



Petfinder Big Birthday Adoption Event Mega Adoption Event Manual

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Introduction

This manual is based on experience producing mega-adoption events from 1999 – 2011 with small and large animal welfare organizations in Oklahoma City and surrounding areas. It reflects a model that works for one organization. It can be adapted to fit the rules of your organization.

Please understand that the documents provided are only templates, only examples; you’ll need to modify them for your own event. We are providing this manual because we figure there’s no need to reinvent the wheel, and we’d like to offer you the opportunity to learn from our mistakes and our successes.

The Basics

What: Petfinder’s Big Birthday Adoption Event! Petfinder is encouraging mega-adoption events around North America to celebrate their 15th birthday. This manual is a blueprint for a 48-hour continuous adoption event, starting at Midnight Friday Night/Saturday morning, and going until about 5pm Sunday – however you can time your event to fit your needs. (Technically that is only 41 hours, so you can go straight through to Midnight if you want).

Who: One organization does most of the coordination for the event. As many other groups as possible participate and bring animals for adoption.

When: It’s usually best done on a weekend—Friday through Sunday. We suggest a temperate time of year—in Oklahoma, that means Spring and Fall. But it really can be done at any time that works for your community and your situation. If you have an indoor space, you don’t have to worry about the weather.

Where: Events are generally held outdoors, but they can also be held at your shelter facility or any other location that has enough room to make it work.

How: Committees, delegation, cooperation and communication! This manual will help you put these things together, but you’ll have to find the people and execute.

Why: To save lots more animals’ lives by finding them homes!

Who's in Charge?

You will have multiple adoption groups participating in this event (unless you can round up hundreds of animals at a time, in which case you can do it alone) But ONE organization – yours—has to be the organizing body. The primary point of contact, the place the buck stops. It's YOUR event, so you make the rules. What you say, goes—just stick with it.

In our case, we had two main qualifications for groups that wanted to participate: they had to be willing to do on-site adoptions (let people take the animals home that day), and they had to primarily get their animals from our municipal shelter, since our main goal is to increase our live release rate at our city shelter. As you might expect, the on-site adoption criteria eliminated most rescue groups in our community, as they were not willing to do on-site adoptions.

Whatever your criteria are, stick to it—it's your event.

Set a Goal

Setting a goal is very important. Make it an achievable goal—you don't want to set a goal that you can't make. For example, if you know that you'll most likely be able to do 50 adoptions, you might set your goal at 40, just to be SURE you meet your goal. You can always set a different internal goal from your public goal.



One caveat about goals: In these presentations, you'll hear about events where hundreds of adoptions took place. If your event doesn't have the capacity to do as many adoptions, don't be discouraged! The event, the publicity, the novelty of it—that's the goal here. We want you to do as many adoptions as you can, but if a great number for you is 20, if it's 200, 2000, fantastic! A life saved is a life saved. So don't feel like you have to do 500 adoptions for your event to be successful.

People get extremely excited about your goal, especially when you're getting close to reaching it (and exceeding it!). Be sure to keep updating your social media and website with the latest updates. Often if there is an animal that is not getting attention, or the last of a litter, people will get really focused on that animal, and promote it with social media.

Social media is a HUGE TOOL that makes or breaks these adoption events! It gets people there, it keeps them involved and informed during the event and keeps them inspired and donating after the event.

You can't do this all by yourself.

You're going to need 20-30 people to PLAN this event—close to 100 volunteers to pull it off!

The good news is, LOTS of people want to help with an event like this. It appeals to people who may not normally be interested in volunteering at your shelter, fostering etc. people can volunteer in groups (think clubs, scout groups, sororities/fraternities, etc.). It's FUN.

Committee Responsibilities

You'll need six basic committees or teams to plan the event. Depending on how you structure your event, you may be able to eliminate one or two, but chances are for most events you'll need all these committees.

If you haven't done any big events, committees may sound more complicated than just doing everything yourself or with a couple of trusted volunteers. In reality, committees, and delegation of tasks and responsibilities to those committees, is an absolute necessity for any large event. You must establish responsibilities for these teams, tell them what their responsibilities are, give them deadlines, and then cross it off your list. You must trust that the team members will get their jobs done. The main thing that makes or breaks an event like this, believe it or not, is teamwork!

