



**Mayor's Alliance
for NYC's Animals®**

Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals: New Hope Transfer Program



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Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals: New Hope Transfer Program

Over 140 agencies have a "distribution partnership" for animals from Animal Care & Control



Before the establishment of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals in 2002, Animal Care & Control of NYC (AC&C) was taking in 43,000 animals a year and euthanizing 74% of them. A vocal activist community was speaking out against the situation, and some rescue groups were transferring animals out of AC&C to improve their chances for adoption. There was no structured program, however, and relations between the rescue community and AC&C were often contentious.

Photo by Rick Edwards courtesy of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals

The Mayor's Alliance was created to facilitate collaboration among four key groups (the public, local government, AC&C, and local no-kill shelters and rescue groups). Together, they work toward the day when no NYC dog or cat of reasonable health and temperament would be killed simply because he or she did not have a home.

Recognizing that cats and dogs at AC&C facilities would have a much better chance for adoption through a formalized distribution partnership between AC&C and the city's vast network of shelters and rescues, the Alliance founders incorporated the Transfer Program as an essential part of the Alliance collaboration.

Stats

- Between 2003 and 2007, adoptions directly from AC&C increased 81%.
- In the same period, animals transferred to participating organizations increased 117%.
- Between 2002 and 2007, the euthanasia rate at AC&C dropped from 74% to an all time low of 43%.

How Cool is That?

We're impressed with the way the Mayor's Alliance saw the issue of low adoption rates (and high euthanasia rates) at AC&C as a basic marketing problem. The Alliance essentially created a giant distribution network of rescues and shelters. They then developed adoption events and venues, as well as other resources, to help both AC&C and the transfer partners get their adoptable animals in front of the widest audience possible.

Adopt or Adapt

While the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals is a multi-faceted collaboration supported in part by a multi-million dollar grant from Maddie's Fund and a million-dollar grant from the ASPCA, the Transfer Program itself is relatively simple in its design. The program could be duplicated in many locations without a significant financial investment.

The essence of the program is a respectful agreement between AC&C and the participating organizations, supported by collaborative adoption festivals and other creative efforts to increase the visibility of shelter animals.

Who They Are and What They Do

The Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals was formed in 2002 as a non-profit, public-private partnership, working with the City of New York to solve the problem of animal homelessness in the city. The Alliance is supported by multi-year grants from Maddie's Fund and the ASPCA, as well as a variety of fund-raising activities.

The Alliance carries out several roles vital to NYC's animals:

- providing a resource for pet owners, shelters, and rescues;
- sponsoring adoption festivals and venues throughout the city;
- administering the Maddie's Spay/Neuter Project NYC;
- providing financial assistance to member organizations to improve their operations and increase their adoption rates; and,
- facilitating communication among participating entities.

The Alliance currently involves over 140 animal rescue groups and shelters as Alliance Participating Organizations (APOs).

How the Program Works

A core objective in forming the Mayor's Alliance was to increase adoptions by increasing the number of adoption venues and providing the public with convenient and innovative access to shelter animals. To that end, the Alliance facilitated the development of a formalized transfer partnership in 2003 through which rescues and shelters remove cats and dogs from AC&C to give them a better chance at finding permanent homes. (AC&C of NYC is a privately funded not-for-profit agency that holds the animal control contract for the city and operates the city's only open-admission, limited-stay facilities.)

The Mayor's Alliance supports the Transfer Program in the following ways.

Staffing

The Mayor's Alliance funds six employees at AC&C's three full-service and two receiving shelters. These employees administer AC&C's New Hope Program with the mission of finding permanent homes for the animals that AC&C is not able to place through its adoption program. New Hope staff members identify those cats and dogs they feel would have a better chance of getting adopted through another agency. Dogs are evaluated using Meet Your Match[®] SAFER[™] to assess canine aggression. The New Hope staff sends e-mail alerts (photos, medical records, and behavior information) regarding dogs and cats available for transfer to Mayor's Alliance President Jane Hoffman, who forwards them to the APOs.

Any group interested in an animal can respond by phone or e-mail. The group then generally has 48 hours to remove the animal from AC&C. The program works on a first-come, first-served basis. Groups do not pay adoption fees. All animals are altered at AC&C before release. AC&C covers costs of caring for the animal during its stay in their facility; however, many groups make donations or voluntarily pay for some services, such as vaccinations. The Alliance pays for extraordinary veterinary care for AC&C cats and dogs through its Picasso Veterinary Fund.
(www.animalallianceny.org/picasso/)

Transport

Recognizing that most people in NYC do not drive – and certainly don't have trucks to transport animals, the Alliance operates a transport program to facilitate the movement of animals. Once a group has agreed to take an animal, they can contact the Mayor's Alliance Coordinator of Transport and Animal Care. Three customized vehicles with drivers are available to take AC&C animals to shelters, rescues, foster homes, veterinary appointments and adoption events. Between 2005 and 2007, the Alliance transported over 5,500 animals. According to Hoffman, they anticipate transporting over 3,000 animals in 2008.

