Community Cat Management
Jacksonville, Florida
City of Jacksonville: Historical Perspective:

The city of Jacksonville was founded as Cowford in 1791 when cattlemen used the area to ford their livestock across the St. Johns River to move them to northern markets. After Florida Territory was sold to the United States by Spain in 1821, General Andrew Jackson successfully conquered the Spanish territory and then was required to return it to Spain, Cowford became known as Jacksonville in honor of the first territorial governor. In the late 1800s Jacksonville became a major winter destination with several notable industrialists as residents. That notoriety along with the mild climate made Jacksonville the “Winter Film Capital of the World” with more than thirty film companies, until Hollywood was formed and the film industry left Florida.

In its more modern history, after nearly the entire city was destroyed by The Great Fire of 1901, the growingly mobile population of the 1920s found Jacksonville as the Gateway to Florida due to the excellent railroad system and accessibility to the ocean by the St. Johns River ports. That provided a wide variety of economic opportunities, but the region was segmented. In 1968, the City of Jacksonville became the largest landmass city in the lower forty-eight states, having been made a consolidated city-county government (and is the thirteenth largest city in the United States). The consolidated city features an urban core with a modern city center and focused downtown development, suburban residential neighborhoods composed of both traditional and gated communities, rural residential zones and agricultural areas, and the largest amount of land set aside for parks of any city in the entire country. It is also home to major naval installations. Jacksonville is comprised of 918 total square miles, of which, 774 are land and 114 are water (primarily the St. Johns River).

The major players in the Jacksonville animal welfare community are the City of Jacksonville’s new Animal Care & Protective Services Division, the Jacksonville Humane Society and First Coast No More Homeless Pets. Since 2008 these organizations have formed a uniquely-focused coalition to move Jacksonville toward becoming a no kill community.
Until the late 1970s, the city of Jacksonville operated its animal control program as an agency that picked up loose dogs and took nuisance animals; some were reclaimed by owners but most ended up being killed – there was no adoption program. Realizing the need for expanding into more modern practices the Animal Care & Control Division (JACPS) was formed, and an adoption wing was added to the operation. Remarkably, the sterilization of all adopted animals was not accomplished until the early 2000s; prior to that, responsible adopters made arrangements to have their newly-adopted animals sterilized but most adopted animals were not sterilized. Jacksonville took a step forward by starting the SpayJax Program that afforded low-cost and free sterilizations to those citizens that received some form of public assistance; JACPS started sterilizing adoption animals in-house. In 2007, the City restructured and modernized its operations. A new shelter was built, a new management team was hired and new programs began. In late-2009 JACPS and its new facility were unveiled with a new plan of how to best serve the community.

The Jacksonville Humane Society (JHS) has been a fixture in animal welfare for more than 125 years. At one time it split the animal control function with the City through a contractual relationship. In 2005, JHS adopted a no kill policy, stopped operating as an open admission shelter, and ended its contractual relationship with Jacksonville to provide any animal control functions. The relationship with the City shifted to a contract to assist in the placement of homeless and unwanted pets that were removed from the municipal shelter. In 2007, the Jacksonville Humane Society’s facilities experienced a severe fire destroying much of their facilities. Although the original capacity of the shelter was rebuilt a current capital campaign is underway to build a state-of-the-art facility in the near future; a community animal hospital recently opened on their campus.

First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP) was founded in 2001 in response to the city of Jacksonville’s desire to create a city-funded spay/neuter program. Jacksonville, Florida moved forward with a major investment in the program there were no existing entities in the area positioned to handle the task. In 2009, FCNMHP opened one of the largest spay/neuter clinics in the U.S. with a designed capacity of 200 daily sterilization surgeries. Founder and executive director Rick DuCharme was a pioneer in pulling together resources in a very short period of time to allow the city of Jacksonville to transform from old traditional methods to the innovation of all-in feral cat management overnight with his Feral Freedom program that led to a comprehensive, active community cat management philosophy throughout Jacksonville, Florida.
**A History Snapshot of Joint Jacksonville Statistics**

**Jacksonville Shelter Statistics 2001-2010**

**Jacksonville Community Cat Management**

Like most government run animal control agencies, Jacksonville had utilized the traditional practice of trapping feral cats, holding them a specified period of time, and then putting them down (*en masse*). Virtually no cats trapped deemed feral ever were reclaimed by owners, nor were they afforded other opportunities for rescue or trap, neuter, and return. In fact ear-tipped cats were not allowed to be reclaimed or returned under the original practices of the city of Jacksonville. Those practices began to change in 2008.

