



Presentation Packet

Breaking down barriers to adoption from animal shelters is one of the ways we can help more animals achieve positive outcomes and lower the burden of overpopulation at animal shelters. [California State Director, UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program Allison Cardona](#) delivered a powerful presentation about saying YES to more people by removing barriers to adoption and by mitigating bias in our adoption processes.

Recordings of her presentation are available to anyone on [Maddie's University](#), but sometimes delivering the message to your staff and stakeholders in your own words can be more impactful than sending someone a link. That's why we've made the slides from her presentation available for you to download so that you can present the information to your teams and others.

How to Use These Materials

Each slide includes notes to help guide you through the material. Where appropriate, we encourage you to share your own adoption stories and ask your audience to share theirs. Reflecting on, and sharing, our own personal stories of animal adoption can help audiences connect with the material. Some slides include questions you can ask your audience to help generate discussion.

A summary of the presentation notes along with the sources referenced in the presentation are also included here for convenience. We hope you find this resource useful.



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#ThanksToMaddie

Slide 1 – Introduction

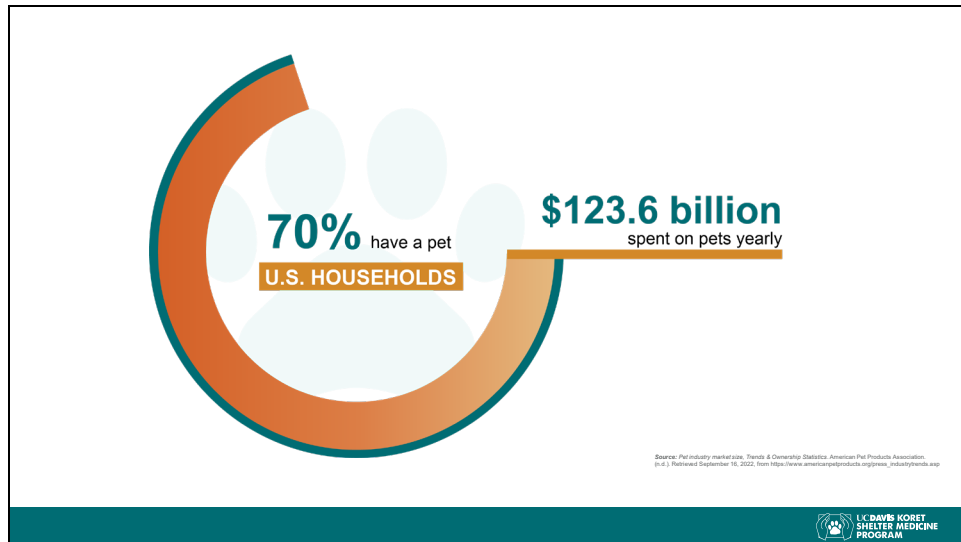


Speaker Notes:

Before you present, consider the following:

- How can you personalize this presentation?
- What has your history been of pet acquisition?
- Where did your family of origin get pets from?
- Set the stage for folks to consider their own experiences beyond animal sheltering.

Slide 2 – US Spending on Pets



Speaker Notes

People love pets and spend a LOT of money on their care and wellbeing. It's important to see the complete picture of pet ownership in the U.S. in order to look at what is at stake.

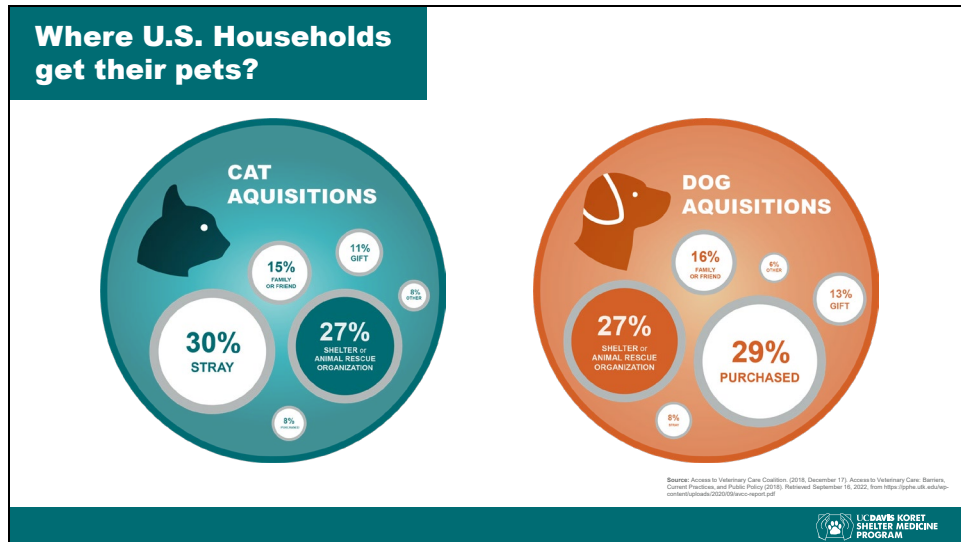
- *2021 Data:*
 - 70% of United States households have at least 1 pet. This figure may even be an underestimate.
 - Americans spend over \$123 billion a year on their pets.

