



## Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon: Mobile Spay/Neuter Service for Ferals

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## Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon

*A mobile clinic dedicated to feral cats*



The Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon (FCCO) provides high-volume spay/neuter services and care for feral and stray cats. Their mobile hospital was the first of its kind in North America, and remains the only mobile hospital exclusively serving ferals.

### Stats

- 2,873 cats altered in 2005; average is 3,000 annually
- Approximately 100 cat surgeries per clinic; average of 3 clinics per month
- 25,000 surgeries performed in the 11 years of FCCO's existence
- Volunteer network 800-strong, including all volunteer vets

### How Cool is That?

FCCO set very targeted goals that were high enough to have an impact on an underserved animal population. Because of travel time and logistics in their large and largely rural state, running a mobile clinic is a labor-intensive challenge. However, FCCO's huge volunteer network enables them to hit their numbers and to provide affordable services that aren't readily available in the remote areas they serve.

### Adopt or Adapt

Despite the challenges, running a mobile clinic can be critically important in rural areas and in communities where caretakers of feral cat colonies don't have access to low-cost spay/neuter services. We at ASPCA® National Outreach™ think FCCO has done an excellent job of reaching populations in need without spreading themselves too thin. Their ability to maintain that balance makes them an excellent model for mobile clinics of any size service area.

# Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon: The Whole Story

*A mobile clinic dedicated to feral cats*

The Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon (FCCO) provides high-volume spay/neuter services and care for feral and stray cats. They operate clinics throughout Oregon and southwest Washington, caring for 3,000 cats per year.

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## Who They Are and What They Do

Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon, Portland, OR  
Karen Kraus, Executive Director

The Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon serves exclusively feral, stray, and abandoned cats in seven communities in Oregon and southwest Washington. The Portland veterinarians who founded FCCO in 1995 had identified feral cats as the most underserved animal population in the state, and they wanted to set up an effective way of helping these cats who weren't getting any care. Since 1995, FCCO has performed over 25,000 surgeries.

The organization's goals are to:

- Increase the quality of life of feral cats
- Provide an affordable medical resource for caregivers of these cats
- Decrease the population of feral cats
- Educate people about feral cats and the benefits of Trap Neuter Return (TNR) as the humane approach to reducing cat overpopulation

FCCO schedules clinics at locations in its service area at the request of verified caregivers of feral cats, averaging three clinics per month. Local veterinarians volunteer their services, performing surgeries in FCCO's mobile hospital. The hospital is a 24-foot van that is specifically designed for spay/neuter surgery. The van has three rooms: prep area, anesthesia area, and a surgical suite that can accommodate 3 vets operating simultaneously.

In addition to the spay/neuter surgery, each cat receives the following treatment:

- Three-way vaccine
- Flea combing and spraying
- Treatment for ear mites
- Treatment for other minor medical conditions as needed
- Tipping the right ear (trimming a small amount of tissue at the top of the ear) to identify the feral as an altered cat

Cat caregivers are responsible for rounding up and transporting cats to the clinic location, and for monitoring and caring for the cats after surgery. Owned cats are not accepted at the clinics.

## Ingredients and Prep Work

### Prerequisites

- Strong champions for the cause who can provide vision and keep everyone focused
- Support of veterinarians

- Solid medical protocols
- Plan to become a 501(c)3 nonprofit

## People

FCCO recommends assembling a board of directors to start up your organization:

- A committed board of directors with diverse skills.
- If possible, a vet who will be the president of the board. This is valuable both for outreach to the veterinary community and for assuring vets, donors, and the public of the professionalism of the medical services you want to provide.

FCCO has found it valuable to have paid staff when it became feasible:

- Staff can provide continuity as volunteer board members change over time.
- Staff can take over operating tasks so that the board can focus on strategic planning and fundraising.

## Up-front Costs and Startup Funding

In 1995, FCCO started with \$1,000 from private donors and some donated equipment and supplies. In 1997, FCCO received an \$82,000 grant from the Leonard X. Bosack and Bette M. Kruger Foundation. The grant enabled FCCO to purchase and outfit their mobile hospital and expand their services beyond Portland.

## Timeline

- FCCO applied for tax exemption as a 501(c)(3) organization in March 1995, received the tax-exempt status in May 1995, and held their first clinic in June 1995.
- From 1995 to February 1998, FCCO held monthly spay/neuter clinics for ferals at Portland-area vet hospitals on Sundays.
- In 1998, when their new mobile hospital was outfitted, FCCO became a mobile clinic. They began providing services across the state (and in southwest Washington), providing all care in the mobile hospital, as they do today.

## Step by Step

### 1. Build a network of people who share your commitment to services for ferals.

- Having a network of committed people enables you to divide duties.
- Assembling people with a shared vision but diverse abilities enables the organization to work more effectively toward its goals.
- FCCO recommends that at a minimum, the board, along with others working to set up the organization, have knowledge and skills in the areas of vet medicine, organization and logistics, and fundraising.

### 2. Find a model: don't reinvent the wheel.

FCCO recommends researching organizations and programs that are similar to what you want to implement. You may be able to find a model that you can adapt for your organization instead of creating everything from scratch.

The programs and services of Alley Cat Allies and FCC of San Diego were important early models for FCCO. Later, FCCO looked to the Red Cross for strategies for using their 800 volunteers effectively.

### 3. Define your service area with care.

FCCO recommends that you consider the following factors when deciding what geographic area you want to cover:

- What contacts and relationships does your organization have with TNR groups and other animal welfare organizations and committed individuals in the area? You will be depending on these groups to trap, transport, and monitor ferals in these communities.
- What contacts and relationships with veterinarians do you have in the communities you want to serve? FCCO relies on the donated services of vets in the communities where they hold clinics. 100% of the vets who do the spay/neuter surgeries for FCCO are volunteers.
- What are the trade-offs for your organization in serving a large geographic area?
  - A statewide or multi-county service area means you can get the word out about TNR to a wider population. In addition, your donor base is larger.
  - The time you spend traveling in your service area costs you money. Also, it can be challenging to work effectively with volunteers from a distance.