A simple request for the City of Jacksonville to consider revising its long-standing practice of not allowing ear-tipped cats to be reclaimed by feral cat colony caregivers turned into something much bigger than ever anticipated. FCNMHP’s Rick DuCharme approached the city about not euthanizing ear-tipped feral cats, which were often being sterilized through his organization, and allowing them to be returned to the colony. The city’s director of environmental compliance (an engineer by trade and education) not only authorized the return of ear-tipped cats, but also suggested that if that was good for some feral cats it should be good for all feral cats. With virtually no knowledge of the earth shaking decision in the animal control arena that JACPS had just made, the City laid down a gauntlet for the private sector to rise to the
The challenge of implementing a non-government financed trap-neuter-return (TNR) program on a massive scale. That challenge to FCNMHP planted the seed that would grow into Feral Freedom.

The program began with the simple policy memorandum that all healthy trapped feral cats would be turned over FCNMHP for the Feral Freedom program. All costs of the program and logistics of removing the cats from the public shelter were taken on by the not-for-profit animal welfare and spay/neuter clinic. Funding was provided through grants, including seed money for the start of the program from the Best Friends Animal Society and other private funds, so the only “cost” to the City of Jacksonville was to hold the trapped cats for a few hours until they were picked up at one of two daily pickup times of noon and 4:00 p.m. That unique arrangement afforded government officials to broadly accept the Feral Freedom program as a pilot cat-management initiative and cost-savings program. The Mayor and his staff provided the necessary education to the city council, and the Feral Freedom program was underway with unilateral support. All questions related to the program were referred to Animal Care & Control and/or First Coast No More Homeless Pets.

The Jacksonville Municipal Ordinance supported the community cat management program in generality, where it stated if the city chose to embark on a feral cat management program it would be done at the discretion of the Chief of Animal Care & Control. The provision had been added years prior to the advent of Feral Freedom and no one could have understood how that simple provision was vital to the growth and success of the program.

Under the newly-hired management of an experienced public animal-sheltering director, Jacksonville began its transition into modern animal control and sheltering while it worked closely with all community animal welfare advocates and organizations to bring about change. The new Animal Care & Protective Services Division for the City of Jacksonville moved forward in a public-private effort to control its feral and other outdoor community cats.
Early Challenges and Learning

Jacksonville had few, if any, models to follow as they envisioned their new community cat management program because of the unique characteristics of the city. In some mostly rural areas cats had never been seen as much of an issue and in other areas poorly managed cat colonies had become an urban and business problem. However, as a river city with a strong port and river/ocean influenced economy Jacksonville has always had cats as part of the neighborhood landscape, often assisting in ridding the city of rats and other nuisances.

With the best of intentions and what seemed like a solid plan, the City and FCNMHP went from no feral cat program to 100 percent TNR literally overnight. The first thought was that proactive education would be the best way to make people aware of the new changes. Informational flyers were made available and Feral Freedom program door hangers were placed on all houses within few blocks of where community cats were returned. That program was handled entirely by FCNMHP. Jacksonville’s animal code enforcement officers additionally took on a new role of educating the citizens they came in contact with in the field whenever the opportunity arose.

The new division chief for the City initially tried to develop and foster education to gain widespread support community cat management through sterilization and return. That was much more difficult than originally imagined. Animal control officers were now being asked to educate the public of the benefits of a program of returning loose cats to the community which was contrary to everything they had been taught about animal control in their formal training. Several of the officers began to understand and accept the pilot program but were still not thrilled about publicizing the program; other officers were forced to accept the new program as city policy and were told if they opposed the program they needed to find other employment.

