



# City of Calgary Animal Services: Dog Licensing Program

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professionals: [www.ASPCApro.org](http://www.ASPCApro.org).

## City of Calgary Animal Services

### *Successful dog licensing*



Calgary has a successful dog licensing program where currently there are more than 90,000 licensed dogs in the city of Calgary, which represents 90% of the dogs in Calgary.

Through an effective licensing program, the city of Calgary Animal Services has a save rate of 97%. Approximately 89% of dogs are returned to their owner, with approximately 85% returned within 24 hours.

### Stats

- Of the 5,000 dogs that entered their shelter in 2004, Calgary had a save rate of 97%.
- The 3% that are euthanized are due to significant health or behavioral issues.
- Approximately 85% of the dogs impounded by Animal Services are returned with 24 hours

### How Cool is That?

We are impressed with the amazing statistics that Calgary has been able to achieve both in returning dogs to owners and decreasing their euthanasia rates. They have combined a strong education campaign with strict enforcement and remained open and accessible to their community.

### Adopt or Adapt

Spokane Regional Animal Protections Services in Spokane, Washington has already taken this model and implemented it. You can read about their program on our website. If you're not ready to implement the whole program, consider implementing on-line license renewals and let your community know exactly what their license monies fund.

If you are looking for grant support in your planning, consider applying for a [PetSmart Charities Curious Cat Grant](#).

## City of Calgary Animal Services

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As Calgary continues to grow, the demand on the shelter has remained stable with slightly more than 5,000 dogs being impounded annually.



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## Who They Are and What They Do

City of Calgary Animal Services  
2201 Portland St. S.E.  
Calgary, Alberta T2G 4M7

At Animal and Bylaw Services, their mission is to “encourage a community where pets, their owners and neighbours can live in safety and harmony.”

The City of Calgary Animal and Bylaw Services

- Develops, maintains and enforces City of Calgary bylaws
- Cares for all animals impounded under the bylaw
- Educates residents of Calgary about responsible pet ownership

## Ingredients and Prep Work

### Prerequisites

- A local statute to support the license campaign. Calgary has been aggressive in its Licensing campaign since the 1980's, and success has resulted from many cases of trial and error this program has taken more than 20 years to achieve the results that it has today.
- A municipal government that makes animal issues a priority. Calgary's success comes from having a solid foundation; this foundation is provided by support from politicians and decision makers coupled with strong legislation that provides them with the appropriate penalties and appointments to successfully get the job done.
- A strong group of partners to work together. In Calgary, the veterinarians, rescue agencies, animal control agencies and retailers are involved and supportive.
- A clear statement for dog owners of the value they receive for their license fee.

### Timeline

- Calgary has been aggressively pushing the licensing program since the late 1980's and started to see significant results in the latter 90's.
- Since the 80's, the population of Calgary has grown from 500,000 to nearly 1 million. Since 1985, they have seen a reduction in aggressive incidents by approximately 75%.

## Step by Step

### 1. Understand the significance of licensing and the impact it has on making owners responsible for their animals.

Calgary's program is a combination of education and strict enforcement. Animal Services is out in the community attending events and visiting schools with a program about responsible pet ownership. They couple education with their strict penalties for unlicensed dogs.

### 2. Maintain good statistics on return to owner rates and euthanasia rates.

Calgary makes all its statistics available to the public online.

### 3. Enact strong legislation and penalties related to non-compliance.

In Calgary, the penalty for an unlicensed dog is \$250 and is a zero tolerance policy.

### 4. Gain commitment from your organization to provide necessary resources to achieve success.

In Calgary they started out with mill rate support which provided for a significant contribution from tax dollars in the beginning to get the program running.

### 5. A solid computer program to track owners and animals.

Calgary has made it easy for the public to buy and renew licenses online.

## Results

### The Numbers

- Of the 5,000 dogs that came into the shelter in 2004, Calgary had a save rate of 97%. The 3% that are euthanized are due to significant health or behavioral issues.
- Their euthanasia rate for dogs is 3%. These are euthanized due to aggression, behaviour, or health not because they euthanize healthy adoptable dogs.
- Approximately 85% of the dogs impounded by Animal Services are returned with 24 hours
- There is less stress on staff due to fewer euthanasias.
- Less stress on their facility. Dogs are going home much faster.
- People are becoming more responsible dog owners: they have their dogs licensed. There is an increase in permanent identification (use of microchips or tattoos).

### Critical Factors

- To be effective, voluntary compliance needs to be achieved, and Calgary has worked hard to teach people the importance of licensing and responsible dog ownership.
- Continual relationship building among their partners so that they support their program and help educate pet owners that they interact with
- Vision and adaptability: knowing what the trends are in the city and being able to address those trends. For example: when dogs are adopted through the Calgary Humane Society, Calgary gives them a free 6 month license. The advantage is that when the dogs are adopted, they are in their system and easy to track. So they will be licensed for life. They are currently working together with other rescue foundations to grant them free licensing for a limited period of time so that they can get those dogs into their system and track them also.

- Continuously strive to be better - examine what other agencies are doing and determine if their program and initiatives can work in Calgary.
- A data system that meets their needs.
- Officers trained in mediation; able to educate people along with enforcement
- Education: sharing the statistics and successes. Renewal system that is easy for people to use and cost and time efficient for the shelter. License renewals are mailed out a month in advance and due the first week of the month. A second notice is mailed on the 10th or 11th of the following month after the license is due. Then any unpaid licenses go on an exception report and the officers call individuals who have not renewed their license. Citizens are advised to pay immediately or they risk a \$250 fine.
- Citizens have a variety of ways to renew their license making it very easy: over the phone, by mail, at the bank at our office, downtown at city hall.
- Approximately every 18 months they have a license campaign to remind people of their zero tolerance policy
- Support from the animal business related community

## Thinking Outside the Box

Their licensing program supports a wide range of services, that Calgary is diligent about telling the public. With the income from licenses, they are able to:

- Feed and shelter unclaimed cats and dogs in a veterinarian inspected facility Transport lost dogs that require emergency care to a veterinarian
- Operate dog and cat adoption programs
- Help neighbors resolve dog related problems
- Return lost dogs to their owners where they operate a drive home program
- Operate a volunteer program for socializing dogs and cats awaiting adoption
- Operate school and community education programs
- Provide dog owners with a vinyl emergency window sticker.

## How They Feel About What They Did

They are understandably proud of their program. In addition to the powerful statistics they have also noticed a change in perception on the part of the public.

Animal Services is now viewed as providing a necessary service as opposed to ending the lives of dogs.

## Their Next Steps

- Calgary is considering life-long dog licensing.

## Some Words of Wisdom

### Be Prepared For

- Changing attitudes: dog owners becoming advocates for licensing and programs in general
- People becoming intolerant of individuals who aren't responsible dog owners
- When people adapt an attitude of responsible pet ownership, every agency benefits. This attitude impacts other areas of pet ownership: spaying and neutering, permanent identification

- Improving stats all around: there are fewer dogs at large, fewer incidents of dog aggression, less defecation in parks

### Your Next Step

With the information we've provided, can you start a program like this in your organization? The profile of the City of Calgary Animal Services on the ASPCA® National Outreach website includes a list of resources to get you started.

## Calgary Animal & Bylaw Services: Thumbnail Sketch

City of Calgary Animal & Bylaw Services  
2201 Portland St. S.E.  
Calgary, Alberta  
T2G 4M7

[www.calgary.ca/animalservices](http://www.calgary.ca/animalservices)



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### **Budget**

\$2.9 million

### **Business Type**

Government agency