Breakdown:

Pet Food & Treats	\$50.0 billion
Supplies, Live Animals & OTC Medicine	\$29.8 billion
Vet Care & Product Sales	\$34.3 billion
Other Services	\$9.5 billion

(Other Services include boarding, grooming, insurance, training, pet sitting and walking and all services outside of veterinary care)

Slide 3 – Where People Get Pets



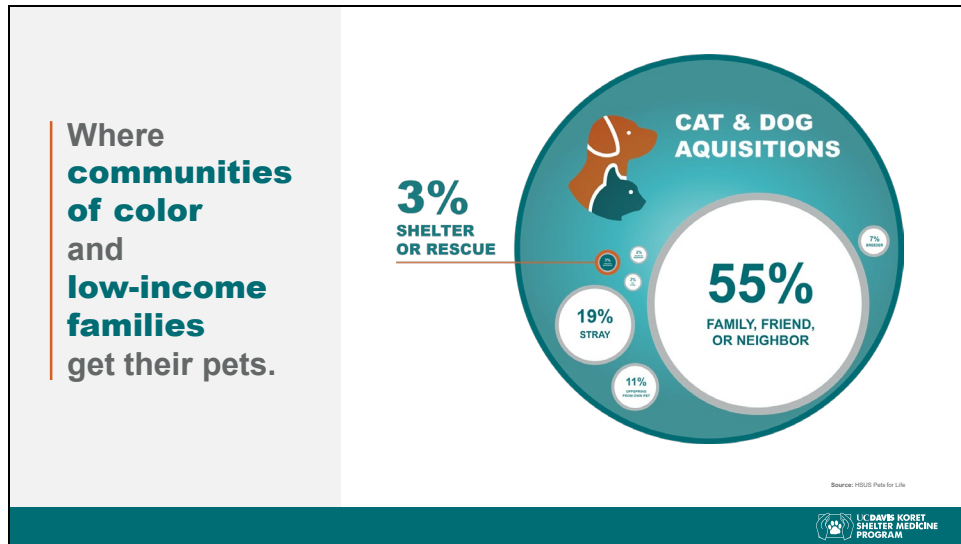
Speaker Notes:

- A survey by the Access to Veterinary Care Coalition found that most people are not getting their pets from shelters or animal rescue organizations. Less than 1/3 of all cats and dogs are acquired through shelters or rescue organizations.
- How cats are acquired as pets:
 - As a stray (30%)
 - Through shelters and rescues (27%)
 - Through family or friends (15%)
 - As a gift (8%)
 - Purchased (8%)
 - Other methods (8%)
- How dogs are acquired as pets:
 - Purchased (29%)
 - Through a shelter or rescue (27%)
 - Through family or friends (16%)
 - As a gift (13%)
 - As a stray (8%)
 - Other methods (6%)

Audience Questions:

- Where have you gotten pets?
- How about your family members and friends?
- How does line up with your own experience?

Slide 4 – Where Communities of Color and Low-Income Families Get Pets



Speaker Notes:

- People of color and marginalized communities have traditionally been excluded from the general Animal Welfare movement.
- A study done by the Humane Society of the United States that surveyed the participants in their Pets for Life community based program found that only 3% of respondents acquired their pets through shelters or rescues.
 - The Pets for Life program serves communities located in focused zip codes where there is limited or no access to veterinary care and pet supplies.
- Instead, the majority of people (55%) got their pets from people in their community that they know and trust.
- How BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color) in Pets for Life program communities acquire pets:
 - Through family or friends (55%)
 - As a stray (19%)
 - Offspring from own pet (11%)
 - Breeder (7%)
 - Shelters. rescues (3%)
 - Purchased (2% pet store, 2% online/newspaper)

Audience Questions:

- How does this line up with your own experience or those of people you know?
- What surprised you about this?

Slide 5 – What it Means for Animal Shelters




What does this mean for **animal shelters**?



Speaker Notes:

Discussion Questions: What does your audience think the information presented so far mean for animal shelters?

