

# Assessing Your Community's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for Animal Needs



This tool provides a structured approach to assessing your community's EOP for its capacity to address animal needs. Each step includes a checklist for evaluation and relevant discussion questions to prompt deeper consideration and input from various community partners. By systematically working through these integrated discussion questions and checklist categories, your community can comprehensively evaluate and strengthen its emergency operations plan to better address the critical needs of animals during a disaster.

## Step 1: Identify Objectives and Requirements

This step focuses on defining what optimal animal disaster preparedness looks like for your community and understanding the foundational elements.

- **Define the ideal state of preparedness for managing pets and livestock during disasters.**
  - *Example: Clear evacuation plans for all animal types, designated pet-friendly shelters, and established livestock staging areas are in place.*
- **Review legal frameworks, best practices, and existing emergency response plans related to animals.**
  - *Example: Compliance with the PETS Act, alignment with National Alliance of State Animal and Agricultural Emergency Programs (NASAAEP) best practices guidelines, and integration with local emergency management ordinances are confirmed.*
- **Establish capability targets such as shelter capacity and search and rescue efficiency.**
  - *Example: Deploy trained search and rescue teams within 24 hours of request, rescue and reunite at least 85% of reported lost or stranded animals within 7 days and establish emergency shelters capable of housing at least 90% of displaced companion animals within 72 hours of a declared disaster.*

### Discussion Questions for Step 1:

- What is our community's vision for animal care during a disaster? What does "fully prepared" look like for us?
- Are there any state, federal, or local mandates concerning animal welfare in disasters that we are not currently meeting?
- What are the most critical animal-related outcomes we want to achieve during an emergency (e.g., reunification rates, animal survival rates, volunteer safety)?
- How will our plan ensure equitable access to animal services and support for all vulnerable populations, beyond service animal owners?

## Step 2: Assess Current Capabilities

This step involves a thorough evaluation of your community's existing resources and current state of animal disaster preparedness.

- **Evaluate existing community emergency response plans related to animals.**
  - *Example: The emergency plan includes designated animal shelter sites.*
- **Identify current resources, including animal shelters, transport options, trained personnel, and veterinary support.**
  - *Example: The community has access to 2 mobile pet trailers, 1 fairground livestock shelter, and 3 trained volunteer veterinarians available for deployment.*
- **Conduct interviews with emergency managers, veterinarians, animal control officers, and livestock owners.**
  - *Example: Detailed meeting minutes and notes from roundtables or interviews with involved organizations have been compiled.*
- **Survey public awareness and engagement in animal disaster preparedness.**
  - *Example: A recent survey conducted through the extension office shows that 30% of households have pet go-bags prepared.*

### Discussion Questions for Step 2:

- Does an updated emergency response information list (ERIL) exist with relevant contacts and resources?
- Do agencies and involved organizations identified in the plan have the authority to conduct the duties or activities listed regarding animal care?
- What are our current strengths in animal disaster preparedness? What resources do we already have in place that are effective?

### Step 3: Identify Gaps and Deficiencies

This step systematically pinpoints areas where your current plan or capabilities fall short in meeting the identified objectives.

- **Planning and Policy Gaps:** Determine if there's a lack of standardized protocols or unclear responsibilities within the plan for animal care.
  - *Example: There is no established protocol for transporting livestock during flood events.*
- **Resource Shortfalls:** Identify insufficient resources such as shelter space, transport, or veterinary support for animals.
  - *Example: There are not enough crates or kennels available for co-location shelters designed for pets.*
- **Training Deficiencies:** Assess if there's a lack of disaster-specific training for animal responders.
  - *Example: No animal-specific Incident Command System (ICS) training is currently offered locally.*
- **Public Awareness Issues:** Determine if a mechanism is in place to disseminate animal-related response information.
  - *Example: No established procedure exists to liaise with the Public Information Officer about animal issues.*

#### Discussion Questions for Step 3:

- Does the plan provide for the acceptance and management of donated resources (e.g., food, bedding, containers) for animals?
- Does the plan identify the agency responsible for coordinating animal shelter operations?
- Does the plan identify equipment and supplies that may be needed to operate each animal shelter, as well as supplies that owners may be encouraged to bring with them?
- Does the plan provide for the acquisition, storage, and security of food and water supplies for animals? Does the plan provide for the diverse dietary needs of animals?
- Does the plan recommend just-in-time training for spontaneous volunteers who may assist with animal care?
- Does the plan have or refer to a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or Mutual Aid Agreement (MAA) that defines the roles and responsibilities of each involved organization?
- Does the plan describe the partnership between the jurisdiction's emergency management agency, the animal control authority, the mass care provider(s), and the owner of each proposed animal sheltering facility?

