

# Act for Cats: Getting started

## So you want to be a cat advocate?

If you want to take action for cats in your community but don't know where to begin, these various on-demand resources have been created and compiled to help you get started. You can find all the videos linked below at [bfas.org/NAWA2023playlist](https://bfas.org/NAWA2023playlist). Let's go!

### Step one

#### Start with a foundation of cat knowledge:

- WATCH: "Cat Stats 101"
  - [youtu.be/B1fIHfd8Fm4](https://youtu.be/B1fIHfd8Fm4) (51:32)
- DO: Identify resources available for cats in your community

### Step two

#### Share what you've learned:

- WATCH: "How Spreading the Word Saves Animals"
  - [youtu.be/GWB59V5HQC0](https://youtu.be/GWB59V5HQC0) (44:41)
- WATCH: "How to Canvass"
  - (English) [youtu.be/ZIZG8h9q3PA](https://youtu.be/ZIZG8h9q3PA) (13:27)
  - (Spanish) [youtu.be/p3c42L\\_3ipl](https://youtu.be/p3c42L_3ipl) (10:45)
- WATCH: "How to Write an Op-Ed"
  - [youtu.be/rmDQSJqXA00](https://youtu.be/rmDQSJqXA00) (16:53)
- READ: "Act for Cats: Canvassing" (pages 2-4)
- READ: "Act for Cats: Op-Eds" (pages 5-7)
- DO: Share out cat information through social media, canvassing, and/or writing an Op-Ed.

### Step three

#### Learn how elected officials can help or hurt local cat issues:

- WATCH: "Talking to Legislators about Cats" (54:33)
  - [youtu.be/GWB59V5HQC0](https://youtu.be/GWB59V5HQC0)
- READ: "Tips and best practices for writing to elected officials" (pages 8-9)
- DO: Write to your local elected officials and/or plan to attend events where local leaders will be present.

### Want to get hands-on?

- DO: Plan a community cat trapping day! (pages 10-11)

#### Questions?

Reach our grassroots team at [action2025@bestfriends.org](mailto:action2025@bestfriends.org) with any questions.

# Act for Cats: Canvassing

## What is neighborhood canvassing?

Canvassing is one of the simplest but most effective forms of building awareness around any effort. This involves going door-to-door, neighborhood-to-neighborhood, and distributing information and resources. It can be an incredibly rewarding experience, too, enabling you to build genuine connections with people in your community. Review the list below to ensure your canvassing goes as smoothly and as enjoyably as possible! You can print the final page (checklist and sample script) to take with you.

### Be prepared!

- Have talking points listed out and/or a canvassing script ready before heading out; this will streamline your experience. Introduce yourself first then present the facts/information you want to share about your effort and what you are asking the people you are meeting to do. A script will always be helpful in navigating the conversation, but it's important to sound natural as well — i.e., put the provided talking points in your own words!  
Need inspiration for what to share? Ask people to sign the cat pledge: [bfas.org/catpledge](https://bfas.org/catpledge)

### Respect the space.

- As you meet people at their homes, keep in mind that you are venturing into their personal space. Be respectful of their property by using sidewalks and driveways and avoid stepping on the person's lawn or garden. Look out for and abide by any "No Trespassing" and "No Soliciting" signs. (Scan the entryway for these signs before you approach the door!)

### Be courteous.

- When canvassing, general etiquette is to knock at most two times (this includes ringing a doorbell). Wait several seconds between each knock or ring. Take a few steps back to allow for ample space when someone steps out and to create a comfortable speaking distance that won't overwhelm or intimidate the listener.

### Leave information, when and where appropriate.

- Leave any relevant literature/flyers you have with the listener, or in a secure spot if no one answered the door. Flyers can be left via door slot, wedged in a door, or tucked into a fence, but do not use people's mailboxes as it is a federal offense for anyone except an official postal service employee or the mailbox owner to do so.

### Safety first!

- When possible, work in pairs as you canvass neighborhoods, especially in unfamiliar areas. Set a specific time and place to meet if you and your canvassing team/partner decide to split up to cover more area. Trust your gut in unknown situations! For example, avoid canvassing homes with unsupervised outdoor dogs; do not enter any property that looks physically unsafe; and avoid wandering out of your agreed-upon canvassing block without letting your team know. Not only is there safety in numbers, but a canvassing partner can also be there to support you as you're engaging with neighbors about your effort!

# Act for Cats: Canvassing

## Dress comfortably.

- Canvassing an entire block can take up to an hour, so make sure to wear comfortable clothing and closed-toe walking shoes. Bonus points if you can wear a shirt that identifies what you will be talking about (for example, a Best Friends volunteer shirt, 2025 Action Team shirt, or other swag from your local shelter).

