



TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC: Animal Adoption Expo



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TampaPets.org, No More Homeless Pets Hillsborough County (FL) Adoption Expo



Hillsborough County, with a population of 1.1 million, is the largest county in the Tampa Bay area of Florida.

TampaPets.org, No More Homeless Pets – Hillsborough County (NMHP-HC) works to achieve their vision that “every dog and cat in Hillsborough County, Florida will live in a loving and healthy environment.”

Since 2007, this organization has hosted two day-long adoption events each year at the Florida State Fairgrounds, featuring hundreds of animals from:

- Hillsborough County Animal Services,
- the Humane Society of Tampa Bay, and
- over 25 animal rescue organizations

These events attract over 2,000 potential adopters from the Tampa Bay area.

Stats

TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC has hosted four Adoption Expos (spring 2007, fall 2007 and spring and fall 2008) with plans for two Expos yearly into the future. To date, 1159 animals have been adopted at the Expos. As a result of adoptions by the public, as well as rescue group and humane society intervention, no animals have been returned to the Hillsborough County Animal Services municipal shelter after the events. This is a true celebration as Animal Services is often understaffed and overcrowded.

How Cool is That?

We're impressed with the way The Humane Society of Tampa Bay, Hillsborough County Animal Services and dozens of private and non-profit animal and breed rescue groups join forces to offer residents of the Tampa Bay area one-stop-shopping for a new pet at the Florida State Fairgrounds.

Adopt or Adapt

The Adoption Expo can be adjusted to meet the needs of your community. The size and number of animal groups in your area and the facilities available for hosting the event are the major factors to determine the scope of the event for your community.

Who They Are and What They Do

The TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC coalition was formed in April, 2004 to bring together animal shelters, rescue groups, humane organizations, community resources, and private individuals in an atmosphere of support and respect. Believing that “their strength is in their unity” and that together they can make a difference that no one group could make alone, the coalition solves problems using shared resources and a common vision — the day when every dog and cat in Hillsborough County will live in a loving and healthy environment.

In 2007, Tampa was named an ASPCA Mission: Orange target community and ASPCA Community Initiatives Manager Sherry Silk was assigned to the area. Recognizing that Hillsborough County Animal Services, with a euthanasia rate of 83%, was finding homes for only 2,900 of the 36,091 animals taken in each year, Silk focused attention on building existing smaller TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC adoption events into the major adoption expos they are today. Silk managed the first two events and remains actively involved in her present role as executive director for the Humane Society of Tampa Bay.

How It Works

TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC currently hosts two Animal Adoption Expos a year in the Special Events Building at the Florida State Fairgrounds:

- Events run from 10am until 4pm.
- All area rescues and shelters are invited.
- Vendors of animal-related products pay \$50 for booth space.
- The Animal Coalition of Tampa low-cost spay/neuter clinic, gives out information to raise awareness.
- The Community Feral Cat Coordinator provides information on Trap Neuter Return (TNR).
- The County Board of Veterinarians is invited to participate and provide information on veterinary care.

Participating animal groups must agree to bring altered, behaviorally sound, healthy animals to the event and to share their adoption statistics. (In rare instances, animals may be brought to the event unaltered but they must be sterilized before they go to their new homes).

Groups are responsible for containment and behavior of the animals they bring. Dogs must be leashed. Cats must be in secure containers.

Each group follows its own adoption policies and charges its own fees. However, groups are encouraged to allow animals to go home with their new families that day. Participating groups may sell items and collect donations.

Ingredients and Prep Work

People

According to TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC leaders, it's essential to have an event coordinator with prior event management experience. This person must be willing to designate at least 4 months to the planning and execution of an adoption event of this magnitude.

It's also essential to have a core of five to ten animal groups interested in working together. Representatives from the groups must be willing to meet and plan over a 4 month period.

Timeline

Each Expo requires about 4 months of planning.

Upfront Costs

Based on the Spring 2008 budget, the Expos cost approximately \$6,250 to produce.