A few months into the program, whenever and wherever the Feral Freedom program educational materials were distributed, and/or where officers took proactive educational opportunities to inform the public, a spike in complaints about cat nuisance problems and the program were quick to follow. Seeing this trend, Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS) pulled back from proactive education and settled into a posture of answering all inquiries directly and honestly, but not providing information unless asked. FCNMHP continued to provide educational information to neighbors. That quieted things down considerably as thousands of cats were being sterilized and returned to the community. After some additional time passed FCNMHP also took a more passive educational stance. The overall theory of JACPS and FCNMHP was that if sufficient experiential data were amassed the citizens and policy makers would see the value of the program.

To that end all of the first Feral Freedom cats were implanted with radio frequency identification (a.k.a. micro chipped) and registered so they could be tracked. This was done to address the concerns that these cats would be hit by cars, bite people, starve to death, be attacked
by dogs, and many other hypothetical tragedies that should nullify the program. After more than
a year of such identification absolutely none of the more than 6,000 feral cats with a microchip
were ever identified as falling into any of those theoretical situations. The cost of the program
was then re-budgeted to the sterilization and release of additional cats, and the microchipping
program was ended for *Feral Freedom*. More than four years later, no identified *Feral Freedom*
cats have been involved in these types of incidents.

During the first year of operation, weekly and sometimes daily communication about the
program was exchanged by the chief of JACPS and the executive director of FCNMHP. Through
that communication what was working and what wasn’t became identified. Modifications to
protocol took place and adjustments were tried until they worked. This was something that could
have never been foreseen when Jacksonville enacted an ordinance with a simple statement that
any feral cat program would be done at the discretion of the division chief, but that flexibility
proved invaluable. After two years of what first started out as sometimes sweeping changes,
adjustments became almost insignificant tweaking. At that time program details were formally
drafted for inclusion in the City ordinance. [Attachment]

One of the most important lessons learned early on is that a single uniform message must
be presented. City council members, the Mayor’s staff, the City call center and other government
entities forwarded all questions, comments, and concerns directly to the division chief for a
response. That uniform message prevented many misunderstandings and showed all parties were
on the same page. No holes existed for people or groups to try to gain a foothold to derail the
program. Now it is simply a matter of course that the program is part of the City’s operation and
even with new council members elected the uniformity of message remains.

**Lessons Learned in Jacksonville**

1. Be flexible in forming and modifying original program details.
2. Don’t be overly aggressive in initial promotion of program until the bugs are worked out and
   you have a track record.
3. Uniformity of message is essential – top down driven by leaders. If possible, have one person
do all of the answering of questions and media.
4. Go “all-in” if at all possible – results will be confusing or incomplete if you don’t sterilize a
   major portion of the population quickly.
5. After your program is in place and working, then solidify it with ordinance language to
   support and establish the program.
Changes to Cat Intake in Jacksonville

The traditional model over years across Florida and the United States was that regardless of the efforts made at trap, hold, and kill, the intake of cats was on a yearly increase. That situation held for JACPS as well. A decrease was experienced when JHS stopped accepting direct intake of feral cats cutting the capacity for feral cat intake in Jacksonville nearly in half. With the early advent of the Feral Freedom program and its publicity, there was a very modest increase in cats entering the shelter, most likely due to some feral cat caregivers bringing in cats to be sterilized and returning to them with the new program. Following that one-time increase, however, the number of cats entering the open-admission public shelter run by JACPS has decreased.

