to delegate, or failing to build trust within their teams. This invaluable listen-and-

[view more](#)



Makena Yarbrough
 Senior Director, Lifesaving Centers
 Best Friends Animal Society

Organizational Cul... Staff Development Change Managem... Shelter Operations... Leadership

Transform Animal Services Through Community Empowerment

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Municipal shelters are exhausted. Rescue groups are full. Communities are struggling. In this listen-and-learn session, we'll prove that when shelters shift their identities — from intake-first facilities to proactive community resource centers — real

[view more](#)



Tiffany Bogart
Shelter Veterinarian
 Hernando County Animal Services



Gina Botticello
Community Partnerships and Prog...
 Pasco County Animal Services

Innovation Keeping Pets with ... Change Managem... Access to Care Community Engag...

Turn Bold Ideas Into Action Through Cross-Team Collaboration

Workshop Breako...

251 F | RACE / Data Champions

Have you ever left a conference energized with big, lifesaving ideas, only to watch them stall out against internal barriers and pushback? This workshop provides a clear roadmap for turning ideas into action through cross-team collaboration that

[view more](#)



Stephani Coe
Director of Shelter Operations
 Operation Kindness Humane Society



Meaghan Swan-Wilson
Director of Data and Logistics
 Operation Kindness Humane Society

Innovation Organizational Cul... Staff Development Change Managem... Shelter Operations...

11:10 AM MT

Saturday General Session

General Session



Marc Peralta
Chief Program Officer
 Best Friends Animal Society



Talia Butler
Executive Director
 Salt Lake County Animal Services



12:15 PM MT

Creating New Academic Degree Programs for Animal Services

Optional Session

251 DE

We need your voice! The animal services profession is truly on the upswing with a wide range of paid and unpaid roles in adoption centers, shelters, and rescue organizations across the nation. For many years, Best Friends and Southern Utah

[view more](#)



William Heyborne
Dean, College of Science, Technolo...
 Southern Utah University



James Sage
Associate Provost
 Southern Utah University

Lunch - Saturday

1:45 PM MT

Barrier-Free Adoptions: Delivering Pets to Their New Homes

Workshop Breako...

251 F | Presented by Petfinder

Adopting a pet should be joyful, not complicated. Yet many of us still rely on outdated, high-barrier processes that turn away eager adopters. The Doggy Dashing Pet Adoption and Delivery Program flips that model on its head. Designed to streamline

[view more](#)



Shannon Steemke
Founder and President
 Cooper's Chance Animal Rescue



Amy Steemke
Volunteer and Outreach Coordinat...
 Cooper's Chance Animal Rescue

Innovation Adoptions Transport Programs Foster Programs

Fundraise With Storytelling, Starring Your Animal Care Staff

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF

Animal care staff members can and should be the star of your fundraising program. Their stories are what drive your supporters. Their heroic efforts will wow and touch your community, so let them shine. This listen-and-learn session is all

[view more](#)



Becca Danz
Annual Giving Officer
Best Friends Animal Society



Amy Kohlbecker
Executive Director, Salt Lake City
Best Friends Animal Society

Fundraising

Shelter/Rescue Col...

Animal Care

Community Engag...

Marketing and Co...

Outbreak Response: An Effective Lifesaving Framework, Part 1

Workshop Breako...

253 AB | RACE Approved

Your teams must act swiftly to contain the spread of disease during an infectious outbreak. In this two-part interactive workshop, led by the Best Friends national shelter medicine team, you'll be guided through an outbreak scenario,

[view more](#)



Erin Katrife
Director, National Veterinary Programs
Best Friends Animal Society

Shelter Operations...

Shelter Medicine

Animal Care

Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return Like You've Never Seen It Work Before

Listen-and-learn B...

251 ABC | Shelter Pet Data Champions

In this listen-and-learn session, we'll explore how Farmers Branch Animal Services, Best Friends, and Operation Kindness collaborate to strengthen trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) through community outreach, strategic partnerships, and

[view more](#)



Valerie Pena
Animal Services Supervisor
Farmers Branch Animal Services



Abby Principe
Manager II of Livesaving Partnersh...
Operation Kindness Humane Society

Community Cats

Field Services

Access to Care

Community Engag...

Cat-Specific Lifesa...