## Plan for the weather.

- Weather conditions can change at any moment. Stay prepared for any kind of weather by checking your local forecast before you begin canvassing. Wear sun-protective gear to keep you safe and cool if you're canvassing during warmer days. Remember to pack water and snacks and take breaks!

## Gather supplies.

- Print our Canvassing Checklist (on the next page) to help you remember all the essential supplies (including script) you'll need for your canvassing day.

## Go! Be friendly and remain positive — you got this.

- Canvassing and talking to strangers can seem daunting if you're doing it for the first time. More often than not, people are interested in learning what you want to share, especially when it comes to connecting them to resources and information that could directly help their community. You will be surprised how many people are excited to chat with you when they learn you are looking to help animals and aren't trying to sell them anything! There may be individuals who will not be interested in supporting your effort and that's okay. Kindly thank them for their time and stay motivated, you will find people who want to support you.



# 2025 Action Team

[bestfriends.org/actionteam](https://bestfriends.org/actionteam)

# Act for Cats: Canvassing

## What should I bring?

- Clipboard(s)
- Cat pledge, petitions/flyers, literature, etc.
- Talking points/script
- Pens/highlighters
- Hand sanitizer
- Sunscreen
- Sun protection gear (sunglasses, hat, lightweight long sleeve, etc.)
- Water/electrolyte packets
- Snacks
- Portable phone charger/power bank



## Sample Script

Hi, I'm [FIRST NAME] and I'm out here today to support Best Friends Animal Society. Do you know that cats are needlessly dying in local shelters when there are solutions being implemented all over the country that could save them? Oftentimes we hear that it's because people don't like cats. We want to show our elected officials that this community cares about its cats.

Today, we are simply asking for our neighbors and community to sign a pledge saying that we agree that cat populations need to be managed in a humane way and that we want to keep the cats in our community healthy and safe.

Thank you so much for your time and have a great rest of your day!

### Structure/order:

1. Who you are and what group/cause you are supporting
2. What the issue is
3. What you would like the listener to do



# Act for Cats: Op-Eds

## What is an op-ed?

Local media can be used to get the word out about your cause. Op-Eds are short opinion-based articles submitted by readers. Watch this video ([bfas.org/OpEdvid](https://bfas.org/OpEdvid)) for more information on how to get your Op-Ed published!

By sharing your stance and the latest information, you can help shape and inform your community's knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about best practices in the ever-evolving industry of animal welfare. The following information is provided to help you craft an Op-Ed that is effective in delivering your opinion with data-backed information to make your point clear and create a persuasive call to action.

## One

### Identify and think through the following:

- Why are you writing this?
  - Is it to convince, change, share or update, celebrate, influence or sway, or change public policy?
- What's the purpose or intent of your piece?
  - Is it a legislative opportunity? Are you asking your local representative for something?
  - Issue(s) that you want to change or improve?
  - Change you want to see in your city or a new behavior you want to see?
  - Who is your audience? Whom are you asking to do something?
- Is there a way to make this topic relevant to other recent news stories?
  - Is there an activity coming up that would make your Op-Ed relevant?
- Word limits depend on the publication; check their website or call the office for specifics. Usually, they're anywhere between 250 – 750 words max. (Tip: You can check your word count at the bottom left of a draft Word document.)

## Two

### Key facts and information to consider including or conveying in your Op-Ed:

- How are the ways of “traditional” thinking not working? How do new solutions provide results in alignment with current values or possibilities?
- How would that which you are recommending/advocating for be advantageous? What's the benefit to the community/individuals?
  - Define key phrasing or terms (especially acronyms).
  - Remember: Most readers will not be as familiar with animal welfare terms, so stay away from shelter-industry lingo and clearly define terms that may seem obvious to you, like community cats or TNR.

# Act for Cats: Op-Eds

## Three

**Tools, suggestions, and timely examples of Op-Eds on animal welfare topics:**

- "Writing Effective Op-Eds" — Duke Communicator Toolkit

Below are some recent Editorials & Op-Eds from Best Friends employees. \*\*If any of these topics pertain to your community, please feel free to use them as thought starters. If you'd like to write about the same topic, you may reuse ideas but please put the message into your own words.