Slide 6 – Intakes Outpace Outcomes



“

There are

7.3% more animals entering shelters than leaving so far this year

up from 6% in the second quarter (Jan-Jun).

...This is still the largest gap in 4 years.

”

Shelters Animals Count, The National Database
(Q3 Analysis, 2022)

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Speaker Notes:

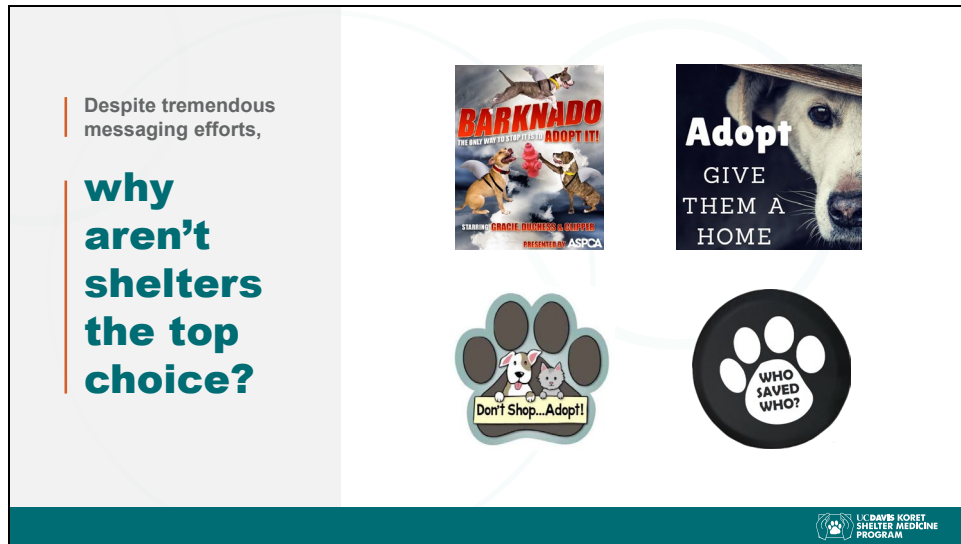
- During this period in 2022, shelters that report data to Shelter Animals Count have seen 17% fewer animals in need of sheltering compared to 2019, but we also have 20% fewer animals leaving shelters, which has resulted in shelters experiencing the biggest population imbalance in the past 4 years.
- There are 7.3% more animals entering shelters than leaving so far this year, up from 6% in the Q2 report (Jan-Jun). While this is forecasted to improve slightly by the end of the year at 5%, this is still the largest gap in the past 4 years.
- In the US, intake is up (not nearly as high as pre-pandemic in 2019, but it is slowly increasing back to that level and outcomes have decreased, leading to increased length of stay).
- Fewer animals are being returned to their families, animals are staying in shelters longer, animals are not getting adopted, and more animals are coming in.

Source:

Shelter Animals Count, Data Reports

<https://www.shelteranimalscount.org/reports/>

Slide 7 – Why Aren't Shelters the Top Choice



Speaker Notes:

- We have worked hard to build messaging into public consciousness such as “save them all”, “rescue”, and “adopt don’t shop”.
- Intake is up which signifies that individuals are *coming* to shelters with their animals, but people are still not *adopting* from shelters.
- There are a variety of reasons this is happening, including a shift to intake of animals that need behavior rehabilitation and extended medical care, animals that are more difficult to adopt. Economic downturn may present challenges to folks adopting new pets. Those concerns need to be investigated and addressed as well but this presentation focuses on the outcome of adoption. In order to fully maximize our adoption potential, shelters need to look at any barriers that exist and identify how to be more inclusive and accessible.
- This webinar will address 3 barriers to adoption and 3 ways to address those barriers.


Slide 8 – 3 Barriers to Shelter Adoption



Speaker Notes:



- The three barriers to shelter adoption discussed in this webinar are: cost, application process, and communications.

Slide 9 – Cost Barrier

**Cost Barrier**

“Adopters don’t value free pets.”

- Studies show amount paid doesn’t correlate with retention or value of the pet.
- Cost of adoption may be a barrier for adopters.
- **Important note:** waiving fees is not the only factor.