- Does the plan provide guidance about utility provisions, such as running water, adequate lighting, proper ventilation, electricity, and backup power, at animal shelters, including explicit consideration of heating and cooling resources?
- Does the plan provide mechanisms for continually updating public statements on animal shelter capacity and availability as people and animals are coming to shelters?
- Does the plan provide for communication of public information regarding shelter-in-place accommodation of animals, if available?
- Does the plan adequately address the needs of service animals and their owners, and other vulnerable populations with animals?
- Does the plan include identification and reunification criteria for sheltered animals? What specific identification tools are prioritized during intake?
- Does the plan provide for the physical security of each animal facility, including perimeter control and security personnel, and what fencing resources may be deployed?
- Does the plan provide for technical consultations with veterinarians or veterinary technicians as official responders, including planning for veterinary surge capacity and specialized medical needs (e.g., equines)?
- How does the plan ensure medical continuity of care for animals, including specific documentation resources?
- Does the plan account for specialized storage needs like cold chain storage for medical supplies?
- What resources or strategies does the plan include to manage waste, ensure sanitation, and prevent disease (including biosecurity for livestock) in animal shelters?
- Does the plan address the behavioral health needs of animals in shelters, and what resources are available to reduce stress?
- Does the plan include provisions for the humane management and disposal of deceased animals?
- Does the plan address the evacuation and transportation of animals?
- Does the plan address how animals provided with evacuation assistance are registered, documented, tracked, and reunited with their owners if they are separated during assisted evacuations?

## Step 4: Prioritize Gaps

This step helps your community focus its efforts on the most critical areas for improvement.

- **Rank gaps by impact (e.g., life safety, financial cost) and urgency.**
  - *Example: Gaps in livestock evacuation routes are marked as high-risk, especially for wildfire-prone zones, requiring immediate attention.*
- **Determine which gaps require immediate intervention versus long-term improvements.**
  - *Example: Basic animal first aid and disaster response training can be provided immediately, while building more permanent animal shelter capacity will be a long-term project.*

### Discussion Questions for Step 4:

- Based on our identified gaps, what are the top 3-5 priorities that, if addressed, would have the most significant impact on animal safety and well-being during a disaster?
- Which of these priorities can we address quickly with existing resources, and which will require more substantial planning or funding?

## Step 5: Develop Actionable Solutions

This step focuses on creating concrete strategies to address the identified gaps.

- **Propose policy updates and funding solutions for addressing gaps in animal preparedness.**
  - *Example: Apply for a grant to purchase mobile livestock fencing to enhance evacuation capabilities.*
- **Design training programs for emergency responders and animal owners.**
  - *Example: Create a Community Animal Response Team (CART) module specifically for local volunteers.*
- **Strengthen multi-agency coordination for animal disaster response.**
  - *Example: Form a local animal emergency task force with formalized Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreements among participating agencies.*
- **Enhance community education initiatives on animal disaster preparedness.**
  - *Example: Host pet preparedness fairs or distribute readiness brochures at local community events.*

### Discussion Questions for Step 5:

- What renovations or new construction would be required to best meet animal needs in our community during a disaster?
- What sources of funding should we apply for to improve our plan for animal welfare in emergencies?
- How do we educate our community to improve individual and business preparedness for animals during a disaster?
- Has your community planned for liability in the event of injury, disease transmission, or other health risks to staff or volunteers by an animal in their care during a disaster? What type of insurance or liability resources might be needed?
- What new policies or protocols need to be developed or updated to address the identified gaps?
- How will emergency management help address the needs of vulnerable populations with animals?
- How can emergency managers support veterinary surge capacity through planning?

## Step 6: Implement and Monitor Progress

This final step ensures that solutions are put into action and continuously evaluated for effectiveness, encompassing both response and recovery phases.

- **Assign responsibilities to key agencies and community partners for implementing animal-related solutions.**
  - *Example: Animal control handles animal evacuation logistics, while the extension office manages public outreach and education on animal preparedness.*
- **Establish a timeline for implementing solutions related to animal disaster preparedness.**
  - *Example: Complete the rollout of the animal-specific training program by the end of the current fiscal year.*
- **Regularly review and update the emergency plan based on drills and real-world incidents involving animals.**
  - *Example: Conduct an annual plan review after a county-wide full-scale exercise that includes animal response scenarios.*

### Discussion Questions for Step 6 (Response & Recovery Focus):

- What other exercises should we conduct to improve preparedness for animal-related incidents?
- What information should be tracked during response (e.g., capacity, intake, reunification status)?
- How can co-located shelters be supported during disaster response, considering shared resources and operational coordination?
- How can public expectations be managed during animal disasters through effective communication?
- How will owners and animals be reunified post-incident?
- During response, what specific responsibilities does emergency management have for livestock, including ongoing management and support?
- What is a key recovery responsibility for emergency management related to animals (e.g., long-term care, returning animals to normal conditions, addressing long-term impacts)?
- Emergency managers should ensure coordination between animal care and which other agencies during large animal incidents (e.g., agricultural, state veterinary, specialized large animal rescue)?
- What post-response actions (e.g., after-action reviews, lessons learned) support future improvement in our animal disaster plans?
- How will we track the progress of our implemented solutions?
- What is our plan for regular review and updating of the EOP concerning animal needs? How often should this occur, and who should be involved?