Subsidies

Some partner organizations, referred to as Maddie's Pet Partners, receive subsidies from the Maddie's grant for every transferred animal adopted above their baseline (2003) adoption figures. AC&C began to receive similar subsidies in 2008. Groups may use the subsidy money any way they wish but are encouraged to use it to increase their ability to get animals adopted. (To learn more about Maddie's support of the Mayor's Alliance and view applications, strategic plans and year-end reports, go to http://www.maddiesfund.org/projects/comm_proj_nyc_apps.html)

Resources

The Alliance sponsors adoption festivals and unconventional adoption sites throughout the city. They also offer trainings and grants to help the receiving groups increase adoptions.

Ingredients and Prep Work

According to Hoffman, the most important ingredient was a well thought out plan that was designed to help AC&C in a way this agency wanted to be helped.

Timeline

Getting the Transfer Program up and running took approximately three years after the establishment of the Alliance.

Upfront Costs

According to Hoffman, the Transfer Program was launched with funds from a four-year \$1 million grant from the ASPCA. In the first year, \$220,000 was spent for four New Hope staff members at AC&C and the purchase of an AC&C transport vehicle.

The program is still supported primarily through the ASPCA grant to the tune of \$280,000 in 2006, \$310,000 in 2007 and \$280,000 in 2008. In 2008, the ASPCA grant supports six AC&C staff members. (This does not include the subsidies provided through the Maddie's grant.)

Step by Step

Step 1: Do your homework. Know what the pressure points are for government officials and how your goals and objectives might impact those pressure points.

The establishment of the Transfer Program is inextricably entwined with the establishment of the Mayor's Alliance itself. Hoffman explains that the impetus for the Alliance came from the New York City Bar Association's Animal Law Committee. According to Hoffman, the committee members knew that government officials were getting pressure to address the city's pet overpopulation issues, including the high euthanasia rate at AC&C. Committee members also knew that there was no money in the budget to solve the problem and that Mayor Rudy Giuliani's administration had little interest in the issue.

According to Hoffman, committee members bided their time until the election of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a known advocate of public/private partnerships, opened the door to negotiations.

- In 2001, the committee approached the incoming administration offering to put together a community collaboration that would develop innovative solutions to pet overpopulation and seek significant private money in the form of a Maddie's Grant.
- The committee presented successful models from other major cities and assured the new administration that they were not seeking government money, just buy-in as an active participant in the collaboration.
- The result was a Memorandum of Understanding establishing the Mayor's Alliance relationship with the City that included, among other things, the stipulation that AC&C would participate in a transfer program.

Step 2: Analyze the problem and make a plan to solve it.

Applying for the Maddie's grant forced the Mayor's Alliance to collect extensive data and do a detailed 10 year strategic plan. Hoffman acknowledges that she hated the process at the time but now says it was the best thing that ever happened. "That has been our road map," she says, adding "If you don't have the data, if you don't know how many animals you're dealing with and where they're going, if you can't measure your problem, you can't fix it."

- Making the plan forced the Alliance to look at the numbers of animals coming into AC&C and estimate how many of those animals could be saved (80%). That became their target.
- They then took a realistic look at how many they could reasonably expect to remove and place in a responsible manner.
- Next, the Alliance determined what tools, such as transport vans, new adoption venues, good marketing and media relations, they would need to make that happen.

Of the process, Hoffman remarks, "We wanted the money, we had a deadline, we knew what we had to do. I hated it, but now I thank Maddie's daily." She advises organizations to take a look at the Maddie's process and go through it to focus their thinking even if they aren't applying for a grant.

Step 3: Respect the points of view of all parties.

According to Hoffman, it was very important to acknowledge that AC&C wanted to be seen as a place where the public could come and adopt great animals. They therefore didn't want the rescues to "cherry-pick" all their best cats and dogs. At the same time, it was important for AC&C to understand that, when another organization has a much better chance of placing an animal, transfer is the best option for that animal.

Step 4: Think of adoptions of homeless pets as a marketing challenge.

Hoffman said she thinks of the Transfer Program as a giant distribution network with AC&C as the "wholesaler" and the partner organizations as "retailers" who get the animals face-to-face with the public.

Step 5: Put it in writing.

Though the process can be difficult and time-consuming, Hoffman stresses the importance of working out the details of a transfer program ahead of time and putting them in writing so you can refer back to the document when issues arise.

An operational protocol was adopted between AC&C and the Alliance. Although it has evolved, Hoffman explains, it established the ground rules that allowed AC&C and the rescue groups to begin working as partners. According to Hoffman, "the devil was in the details."

Questions such as whether the groups would pay adoption fees and who would cover the costs of caring for an animal ultimately transferred required serious negotiation. "Don't expect it to go smoothly," she advises, "just deal with each issue as it arises." (Policies and procedures governing the New Hope program are spelled out at www.nycacc.org/newhope.htm. You can also download this information from the resources list for this profile at www.ASPCApro.org.)

Step 6: Provide resources to help everyone involved in the program succeed.

