Public Funding for Spay/Neuter

Best Friends
ANIMAL SOCIETY

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Do you have great ideas for a spay/neuter program but lack funding? Have you exhausted every fundraiser imaginable – from garage sales to silent auctions?

Money *is* available. It's time to get creative and look in new places that you might not traditionally think of as possible funding sources.

I'd like to share ideas of how other communities have funded spay/neuter programs in unconventional, innovative ways. All of them may not be the best fit for your needs, but one of them is bound to be perfect for your community.

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LICENSE SURCHARGES

New Hampshire

The state of New Hampshire was one of the first to try this strategy. By adding a $2 surcharge onto their dog license fees, they funded two programs:

Shelter adopters' program: New Hampshire residents who adopt a cat or dog from a local shelter can have the animal sterilized for a fee of $30, which covers the cost of surgery and all post-surgical care, such as suture removal. The program pays the rest of the neutering cost. The pet caretaker remains responsible for all other costs, such as any necessary presurgical immunizations and the presurgical examination.

Low-income program: This program is available to all New Hampshire cat or dog caretakers who are eligible for Medicaid or food stamps or one of five other public assistance programs. The only cost to them is a $15 co-payment for the sterilization. The program pays the rest of the veterinarian's fee for the surgery and related expenses, including any necessary presurgical immunizations.

Program design

All services are provided by licensed veterinarians in their own hospitals and clinics. Vets who participate in the program agree to accept a 20% reduction of their customary neutering fee. About three-quarters of all the state's veterinarians have joined the program. The state veterinarian sets a maximum neutering fee each year based on the customary fees of all the veterinarians who participate in the program. In 2001, these caps ranged from $48 to sterilize a male cat to $130.40 for a female dog over 75 pounds.

Revenue

All funding for the program is derived from a $2 surcharge on dog licenses. About 130,000 dogs are licensed in the state each year, generating revenue of about $260,000. These funds are maintained by the State Treasurer in a separate

account which is dedicated for the sole use of the program.

Program statistics

Over the first seven years, 29,658 surgeries were performed through the program at a cost of $1,236,817. The average subsidy paid by the program in FY '01 was $55.29.

How to do something similar in your community

Decide if you want this done by county or statewide. If you decide to try this on a county by county level, contact the county commissioners to find out who oversees licensing. It may be the commissioners, the auditor, or the treasurer. Develop a program and present it to them with as much detail as you have, including cost savings, statistics, projections, and benefits. It is helpful to have the support of animal control. If you are going on a statewide level, you will most likely need to get the legislature to pass the necessary legislation, as they did in New Hampshire.

For more information

E-mail: petsolutions@aol.com

VOLUNTARY LICENSE CHECK-OFF

Maricopa County, Arizona

Maricopa County, Arizona, has added a simple line at the bottom of its dog license form that says "I would like to give a voluntary donation of $xx to save more pets' lives."

This is a voluntary donation and the amount is left open so that people can decide how much they would like to give. This program raises $10,000 a month for Maricopa County Animal Care and Control and helps fund programs that their budget does not cover, such as treatment for sick or injured animals and spay/neuter clinics for feral cats.

How to do something similar in your community

Contact the department responsible for overseeing licensing in your community and schedule a meeting with the director. If you don't know which department this is, call your county commissioners. Do some advance research to know how many licenses are sold, what kind of program you want, how it would work, and what fund the money would go in.

You will need to decide who will administer the funds. In Maricopa County, the funds are used to bolster animal care and control programs that are not funded by the county.

It is important to make sure that this money is earmarked specifically for the programs you intend it for, and not put in a general fund.

For more information

Visit this website: www.maricopa.pets/gov

STATE TAX CHECK-OFF

Colorado

The state of Colorado was the first state to use the voluntary state tax check-off for pets. It has been used in other states for various issues including wildlife.

Grants for educational programs and for subsidizing spay/neuter services are made possible primarily by donations from citizens checking off a box on their state income tax returns.

The Pet Overpopulation Fund was established by Colorado statute. The fund exists to educate the public about the importance of controlling pet overpopulation and to work with animal shelters, veterinarians and local communities to curb pet overpopulation in Colorado, ultimately ending the need for animal euthanasia due to unwanted pet births. The fund subsidizes sterilizations for Colorado's pets by providing grants that support collaborative efforts between local veterinarians and animal care and control agencies statewide.