Logistics

The logistics team is responsible for all physical arrangements and pre-planning of event items. This team makes sure all the pieces of the puzzle are in place. They arrange for rental of the tents, trucks, pylons and other equipment. They make sure there's a hose and available water source to hook up to. They make sure you have generators, extension cords, ladders, hammers, screwdrivers, gasoline, and all the other "behind the scenes" stuff without which you could not do the event!



Marketing



The marketing team is responsible for getting the word out about the event. They make the press kits, write the press releases, post the social media updates, take and post the photos and videos. It really helps if you get some folks

on this committee who have contacts with local TV or radio stations to increase exposure. People on this committee need to be authorized by your organization to talk to the media, and they need to feel comfortable doing so. The marketing team comes up with graphic design for posters, postcards, website and the logo for the event as well. They can design/layout the print materials design and banners.

Creative

Your creative team is great for people who love being creative and crafty. Once you decide a theme for your event, the creative team will get busy manifesting that theme. They make decorations for the tents, tables and everything



else at the event.

Activities

At our events, we always have a children's area with event-themed activities. Usually there is a craft element (coloring, painting, making a dog treat or toy, etc.) and some games. We've had clowns in the past making balloon animals, jugglers, fire-breathers. Having a kids' area is great for parents, because the kids can be

somewhere safe and kept busy while they concentrate on the conversation with the adoption counselor and filling out paperwork. It also makes it more of a "family" event, which results in a bigger turnout.

If you don't want to have a kids' area at your event, you may not need to have an activities team; or you could have them concentrate on other duties.

Volunteer Management

Ideally you'll have a staff member who can coordinate this team. If not, you'll need a trusted, organized volunteer who can be in charge of recruiting, scheduling and training volunteers, and checking them in at the event and making sure they have one central point of contact for questions or concerns that arise during the event.

Many of your volunteers for this event will be new volunteers who won't know anyone else in your organization yet—so the people on this committee will be the faces they recognize. Hopefully these volunteers will stick around and become regular volunteers, and this team is their first impression of your organization.

Foster Team

Again, if you have a shelter-based organization, you may not need additional foster homes for this event, but for most organizations, you'll rely on foster homes to increase your animal capacity in preparation for the event.

The foster team recruits fosters, trains them, helps them coordinate medical care/surgery for their animal(s), and tells them when and where to bring the animal for adoption. The foster team is the point of contact for the fosters. This team must have great communication and be VERY organized. Depending on the structure of your organization, this team may keep track of and manage all the paperwork for the adoptable animals as well.

Where will you get the money?

Unless you're independently funded, you'll need some way of paying for the supplies, publicity, extra medical care and other expenses of producing this event.



- ✓ Provide a convincing, **cogent, organized plan**.
- ✓ Prove you will deliver **results**.
- ✓ Show how you'll make it **easy** for them.
- ✓ Show how it will **benefit** them.

If you provide a convincing plan, there is a great chance that you can get an organization like the PETCO Foundation to put up the money for this event, and hopefully allow you to hold it at their store. It means CRAZY increases in revenue for that store, so it's totally worth their time. Every adopter walks out of the store with a cart full of stuff for their new pet.

The key is presenting them (or any benefactor) with a great, solid, organized, cogent plan. Show them you know exactly what you're going to do, how you're going to do it and what you expect the results to be.

If you can't get a big box pet supply store, you still have LOTS of other options. Probably your best bet will be local businesses, as it's very hard to cut through the red tape at chain stores such as Wal-Mart, Target, Lowes, etc.

What you'll spend money on—a sample budget

Keep in mind that some of the things you buy you can re-use in other avenues (crates, for example) and some are consumable (food, collars, etc.). So the first time you do this event, you'll have to allocate money for crates, and then you won't have to do that the second or third time around.