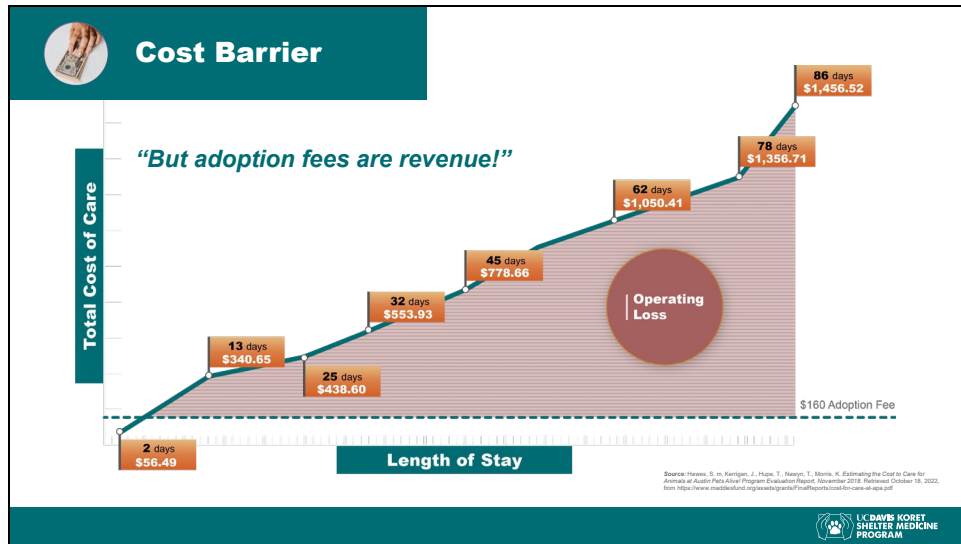


Speaker Notes:

- There is a common misconception that “adopters don’t value free pets” when in actuality, studies show that the amount paid for a pet doesn’t correlate with the retention or perceived value of the pet.
 - There is no difference in the value that people feel whether they paid, were gifted the pet, or the pet was free.
 - Reference to share: A Comparison of Attachment Levels of Adopters of Cats: Fee-Based Adoptions Versus Free Adoptions <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888700903163674>
- High adoption fees can be limiting and a barrier to adoption. Folks may be able to care for a pet long term but not have a lot of money to pay for adoption up front.
- Experiment with reducing and varying prices – don’t equate what people are able to pay with how well they will care for their pets.
- Share your own experience – my first cat was gifted to me by a neighbor. I loved her for 17 years – amount paid does not equal level of care or attachment level.
- **Important Notes:**
 - Although reducing adoption fees can be a very valuable tool, it should be used with context and thought for the community you serve.

- Pairing reduced or no fees with an attention-grabbing promotion that brings attention to the shelter and the animals has been shown to drive more adoptions. It's important to know that having something to promote and market is the driving force behind this strategy. For example, if a shelter always waives adoption fees there is nothing to promote. If they do a 2-week-fees-waived promotion, it is something to advertise/market on social media and drive people in.
- Partnering with the community and figuring out what is attractive can be effective.
- Example: LA County found that completely waiving fees was not the driving factor in increasing adoptions, instead, catchy promos and varying prices by month made a bigger difference. "Not effectively communicating reduced and waived adoption fees is often a barrier to successfully implementing these programs".
- If reduced or waived fees don't equal immediate increase in adoptions, don't lose hope, keep trying different tactics and get feedback from your community. There may be other factors that are keeping folks from adopting.
- Keep trying!

Slide 10 – Adoption Fees vs Cost of Care



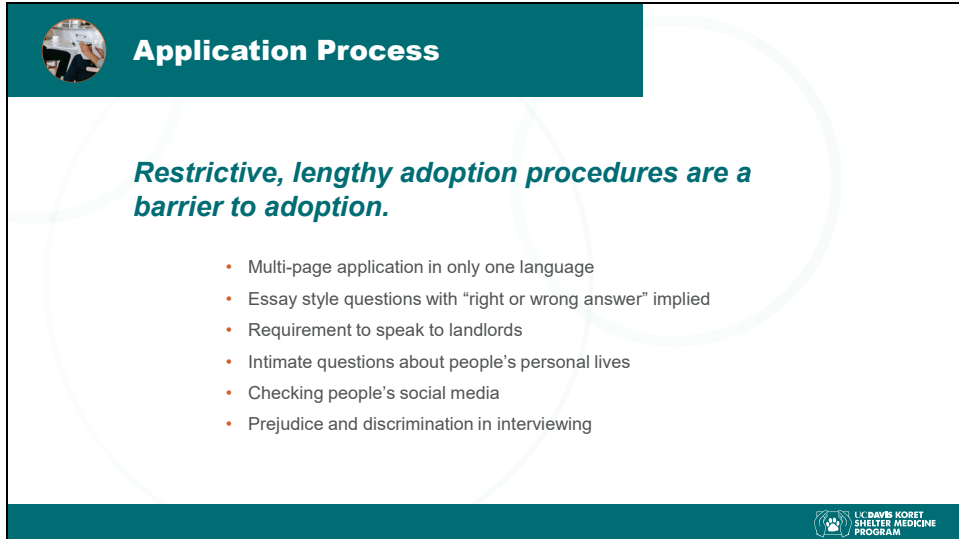
Speaker Notes:

- There is often concern about reducing fees and as a result losing revenue. We hear this a lot from municipal animal shelters that are asked to bring in revenue for their department.
- A study was done by the University of Denver estimating the cost of care at Austin Pets Alive.
- When comparing the length of stay vs. the total cost of care, after just a few days (assuming a \$160 adoption fee), the cost of care far surpassed the income from adoptions.
- The best financial return actually happens if the animal leaves quickly.
- Adoption fees often do not recoup costs or bring in any significant revenue.
- Share this data with others. Use this as an example of not holding on to animals that can be adopted. Best case scenario is for the animal to spend as little time in the shelter as possible.

Source:

Estimating the Cost to Care for Animals at Austin Pets Alive! Program Evaluation Report, November 2018 Institute for Human-Animal Connection, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver Sloane M. Hawes, MSW, Josephine Kerrigan, Tess Hupe, Tressa Nawyn, and Kevin N. Morris, PhD

Slide 11 – Application Process Barrier



Application Process

Restrictive, lengthy adoption procedures are a barrier to adoption.

- Multi-page application in only one language
- Essay style questions with “right or wrong answer” implied
- Requirement to speak to landlords
- Intimate questions about people’s personal lives
- Checking people’s social media
- Prejudice and discrimination in interviewing

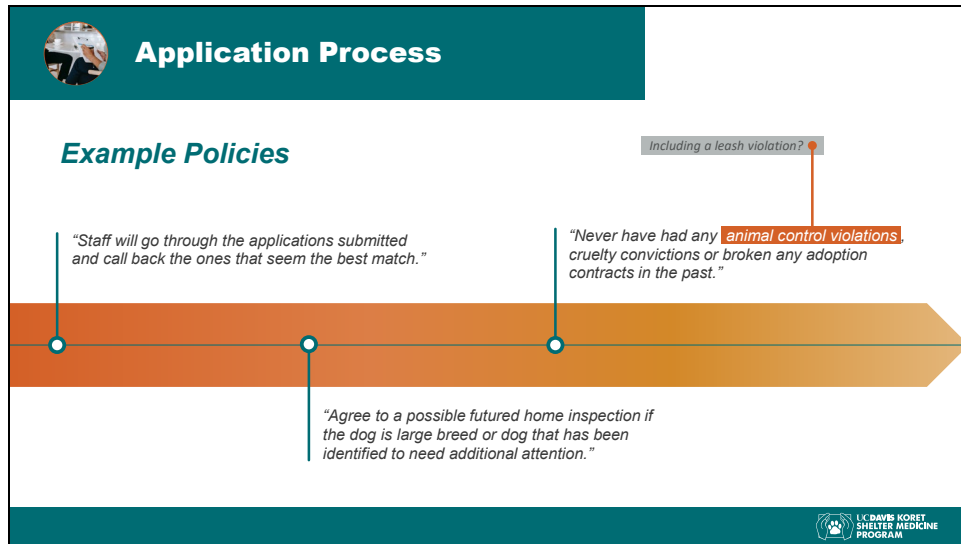
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Speaker Notes:

- Restrictive, lengthy adoption procedures are a barrier to adoption. They are not helping to increase positive outcomes for animals.
- Remember – 70% of households have pets and the majority of folks are not getting their pets from rescues and shelters. We want to make it easier and friendlier to get a pet from a shelter.
- To build trust with community members we have to show trust as well.
- To reduce barriers in the application process consider:
 - Reducing the length of the application (the application should not be multiple pages)
 - Offering the application in multiple languages.
 - Eliminating essay questions.
 - Eliminating questions that have a “right or wrong” answer implied.
 - Eliminating policies requiring everyone in the home to meet the animal before adoption.
 - Eliminating proof of vaccines and medical care for other pets in the home.

- Removing requirements pertaining to housing (speaking to landlords, requiring proof of renting, etc.)
- Eliminating policies requiring adopters to spend a certain amount on pet supplies.
- Eliminating questions asking intimate details about people's lives.
- Avoid making the adoption process feel like an interrogation.
- Stop checking people's social media (yes, this is a thing that some agencies do!)
- Actively work to reduce prejudice and discrimination in interviewing.
- It is important to consider what our main goal is. Of course, we don't want anything bad to happen to these animals, but in reality, once animals are in the community we don't have control over what happens to them. And we want folks to get pets that are spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and microchipped, which is what we provide at shelters.
- Our role and goal should be to act as a resource and serve the community.