The fund has seven board members representing different humane organizations who serve without compensation for a period of two or three years. They donate their time in support of the fund's cause and decide how the grants will be distributed. They are appointed by the commissioner of the Department of Agriculture.

As of May 31, 2003, 56% of the funds had been expended, with 58% of the grant year completed. A total of 3,580 surgeries had been preformed at

a cost of $112,164. These funds were spent in underserved areas in Colorado using private veterinary clinics and nonprofit shelters. The coalition estimates that 60% of these sterilizations were performed on cats and 40 percent on dogs, at an average cost of $33.57.

In 2002, the fund awarded a total of $200,244 to 25 groups.

How to do something similar in your community

The state legislature would need to pass legislation creating a special fund for the monies and setting requirements for the program.

Maine has also recently passed a state check-off.

For more information

Visit: www.savecoloradopets.org

HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

(Rabies tags, general budget, discretionary funding, rabies clinics)

Columbus, Ohio, and Bridgeport, Connecticut

The Health Department in Columbus, Ohio, convened a special coalition of local animal, wildlife, and public health organizations to form a proactive response to raccoon rabies in Ohio.

Out of this discussion came the formation of a feral cat program funded with a new $1 rabies tag fee. The goal was to create a rabies buffer by sterilizing and vaccinating feral cat colonies in Franklin County. This changed the discussion from just animal welfare to rabies control, animal welfare, humane treatment of animals, and animal health and safety.

The Health Department committed a total of $300,000, providing $50,000 a year through the sale of rabies tags to the local humane society to oversee the program. Currently, this program is not being funded due to budget constraints and other issues, but there is hope that it will be continued soon. However, the precedent it sets involving collaboration between the Health Department and humane groups is worth mentioning.

There are other ways to partner with your local Health Department. The Bridgeport Cat Project in Connecticut was fixing 500 owned and feral cats a year. They approached their Health Department for help and were surprised to hear the department was receiving a lot of cat complaints and was receptive to a test program. The director offered discretionary funds for anything under $5,000. The program is being renewed annually.

How to do something similar in your community

It is best to meet with the director, if possible, or someone sympathetic to animals within the Health Department. It also helps to approach

them before there is a big problem, like a rabies outbreak or complaints about cat disease, because then things are polarized.

Do advance research to highlight how a feral program that includes rabies vaccinations can help protect public health and safety. Gather examples of successful programs in other communities (available at www.alleycat.org). If your Health Department cannot give discretionary funding, or fund a rabies tag, see if they have a budget to offer rabies clinics. Ask if the money designated for rabies clinics can be used instead to fund spay/neuter surgeries AND a rabies shot.

For more information

E-mail: aimee@bestfriends.org

GRANTS FROM LOCAL CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND ROTARY CLUBS

Ft. Meyers, Florida

A local humane society realized the importance for humane education and spay/neuter but also understood how tying the two together could bring additional funding.

A program was developed where the humane society visits a classroom twice for two hours and talks about humane education and the importance of spay/neuter. The students then come to the shelter to help at the spay/neuter clinic and get to see actual surgeries in progress.

Afterwards, the students create projects to help the shelter, including designing billboards, creating brochures, and running a food drive.

Because the program educates students and creates an opportunity for them to become involved, the humane society is able to obtain funding from local organizations that would not normally fund spay/neuter. Funding comes from local community foundations, rotary clubs, and the chamber of commerce.

How to do something similar in your community

Find out what resources are offered by leadership groups, the chamber of commerce, and community foundations that exist in your community. If they do not fund animal organizations or issues, determine if you can collaborate with another group or project, like the humane society in Ft. Meyers did.

For more information

E-mail: aimee@bestfriends.org

CITY GOVERNMENTS SPONSORING A DAY OF SURGERIES

Austin, Texas

The City of Austin sponsors one day each week for free spay/neuter surgeries and rabies vaccines for low-income residents. A mobile van operated by the nonprofit Emanci-Pet performs the surgeries at a cost of $30 for a dog spay, $25 for a dog neuter, $20 for a cat spay, and $15 for a cat neuter. The mobile van spays or neuters between 25 and 40 animals per day.

How to do something similar in your community

Develop a plan with a local spay/neuter program. This could be a mobile van, an agreement with local veterinarians, or a MASH/fixed clinic. Make sure you include the cost per surgery and the total number of projected surgeries. Stress that this is a public service for low-income residents who could not afford this service otherwise. Approach your city council or your county commissioners and ask them to consider sponsoring the surgeries one day a week or even once a month.