Item	Cost
Marketing	
Posters/Postcards Printing	336.00
Check stuffers (printing)	255.00
Facebook Contest	250.00
Website/Social Media	700.00
Setup	
Tents	3,000.00
Crates	1,000.00
Port-o-potties	89.00
Supplies	300.00
Banners	250.00
T-shirts	1700.00
Decorations	500.00
Spotlights	650.00
Gas for Generators	200.00
Leashes	75.00
Kids Tent	250.00
Collars and Tags	175.00
Kitty take-home boxes	150.00
Kitty Litter Trays	30.00

Location, Location, Location

Our most successful events have been held in the parking lot of shopping centers – outside a pet supply store or other supportive business.

You need a really supportive store partner, because they have to coordinate with the management of all the other stores in the shopping center so they know what is going on and support it!

You might also look into a vacant building—lots of those these days. Old Wal-Mart or grocery stores, for example. Owner companies might rent to you for a week, in exchange you could pay utilities (insurance is a factor here).

Finding People to Help

You'll need a lot more volunteers for this event than for most things you usually do. However, you'll find that getting people to sign up is a breeze! People LOVE these events and get excited about volunteering.

- ✓ High Schools/Colleges (community service)
- ✓ Clubs like 4-H, FFA
- ✓ Churches
- ✓ Scout Troops
- ✓ Corporate Volunteers
- ✓ Social Media
- ✓ Craigslist
- ✓ ASK

Volunteer Orientation and Management

After you recruit these people, you need to put them into shifts to make sure you have enough people at the event at all times at all locations.

The best way to make sure volunteers do what you want them to do, is to TELL them clearly what you want them to do. We have a 1-hour volunteer orientation session, offered at three different times (to make sure everyone can make it), where we go over the event, what it's about, what they'll be doing, etc. This is crucial because a lot of our volunteers for this event are new volunteers.

Adoption Fees

Part of the reason people will show up in droves to adopt at this event is because it's "special," it's an "event," and lowering your adoption fees just for the event is part of that. If you lower your adoption fees for this event, it adds incentive for people to come adopt.

Obviously you are not going to "make money" on this event. Since you have *increased* your expenses for the event (getting all these extra animals ready and vetted for adoption costs money), it may seem counterintuitive to *reduce* your adoption fees. But let's be honest—do we actually "break even" with adoption fees anyway, no matter how much we charge?

The purpose of a mega-adoption event is **volume**. A hugely important part of guaranteeing that volume is to have a "sale." (I know we cringe at any association with "retail," but the analogies are appropriate in some cases!)

Your adoption fees may be different than ours, but what we have found to work best are the following:

Adult dogs & puppies: \$25

Kittens: \$25

Adult cats (over 6 months): adoption fee waived (*we don't publicize this, and we don't even tell the adopter until the paperwork is filled out and they are ready to adopt. Then we tell them that we are pleased to announce that their cat's adoption fee has been "sponsored."*)

If you have misgivings about reduced or free adoption fees, check out the ASPCA's study on this very topic: <http://www.aspcapro.org/research-on-fee-waived-adoptions.php>

We also run promotions throughout the event to increase traffic. From midnight until 7 am each night, all animals are \$10. This really helps bump traffic in those wee hours of the morning.

We feature promotions of certain animals as well. These aren't reduced fee promotions, but they help to spotlight certain animals. As you might expect, the first animals to get adopted are the puppies, kittens and small dogs. So we have "brown bag specials" to highlight the brown dogs; "Black Beauty" specials to highlight black animals, etc. You can get really creative with it!

We've also had great success with "seniors for seniors" which is where senior citizens over age 65 get to adopt any senior animal (6 years or older) for \$5 at the event. Many of these folks are on fixed incomes, and a pet can provide much-needed companionship and love. This has been one of our most rewarding promotions!

Could all Groups Have the Same Adoption Fee?

This is something we've tried every time, and have not been able to pull it off. Too many different groups, too many different ideas about adoption fees.

We also tried to create a universal adoption application, so that adopters could fill out one application and use it with whichever group they ended up adopting from. This generated even more controversy than the universal adoption fee! As you know, groups have many different policies about adoption applications and criteria which they consider deal-breakers. So it has never been possible for us to use one application for the entire event.