Slide 12 – Some Policies Create Barriers



Speaker Notes:

Examples of bias and prejudice in adoption applications/interviews. These are quotes from organization's websites:

- ***"Staff will go through the applications submitted and call back the ones that seem the best match."***

Studies have been done that show that discrimination happens in hiring practices when employers look at names. Even when comparing the resumes of 2 individuals with the same level of experience, training, and education discrimination still happens. If the name sounds ethnic or not white, discrimination will occur. Reference to share Systemic Discrimination Among Large U.S.

Employers <https://eml.berkeley.edu/~crwalters/papers/randres.pdf>

- ***"Applicant must agree to a possible future home inspection if the dog is a large breed or the dog has been identified to need additional attention"***.

Home checks are 100% a barrier. Logistically, it takes a lot of effort and resources to do home checks. Additionally, this practice does not cultivate trust between the shelter and the communities we serve.

- ***“Applicant must have never had any animal control violations, cruelty convictions, or broken any adoption contracts in the past”.***

This statement is very broad. What about a leash violation or a violation for a dog that escaped the yard?

When it comes to cruelty convictions, it is important to consider that BIPOC and marginalized communities are overpoliced so there is a perception that there are more convictions in these communities. The criminal justice system is biased towards BIPOC communities.

Preventing someone that has broken an adoption contract from adopting an animal is a direct contradiction to our mission. As shelters, we say we want people to adopt pets and we tell them if they need to return the animal, they can bring it to us.

Source:

Harvard Study, Discrimination based on names

<https://eml.berkeley.edu/~crwalters/papers/randres.pdf>

Slide 13 – Communication Barrier

**Communications Barrier**

Non-Inclusive Communications

- Events promoted only in English
- Industry jargon used in communications
- Assumptions are made about the community's attitude towards animals
- The adoption process is vague or unclear.





Speaker Notes:

- Adoption applications and information about how to adopt can often be hard to find. Be sure this information is easy to find and accessible on your organization's website. How many clicks does it take to find information about adoptions?
- Applications and communication documents should avoid using jargon and acronyms. Additionally, the adoption process is often vague or unclear. We need to make our adoption process as simple as possible.
- Often, assumptions are made about communities' views/attitudes towards animals. Question generalizations and stereotypes about community members. People love pets and deserve to get support and resources.
- Often events are only promoted in English. Puts up a barrier to people in your community. Consider translating documents and communications into 2-3 other prominent languages in your community. We should aim for the broadest communication possible.

Audience Question:

What barriers to communication do you see in your community?

Slide 14 – Animal Adoption with Fewer Barriers

Animal Shelter Adoption with Fewer Barriers



Simplify Adoption



Partner with Community



Mitigate Bias



Speaker Notes:

These are three areas where we can work to reduce barriers to animal adoption at our shelters.

- Simplify Adoption
- Partner with Community
- Mitigate Bias

Slide 15 – Simplify Adoption

Simplify Adoption



- Regularly review your policies and practices and **challenge the way things have “always been done”**
- **Reduce length of application**, use plain language, and remove jargon or industry speak
- Remove housing related questions****
- **Simplify vague or unclear language** in your application and documentation
- **Provide resources** verbally, in writing and by follow up afterwards



Speaker Notes:

- Keep things simple – There is no need for a lengthy application or questions. Include questions for the adopter - what would they like to know about a pet?
- Regularly review your policies and practices and challenge the way things have “always been done”. Get curious and ask questions like “Who is this policy benefiting? Who is it harming?” This work is a practice, it’s not a one and done situation.
- Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for potential adopters. Provide training for staff and volunteers on how to recognize bias and welcome all who enter.
- Remove any questions from your application that have to do with housing, whether folks rent or own or where the pet will sleep. Remember that you are placing a spayed or neutered, vaccinated and microchipped animal into the community. And you will be a source of information and support to this new pet owner. Communicate the adoption process and look to simplify vague or unclear language.
- You can’t measure love and connection to an animal. That looks different for each individual and no one should have to prove or defend their unique bond. Be a resource and friendly partner to your community members.
- Provide resources verbally, in writing and by follow up afterwards. Folks will be excited in the moment and may not take in all the information. Use follow ups and reminders to let them know you are a resource.