- "Saving pets is a community issue where everyone can have a role" – Lee Ann Shenefiel
- "Cat gulags a misguided, counter-productive idea" – Richard Angelo
- "Your local Utah animal shelters need you more than ever" – Michelle Dosson
- "Let's Not Kill Cats" – by Lee Greenwood

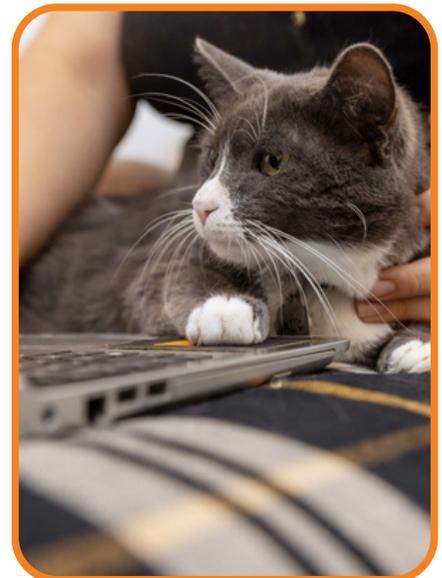
## Four

**Submitting your Op-Ed:**

- Sometimes, you'll be able to submit your Op-Ed through the paper's website. Check the Opinion section for directions.
- If you don't see that option, check your paper's staff directory for the Opinion Editor. If you can't find that person, call or email the paper and ask who is best to receive your submission.

## Five

See the next page for definitions of general terms Best Friends uses that may come in handy while writing your Op-Ed.



# 2025 Action Team

[bestfriends.org/actionteam](https://bestfriends.org/actionteam)

## Terminology guide: General terms Best Friends uses that may come in handy

**Trap-neuter-return:** In trap-neuter-return (TNR) or trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) programs, community cats are trapped and transported directly to a spay/neuter clinic, where they are sterilized, vaccinated, and ear-tipped for identification. Following recovery, the cats are returned to the location where they were trapped to live out their lives without producing any more kittens.

**Community cats:** Outdoor cats who live in the community and are often cared for by multiple residents. Adjectives to use to describe community cats: stray, free-roaming, outdoor. (We've decided not to use "unowned" or "ownerless" to describe these cats since that's not an important descriptor.) Upon first mention of community cats in a piece, it's a good idea to provide a brief description, since readers might not know what we mean by "community cat." For example: "community cats (aka stray or outdoor cats).

**Community-supported sheltering:** This new term encapsulates the future of sheltering — having communities more actively involved in the lifesaving process through comprehensive fostering, adoption, and outreach programs. "Community-driven sheltering" may be appropriate in some situations, but not for general use.

**Breed-specific legislation:** BSL stands for breed-specific legislation. It refers to laws that ban or restrict certain types of dogs based simply on their appearance, usually because they are perceived as dangerous. BSL is a misnomer in that BSL laws are anything but specific. These laws target dogs not because they are a specific breed, but because someone thinks they may look like a certain breed. And even if dogs may look alike, it doesn't mean they will behave the same way.

**Dog breed restrictions:** Dog breed bans and other forms of breed-restrictive legislation force many people to give up their beloved pets. In America, responsible people should be allowed to love and care for any breed of dog they choose. Working together, we can ensure that every loving pet — no matter the breed — receives a loving home.

**Pet-inclusive housing:** Housing is the second most cited reason people give for surrendering a pet, so it is imperative that people have access to pet-inclusive housing. Many rentals and government-subsidized housing make it difficult to own a pet. Even properties that are "pet-friendly" might have pet weight limits, such as "no dogs over 25 pounds" or breed restrictions. When families are forced to choose between securing a place to live and keeping their family pets, they may see surrender as a last resort.

## Tips and best practices for writing to elected officials:

### Be polite.

- Decision-makers are more likely to respond to friendly messages that offer collaboration, not criticism.

### Be proactive.

- Start building a relationship with your local elected official by simply letting them know who you are, what local issues you care about, and that you appreciate their service to your community. Your message doesn't need to come with an ask. In fact, starting a conversation without a particular ask can be a great way to get their attention.

### Be patient.

- Elected officials have a lot of issues on their plate and may be unaware of the issues that are most important to you. Give them time to learn and understand why this particular issue matters to you and to the community.

### Be specific.

- Think about what motivates elected officials and draft your message accordingly. Communicate using reasons like data, taxpayer savings, and community health benefits as opposed to purely emotional-based appeals (e.g., "these programs are cost-effective" rather than "these programs help furbabies!"). Share resources where applicable. ([network.bestfriends.org/proven-strategies/advocacy/policy-resources](http://network.bestfriends.org/proven-strategies/advocacy/policy-resources))

### Stay local.

- Community cat programs are approved at the city and county levels; focus your advocacy messages accordingly! Search your city council and/or county commission for decision-makers to contact (e.g., your mayor, the council member for your district, etc.). Often, this information is found on your local government website. Emphasize that you are a member of the community, a constituent, and a voter. ([usa.gov/elected-officials](http://usa.gov/elected-officials))

### Grease the wheels!

- Make a personal connection. Congratulate the official for something they've done or that you've seen about them in the local paper, thank them for working and securing funding for a recent community project, etc. Everyone likes to feel appreciated, and this is a great opener when you're introducing yourself.