From a customer service perspective, it would be HUGE to be able to have one adoption fee and one adoption application. Adopters are very confused at the event—no matter how many signs we put up, no matter how clearly we explain it on the website, people still don't understand why dogs in one corner of the tent are \$250 and in the other corner they're \$25, and why they have to fill out different applications for those dogs.

If you figure out a way to make this work, let us know! We'd love to hear your success stories!

Followup



The inevitable question from rescue groups about an event like this is, “are these good adoptions? Are these good homes? How can you make a good match at a big event like this, with so many people?”

Okay, that was four questions. But you get the idea.

At our event, we have trained adoption counselors—staff and volunteers—who talk with every potential adopters individually. They fill out an application. We have turned down adopters. So this is not a free-for-all situation.

We also do followup after the event for every adoption, just as we do for regular adoptions during the rest of the year. Two weeks after the adoption, a volunteer calls or emails the adopter and checks to see how things are going.

We have not experienced any higher return rate from adoptions at our mega-adoption event than during our normal adoptions. We feel confident that we are making good adoptions every day of the year—including at our mega-adoption

events. We believe there are many ways to give a pet a great home—and none of those involves being wealthy. We don't believe that adoption fees have anything to do with how much people love their pets, and the difference that these animals make in the lives of their adopters.

Weather Considerations

Chances are, you'll be holding this event outdoors, so weather is a huge factor in the event's success. It's obviously going to be very different, depending on where you are located (if you're in southern California, you can probably skip this section!!).

For us in Oklahoma, fall and spring are the best times to avoid extreme temperatures. But we also have to deal with intense wind and rain possibilities during those times of year. We've been very lucky through most of our events, although it has been pretty hot during some of them, and rainy during a few.

The biggest expense for us, and the biggest savior, has been the large event tents. We rent these from a local company, but other groups have said that they have had them loaned (for free) from insurance company's disaster relief teams, as well as funeral homes, so those are great avenues to pursue. You could possibly save a lot of money if you didn't have to pay to rent those tents.



In hot weather, we hook up extension cords with fans (borrowed from volunteers) to the generators and make sure all the dogs have plenty of circulating air. Of course, they also have lots of fresh water available at all times. We had wading pools available for the dogs who liked to get in the water, and wet bandanas to keep around their necks. We kept a close eye on all the animals, so if anybody looked tired or overheated, we had their foster come

pick them up and take them home for a break.

The reality was, though, that most dogs just didn't hang around the event very long! They were adopted quickly, so they didn't lie around in the heat for long at all.

As far as cats, they were housed in an air-conditioned trailer, so they weren't exposed to the elements at all.

We haven't had to deal with cold weather yet, but the tents do hold in air pretty well, so it's quite a bit warmer than the outside temperatures, and probably could be increased using space heaters. The rain isn't too much of a factor, especially if you have tents. We found that rain did not hamper adopter attendance at all.

Cats

The general chaos and noise level of an event like this is pretty stressful for cats. We wanted to have cats for adoption at the event, but we didn't want to make it too stressful on them.

Our municipal animal control has two large, air-conditioned rescue trailers that we used to house the cats for adoption. The cats were in cages in the trailer, and people walked through the trailer to look at the cats. It worked great. Obviously, for an animal (dog or cat) that is really excitable, fearful or nervous, they should probably stay home. But none of our cats had a problem.



If you don't have access to trailers like this, see if you can locate the adoptable cats indoors somewhere. If you can minimize the noise, cats should be okay. If there is no alternative place for cats, consider making this a dogs-only event.