How to simplify adoption applications:

- Get rid of essay questions.
- Remove any questions with a subjective answer.
- Reduce the length of the application and process.
- Get rid of jargon.
- Simplify vague or unclear language in your application and documentation.
- Remove housing-related questions.
- Regularly review your policies and practices and challenge “the way things have always been done”

Slide 16 – Partner with the Community

Partner with the Community

- Get to know your communities
- Learn about **current and historical housing policies** in your area
- Understand **pet-inclusive housing** in your area
 - <https://www.foundanimals.org/pets-and-housing/>
- Learn what **languages** are prominent in your area





Speaker Notes:

- Get to know your community- people in your service area, people who come to your shelter, and people who don't come to the shelter. Find out where people are getting their pets, what needs there are, and what could be helpful.
- Learn about current and historical housing policies in your area. How has redlining affected your communities? Look at census data, housing information and compare it to areas of high intake. You will likely learn about generational wealth gaps that line up with lack of veterinary services and supplies.
- Understand pet-inclusive housing in your area. How many rental units allow pets? Are there breed or weight restrictions?
- Learn what languages are prominent in your area, consider translation to the top 3 languages or certain materials.
- Online translators typically do a poor job of translating documents, promotional materials and forms; online translators should be a last resort.
- Look for staff and/or volunteers who speak the language and are willing to help you translate materials first.

Resources:

Pet Inclusive Housing Resource: <https://www.foundanimals.org/pets-and-housing/>


Slide 17 – Translate Materials


Partner with the Community

Make applications and other materials available in **multiple languages**

Eventos de adopción

Nuestros MEGA eventos de adopción en el sur de Texas tuvieron mucho éxito. ¡Más de 200 mascotas encontraron a sus familias y se fueron a casa! [Lee más](#)






Speaker Notes:


- Learn what languages are prominent in your area, consider translation to the top 3 languages or certain materials.
- This is a great example from Best Friends Animal Society. Check out their website in Spanish for additional resources.

Slide 18 – Mitigate Bias

Mitigate Bias

- Create a **welcoming and inclusive environment** for all potential adopters
- Verify **staff and volunteers understand our goal** of finding homes for pets
- **Don't let** match-making turn into screening
- **Integrate diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging** into your policies and practices.





Speaker Notes:

- All humans are biased, either consciously or unconsciously. Bias is the lens through which we view the world and process information. We need to recognize, acknowledge, and actively work to mitigate and work through bias.
- This is personal work that needs to happen. We must also recognize that our bias influences policies and practices and can create or reinforce institutional bias.
- We must create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all potential adopters.
- It is our responsibility to make sure staff and volunteers understand our goal of finding homes for pets.
- We can't let matchmaking turn into screening, it steers people away from an animal that they may be ready and prepared to adopt. You don't have to determine whether someone is willing to adopt a pet. If they tell you they are, give them the tools and resources to thrive with their new pet.
- We must integrate diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging into our policies and practices. We want to make sure we are integrating racial equity into our practices to make our organizations more welcoming.
- Review your policies and practices. Question everything through a racial equity lens. Make sure you have diverse representation at every level of your organization and that you listen to folks from marginalized and underrepresented communities.

Slide 19 – Black and Latinx Community Not Feeling Welcome in Shelters


Mitigate Bias

Black and Latinx survey respondents report not feeling welcomed at animal shelters.

Love of Pets is Universal but Access to that Love is Not

Understanding the Role of Race and Ethnicity in the Pet Care Ecosystem
Presented to The Association for Animal Welfare Advancement
June 2022

Study by Habri and Petco Love



Speaker Notes:

- A survey by Habri and PetCo Love found that Black and LatinX individuals do not feel welcome at animal shelters. 68% of Black respondents said they did not feel welcomed at animal shelters.
- This has to change in order to create more inclusive environments and increase adoption outcomes.
- A great resource is the Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) training course available through Companions and Animals for Reform and Equity CARE <https://careawo.org/redi/>

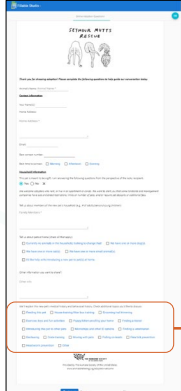
Slide 20 – Lowered Barriers in Action

Lowered Barriers in Action

"We believe in lowering the barriers to adoption
and because of this we do not require a minimum adoption fee. We do, however, rely on financial contributions. Any funds received is at the discretion of the adopter and goes toward the care of animals in our rescue."
- Seymour Mutts Rescue

Relatively short adoption questionnaire

Adopter can ask for additional pet care information



The screenshot shows a web form titled "SEYMOUR MUTTS RESCUE". It includes fields for "First Name", "Last Name", "Email", and "Phone". There are sections for "Adoption Information" and "Additional Information". A red box highlights the "Additional Information" section, which contains a list of checkboxes for "Additional Pet Care Information". The form is labeled "Relatively short adoption questionnaire" and "Adopter can ask for additional pet care information".