Major expenses are:

Venue (including facility and rentals of tables, chairs etc.)	\$4,500
Advertising	\$ 525

Sponsorship is essential because the only sources of income are booth fees from vendors, donations received at the event, and fees for any additional activities offered. For the TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC Spring 2008 Expo, total non-sponsor income was just \$753. The ASPCA is currently the sole sponsor of the Tampa Expos.

Step by Step

Step 1: Put together a coalition.

While a formal coalition might not be essential in every community, the ability of groups to work together is a must. TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC had already established a habit of working collaboratively with area groups. That habit of cooperation facilitated the planning for the expos.

Step 2: Put together your planning committee and establish a means of communication.

In addition to your event coordinator, you'll need one representative from each group willing to attend planning and information meetings. You also need to agree on a strategy vehicle for handling inquiries from groups and the public. In Hillsborough County, all calls about the event go to a dedicated phone line at the Humane Society of Tampa Bay.

Step 3: Set a date, secure your venue, and work out the logistics.

Once the first event has been held, Silk recommends holding the Expos at the same times each year — say the first weekend in May and November — so the groups can plan ahead and the public begins to look forward to them.

A donated large facility with ample parking like a fairgrounds or convention center is an ideal venue. (TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC pays for the fairground space but parking is donated.) The Tampa adoption events are held indoors. If you select an outdoor venue, factor in additional costs for running electricity and for tent and port-o-john rentals. In addition, be aware that you run the risk of bad weather and possible animal escapes.

The Florida State Fairgrounds has its own food service and rents tables, chairs and other supplies. If your venue doesn't do that, you'll have to line up those items and services. Don't forget to consider security.

You will need an estimate from each organization regarding the number and species of animals they plan to bring.

Display space for dogs and cats varies based on size and age:

- Puppies display well in an exercise pen with a designated volunteer inside the pen.
- Cats display best in carriers placed on six-foot tables (typically four carriers will fit safely on a 6-foot table).
- Cardboard placed between the carriers cuts down on disease transmission and stress.

You'll need to provide tables and chairs, so it is important to have an estimate of how much space each group will need. Groups needing electricity may be charged an additional fee.

Event participants are expected to bring their own carriers and animal care supplies. However, you should expect to assist less experienced groups with their animal displays.

Step 4: Determine your budget, and determine how you will fund the event.

When you determine costs, you may want to reach out to local businesses for sponsorship and donated services (tent rental, etc.). You may also gain revenue by selling vendor booths. (A sample vendor agreement and other forms are available with this profile at www.ASPCApro.org.)

Step 5: Make sure you have the proper insurance.

You'll probably just need to get a rider on your agency's existing liability policy. However, be sure to check with the venue to see what they require. Check with your agency's insurance provider to be sure you are adequately covered.

Step 6: Make expectations clear.

Hold meetings and information sessions with Expo participants and send them detailed instructions, including directions to the facility, a map of the venue, participant requirements and set-up and take-down procedures. Be clear about what you will provide and what you expect of the participating groups.

For example, participants in the Tampa Expo agree to sanitize their cages and public areas throughout the day, to provide the animals in their care with food or treats and fresh water, and to be ready for the public at 9:45AM so that the doors can be opened at 10AM sharp.

Step 7: Develop and implement an advertising and promotion plan.

TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC spent over \$500 on advertising for the Spring 2008 Expo and mounted an aggressive public relations campaign. This campaign included:

- consisting of pre-event press releases
- flyers
- radio and TV

News directors were invited to send reporters to the event to conduct post-adoption interviews and capture the excitement of the day.

Step 8: Secure Supplies

Items you'll need to have on hand include:

- a public address system
- 2-way radios
- cow bell or large noisemaker
- yellow caution tape for parking
- directional signage
- extra animal care supplies and equipment
- poop scoopers and bags etc.

Step 9: Secure volunteers for the day of the event.

