



# Staff and Volunteer Training and Development Study *Caring for Animals, Caring for People*

Summary Report  
May 2013

***By better understanding current training and development practices, we can help provide the support needed to save and enrich more lives.***

While there is a growing sense of urgency to professionalize the fields of animal shelter medicine and management, animal care organizations often report that a lack of financial resources and staff capacity are barriers to building robust training and development (T&D) programs for staff and volunteers. In essence, “people care” has taken a back seat to animal care at many shelters and rescues.

In the fall of 2012, Maddie’s Institute conducted an online survey of executive directors, employees and volunteers from companion-animal care organizations across the country.

The purpose of this study was to:

- 1) Understand current training and development practices.
- 2) Identify common needs and challenges.
- 3) Offer tips and resources to help organizations create or improve their training and development programs.

*“We are committed to a high standard of **people care**, both internally and externally, because people are the key to meeting our mission.”*

The Dumb Friends League  
Denver, Colorado

**Why?** In the most basic sense, effective training and development programs build the competencies needed for staff and volunteers to give the best standard of care to those we serve. Importantly, research shows that attention to your workers’ training and development can also lead to increased confidence, a deeper connection to the mission, accountability and retention, while reducing monotony and disengagement.

## **What’s the difference?**

**Training** is a short-term effort to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed in their present jobs.

**Development** is a long-term effort to build competencies for the future, and most development occurs on the job.

*Introducing Talent Management*  
Dale Carnegie Training

To see the complete report with resource links click [here](#).



## Our Findings

### 8 Things Shelters Can Do to Improve T&D

#### **1) Create job descriptions for employees and service descriptions for volunteers. Update them annually.**

Forty-two percent of volunteers surveyed did not have a service description. While most employees surveyed had a job description, only 22% reported that their job description was updated at least annually.

*“[Service descriptions] are the basis for evaluating whether your volunteers succeed in their commitment to your organization.”* – The Humane Society of the United States

*“A job description is useless if it is obsolete... it should be updated on an annual basis.”*  
– HR Professionals Magazine

Job or service descriptions provide an opportunity to give concrete clarity regarding expectations, build engagement and drive accountability and performance of each worker, *throughout* their career with you. Think of them as living documents – to be updated regularly – which directly link to training and performance evaluation. [Click here for sample job descriptions for employees](#). For [sample service descriptions for volunteers click here](#) and [here](#).

#### **2) Beef up your new hire orientation.**

Our results indicate that employed staff are not only less likely to receive an orientation as compared to volunteers but are also less likely than volunteers to rate that orientation highly.

*“[An orientation program] is a coherent, planned introduction that combines information, experiences, and a transmission of the values and culture of the organization, all of which are aimed at giving new staff members the foundation they need to do their jobs and to integrate themselves into the organization and the community as easily as possible.”*

– The Community Tool Box, University of Kansas

A successful orientation program is more than a tour and “good luck” wish before sending them to the front lines. Set up new hires and volunteers for success from day one; research shows that the first days or weeks are critical to molding future perceptions, actions and relationships. [For ideas on how to plan an employee orientation click here](#) and [here](#). Need help with [volunteer orientation, click here](#).

#### **3) Discuss the training plan with staff and volunteers and set expectations for the first 90 days.**

Half of executive directors from organizations with paid employees had written guidelines for new staff training; fewer executive directors from volunteer-only organizations (20%) reported having written training guidelines for new volunteers. What’s more, half of employees did not agree that their organization’s new staff training was designed and executed with clear and consistent learning objectives.

*“When expectations are not clearly defined, new hires begin to flounder. This is easily rectified by a statement similar to: ‘In your first 90 days, first 6 months, and first year, we expect to see the following goals accomplished’.”* – Dale Carnegie Training

*“Another useful tool is a checklist of training items for volunteers and their trainers to mark... material must be developed in such a way that it can be delivered consistently no matter who is leading the training.”* – The Humane Society of the United States

[Click here for ideas on employee learning objectives](#) or [click here for ideas on volunteer training objectives](#).



**4) Time or finances holding you back? Think again and think outside of the box.** Ninety-two percent of executive directors cited time and 83% cited funding as barriers to building training and/or development programs.

Training and/or development does not have to be expensive. Entrepreneur.com suggests low-budget resources, such as “*guest speakers, group wikis, internal YouTube videos, webinars and brown-bag lunches*” to ramp up a new program.

- **Seek guest speakers and joint training opportunities.** Fifty-nine percent of respondents reported that guest presentations are rarely or never incorporated in their organization’s training and/or development programs.