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Speaker Notes:

- This is a sample adoption application. It is very simple, short, and straight-forward.

Sources:

"We believe in lowering the barriers to adoption and because of this we do not require a minimum adoption fee. We do, however, rely on financial contributions. Any funds received is at the discretion of the adopter and goes toward the care of animals in our rescue." Seymour Mutts Rescue

Madison Cat Project: Adoption questionnaire is pretty short

Jacksonville Humane Society <https://jaxhumane.org/adopt/how-to-adopt/#1629478706902-e26cb8f2-506a>

LA County Animal Care and Control

Slide 21 – Lowered Barriers in Action (cont'd)

Lowered Barriers in Action

Online

Step 1: Complete the Adoption Questionnaire

What kind of pet are you interested in? Complete the Adoption Questionnaire to let us know!

¿Habla español? ¡Complete el cuestionario de adopción en español!


If you would like to fill out a questionnaire in Chinese, or would like a PDF version of our English or Spanish Questionnaire, please download the relevant form and email it to AdoptMCASAC@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Questionnaires and documents offered in multiple languages

¡Adopte el mismo día! *
¡Realizamos adopciones el mismo día! Una vez que recibamos y revisemos toda su información, se le pedirá que programe una cita para conocer a los posibles nuevos miembros de la familia. Si se enamora ¡se lo llevará a casa ese mismo día!

☐ Lo espero con ansias!

Source: Montgomery County Animal Services and Adoption Center
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/animalservices/adoption/howtoadopt.html>

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Speaker Notes:

- This is an example of how to adopt adoption applications by translating them into multiple languages.

Sources:

Montgomery County Animal Services and Adoption Center

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/animalservices/adoption/howtoadopt.html>

Slide 22 – Lowered Barriers in Action (cont'd)

Lowered Barriers in Action


Promotional materials are produced in multiple languages





Slide 23 – People Love Pets

People love pets
and want a place
where they can
find a companion
and receive
ongoing support.



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Speaker Notes:

People love pets and want a place where they can find a companion and receive support. Remember the facts: People get pets and they don't generally get them from shelters and rescues. We want to increase the number of animals adopted from our organizations. We can make a difference!

Slide 24 - References

- Access to Veterinary Care, Barriers, Current Practices, and Public Policy <https://pphe.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/avcc-report.pdf>
- American Pet Products Association https://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp
- Shelter Animals Count 3rd Quarter Report 2022 <https://www.shelteranimalscount.org/intake-and-outcome-data-comparison-for-q3-2022/>
- A Comparison of Attachment Levels of Adopters of Cats: Fee-Based Adoptions Versus Free Adoptions <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888700903163674>
- Estimating the Cost to Care for Animals at Austin Pets Alive! Program Evaluation Report, November 2018 <https://www.maddiesfund.org/assets/grants/FinalReports/cost-for-care-at-apa.pdf>
- Systemic Discrimination Among Large U.S. Employers <https://eml.berkeley.edu/~crwalters/papers/randres.pdf>
- CARE, Companions and Animals for Reform and Equity, Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) training <https://careawo.org/redi/>
- Best Friends Animal Society resources in Spanish https://support.bestfriends.org/site/SPageNavigator/es_us/inicio.html



- Access to Veterinary Care, Barriers, Current Practices, and Public Policy <https://pphe.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/avcc-report.pdf>
- American Pet Products Association https://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp
- Shelter Animals Count 3rd Quarter Report 2022 <https://www.shelteranimalscount.org/intake-and-outcome-data-comparison-for-q3-2022/>
- A Comparison of Attachment Levels of Adopters of Cats: Fee-Based Adoptions Versus Free Adoptions <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888700903163674>
- Estimating the Cost to Care for Animals at Austin Pets Alive! Program Evaluation Report, November 2018 <https://www.maddiesfund.org/assets/grants/FinalReports/cost-for-care-at-apa.pdf>
- Systemic Discrimination Among Large U.S. Employers <https://eml.berkeley.edu/~crwalters/papers/randres.pdf>
- CARE, Companions and Animals for Reform and Equity, Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) training <https://careawo.org/redi/>

- Best Friends Animal Society resources in Spanish
https://support.bestfriends.org/site/SPageNavigator/es_us/inicio.html