When looking specifically at the timeline of the program it shows a decrease coming into the year the Feral Freedom program began (August 2008), followed by the one-time spike. Then a dramatic drop in intake the following year, followed by further decreases at a reducing rate. The program more consistently affects the number of owner-surrendered cats.
Under the previous trap and kill program, many of the cats surrendered by citizens were cats that these people were caring for when an animal code enforcement officer or neighbor confronted them about such behavior being illegal, and they brought them into the shelter to avoid citations. Others were “outside” cats that the citizen felt they were responsible for until they were made aware “outside cats” were not allowed by ordinance. One major problem was that these people often “found” other cats after they relinquished the existing cats, and it was a vicious circle of trap and kill with no decrease in population and no change in caregiver behavior.

With Feral Freedom, these people were able to keep caring for “outside cats” as long as they met the requirements of the program and the cats were sterilized, vaccinated, and ear-tipped. JACPS officials believe that it is primarily for that reason that such a dramatic and continuing drop in owner surrenders of cats has occurred. This is further supported by the drop in the number of nuisance calls that have been received by animal code enforcement officers regarding stray and unwanted cats. The overall cat-related calls and incidents have dropped over the course of the program to a negligible number.

What is sometimes viewed as unique in Jacksonville is that the vast majority (well over 95 percent) of all outdoor cats are cared for by caregivers are in numbers of five or less. The previously seen large colonies have ceased to be a model and individual backyard small grouping are the norm. This model works well in that many neighbors are okay with a few cats living nearby that may periodically come into their yard as opposed to large colonies creating nuisances and having large food drops attracted wildlife and rats. The overall burden of outdoor cats has shifted to individuals and the public, rather than being an animal control or public problem.
Now that there is an alternative to surrendering and having the feral cats euthanized, caregivers are allowed to be more open in their work. This has built a more cohesive care community and allowed the sharing of successes and failures for overall better management practices to be disseminated. Remarkably the “decriminalization” of caring for feral and outdoor cats has also changed the attitude of the public as to who is or should be responsible for cats in the neighborhood. A dramatic resource shift has occurred, in which, sterilization surgeries are increasingly being funded by individuals and after the initial seed money of the community cat program the private sector is taking on the lion’s share of the financial burden. The rapid rise coincides with the removal of the stigma of being a ‘crazy cat lady’ and the removal of barriers and legal issues associated with providing these cats with care and surgery.

A random sample of individuals utilizing the private/individual payment option found the following reasons listed for not going through Feral Freedom:

1. Saving Feral Freedom funds for those who can’t afford to pay
2. No need for City to fund the surgeries if there is a low cost option
3. Guarantee their cats are returned to them and not adopted out of shelter
4. No risk of the cats being euthanized rather than returned for any reason
Euthanasia of Cats at Jacksonville JACPS

Another measure of the success or value of a community cat management program is based on the changes to the euthanasia totals for the community. In this case study, the breakdown of euthanasia was taken in various cross sections to show both results and to ensure that results are correlated to the community cat program and not a coincidence of reduced euthanasia shelter wide due to other administrative or program changes. It should be noted that dramatic program changes to operations of JACPS have taken place since late 2008 (FY2009) that have affected all area of the operations. The following chart shows overall live outcomes versus shelter deaths as a percentage of intakes as a baseline reference:

With that overall snapshot of JACPS euthanasia and live outcomes, the focus of community cat program results can be evaluated by isolating specific measures of the program as well as correlation factors.
In order to accurately measure feral community cat euthanasia at JACPS it was determined that the subcategories for all cats euthanized for “feral,” “previous behavior,” and “behavior observed” would be considered ‘feral cats’ for the purposes of the community cat case study. All other reasons are lumped together as non-feral euthanasia reasons. There may be some crossover in other subcategories, but this seemed to make the most accurate measure.