Depending on the size of the event, you need volunteers for:

- event set-up
- security
- public information
- event management
- site clean-up

For the Spring Expo, TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC provided approximately 12 volunteers. Each participating group provided from three to 12 volunteers.

Results

The Numbers

The first Expo, in the spring of 2007, found homes for 182 animals. That number jumped to 216 in the fall of 2007 and more than doubled to 386 in the spring of 2008. The Fall 2008 event resulted in 375 adoptions on the day of the event, with potentially more adoptions finalized shortly afterward for animals from agencies that do not have same-day adoption policies.

In addition, TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC reports the following intangible results:

- A significantly improved relationship with local veterinary medical society.
- A new target audience of potential adopters who would not have actively sought out a shelter or rescue group for a pet.
- Increased awareness of reduced-fee, high-quality spay/neuter and wellness services, as well as humane animal care, pet adoption and pet overpopulation.
- Strengthened spirit and resolve of groups in the area to work collaboratively and to continue more “out of the box” thinking and planning.

Critical Factors

According to TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC leaders, putting differences aside and coming together for a cause is essential to the success of an Adoption Expo. They experienced a high level of cooperation and an agreement for effective and professional communication from all groups involved. Because the reputation of each participating group is a concern, however, a highly skilled and effective event coordinator who has conflict-resolution skills is mandatory.

It’s important to be flexible – to recognize differences of opinion among organizations and honor those differences. Sherry Silk advises: “Don’t draw a line in the sand. Accept other organizations’ adoption philosophies, even if you don’t necessarily agree with them.”

This open-minded approach can pay off in some surprising ways. For example, groups whose adoption policies are flexible tend to attract more potential adopters — and adopt out more animals — during the events than groups with very restrictive policies and those who don’t allow same-day adoptions. That experience can be very helpful in changing attitudes about the value of working with adopters to facilitate adoptions rather than erecting barriers to adoption.

Their Next Steps

TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC plans to hold this event twice a year and build on its strong foundation by increasing the number of groups involved and raising the number of animals adopted. The reputation of this event is good, and the coalition should be in a position to solicit new sponsorship support (after ASPCA sponsorship ends) and increase the number of participating vendors.

Words of Wisdom

What Worked

- Keeping guests out until the official start time. People start lining up for the expos over an hour ahead of time, but Silk strongly warns against allowing the public in before the scheduled opening. It complicates setup for the animal groups and may cause friction among guests.
- Allowing groups to raise funds. Allowing individual groups the opportunity to sell promotional items and seek donations for their own organizations creates a “trade show” or “festival” atmosphere. The public and other event participants learn about the various groups and the groups raise some additional funds.

- Requiring groups to stay throughout the day unless they ran out of pets to adopt.
- Not charging an admission fee to the public.
- Ringing a bell after each adoption and announcing at the top of the hour the number of animals that have been adopted raise enthusiasm. According to Silk, attendees usually cheer at the announcements.
- Having security at each exit checking for adoption paperwork whenever a guest leaves the premise with an animal.

What Didn't

- A podium and stage are not needed and only add to event costs.
- Additional activities may be added that include local celebrities, vendors, disaster preparedness information, agility/fly ball/tracking/disc dog demonstrations, raffles, pet micro-chipping and behavior advice; however, these "sideshow" events add additional work and coordination and sometimes may even distract from adoptions.

Be Prepared For

Anticipate foul weather, disagreements between participants, injuries and for animals to react to excitement and stress. Silk's advice is, "Keep it simple and keep smiling! Coordinating an event this large with so many groups and animals involved can be hard. However, as you see the animals being walked out the doors and driving home with their new families, it makes all the hard work worthwhile."



Thumbnail Sketch: TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC

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TampaPets.org, NMHP-HC is a coalition of over 40 animal welfare groups and individuals working together to end euthanasia as the primary means of animal population control and enhance the quality of life for the dogs and cats of Hillsborough County.

Staff

The coalition is an all volunteer organization.

Operating Budget

\$4,000 per year

Business Type

501(c) (3) nonprofit organization