Using Collective Team Creativity to Increase Lifesaving

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC | Shelter Pet Data Champions

Picture this: Your medical team recommends euthanasia. The behavior team disagrees. The adoptions folks have another perspective. Meanwhile, an animal's future hangs in the balance as departments debate in isolation. Sound familiar? At the

[view more](#)



Jacqueline Hernandez
Vice President of Operations and Strategy
Nebraska Humane Society

Managed Intake

Organizational Cul...

Removing Barriers...

Leadership

Working Smarter: What AI Agents Are and How They Can Help

Listen-and-learn B...

151 DEF

AI agents are so much more than buzzwords. They're the next big thing: tools that meaningfully change how work gets done. In this listen-and-learn session, we will introduce you to what AI agents can realistically do today and what they might be able

[view more](#)



Anthony Acquisti
Principal, Growth Strategy & Transformation
Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation AI Insights Technology

3:05 PM MT

Charting the Waters Ahead: AI and What Comes Next

Listen-and-learn B...

151 DEF

AI is already reshaping social impact around the world, and its currents are only getting stronger. This powerful listen-and-learn session explores inspiring examples of AI's positive contributions and invites animal welfare professionals to consider how they can move with the flow.



Anthony Acquisti
Principal, Growth Strategy & Trans...
Best Friends Animal Society



Amy Starnes
Principal, Growth Initiatives
Best Friends Animal Society

Innovation AI Insights Leadership Technology

Outbreak Response: An Effective Lifesaving Framework, Part 2

Workshop Breako...

253 AB | RACE Approved

Your teams must act swiftly to contain the spread of disease during an infectious outbreak. In this two-part interactive workshop, led by the Best Friends national shelter medicine team, you'll be guided through an outbreak scenario,

[view more](#)



Erin Katribe
Director, National Veterinary Programs
Best Friends Animal Society

Shelter Operations... Shelter Medicine Animal Care

Reframing the Euthanasia Conversation to Support Your Staff

Listen-and-learn B...

250 DEF

This compelling listen-and-learn session addresses the difficult topic of euthanasia. Together, we'll explore the most compassionate and ethical outcomes for the animals in your care, including when a live outcome may not be possible. Staff

[view more](#)



Jennifer Adkins
Director, Cat World
Best Friends Animal Society

Organizational Cul... Staff Development Behavior Shelter Medicine Animal Care

Small Towns, Big Impacts: Lifesaving in Rural America

Listen-and-learn B...

250 ABC

Life in rural America can be challenging, but its greatest strength lies in community. In places where everyone knows everyone, your shelter can become the heart of that community: a trusted hub for compassion, connection, and problem-

[view more](#)



Louiza Chan
Senior Strategist – South-Central R...
Best Friends Animal Society



Heather Hall
Director
One Tail at a Time - West Texas

Shelter/Rescue Col... | [Advocacy](#) | [Coalition Building](#) | [Marketing and Co...](#)

Sustainable Solutions for Animal Cruelty Cases

[Workshop Breako...](#)

251 F

Joint Animal Services in Olympia, Washington, is a municipal shelter with an annual intake of more than 4,000 animals. Limited staffing and resources once challenged our ability to respond quickly and effectively to large-scale animal cruelty

[view more](#)



Bekka Kraai
Positive Outcomes Coordinator
Joint Animal Services



Sierra Teas
Animal Welfare & Field Services M...
Joint Animal Services

[Innovation](#) | [Field Services](#) | [Volunteer Programs](#) | [Foster Programs](#)

Your Volunteer Shortage Is a Trust Problem

[Listen-and-learn B...](#)

251 ABC

The answer to solving staffing shortages and boosting community engagement is simple: more trust. This listen-and-learn session explores the power of volunteers. Everyday community members can contribute vast resources to your shelter

[view more](#)



Bella Hillman
Volunteer & Event Coordinator
Aggieland Humane Society



Katrina Ross
Executive Director
Aggieland Humane Society

[Innovation](#) | [Removing Barriers...](#) | [Volunteer Programs](#) | [Foster Programs](#) | [Community Engag...](#)

5:00 PM MT

Closing party

Join us Saturday evening from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m. for an awesome after-party in the Regency Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency. This year we are highlighting our animal welfare stars — that's you! — and bringing all the sparkle to celebrate the people

[view more](#)

Thank you to our sponsors:



See you in...

27

Days

17

Hours

7

Minutes


Questions? Reach out!

[Contact Us »](#)

 **Best Friends**

National Conference

Share:  Facebook  x  LinkedIn

[Event Privacy Policy](#)  [Best Friends Privacy Policy](#) 