As the charts show the program changes that have resulted in reductions in the death rates of non-feral cats are not directly correlated to the feral cat euthanasia rates and the corresponding reductions in death rates due to the Feral Freedom program. The reduction in feral cat deaths at the shelter is much more dramatic and consistent in its reduction over the course of the community cat management program. Unique patterns in the non-feral cat euthanasia trends are not reflected in the feral cat euthanasia trends. When the euthanasia numbers are translated into a percentage of the total intake of cats the results affirm that no correlation exists between operational changes in handling all cats at JACPS and community cat euthanasia reductions.
The conclusion is that a feral cat program positively affects the drop in euthanasia rate for the community. Since a large portion of cat intake in most shelters is composed of the feral cats, if sterilized release is possible rather a euthanasia requirement the number of shelter deaths of cats are going to decrease. An unexpected benefit of not having to handle feral cats in the traditional manner was the resulting increase in live outcomes for non-feral cats and the other savings to the organization.
In addition to the thousands of community cats returned to their neighborhoods, Jacksonville has seen a marked increase in other cat live outcomes through direct adoption, rescues, and transfers to other area shelters for adoption. The numbers went from just over 900 in FY2007 to nearly 2900 in FY2012. What are the likely contributing factors that relate to overall cat management?

The first change identified was the decrease in upper respiratory infection among cats in the shelter. That not only made the cats more adoptable it saved space and resources by not having cats moved to a sick ward after being put up for adoption. With the contact between staff and feral cats, the staff acted as fomites moving germs among the cat population even when the most stringent protocols were in place to limit disease transfer. Given the uncertain history of animals entering a public shelter and their acquired immunity, the feral cat population was often either a carrier of a urinary track infection or it became an incubator due to its lack of acquired immunity with no vaccination antibody buildup. Once that variable was eliminated the overall health of non-feral cats improved greatly.

Another identified change was that the total housed cat population was reduced effectively in half and that allowed staff more time to care for, properly clean, and address needs of the resident cat population. It could possibly be demonstrated that an increase in staffing with the traditional feral cat program would result in similar reductions in disease but that too becomes a new cost of the traditional model that has shown ineffective over decades of use. With more time per cat fewer things slip through the cracks and fewer corners are cut in doing daily
protocol because the employees responsible for the care are less overworked. The total number of “care days” (one cat housed per day equals one cat care day) dropped from 89,217 cat care days in FY2007 to 23,752 cat care days in FY2011.

Additionally, resources are no longer wasted in capture, transfer, housing, care, feeding, and euthanasia of feral cats. Much of that savings in the Jacksonville example was returned in the budget process as reductions in costs to the municipal program, but a portion of that savings was used to improve the condition of the cats remaining in the care of and ultimately placement from the shelter. Even foster programs were expanded to deal with young kittens too small for surgery. Although still a large number of neonatal, nursing kittens without a mother unfortunately do not survive currently in Jacksonville.

The actual number of days a cat spends in adoptions before placement has reduced greatly in Jacksonville. This reflects the removal of recovery days for sick animals and a revision of hold times prior to adoption based upon the low reclaim rate for cats. Quicker turnover in cats further reduces the costs associated with care, feeding and medical costs. It also limits additional exposure to disease and cross-contamination from the public serving as fomites between cats handled in adoptions. This has proven a better model. Quick turnaround often means that even when a cat breaks with urinary track infection at an adopter’s home it is easier and less expensive to assist in treating that cat in its new home rather than returning it to the shelter.
**Costs & Cost Savings from a Comprehensive Community Cat Program**

One overriding question and concern from an administrative standpoint is, “How much money is this program going to save us?” That should not be the primary focus of determining whether or not to implement a community cat program. In fact, it is a question that should be removed from consideration of a program that has positive results. Jacksonville’s experience, while not guaranteed to translate directly to other areas, will illustrate both hard-cost savings and soft-cost savings. Not everything in the change to community cat management can be measured in dollars, and not all savings are immediate.

The community cat management program costs have been carefully analyzed and broken down into expenses/costs saved that otherwise would have had to be expended under the trap-hold-euthanize-dispose scenario, expenses incurred by the program that are related to sterilization, potential capital cost savings, and other costs for consideration in program planning. Where possible the inclusion of costs factors has been identified, but in some cases they simply have been folded into a general cost factor. Every aspect of cost has been reviewed and included into the breakdown – these numbers reflect actual costs in Jacksonville.