# Act for Cats: Write on

## Sample message:

As your constituent, I wanted to introduce myself and let you know that I care about our community, including the cats who live here and the people who care for them. I appreciate your service to the community and wanted to share that this is an issue I am passionate about.

[Include a personal story, anecdote, or relevant local information or context]

Trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) programs for cats create safe, compassionate communities for people and pets alike. TNVR is an animal-friendly, veterinarian-approved, cost-effective, and common-sense method for keeping community cats safe, healthy, and out of shelters, while reducing their numbers over time. Cats are sterilized, vaccinated against rabies, then returned to their homes.

Removing community cats doesn't work – if it did, we wouldn't have any community cats left! Alternatively, TNVR stabilizes the population with sterile, vaccinated animals who keep out the intact and unvaccinated cats, and their population decreases naturally. TNVR is \*the\* best practice for humanely managing community cats and it is supported by the American Bar Association, the National Animal Care & Control Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Humane Society of the United States, Best Friends Animal Society, and me – your constituent!

Thank you for your service to our community,

[YOUR NAME AND LOCAL ADDRESS]



## 2025 Action Team

[bestfriends.org/actionteam](https://bestfriends.org/actionteam)

# Act for Cats: Trap away

## Plan a cat-trapping day:

One of the many ways you can take action to save more animal lives is by holding a community cat-trapping day!

What is cat trapping? Trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) is a management technique in which community cats (aka stray or outdoor cats) are humanely trapped for the purpose of transporting them to a spay/neuter clinic, where they are evaluated and sterilized by a licensed veterinarian, vaccinated against rabies and ear-tipped for identification. Following recovery, the cats are returned to the location where they were humanely trapped so they can live out their lives.

For more info and FAQs, visit: [resources.bestfriends.org/article/frequently-asked-questions-about-tnvr](https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/frequently-asked-questions-about-tnvr)

Community cat trapping consists of a few steps. Prior to trapping, it is key to do research, planning, and preparation to ensure that you have the community support, proper resources, and details firmed up to pull off a successful cat-trapping day.

## Step one

### Research and planning:

- Review humane cat trapping best practices and procedures:
  - [resources.bestfriends.org/article/humane-cat-trapping-instructions-tnvr](https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/humane-cat-trapping-instructions-tnvr)
  - [alleycat.org/resources/how-to-help-community-cats-a-step-by-step-guide-to-trap-neuter-return/](https://alleycat.org/resources/how-to-help-community-cats-a-step-by-step-guide-to-trap-neuter-return/)
  - [resources.bestfriends.org/article/found-kittens-what-do](https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/found-kittens-what-do)
- Connect with your neighbors and include them in the effort. Many people want to help the neighborhood cats but don't know how. Let people know what you are planning to do and why, and how they can help.
- Identify your local spay/neuter clinic. Use Google or the following links then schedule appointments when ready.
  - [unitedspayalliance.org/state-local/program-locator-map/](https://unitedspayalliance.org/state-local/program-locator-map/)
  - [animalleague.org/get-involved/spay-usa/](https://animalleague.org/get-involved/spay-usa/)
- Create a checklist for any resources and supplies that you'll need, including transportation to and from the clinic and a recovery area for the cats post-surgery.

# Act for Cats: Trap away

## Step two

### Preparation:

- Do a manual count of the cats you see outside in your neighborhood. Check to see if any belong to your neighbors. Are any of the cats you've seen ear-tipped?
- Secure traps to use (from spay/neuter clinics, animal rescue organizations, neighbors, etc.).
- Ensure you have approval for the areas you plan to place traps.
- Helpful prep resources:
  - Learn how to trap here
  - Easy solutions for resolving issues with neighborhood cats here
  - Creative fundraising solutions to help cover costs here
  - Community Cat Program Handbook here
- Share important information with neighbors
  - Use your neighborhood network, Nextdoor, or Facebook to communicate your plans with neighbors
  - Alert them prior to trapping (door knock, leave notes on people's doors, and communicate via any neighborhood channels)

## Step three

### Schedule your cat-trapping day!

## Questions?

Reach our grassroots team at [action2025@bestfriends.org](mailto:action2025@bestfriends.org) with any questions about these resources. We look forward to hearing how it goes!

You can also share your story in our Facebook group:  
[facebook.com/groups/2025ActionTeam](https://facebook.com/groups/2025ActionTeam)



[bestfriends.org/actionteam](https://bestfriends.org/actionteam)

# 2025 Action Team