### 4. Set high standards, and plan to meet them.

FCCO has found that high standards are especially important when it comes to medical protocols and procedures. Setting the bar high means that the cats receive the best possible care you can give them. In addition, your organization builds a track record of medical excellence, which is vital to the long-term success of the organization.

### 5. Apply for tax-exempt status as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

This federal tax status enables you to accept donations that are tax-deductible for the donors. 501(c)(3) refers to the section of the US Internal Revenue Code that specifies the criteria a charitable organization must meet for tax exemption.

### 6. Create and implement a fundraising plan.

Ongoing fundraising is essential. FCCO requests donations from caregivers for the services they provide to the cats. However, these cover less than a third of operating costs. Some FCCO board members are dedicated to raising funds. In addition, development activities are part of the responsibilities of an FCCO staff member.

### 7. Get help where you need it.

FCCO recommends contacting similar organizations for ideas and support. In addition, FCCO has obtained advice from professionals in fields such as organizational development and strategic planning, law, and accounting. They also established a veterinary advisory committee.

### 8. Take that leap of faith.

Karen Kraus, Executive Director of FCCO, says, "If there isn't a feral program in your area, don't be afraid to step up and be the person to make that happen. Every program started small."

## Results

### The Numbers

- 2,873 cats altered in 2005; average is 3,000 annually
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- 25,000 surgeries performed in the 11 years of FCCO's existence

Firm statistics are not available in the communities where FCCO provides services. However, the feedback FCCO receives is that shelter numbers drop for cats when FCCO regularly holds in clinics in a community. In some areas of the state, no other low-cost options are available for feral cats.

A secondary result is that FCCO's services have enabled more people to become rescuers of ferals. Their large number of volunteers has created a network of trappers and rescue groups that foster and adopt out tame cats and kittens from colonies.

## Critical Factors

FCCO cites the following factors as key to their success:

- Long-term dedicated staff who can fill more than one position (For example, FCCO has a certified vet tech on staff who in addition to her vet-tech responsibilities can drive the van, manage the clinics, procure supplies, and troubleshoot problems on the fly.)
- Having vets involved in defining the medical protocols and procedures
- Getting professional advice when needed

## Thinking Outside the Box

FCCO has remained tightly focused on its mission to improve the quality of life for feral cats and to reduce their overpopulation through spay/neuter services. Even as they've grown, they are always looking at how to reach more feral cats in need.

## Their Next Steps

- Increase their goal for surgeries by 10% by holding mid-week clinics and increasing efficiency at all clinics to maximize the number of surgeries per clinic
- Expand the CertifiCAT program, which enables feral caregivers to purchase a CertifiCAT that so that they can obtain spay/neuter surgery from a participating vet in their community; these vets also provide vaccinations and other basic medical care (comparable to what is provided at FCCO clinics)
- Focus on feral cat colonies, altering as many cats as possible from the same colony at the same time, and providing more support and resources for caregivers
- Target colonies specific locations, such as trailer-park ferals in Salem, OR, and collect data on the results
- Look for ways to help cities without having to travel to them. FCCO is looking at providing funding, training, the CertifiCAT program, and other approaches to long-distance support for feral spay/neuter
- Continue to educate the public about feral cats and TNR

## Some Words of Wisdom

### What Worked

- Building strong relationships with volunteers and TNR groups in areas you want to serve; Karen Kraus says, "These are the groups who will be trapping and bringing cats to your clinic when you arrive. Without their support and involvement, you'd have no cats."
- Hiring dedicated staff who can wear many hats
- Developing policies and procedures that have high standards and that are adhered to
- Keeping people in the organization motivated, and bringing in new people with new ideas

## What Didn't

- Not having electronic records from the very beginning
- Not having a formalized volunteer program earlier

## Be Prepared For

### Challenges:

- Educating the public about feral cats and TNR, and dispelling myths
- Finding and managing volunteers, especially if you are working long-distance
- Getting local veterinarians to understand that the organization is not competing for their business
- Managing the logistics of each clinic (when and where held, how many vets, how many cats expected, etc.)
- Accepting that though the organization is fueled by passion and personal commitment, it needs to be run as a business to sustain itself and remain viable

### Successes:

- The growing knowledge in communities about feral cats, and the number of people who are getting involved in TNR
- More social acceptance of feeding ferals
- Being contacted by people who are interesting in taking on a feral colony

## Your Next Steps

With the information we've provided, can you start a program like this one in your organization? [Click here](#) to send an e-mail to ASPCA® National Outreach with your feedback.

## Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon: Thumbnail Sketch

Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon  
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<http://www.feralcats.com>

The Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon is a trap-neuter-return (TNR) program for feral and stray cats living in Oregon. The focal point of their organization is its mobile hospital, which provides spay/neuter surgeries for feral cats in Oregon and southwest Washington.



The goal of the program is to reduce suffering for existing feral cats and prevent the births and suffering of future generations. The program's services are targeted for feral cats who have caregivers feeding them.

### Staff

FCCO has five paid staff members:

- Executive director, full-time
- Operations director, full-time
- 2 certified veterinary technicians, part-time
- Volunteer manager, part-time
- FCCO staff work out of their homes when not on the road with the mobile hospital.

### Operating Budget

\$210,000 annual operating budget

- \$62,000 from clinic donations for services to ferals
- Remaining through fundraising of other donations

### Business Type

501(c)(3) non profit organization.