**Staffing Cost with Trap-Hold-Euthanize-Dispose**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staffing Events</th>
<th>Time Saved</th>
<th>Cost Estimate</th>
<th>Total per Cat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capture &amp; Transport (inc. disposal)</td>
<td>60 min.</td>
<td>$20/hr.</td>
<td>$20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intake Processing &amp; Cage Transfer</td>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>$15/hr.</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care &amp; Cleaning</td>
<td>15 min./day</td>
<td>3 day hold</td>
<td>$10.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia Procedure</td>
<td>30 min.</td>
<td>2 people</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When looking at the staffing cost estimates in this Jacksonville example all costs of healthcare benefits and other fringes are included in the hourly wage calculations. Estimates of time are based on the processes and protocols of JACPS and local estimates of time may vary (as cost of labor probably will as well). In Jacksonville, the direct staffing impact of implementing the community cat program included the elimination of two kennel positions and one field operations position over a three-year period. The kennel positions were eliminated in the second year of the program, and the officer was eliminated in the third year.
**Hard Costs: Supplies, Food, and Other Tangible Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items Saved</th>
<th>Cost per Cat/Day</th>
<th>Total Per Cat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food, Care &amp; Cleaning Supplies</td>
<td>$3/day</td>
<td>$9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia &amp; Disposal Supplies</td>
<td>$4 per cat</td>
<td>$4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinations, Medical Supplies</td>
<td>$17 per cat</td>
<td>$17.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$30.00</strong></td>
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With all figures included in this analysis, the actual costs of each step or program are shown. That means that a reduction in one area may also be shown as a cost in another area. Overall net costs/savings will be reflected in a chart of combined costs and savings.

Although Jacksonville benefited from extensive private non-profit contributions to fund the actual costs of the community cat program (meaning no out of pocket costs for the City), the following chart lists estimated costs if all program costs were handled in-house and funded by City shelter operations. This was done to allow a more comparable analysis for other communities that may have to fund such programs directly.

**Expenses/Costs Associated with Community Cat Program (In-House)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense Item</th>
<th>Cost per Cat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intake, Feeding &amp; Prep</td>
<td>$13.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgery Items, Vaccinations &amp; Labor</td>
<td>$59.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Location</td>
<td>$7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$80.25</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Some program costs could be possibly reduced through the use of volunteers or even by contracting services to other providers, the chart was meant primarily to help identify all of the cost items and provide an example of expected costs for community cat programs.
The experience of the Jacksonville program indicates a declining cost to the program over time. Additionally, an upward trend in cat intake has been reversed by the implementation of the program. Those cost savings have been estimated based on a traditional five-day stray hold most organizations utilize for cats in the chart below.
Decreasing intake of total cats has reduced the non-community cat program costs for all years of the program except the most immediate year. The immediate year showed a slight increase in non-feral intake possibly due to tighter review of community cats returned versus cats placed into the adoption program; or it may simply have been an unexpected increase in non-feral intake. The overall cat program costs are illustrated below. The total costs include the community cat program and the cat adoption program as well as any cats that were euthanized or died while in the care and custody of JACPS.

**Total Jacksonville Care Program Costs by Fiscal Year**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY06-07</th>
<th>FY07-08</th>
<th>FY08-09</th>
<th>FY09-10</th>
<th>FY10-11</th>
<th>FY11-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community/Feral Cat</td>
<td>$356,156</td>
<td>$333,639</td>
<td>$430,960</td>
<td>$360,329</td>
<td>$348,039</td>
<td>$321,898</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Cat Program</td>
<td>$862,841</td>
<td>$856,010</td>
<td>$659,704</td>
<td>$580,852</td>
<td>$469,474</td>
<td>$549,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cat Program</td>
<td>$1,218,997</td>
<td>$1,189,649</td>
<td>$1,090,664</td>
<td>$941,181</td>
<td>$817,513</td>
<td>$870,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td></td>
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There are many ways to look at the costs/savings of a comprehensive cat management program that includes a feral cat component. Various measures have been provided as guidelines to show what data should be kept and analyzed. Jacksonville is one of the first major cities to perform this comprehensive case study. Individual community costs and experience will likely be different but this does show that there is no greater cost including a community cat management program, and over time the trend seems to show that costs will decline. Other less tangible costs should also be considered in determining a program and its cost/value.
**Other Community Cat Management Costs, Savings and Intangibles:**

