

## ***How to Gather and Share Pet Owner Stories to Advocate for Policy Change***

Lack of access to both affordable veterinary care and pet-friendly housing are among the top reasons pet owners cite for making the difficult choice to give up their pets. When pet owners face logistical or financial barriers to accessing veterinary care or pet-friendly housing, they may reach out to your shelter or rescue organization for advice and assistance to potentially help keep pets in their homes. If they are either unable to care for their pet or no longer wish to do so, they may also need your support if surrendering their animal may be the best outcome.

Most people consider pets to be part of their family. Still, sadly, these bonds are being tested by restrictive policies that make it particularly challenging for families, especially lower-income households and renters, to access veterinary care or secure housing that accommodates their four-legged family members.

Strong bonds between pets and people make for stronger communities, and it's critical that we in the animal welfare field collaborate with human service agencies, pet owners, veterinarians, landlords, and policymakers to help keep pets and people together. Animal shelters are on the frontlines of this crisis, and by sharing the stories of the clients you work with, you can be a powerful advocate for change to urge lawmakers to remove barriers that threaten to separate pets and people.

Here are some key steps to help your teams capture pet owner stories to showcase the lifesaving support you provide to pets and people, and ultimately compel lawmakers to take action:

1. **Develop an Internal Database:** Establishing an internal resource where staff and volunteers can elevate client stories that showcase your work and the need for policy change can be helpful for tracking compelling stories and ensuring alignment across your organization to determine where and how you may want to amplify these narratives.
2. **Create a Landing Page:** In addition to capturing stories within your organization, gathering stories from the public can also be helpful for highlighting how the services you provide are helping pets and people or inspiring new ways to support your community. Creating a web page for sourcing stories, including information on what type of stories you are trying to source and why can be another way to capture examples to connect your work and compel people to take action.
3. **Create a Story Submission Resource:** (Here's an example of our [submission form template](#)). Using a story submission form or email address to include on the landing page is critical as it provides people with a place where they can submit their stories. Whether you receive stories by email or through an automated form, it's important to make sure these stories are archived somewhere so you can tap into this resource when there's a timely opportunity to highlight a particular story or attach it to a specific call-to-action. Additionally, you should consult your legal team to ensure the appropriate legal disclosures are called out on the landing page/submission form so people can opt-in to give their consent for you to publicly share any stories/visuals they include with their submissions.

4. **Call for Submissions:** Now that you have the landing page and story submission form set up, it's time to begin seeking entries. We recommend leveraging email, website, social media channels, and in-person events or client interactions to highlight this resource and encourage the public to share their stories. Create a plan to show the timeliness and impact of their story submission.
5. **Reviewing Stories:** As submissions come in, review each story through the lens of your target audience. Is this a compelling story that changes the way you feel or think about an issue? Does the submission have images or videos to accommodate their story, or is there a potential for gathering imagery?
6. **Utilizing Stories:** As you come across interesting stories that you think could change people's hearts and minds on an issue you're trying to address, consider the storytelling techniques that would most appeal to your target audience. Whether you want to raise awareness among your community or compel lawmakers to take action, these stories shared through social media, traditional media, blogs, and emails to lawmakers can be an incredible driver to create change.

In addition to capturing and sharing stories on your own channels, the ASPCA would love to hear from you! We are currently working to gather stories to demonstrate the need for new policies to address the barriers pet owners face when trying to access veterinary care or secure housing to accommodate their pets. If you would be interested in supporting this effort, please share your stories with us [here](#) and we will work with you to best amplify the stories you want to tell to shine a light on the incredible work you're doing to support pets and people in your community.