



Steps for Planning an Animal Shelter

Keep in mind that these steps may not occur in this exact order and some may overlap. Every organization is different. This is intended as a general guide. It is not comprehensive, but rather is to help organizations understand the components of building a new facility.

While we are talking about facilities, it's important to note that while there will always be some animals that need sheltering, trends in the field of animal welfare are increasingly moving toward robust community involvement and volunteer program development, including foster care. These programs rely less on large brick and mortar shelters that house large numbers of animals and more on community participation. There is also an increased focus on access to veterinary care and other services for the community that help keep pets in homes and community cats in their outdoor homes.

CLARIFY GOALS OF THE ORGANIZATION

The first step is to get clear on the goals of the organization. Discussions with the board and staff leadership can help ensure everyone is on the same page. Here are some questions to guide these discussions:

- What will the organization be doing in 10 years?
 - What programs and services will be offered? Do these include the operation of a clinic? Public spay/neuter or veterinary services? Sheltering? Adoption? Sanctuary? Foster care? Community educational events? Field services? TNR? Stray holding and RTO, Other?
 - Which species will be served?
 - What are the estimated intake and adoption numbers?
- What is driving the consideration of a new facility? Why is it needed?
- What goals will the new facility allow the organization to achieve?
- What type of facilities make the most sense for the goals of the organization?

ESTABLISH A COMMITTEE OR PROJECT MANAGER

Establish a small committee with a strong and effective chairperson or appoint a project manager for this effort.

CONSIDER TRENDS IN THE FIELD

Consider the direction things are taking in the field of sheltering and animal welfare at large. If no one on the team is already tuned into current best practices and trends in the field, find a way to acquire this information. Working with consultants, conducting your own online research and attending conferences can all help ensure that you have the information you need to help inform plans.

Share this information with those engaged in this process (board members, leadership, key staff, etc.).

CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY STUDY

A feasibility study is an analysis that takes into account all of the relevant factors that may impact a project including economic, technical, legal, and scheduling considerations. The goal is to ascertain the likelihood of completing the project successfully.

At the very least it is essential to look at two major factors that will affect the success of your plans:

- The Community: Assess the ability of the community to support the capital campaign for a new facility. Will you likely be able to raise the funds needed to build and to sustain the new facility?
- Your Organization Development Capacity: Here the word development is just a fancy way of saying fundraising. Will your organization be able to manage the capital campaign (the fundraising effort for the building).
 - What assets are available? Financial, staff, board, volunteers, etc.
 - What is the status of the organization's donor cultivation efforts to date?
 - Are there clear lead gift prospects?
 - Are there potential major gift prospects in your donor database?
 - What needs to be done to be ready for this major fundraising effort?
 - Is financing an option for some of the building costs?

CONDUCT RESEARCH

Learn from Other Organizations: Research, visit and talk with other shelters that have recently completed major building projects. The insights they can share can be invaluable. Often you can also gain insights into the selection of a shelter design firm or architect as well as practical advice.

- Discuss what worked well and what did not with others who have recently completed capital campaigns and built facilities.
- Review latest best practices in animal housing in shelter settings.

Online Resources: You or someone on your team should check out these online resources.

- Facility Design, Shelter Animal Housing and Shelter Population Management 2019 <https://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/resources/?r=facility-design-shelter-animal-housing-and-shelter-population-management>
- HSUS Animal Sheltering – Shelter Design (multiple articles) <https://www.animalsheltering.org/topics/shelter-design>
- Design for Health: Building Welfare into Shelter Construction 2014 <https://www.aspcapro.org/webinar/20141014/design-health-building-welfare-shelter-construction>
- Planning and Building an Animal Shelter 2010 American Humane Association (dated, but still some helpful information) <https://americanhumane.org/app/uploads/2016/08/op-guide-planninganimalshelter.pdf>
- Shelter Design, HSUS (dated, but still some helpful information) <https://www.animalsheltering.org/sites/default/files/documents/hsus-shelter-design-packet.pdf>

SET CLEAR PRIORITIES

Having gathered a lot of information, revisit the organization's key priorities for the organization at large and for this project specifically. Document the desired results for this undertaking and the key priorities in writing and get approval on it from the board.

INTERVIEW ARCHITECTS & DESIGN FIRMS

Talk with several different architects or shelter design firms to find one that is a good fit with your organization.

- Call other organizations that have worked with them to seek their candid input on the working relationship and results. Ask pointed questions to get specific information.
- If you are going to work with a firm that has not designed a shelter before, be sure that they familiarize themselves fully with the many unique needs of animal shelters.
- Select a firm and/or architect.