Leverage expertise outside of your organization. First, take advantage of the opportunities that may already exist. Second, consider creating opportunities – where it makes business sense and where there is a common need – by pooling resources and partnering with other local agencies.

*“You can probably find commonalities, and you can have a trainer come out and do training for all the [organizations] together.”* – Entrepreneur.com

*“Especially where none of the organizations alone has the staff or financial resources to conduct a full-fledged training program, this can be a great way to provide high-quality staff and professional development.”* – The Community Tool Box

- **Finding it hard to teach ‘soft-skills’? Introduce role-play.** Approximately 75% of respondents reported that role-play is rarely or never incorporated in their organization’s training and/or development programs.

*“[Role-play] is most useful for preparing for unfamiliar or difficult situations...you build up experience and self-confidence for handling it in real life...you develop quick and instinctively-correct reactions to situations. This means that you’ll react effectively as situations evolve, rather than making mistakes or becoming overwhelmed by events.”* – Mind Tools

Role-play can provide a framework, teaching workers how to tackle tricky inter-personal situations with poise, perspective and with the best interests of the organization, animals and customers in mind. [Click here to find out how to set up role-play scenarios step by step.](#)

**5) Initiate individual development conversations to build actionable plans.** Sixty-one percent of employees and 56% of volunteers reported that their organizations provided ongoing training or development opportunities; however, of those respondents, 61% of employees and 41% of volunteers rated the quality as neutral to very poor. Moreover, only 26% of employees and 5% of volunteers cited having an individual development plan (IDP).

*“The key to development is to make it occur on a daily basis. Most development occurs on the job and in the context of work activities...The manager’s challenge is to build individual capabilities at the same time he or she encourages individuals to tackle new challenges that build their competencies in preparation for the future.”* – Dale Carnegie Training

Individual development plans (IDPs) plot out short and long-term goals and related action steps for each individual as they fit into your organization’s mission and needs. [Click here to check out pages 1 – 6 of this IDP template.](#)



**6) Guide on-going training and development with periodic performance evaluations.** Results show that employees are considerably more likely than volunteers to have performance evaluations. Of employees with evaluation processes at their organization, only 46% expressed that evaluation findings guide training and development they receive.

*“Regularly scheduled performance reviews are an important ‘tool’ for assuring goals and work standards are being met, for providing a forum for the discussion of issues of concern to both manager and employee, and for distributing rewards to deserving employees.”*

– The American Humane Association

*“Volunteers need to receive appropriate and consistent feedback, including periodic evaluations of their performance.”* – The Humane Society of the United States

Performance evaluations should directly link to items listed in job descriptions and feed into individual development plans. If you’re not ready to formally evaluate active volunteers, work to measure volunteer performance and be certain to give structured feedback and encourage opportunities for role growth. [Click here](#) and [here for tips on how the business world tackles performance evaluation](#).

**7) Assess, implement and assess again. Build in quality.** Only 22% of paid employees and 18% of volunteers reported that their organization had a system for soliciting feedback on training. This is interesting given that 51% of employees rated the quality of initial training as neutral to very poor.

*“Your training program should be dynamic, constantly changing to improve its effectiveness and meet the evolving needs of the organization. The way you assure this dynamism is through regular, careful examination and evaluation of what you're doing and how you do it.”* – The

Community Tool Box

You don’t know unless you ask. Continuously assess your organization’s areas of need and match them to your training programs. After programmatic implementation, complete the cycle by actively soliciting feedback – including orientation, initial training and ongoing development opportunities. [Click here for a sample training evaluation survey](#).

**8) Don’t forget the “manage” part of T&D management.** Fifty-eight percent of employees believed that managers are adequately prepared to train new staff, while 47% believed that managers are adequately prepared to develop current staff. Notably, 43% of employees reported having the opportunity to evaluate supervisors and/or management.

*“Go back to basics by creating relationships built on trust and respect and by implementing frequent, consistent employee-manager interactions.”* – Dale Carnegie Training

*“By using ongoing direct communications, managers support people in their roles, coach them for improved performance, and help them to see how their contributions add value to the organization.”* – Dale Carnegie Training

High-quality management may be the biggest lever in workforce retention, motivation and the creation of a “learning organization.” Therefore, we should: 1) guide managers on how to train and develop the workforce, 2) ensure that each employee or volunteer has consistent, meaningful and direct interactions with managers and 3) give employees and volunteers the opportunity to honestly evaluate organizational leadership and their supervisors.