In addition to providing AC&C with New Hope staff and a transport program, the Alliance:

- holds adoption events throughout the city where all groups can showcase their animals;
- provides training to the groups in public relations, talking to the media, showcasing animals and other aspects of professionalism;
- provides funds for holding and boarding of animals in emergency situations waiting to be transferred from AC&C;
- provides emergency medical assistance through the Picasso Veterinary Fund; and

- makes capacity-building grants to help groups build infrastructure, insure sustainability and care for animals better until they are ready for adoption.

Step 6: Keep good stats.

The Maddie’s grant requires detailed record-keeping on the part of groups taking animals from AC&C. Every month, the Alliance gets a report from each transfer partner detailing their intake, source (including transfers), and outcomes. A similar report from AC&C gives the Alliance the opportunity to cross-check. The data collected enables the Alliance and all participating groups to evaluate the impact of the program.

Results

The Numbers

Adoptions & Transfers	2003	2007	Increase
Adoptions Directly from AC&C	4,927	8,905	81%
Animals Transferred to APOs	5,519	12,023	117%
Adoptions from APOs	7,892	17,292	119%

Intake & Euthanasia	2003	2007
Intake	46,187	42,500
Euthanasia	31,700	18,190
Percent Euthanized	69%	43%

Critical Factors

- **The attitude that AC&C is the jewel in the crown of the Alliance.** According to Hoffman, it was important, during negotiations, to approach AC&C with the assumption that they were just as concerned about the high euthanasia rate as anyone else – that they did not want to be killing animals.
- **It was important to refrain from saying that the partners were “rescuing” animals from AC&C,** but instead to acknowledge that the animals had already been rescued by AC&C.
- **Building up the New Hope program within AC&C.** Although the Alliance pays their salaries, the New Hope employees work for AC&C. They are “ambassadors within.” It is their mission to get animals out and available to the public.
- **Developing an attitude of trust among the transfer partners.** Occasionally there are disputes over an animal, but generally the groups understand that it’s first-come, first-served and that the breed rescues often have the best chance of placing purebreds.
- **Keeping the welfare of the animal as the first priority.** Groups know they are expected to get an animal out within 48 hours, but sometimes a pending spay/neuter surgery or other health issue can delay the release. On the other hand, an issue with a foster family might cause a group to fail to meet the deadline. According to Hoffman, AC&C and the rescues have learned to be flexible and do what’s best for the animal.

- **Timing.** According to Hoffman, a 2000 bill would have required the city to build two new full-service shelters. When 9/11 happened, the issue was put on the back burner – for a time, but by 2002, there was “noise in the system.” A vocal activist group was complaining about the “miniscule” number of animals coming out of AC&C. The city was looking for solutions but they were not eager to spend the money to build new shelters. The Mayor’s Alliance offered a non-financial solution that, officials believed, might eliminate the need for new shelters.
- **The fact that the proposal for the Mayor’s Alliance came from a committee of the New York City Bar Association.** According to Hoffman, the source of the proposal gave it credibility among government officials.
- **A “neutral person” leading the way.** Hoffman was known and respected for her work as a founding member of the Animal Law Committee but she did not have any history or affiliation with either the rescue community or AC&C.

Thinking Outside the Box

In NYC, it was essential to recognize that providing transport to move animals around the city would be essential to the success of a transfer program.

Their Next Steps

According to Hoffman, a fourth transport vehicle has been ordered and will be operational by the end of 2008.

Words of Wisdom

What Worked

- According to Hoffman, it was a challenge at the beginning to ask the shelters and rescues to step up and start taking animals before resources were in place to give them the additional support they needed. At first, all the Alliance could offer was increased public awareness, some adoption events and adoption vests for the animals. They were essentially saying to the groups “trust us, we’ll get the Maddie’s grant and then we’ll be able to provide the support you need.” Hoffman feels it worked because there was such a sense of euphoria that the doors had opened and groups were being welcomed into the AC&C facilities. She feels that sense of euphoria overrode the lack of additional resources.
- The Alliance’s newest transport vehicle is equipped with removable, collapsible crates. This provides greater flexibility for loading the vehicle and, when the transfer is made and the receiving organization doesn’t have a crate, the Alliance driver can provide one.

Be Prepared For

- The need to be patient. Hoffmann cautions that this is a long-term multi-year project. “Animals will continue to die as you move along the continuum,” she warns, “and, while this is very frustrating to all involved, you have to be patient and trust your plan.”

Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals: Thumbnail Sketch

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Founded in 2002, the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's animals is a non-profit public-private partnership of over 140 animal rescue groups and shelters working with the City of New York toward the day when no New York City dog or cat of reasonable health and temperament is killed merely because he or she does not have a home. The Mayor's Alliance serves as the liaison between government, animal control, and local animal shelters and rescue groups, as a resource for participating groups, and as the lead agency for funding.

Staff

6 full time

Transport drivers hired as independent contractors on an as-needed basis

Operating Budget

\$3.5 million

Business Type

501(c)(3) not for profit