

A 5-step plan for helping shelters and rescue groups

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VETERINARY ECONOMICS

If you want to help shelters but don't know where to start, Linda Wasche, president of LW Marketworks in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., has a plan for you. She's advised veterinarians on how to work with their local shelters and even sells T-shirts and items promoting spaying and neutering. Her organization, [Nooters Club](#), uses whimsical cartoons and sayings like "My dog stops at heavy petting" and "Prevent littering" (get it?) to grab pet owners' attention. Wasche's five-step process has helped veterinary hospitals set up financially sensible ways to collaborate with animal-welfare groups in the community. Use her advice as a framework to build a more detailed plan with the organization of your choice.

Step 1: Determine your goals. What do you hope to achieve by working with a shelter or rescue group? Do you want peace of mind and a sense of giving back? Do you want to improve your associate's surgery skills with high-volume spays and neuter procedures? Do you want to attract new clients? Do you want to amp up your visibility in the community? Figure out what you want before establishing a relationship with a group.

Step 2: Brainstorm ways to reach your goals. To boost your new associate's surgery savvy, ask her to perform a day's worth of spay and neuter procedures once a month. To boost community awareness of your clinic, you could take on one medically complicated case a month from the organization and then publicize your work through the shelter newsletter or stories in local media. (Check out Linda Wasche's [latest stories](#) for more on generating media coverage.) To attract more clients, you could offer free wellness exams or discounts to people who adopt pets from a particular group or shelter.

Step 3: Write your plan. Figure out how much you're willing to do in a certain period of time and what you expect to receive in return. For example, you'll provide a certain number of tests or exams during a three-month period, and the shelter or group will provide a certain amount of publicity in their facilities, in the community, and to adopters. Many groups offer Web sites, newsletters, and other opportunities for promoting your clinic.

Step 4: Educate the stakeholders. Make sure your team and the organization you're working with understand the plan and what you can comfortably give. With everyone agreed on the help you'll provide, you'll feel less guilt and enjoy more pleasant relationships with the animal-welfare world. When other organizations contact you, tell them you're already helping another group but you'll keep their contact information so you can get in touch if you can help in the future.

Step 5: Check that the plan is working. If the provided services are straining your budget or your team's resources, consider cutting back. If the group hasn't used all the services you've committed, ask them if there's something else you can do—or offer the services to another organization. If you're hoping to boost client numbers, look at the referrals from the shelter or rescue group and see if these people have become clients. Tweak your plan based on what you find.

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