For more information

Visit: www.emancipet.org

COMMUNITY BLOCK-GRANT FUNDING AND COUNCIL DISCRETIONARY FUNDS

Toledo, Ohio, and Spartanburg, South Carolina

A local coalition of animal groups in Toledo, Ohio, started a cat spay/neuter program called Operation FELIX. This program is geared toward low-income people and feral cat colonies in low-income census tracts.

FELIX applied for community-development block-grant (CDBG) funding, which is a federal HUD grant that communities administer locally. CDBG funding is geared toward helping low-income people and areas. FELIX was able to get $15,000 from this funding because the program targeted only low-income census areas and set a goal of helping 200 low-income households and sterilizing 800 cats (half owned and half unowned).

FELIX also received city council discretionary funds. Each city council person had a small amount of funding to give to select projects. FELIX was able to get multiple council members to give a few thousand dollars each and received $10,000 for spay/neuter efforts in target areas.

Animal Allies in Spartanburg, South Carolina gathered information from the Toledo program and approached their city about block-grant funding. In 2003, they were awarded $11,000 for a low-income spay/neuter program.

How to do something similar in your community

1. Find out who appropriates the CDBG funding in your community. In Toledo it is the Department of Neighborhoods, and the city council and mayor approve the funding requests.

2. Find out if there are city council discretionary funds available. If so, approach council members who are animal-friendly or with whom you might have a connection. CDBG funds are getting harder to come by due to budget cuts, so this may be an alternative.

3. Once you find out who appropriates the funding, find out the process for submitting applications. Request that an application be sent to you. They may say that animal groups do not qualify, but remember that this is a HUMAN benefit that you are providing (public safety, health, a community issue).

4. Make sure you pay attention to deadlines since if you miss them, you have to wait another year to apply.

5. Before starting, make sure that your group is prepared to do a lot of paperwork in the beginning and keep very accurate, updated records. There is a monthly reporting requirement and you need to have different policies written up on your program. There may also be requirements for trainings and to be compliant with some of their policies/procedures. If you are not prepared to do this and think you could become overwhelmed, do not apply for this funding.

For more information

E-mail: aimee@bestfriends.org

ADD A PENNY TAX

Marion County, Florida

Marion County added on a penny in sales tax for two years for a capital improvement plan for the county that helps the jail, the library, the court system, and the expansion of the Marion County Animal Center, doubling the kennel size from 36 to 72 and connecting it to the adoption wing.

The commissioners have already funded one Neuter Scooter mobile spay/neuter unit and are looking to purchase a second van.

How to do something similar in your community

This is something that the county commissioners would need to consider doing, so you would need to contact them with a proposal and good statistics.

For more information

Visit: www.marioncountyfl.org

FUNDING FROM THE COUNTY'S GENERAL FUND

Jacksonville, Florida

First Coast No More Homeless Pets submitted a proposal for a spay/neuter program to the City of Jacksonville and received $250,000 in funding for one year of a no-cost program for low-income people.

Each year, the program will be reviewed and it is hoped money will be allocated in the budget to continue the program. The program is a collaboration among the city, First Coast NMHP, and the Jacksonville Veterinary Medical Association.

Twelve vet hospitals participate in the program, which is geared toward low-income people. The hospitals do the qualification screening. The program expects to do 3,200 surgeries in 2003.

First Coast No More Homeless Pets also does a lot of educational outreach with flyers, billboards, radio ads, and booths at events to promote the general message of spay/neuter and to promote this program.

How to do something similar in your community

Develop a plan – will it be a mobile van, a partnership with local vet hospitals, or a MASH clinic? It is helpful to get veterinary support for your efforts and the endorsement of the local veterinary association.

Once you have an idea of what kind of program you want to do, you need to develop a budget, goals, and the details of the program. Meet with the county commissioners to discuss the benefits and submit your proposal to them.

For more information

E-mail: FirstCoastNMHP@aol.com

PET-FRIENDLY LICENSE PLATES

Numerous states

Pet-friendly specialty license plates that fund spay/neuter are becoming more and more common. There are now 22 states with such plates and the amount of money raised can be anywhere from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. There are many different ways of developing pet-friendly plates, so it is recommended that you do your own research.

Prevent a Litter Coalition (PaLC) is working to research and analyze animal-friendly license plate programs around the country with the purpose of making best-practice recommendations for the programs. Their website also serves as a central information resource and collaborative forum for those interested in reviewing the existing programs and making best-practice decisions for their own states.