1. Increased employee morale
2. Increased productivity from shelter workers
3. Improved community support and growing volunteerism
4. Decreased need for shelter space for feral cat housing
5. Decreased worker’s compensation injuries and claims
6. Reduced risks of disease transfer and associated medical costs
7. Increased visibility of your community on national stage

The increase in employee morale and productivity that is experienced with the reduction of euthanasia and increase in live outcomes should not be undervalued. The increased morale has nearly eliminated turnover except where employees are able to advance their careers. The increase in productivity has allowed JACPS to cut its labor force by 26 percent, while being recognized as the Outstanding Animal Control Agency in Florida by the Florida Animal Control Association. The combination of successful outcomes has brought national attention to Jacksonville as a national model of public sheltering success.

When employees do not see or have to assume that when cats come in they will have to be euthanized shortly, they can focus their energy on the positive rather than lament the negative. Even in the field operations, the productivity has increased dramatically.
The enthusiasm of the team and the recognition of the positive changes has brought forth a major increase in community involvement in Jacksonville. At times the number of people wanting to assist the organization has overwhelmed the ability to respond to them. In the long haul the increase in volunteers and foster caregivers will make the job easier for shelter employees and mean more animals get adopted into forever homes. This evolution is still underway in Jacksonville, but it has shifted focus to expanding the thought process of where animals need to be in order to find new homes. That would not have been possible without eliminating all of the negativity surrounding the old trap-hold-kill-dispose feral cat program. Also, the community sees the organization as citizen-friendly in that the organization better reflects what the community has been doing for decades in caring for animals and instead of trying to punish them for doing a good deed; the organization helps them to understand the right way to do things and assists them with tough issues.

Depending on where a community is in planning for new facilities, expanding old facilities, or repurposing existing facilities; an unexpected and potentially sizeable cost reduction in capital expenditure can be realized by full-scale community cat management. In the Jacksonville example the program began as a new shelter was being completed and changes to the facility were not possible. However, planned space could be repurposed for a more needed use and over 650 square feet was dedicated to the housing of feral cats. That equates to $81,250 in average construction costs saved (using $125/sq. ft.); or if you look at it another way it would cost the City of Jacksonville and additional $8500-9000 per year in building rental for that amount of space if they needed to expand operations without construction.

Had the equipment not already been ordered for the housing of feral cats, the City could have saved nearly $100,000 in capital costs for housing facilities for cats. These rooms have been converted into offices, warehouse space, behavioral assessment room, and other needed but unplanned operational needs—truly a hidden gem in the implementation of the community cat program.

With the marked increase in medical costs in recent years, the reduction in injuries and incidents involving staff and feral cats have been a major cost savings for operations at JACPS. Cat bites, scratches and other related injuries, primarily from fractious cats, account for nearly 70 percent of the worker’s compensation incidents in Jacksonville. Since these animals now enter the shelter in cages, remain in cages until transfer and are fed in cages; the incident numbers have dropped dramatically. Even with increasing annual costs across the board in medical areas, JACPS has seen a sizeable reduction in worker’s compensation premiums.

The reduction in cross-contamination, airborne and fomite borne transfer, and other disease exposure among the cat population has nearly eliminated the need for a large sick cat ward. That in turn has reduced medical expenditures and decreased the time a cat stays in the shelter before being adopted or placed into a new home. Upper respiratory infections among
adult cats are negligible and even among the kitten population the reduction has been very noticeable with only minor transmission incidents observed.

