

## Tips for Successful Lost and Found Pet Matching

Kris Deardon, of the [Humane Society of Pikes Peak Region \(CO\)](#), Melissa Pimentel and Xiomara Mordcovich of the [Miami-Dade Animal Services \(FL\)](#), and Melissa Gray from the [SPCA of Tampa Bay \(FL\)](#) offer these tips for getting more lost animals reunited with their owners.

### Empower Pet Owners

1. People who lose pets are frantic. They don't know what to do. Talk them through the search process and provide them with resources, such as lists of area shelters to call, Craig's List ([www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)), PetHarbor ([www.petharbor.com](http://www.petharbor.com)), area newspapers, etc. Print handouts of this information to give owners.
2. Fliers with good photos, in addition to the description and multiple contacts, are the very best tool for matching lost and found pets. Provide owners of lost pets with a template as well as tips for where to hang fliers (such as at crossroads where drivers have to stop). Hang Found fliers in your shelter where people looking for lost pets can easily see them.
3. Encourage owners to check out the [Missing Pet Partnership](#) website, which has excellent information about effective strategies for finding a lost pet.
4. Strongly encourage owners to stay in close, frequent touch with all area shelters and any other lost and found resources they are using. Checking every 2—3 days is not too often. Distressed owners may not understand the demanding operations of shelters and animal control agencies, where a lost pet report is one among many events in a long, busy day. Owners can take the initiative to contact each agency.
5. Give owners hope by telling them your success stories — animals returned home after months or years.

### Make Yourself Useful

6. Log strays coming into your shelter by breed and the zip code where they were found (not the zip code of the person who brings them in). Being able to sort on these two major categories can narrow the search when an owner comes looking for a lost pet. Logging other identifying information, such as gender, description and markings, microchip number, and any other available information, can also help make a match.  
[PetPoint](#) and [Chameleon](#) shelter software include useful lost/found reports.
7. Post photos and details of strays (where found, etc.) on your website. Posting the information and templates described in #1 above will help owners get right to work on searching. Tips for people who have found a stray animal are also useful.
8. If your shelter is large, consider creating a digital walk-through as an alternative to taking owners through the shelter to look for their pets. Some people find the experience of seeing so many stray animals, including those not yet ready for adoption, overwhelming and may even fail to identify their own pets. In addition, this avoids the safety issue of people walking through kennels and putting hands in cages.
9. If you are an organization that has to euthanize for space - Every morning, check all lost pet reports against the euthanasia list and make a last attempt to find the owner by checking against found reports and other resources such as PetHarbor. The goal should be no euthanasia of lost pets.
10. Make use of volunteers. Consider having a volunteer dedicated to entering information in your lost and found reports or creating a "[Pet Detective Club](#)" as they did at Miami-Dade Animal Services. Volunteers can look for matches from home using online sources and newspaper ads or by combing through fliers hung on prominent Lost and Found bulletin boards at the shelter.



- 11.** To avoid turning animals over to people who falsely claim to be their owners, require anyone claiming a pet to bring in a photo, vet records, or collar ID.
- 12.** Consider implementing a Spay or Pay program offering a reduced RTO fee for owners who allow you to alter and microchip the unaltered pet you took in as a stray.
- 13.** Consider an ID tag program. Send every animal home with a collar and ID tag to cut down on repeat strays.

### **Educate. Educate. Educate.**

- 14.** Keep lost pets out of your shelter by encouraging the public to:
  - Keep current photos of their pets so they can make fliers if necessary.
  - Keep a record of microchip numbers and keep registrations up to date.
  - Always keep a collar and ID tag with a phone number on each pet.
    - People feel more comfortable approaching a dog with a collar.
    - People who find pets are often willing to help but too busy to do more than check a tag and make a phone call. Even license and rabies tags require research to identify the owner.
    - Many people don't know they can have an animal checked for a microchip.
- 15.** Make use of free resources to get the word out about finding lost pets in your community. In addition to PSAs and free ads for nonprofits in local newspapers, consider contacting magazines to see if you can run your ad in space that had been reserved for a paid advertiser who cancelled and have a compelling ad with a great picture ready to go. The magazine ends up with a good ad instead of empty space, and you get your message out for free.
- 16.** Keep in mind that, if your tag and education programs work, your RTO numbers may not increase, but your stray intake will decrease.

### **Happy Endings**

- 17.** When owner and pet are reunited, offer to photograph the pet to use for current or future lost pet needs if the owner doesn't have a current photo. You can email the photo to the owner to keep.
- 18.** Take a "reunited and it feels so good" photo of pet and owner.
  - Email a copy to the owner, because it's nice to have and because the owner can use it to prove ownership if the pet is ever lost again.
  - Keep a copy for yourselves. You may want to use it in a fundraising appeal, a success story for the media, or an education campaign.

### **Learn More**

To learn about the details of the three lost and found matching programs from these agencies, and to find articles about Spay or Pay programs and effective licensing programs, visit the [Return to Owner](http://www.aspcapro.org/return-to-owner) section of ASPCApro.org.