Promoting the Event

You can't have a successful event if people don't come, so this is a key part. Lots of different ideas to promote the event; here are a few:

- ✓ Promote the event on your Petfinder home page and Event Calendar
- ✓ Promote event with a contest! (wildfireapp.com is a great place to start)
- ✓ Use social media (reporters hang out on Twitter)
- ✓ Encourage fans/friends to promote in THEIR social media
- ✓ Create a website or a section of your website with all event details: time, location, list of



adoptable animals, etc. (see <http://midnightwoofness.okhumane.org> for ours)

- ✓ Promote prior to event with photo-ops, on camera
- ✓ Restaurants—check stuffers with a coupon
- ✓ Make a unique press kit to deliver to TV stations
- ✓ Posters—volunteers hang around town
- ✓ Get on as many online community calendars as you can (free)
- ✓ Radio—see if stations will record and run PSAs
- ✓ Postcards—hand out at workplaces, schools, churches, ANYwhere
- ✓ Promote with video; featured pets leading up to event
- ✓ Countdowns are critical (people will STAY UP to see what's happening)
- ✓ Keep updated through social media & event website or your regular website and blog

Keep in mind that people are very “last-minute” oriented. So if people aren't talking about the event until just a few days before, don't fret.

However, newspapers, magazines and TV stations DO plan ahead, so get on their radar as early as you can!

Miscellaneous Info (things we learned from our mistakes!)

Have access to restrooms at all times

The first time we did an overnight event, we forgot about restroom access! During the day, you'll have access to restrooms in nearby stores (if you hold your event in a retail area), but make sure you have access overnight.

Security

If you do an overnight event, you'll want to recruit some volunteer off-duty police officers or someone who can act in the capacity of security. No matter where you're having this event, it's worth the expense (if you can't find volunteers) to invest in a security officer overnight or (preferably) during the entire event. Why? You will have money there, you'll have lots of people who are very excited—you could potentially have fights over highly desirable animals. Overnight you may have kids or intoxicated people who want to cause trouble. A uniformed officer can go a long way to deterring any problems like these.

Feeding Volunteers

We had SUCH appreciative volunteers when we fed them! Ask local restaurants to donate food and snacks for meals during the event for volunteers. Then you

can thank these vendors on your website, social media, etc. In addition, be sure to get bottled water for volunteers to drink, at the very minimum.

Make sure you have Internet access

A key part to keeping people engaged is to post regular updates on social media. A GREAT way to do this is to upload video updates and photos. You'll need an Internet connection to do this. Usually a nearby store can allow you to use their wireless connection, but if not, you could borrow or rent a mifi card (cellular providers carry these; it's a small card that acts as a wireless router, providing a connection via a cell tower)

Minor Emergencies Clinic

It's good to have an emergency plan in place. With so many animals and so many people, it's likely that someone will get hurt, bitten, etc. have a plan, and make sure your organization's insurance is up to date and covers an event like this. Make sure you know where the nearest clinic is and how to get there!

Cage Cards—"snatch & grab"

When we opened at midnight, people would rush in in droves and grab several animals at once, to "decide" later. This meant that within minutes, we had entirely empty cages. Then people would return the pets they didn't want back to any cage, with a cage card that didn't match that animal. This can be very confusing with many volunteers who are not familiar with every animal, and the general chaos of the event, and the dark of night.

We devised a new system where each cage card goes with the animal, so if the animal is put back into a different cage, it's not the end of the world, because its cage card stays with it.

Each animal is also tagged with an ID tag that has its ID number and our phone number. This way if an animal is separated from its cage card, we can still identify it by ID number. We don't put the animal's name on the tag, because adopters usually change the name, and we hope they will leave this tag on the animal as a secondary ID.



Adoption Tally at the Event

Be sure to have some way to keep a publicly visible adoption tally at the event. Everyone wants to know how many adoptions have been done so far. A volunteer built us a stand and we used large binder rings and clips to fashion a “flip chart” calendar (see photo). It was simple and allowed it to be updated whenever we got updates from the store.



Appendices

Outside of this guide, you'll also find some extra documents to help you produce your mega-adoption event.

Volunteer Scheduling Template

This is a document for you to fill in to keep track of your volunteer schedules. You'll need to customize it with your event details, but it's a great template to start with.

Volunteer Job Descriptions

A breakdown of what volunteers will do in each position during the event

“Master Document” Template

Contains snapshot of event details, as well as checklists of duties for all committees and members. This will be your brain in planning for and executing the event; a place to keep all your most important information handy.

Budget Spreadsheet

An example of a budget in spreadsheet form