DEVELOP A BUDGET & A PLAN FOR FUNDING

Determine the cost of the building you want as well as the cost of operating the facility. In your planning, be sure to include these elements of a typical financial planning document for a new facility called a Proforma:

- Hard Costs: Tangible assets, such as the land and the building. Other hard costs include construction, grading, paving and sidewalks, landscaping, environmental hazard mitigation, road improvements, utility connections, upgrading or extensions, equipment and caging, furnishings, signage, telephone, computer, intercom, and security systems.
- Soft Costs: Services, such as architectural, engineering, legal, accounting, construction financing, and contingencies.
- Fundraising expenses for the capital campaign and/or financing (principal and interest payments).
- Operating Expenses: Taxes, insurance, utilities, maintenance, etc. Keep in mind that a new facility may impact your operating budget in other ways. For example, additional staffing, including more experienced managers, may be needed in a larger facility handling more animals or providing new or expanded services.
- Full Capital Campaign and/or Financing Plan:
 - Identify the total amount you need to raise not only to build the facility but also to outfit the building with equipment and furniture and to move into it, as well as the cost of executing the capital campaign. Because a capital campaign can draw on some of your routine donations while it is underway, it's important to plan carefully.
 - Have a drawing of the planned facility prepared. This is essential to selling the idea to supporters.
 - Develop clear messaging. You need to be able to clearly express what the building will enable you to accomplish for the animals. Stories are a powerful element to build the case for the need for any fundraising effort, but you also need to have statistical goals to support the case for the new facility.
 - Develop recognition packages (naming opportunities and other recognition for contributors).
 - Seek lead and major gifts, as well as energize the community to bring in many mid-sized and smaller gifts to raise the target amount.

CREATE A BUILDING PLAN

Things to consider in developing a building plan are:

- Guidance from a professional architect/shelter design firm is essential.
- It should include site location, zoning, permits, architectural plans, and construction schedules.
- Shelters have specific requirements. Be sure to consider these factors in your planning:

Steps for Planning an Animal Shelter

www.humanenetwork.org ♦ info@humanenetwork.org ♦ 858-395-3677

- Efficient and safe flow of animals through the facility. The floor plan of a shelter or clinic is especially important to get right, because it will dramatically affect efficiency and the flow of animals which impacts health, safety, and potentially even length of stay.
- HVAC air exchange for odor and infection control.
- Noise control for dog housing.
- Sanitation and drainage.
- Following specific animal housing and safety regulations.
- Compliance with the Five Freedoms <https://www.sheltervet.org/assets/docs/shelter-standards-oct2011-wforward.pdf>.
- Overcoming any neighbor objections to the construction of a shelter.
- Consideration of animal holding space (species specific), isolation space, grooming and bathing, food prep, storage space for supplies and equipment, laundry, utility and clean up, cage washing/pressure wash system, euthanasia, behavioral assessments, play areas, employee break room and locker room, animal admissions, adoptions, training, field services (may include need for vehicle storage and safe animal transfer from vehicles in an enclosed sally port), administrative and program staff offices, classroom/conference room, veterinary clinic and/or treatment space, surgical suite, clinic reception, and other very specific clinic needs such as pharmacy, lab and Xray spaces, etc.
- Compliant with ADA and OSHA regulations.
- Water and sewer or septic needs. It is imperative that is available and affordable. It is not uncommon for code changes to have unexpected consequences that do not turn up until the permitting process. California has some of the most stringent regulations regarding water conservation and usage.
- Architectural illustrations and information to be prepared. This needs to include a site plan with identified access points, parking, layout, landscaped areas and buildings with "footprint" location, diagrammatic floor plans with general room sizes and configuration, exterior elevations demonstrating scale, image, appearance, and massing, exterior and interior sketches illustrating building appearance, and a working budget for project costs.
- Selection of a contractor:
 - Seek local word-of-mouth recommendations.
 - Conduct phone interviews. Do they take on projects of your size? Are they willing to provide financial references, from suppliers or banks? Can they give you a list of previous clients? How many other projects would they have going at the same time? How long have they worked with their subcontractors?
 - Ensure proper licensing.
 - Call former clients and ask pointed questions.
 - Request bids.
 - Don't automatically go for the lowest price; consider past client satisfaction and communication.

START CONSTRUCTION

Components of the Construction Process: Throughout the process there are specific steps that need to be taken. Pages 57 – 59 of this American Humane document detail the steps of three phases and who is

Steps for Planning an Animal Shelter

www.humanenetwork.org ♦ info@humanenetwork.org ♦ 858-395-3677

responsible for each (<https://americanhumane.org/app/uploads/2016/08/op-guide-planninganimalshelter.pdf>).

Material selection: The selection of materials can be especially important for a shelter. For example, non-slip surfaces (for safety) also need to be easy to sanitize to prevent disease in the shelter. The shelter not only needs to meet the practical needs, it also needs to look appealing for the public. Pages 65 – 72 of this American Humane document (<https://americanhumane.org/app/uploads/2016/08/op-guide-planninganimalshelter.pdf>) while dated, has some helpful information about materials. Pages 73 - 77 cover lighting, HVAC, and other key items that need to be considered. This HSUS document (while also dated) has a lot of helpful information on shelter planning considerations in the appendix (<https://www.animalsheltering.org/sites/default/files/documents/hsus-shelter-design-packet.pdf>).

Building a new facility is challenging, but with preparation and thoughtful planning it can be very rewarding and help your organization achieve its goals.