

Project TNR
NJ's Humane Solution for Feral Cats



Post Office Box 174
Englishtown, NJ 07726
Phone: 732-446-6808
Web: ProjectTNR.com

Dear feral cat advocate:

We are excited that you want to work with your town on implementing a feral cat Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) policy and we want to help you in every way that we can.

Our assistance will be more useful and productive if you take a few initial steps to gather information. If you can, please do the following. It will help if you have weekly or monthly meetings set up so that you can work on this as a team.

You will need to submit a request to your town for information. If for any reason you are not comfortable submitting such a request under your name, let us know and we will help you.

1. GET STATISTICS: Your town's animal control and sheltering records are public records. A New Jersey law called the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) says that towns have to give you this information if you ask for it. Your town should have a form for requesting public records. Look on your town's website to see if it is posted online. It may be under a link for forms or documents, or under a link for the town clerk's office. If you can't find the form online, go to the town clerk's office in your town's municipal building and ask for a hard copy of the form.

Do not write on the records request that you want to start a TNR program. In the space on the public records request form that asks what you want, simply write the following:

"Records showing the following information for the current year thus far AND the last 3 calendar years:

- a) number of cats impounded
- b) number of cats euthanized
- c) number of cats adopted
- d) number of cats reclaimed
- e) cost to town of holding each cat for 7 days
- f) cost per cat for euthanasia and body disposal
- g) logs or other records showing locations where impounded cats were picked up by animal control
- h) logs or other records showing number, type, and place of origin for complaint calls regarding cats

Once you file this request, the town must respond within 7 days. You will have to pay for copies of these records. Under a new law, your town cannot charge you more than 5 cents per page for regular size documents and 7 cents per page for legal size documents. This is a lot less than most towns used to charge, so if you have had trouble paying for copies of similar records before, it should be more affordable now.

If you cannot pay for the copies, you can ask to inspect the documents instead of receiving copies, and just copy the information. You can also ask some towns to email you the records, in which case there also should not be a fee. It depends on how many pages the records are.

The goal of Project TNR, a program of Animal Protection League of NJ, is to introduce Trap-Neuter-Return to communities as the humane, effective and cost-effective method of controlling feral cat populations. Trap-Neuter-Return is a comprehensive program that will result in lower animal control costs, fewer to no births, reduction of nuisance complaints by residents and the alleviation of public health concerns.

The town cannot charge you for researching or gathering the information unless you are asking for something that would reasonably require extra time for research. The records listed above are basic records that towns have to keep on an ongoing basis and should not require research. If you have difficulty obtaining the records at a reasonable cost, contact APLNJ or the ACLU of New Jersey for assistance.

2. FIND YOUR TOWN'S ORDINANCES RELATING TO CATS: It is important to know what your town's ordinances say. Look at your town's website to see if your town's ordinances are online. Many towns have their ordinances online. If your town does not, go to the town clerk's office and ask to see the code book. Save or make copies of the following:

- a) any ordinances related to cat licensing
- b) your town's nuisance ordinance and public health nuisance ordinance or code
- c) any ordinances that ban feeding any animals—cats, wildlife, etc.
- d) any ordinance limiting the number of companion animals per household
- e) any ordinance that mentions feral cats
- f) all other ordinances in the animal control section that mention cats or could affect cats

3. FIND OUT WHO IS ANIMAL-FRIENDLY IN YOUR TOWN GOVERNMENT: It is usually best to first approach a person in your town government who cares about animals. Ask around to find out if there is anyone in any of the following offices who is known to care about animals (while you are asking, find out if any of the following people are just plain reasonable and friendly and easy to approach, as this is important too):

- a) anyone on town council
- b) the mayor or anyone in the mayor's office
- c) the town business administrator or anyone in the town administration office
- d) the Board of Health
- e) the Health Department
- f) the Animal Control Officer

4. FIND ALLIES: Try to find a few other residents or business owners in your town who would like to see the policy changed. These people can be feral cat trappers, caregivers, or just people who want to see better policies for cats and people in your town. If you cannot find anyone, don't despair—we may be able to help with this.

5. TRY TO GET A SENSE OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE: If your town suddenly agreed to embrace TNR, are there already trappers and caregivers in your town to accomplish it? Try to get a sense of how many people, and what they can accomplish. Are there only two of you? Or are there enough people to do town-wide TNR if the town will just allow it? Do you or any of the other trappers have access to funding? Again, don't despair if you can't figure this out—we may be able to help. But the more information you have about this, the easier it will be to get started.

Once you have all of this information, contact us at info@aplnj.org. We can help you figure out what you need from your town and how to go about trying to get it. We can help you make a presentation to your town. Also email if you have any questions about the information in this packet, or if you have trouble following any of the steps or you feel you need to discuss something right away.

We look forward to working with you and we look forward to hearing about your progress!



Michelle Lerner, Policy Specialist