**Scripts when dogs are presented to the shelter**

**Goal:** Gain objective information about the dog to ensure it is not injured or ill and accordingly determine the best care and pathway placement for the dog.

* **Secondary goal:** Determine if the person and dog can be helped in a way that does not involve shelter intake/get the dog back home.
* **Secondary goal:** Determine if the finder can help the shelter by temporarily holding on to the dog and possibly help to rehome the dog.

**Things to keep in mind:**

* This process can be emotionally tolling for many people (community members & shelter personnel)
* Work towards building relationships based on respect, trust and safety
* Focus on working with the finder or owner rather than against them, remembering the power dynamic between your organization and the finder or owner (emphasis is on comfort v. control)
* Frame questions and responses with empathy and curiosity, being mindful not to be judgmental
* People may not feel comfortable telling their story for a variety of reasons, many of which we’ll never know; it can behoove us to refrain from assuming selfish or manipulative intent and instead focus on working together no matter what the back story may be. Instead of seeking to discover inconsistencies or call out people for lying, approach all interactions with respect, assume positive intent, and recognize that the person bringing the dog in is making the best choice they feel they can make.
* Understand when flexibility can be helpful to meet client and/or pet’s needs while also benefiting the shelter (i.e., consider accommodating or flexing organizational policies or practices to help keep the pet with their family or finder)
* Use curiosity to help overcome biases that may be affecting interactions with the finder or owner
* Offer real, solution-focused choices, focusing on strengths and not deficits
  + Instead of asking “Do you want to leave this pet here and be potentially euthanized or do you want to help the pet?
  + Try “Our shelter is (nearly) full. This makes it hard for us provide care for all of them and puts many of the dogs at risk for euthanasia. This also means we are at risk of not being able to help animals experiencing a crisis. Can you help by keeping this/your pet in your home while we help find a new home?”
* **Why might someone try to turn in their own dog as a stray to the shelter? What changes to the intake process could help “shape the path” if your primary goal is to collect truthful, objective information about the dog?**
  + For example, if you feel the finder is actually the owner and that they’re calling the dog a stray to avoid feeling ashamed, explain why it’s important to know if the dog is owned or stray in order to ensure the best care and outcome for the dog.
  + Perhaps they cannot pay the surrender fee. Can you invite them to donate an amount that they can afford toward the cost of caring for the dog instead of having set fees?
  + Think of as many other possible reasons someone might feel more comfortable providing false information, and for each, identify at least one change that could be made to help improve the chances that people feel able and invited to provide accurate information.

**Questions:**

* **This is a judgement-free zone - we want to work with you to make the best decision for this dog. Please let us know how we can assist you today.**
* Use reflective listening to engage with people presenting animals to the shelter for intake, for example:
  + “It sounds like you found this dog running loose last night near First Avenue and you were worried they might get hurt, so you brought the dog home to keep them safe, and you’re here today to turn the dog in to the shelter?”
  + “If impounded we are legally required to hold a stray dog in the shelter for X days before we can adopt them out, while surrendered dogs can go home right away which is better for the dog. We would really appreciate any information you might know about this dog’s owner so that we can try to get him/her back home or adopted out as quickly as possible.”
    - Where did we find this dog? Why did you pick up this dog and bring them to the shelter?
    - Any ideas of where it lives or might live? [Yes/no/I know or think I know but don’t want the dog returned]
    - How long have you had this dog in your care? [\_\_hours/days/weeks/months]
    - Does the dog have any signs of ownership? [Collar/tags/another item around neck/microchip/etc.]
* Ask if the finder is willing to help the shelter by temporarily holding onto the dog:
  + **We have some options that can help you get this dog home without impounding them to the shelter. Would you like to learn more about these options?**
    - Yes, I could hold this dog for a couple of days to give the owner time to reclaim
    - Yes, I could hold this dog and help get them adopted if their owner is not found
    - Yes, I would consider fostering or adopting this dog after the stray hold period
    - No, I am unwilling or unable to hold this dog for any amount of time
    - Other (please specify)
* **We have a few more questions that will help us find the best placement for this dog if we can’t locate their family.** 
  + What does the dog do when approached by or approaching another pet, a human, a child?
  + When at your home what or who did the dog avoid (other pets, children, men, women, trash can, etc.)?
  + When out for a walk, what or who did the dog avoid (e.g., other dogs, people, trash cans, noisy vehicles, etc.)?
  + What did this dog do when provided food, treats, a bed, or toys?
  + Do you know if the dog knows any commands, is house-trained, knows how to walk on a leash?
  + Have you noticed any medical issues with the dog?
  + To your knowledge, has this dog bitten anyone in the past 10 days?
  + What is this dog’s favorite things to do?
  + Is there anything else you would like to share about this dog?