Finally, moving to more progressive and twenty-first century practices by fully implementing a comprehensive community cat program helps a community gain recognition as a leader. There have been countless dozens of individuals and agencies that have come to Jacksonville to see how things are done and how they are working, then model programs in their areas. National organizations have not only been supporters of the programs they have asked key players to present at conferences, write articles, do webinars, and other outreach to the animal sheltering community. When asked, JACPS employees say they have gone from not being shown a lot of respect, to now being invited to press conferences with the Mayor of Jacksonville.
Sample Ordinance Language for Community Cat Management:

City of Jacksonville Municipal Ordinance

Sec. 462.102. - Definitions.

For the purposes of this Chapter, the following terms shall have the following definitions unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(i) Community Cat means any free-roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents of the immediate area who is/are known or unknown; a community cat may or may not be feral. Community cats shall be distinguished from other cats by being sterilized and ear tipped; qualified community cats are exempt from licensing, stray and at-large provisions of this ordinance and may be exempt from other provisions directed toward owned animals.

Sec. 462.312. - Feeding of cats and dogs outdoors.

(a) Rules applicable to all dogs and cats, excluding managed community cats covered in subsection (b) below, are as follows:

(1) The feeding of cats and dogs outdoors shall take place primarily during daylight hours to minimize the risk of domestic-wildlife interactions that have increased potential of rabies exposure for the cats or dogs. Any food provided after daylight hours shall only be provided for such time required for feeding, and no longer than 30 minutes, after which it shall be removed.

(2) Feeding outdoors is only allowed when an appropriate amount of food for daily consumption of the cat(s) and/or dog(s) being cared for is provided. Food must be appropriately placed in a sanitary container sufficient for the cat/dog being fed. Automatic feeders that are properly maintained and secured may be used to dispense daily food rations and may be present during night hours.

(3) Dumping excess quantities of food on the ground, placing excess quantities in bowls or other containers, and leaving open food packages is prohibited.

(4) Feeding outdoors must take place on the property owned by the person placing the food or be done with the consent of the property owner. Feeding on public property, road right-of-ways, parks, common land of a multifamily housing unit or any property without consent of the owner is prohibited.

(5) Violations of this section are subject to a fine of not less than the amount designated in Chapter 462, Part 18.

(b) Community Cat Management Initiatives: The City of Jacksonville recognizes the need for innovation in addressing the issues presented by feral, free roaming and other community cats. To that end it recognizes that there are community care givers of cats, and acknowledges that
properly managed community cats may be part of the solution to the continuing euthanasia of cats; and establishes the following requirements:

1. All managed community cat colonies/groups must be maintained on private property of the caregiver, or with permission on the private property of another landowner (including city, state, and federal public property).

2. A free community cat caregiver certification program may be developed to educate people about community cats, the importance of a veterinary provider relationship to best address community cat needs, common disease(s) and proper care, good management practices, and maintenance of the community cats. The educational program shall be developed by community veterinarians, community cat caregivers, ACPS and citizens through an ad hoc advisory committee that will be disbanded upon recommendation to the Chief of ACPS. The Chief of ACPS may remove any member at any time for any reason within his/her discretion. Periodically, ad hoc committees will be convened to review, revise and update the program as needed.

3. All cats that are part of community cat management programs must be sterilized, vaccinated against the threat of rabies, and ear-tipped (preferable on the left ear) for easy identification; if these requirements are met the community cat is exempted from licensing, stray, at-large and possibly other provisions of this ordinance that apply to owned animals.

4. If a person is providing care for the community cats, he or she is required to provide certain necessities on a regular/ongoing basis, including, but not limited to, proper nutrition and medical care as needed. If medical care is unavailable or too expensive, the caregiver must not allow the cat to suffer.
   
   (i) Food must be provided in the proper quantity for the number of cats being managed and is to be supplied no less than once per day. Food must be maintained in proper feeding containers.
   
   (ii) Water, if supplied, must be clean, potable and free from debris and algae.
   
   (iii) If shelter is provided, it shall be unobtrusive, safe, and of the proper size for the cat(s).

(c) Violations of this section are subject to a fine of not less than the amount designated in Chapter 462, Part 18.