How to do something similar in your community

Visit the PaLC website and review the legislation from other states. Find the program that fits what you want to do and contact the group in that state responsible for getting the plate passed. Talk with them to learn what worked and what didn't so you can learn from their experience.

Once you have done your homework, develop your plan and approach the legislature about introducing a pet-friendly license plate bill in your state.

For more information

Visit: www.palc.org

USDA GRANTS

Community facility loans and grants are made to build or improve essential public facilities in areas or towns of not more than 20,000 in population. Eligible applicants include federally recognized Indian tribes, government or nonprofit organizations. Examples of loan purposes include health-care facilities, nursing homes, daycare centers, public safety facilities and equipment, community buildings and educational facilities.

For assistance, contact the USDA office that serves the area you are interested in.

These grants can also be used for spay/neuter. Below is an excerpt from an article on a shelter in Minnesota that received a USDA grant. This was the first time an animal shelter qualified.

Animal Shelter gets USDA grant

Federal grant for $24,500 will be used to purchase kennels

WENDY JOHNSON
The Pine Journal
Last Updated: Friday, October 10th, 2003 01:33:09 PM

The Friends of Animals Humane Society Shelter got a big vote of confidence – and a significant financial donation – from the United States Department of Agriculture last week.

USDA Rural Development State Director Steve Wenzel was on hand at the local shelter in person last Wednesday to hand over a check for $24,500 to the FOA.

The grant money will be used primarily for the purchase of much-needed pet kennels, according to FOA board member Armida Turk. She said the shelter currently has 22 dog kennels and 18 cat kennels, and it is operating at a full house status almost all of the time.

Wenzel said that, to his knowledge, this is the first time an animal shelter has been the beneficiary of such a grant in the state of Minnesota.

UNITED WAY GRANT

While the group below got a United Way grant for adoptions, that doesn't mean you couldn't get a grant for spay/neuter if a quality program is presented.

Lafayette, Indiana. Pets for Seniors' first year will be funded by a United Way Venture Grant of approximately $3,000, which will pay for the adoptions of 25 cats and 10 dogs. Eventually, the humane society hopes to offer the program to all local seniors.

REBATES FOR SPAY/NEUTER

Flagler County Humane Society. When this Florida shelter takes in lost-and-found animals, and they are unaltered, the shelter offers to waive the reclaim fees if owners purchase a low-cost spay/neuter certificate. Roughly 60–65% of the people take them up on the spay/neuter offer.

The cost of the certificates is paid for by the owners. The county has a rebate of $25. The shelter applies the rebate directly to the purchase price of the certificate and gets the funds back later from the county.

STATE IMPROVEMENT FUNDS

While these funds also have not been used to date for spay/neuter, there is no reason you couldn't submit a proposal to build or add onto a spay/neuter clinic or room in a shelter.

Baxter, Arkansas. A construction site in an industrial park has been proposed as a spay/neuter clinic. The proposed concrete-block structure will include 600 square feet of enclosed space with 12 dog runs, an office, a food and storage room, a bathroom and a room for cat cages. The project anticipates $7,000 in state Improvement funds during the 2003–04 fiscal year and another $7,000 during the following year.

IN-KIND DONATIONS

While in-kind donations are not actual monetary donations, they can be as good as dollars with the amount of public awareness they can create for spay/neuter and responsible pet care.

Utility bill inserts. Contact your local water, electric, and gas companies to ask about including an insert with the bills. Many will actually do the folding and stuffing for you if you provide the copies.

Housing authority rent-check mailings. Contact your local housing authority to ask if you can include an insert with rent checks being mailed to those in government-subsidized housing. The housing authority will often do the folding and stuffing if you provide the copies.

Putting in licensing renewal forms with tax bills. The county treasurer in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, put a flyer in tax bills and went from 44,000 licenses sold one year to 100,000 the next year. Imagine if they then added on a $2 surcharge to fund spay/neuter! They also created a "collar ID" card (a play on "caller ID") that not only encourages pet owners to license their animals, but raises awareness of area shelters and gives their phone numbers. The collar ID card was inserted into dog license renewal forms.

Mailings to dog license lists. In many areas, the dog license list is available from the county at no cost to nonprofits. If this list is available, send out messages about spay/neuter, responsible pet care, or adopting a second pet to the people on the list.

These are just a few samples of what can be done when you get creative and start looking at new ways for funding spay/neuter. If you have a public funding idea that has worked for you, I would love to hear about it! Please e-mail aimee@bestfriends.org with details.