

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Complete Mailing Address: _____

Telephone # _____ Fax # _____

E-mail: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Chesterfield County Police Department Animal Services Unit Free Ride Home Program

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM (Short Overview)

Society today accepts animals, especially dogs and cats, as part of the family unit. When one is lost or missing the human members of the family unit experience an emotional sense of loss and will do anything they can to find the pet. The "Free Ride Home" program recognizes the importance that animals play in families and communities. There are many success stories related in the media that report on lost animals that are returned to their owners safely. These stories promote government agencies and communities working together with programs that can deliver successful results for all parties involved.



The "Free Ride Home" program is simple in concept. If an unattended pet is found by an animal services officer, they immediately look for an identification tag, microchip or other means of identifying the owner. If the pet, mostly dogs and cats, does not have an identification tag, microchip or other means of identifying the owner of the pet, then the pet is safely transported to the animal shelter. However, if the pet is found to have identification, the owner is immediately notified. The officer will safely transport the companion pet to the owner's residence at no fee. The officer will then have time to speak with the owner about the importance of keeping their pets home and safe from harm. In addition, officers check to ensure the owner has a current rabies vaccination and requirements of dog ownership.

While the program's main focus is to reunite the owner and lost pet, the program has many positive aspects. The "Free Ride Home" program will keep pets out of the public facilities and at home with family members. Officers can return the pet at no fee and ensure the owner is in compliance with the County ordinances; such as, dog license or rabies vaccinations for dogs and cats. The officer is presented in a positive light to the community because now citizens see first hand the compassion the officers has when reuniting pets. Citizens now see the positive aspects of working with the Animal Services officers when returning the pet back to the owner at no fee. In addition, the citizen has the officer's attention to listen to their concerns. Owners and officers now work together to address other animal related issues.



ABSTRACT OF THE PROGRAM (For press releases, brochures, etc.)

The Chesterfield County Police Department's Animal Services Unit recognized a need to reunite lost dogs and cats with their owners as soon as possible. The creation of the "Free Ride Home" program brings together the Animal Services Unit and County citizens to ensure lost companion pets make their way home quickly and not to the local shelter.

The program allows Animal Services Unit officers to provide a free ride home to any pet where officers can identify the owner. Officers who pick up a lost dog or cat with the appropriate identification information will attempt to contact the owner and transport the animal to its home, rather than the shelter.

There is no fee to the owner for having his or her animal returned through the "Free Ride Home" program, whereas owners of dogs and cats that are admitted to the shelter must pay a fee. This program is an incentive for owners to ensure their pets have appropriate identification or a registered microchip. Additionally, there was a very minimal cost to starting the program with a result of some savings in the costs of normal shelter expenses.

THE NEED FOR THE PROGRAM (Innovation, partnering, model, financing, staffing)

The Animal Services Unit recognized a need to provide additional services to the community by assisting citizens in finding and returning lost pets. Once a lost dog or cat is impounded by an officer, the search begins for the owner. Dogs and cats can be at the shelter through the weekend until the shelter opens to the public on a Monday morning. The Animal Services Unit will spend funding to transport, house and maintain the pet until the owner comes forward. In addition, this program will relieve emotional distress that the owner goes through until their pet is returned.



The Animal Services Unit found three points that made this program the best practice for the County. First, providing a service to return lost pets quickly thus reducing stress on citizens and promoting bonds between citizens and officers. Second, reducing the number of pets entering the shelter thus reducing the funding required in transporting, caring and maintaining a pet at the shelter. The third point is providing a program that brought together Animal Services, the local humane society, and citizens working together in unison to provide the best practices in returning lost pets to their owners. The Animal Services Unit found in the early planning stages of the program there was a willingness of all parties to develop and promote a successful program.

Due to the economic downturn, the Animal Services Unit found citizens did not have enough resources to pay high fees associated with the impoundment of their dogs or cats. A dog entering the shelter on a Saturday evening would cost a citizen picking the dog up on Monday afternoon, \$54.00. The Animal Services Unit would have to pay for transportation to the shelter, animal care and maintaining the dog at the shelter. Depending on the type of care needed, the funding for this same dog at the shelter could

be over \$100.00. Therefore, returning the dog back to the owner, which is normally less than a quarter of a mile from its home, was the best solution for the citizens and the County.

The Animal Services Unit in partnership with the Chesterfield County Humane Society began selling lost animal tags for a cost of \$5.00 that citizens could put on their dogs, cats or other animals. When the citizen purchased the tag they fill out a form requiring their name, address and telephone number. The information obtained from the citizens was then entered into the "Free Ride Home" database. The information in the database is available not only to administrative staff at the shelter but also to officers working in the field.

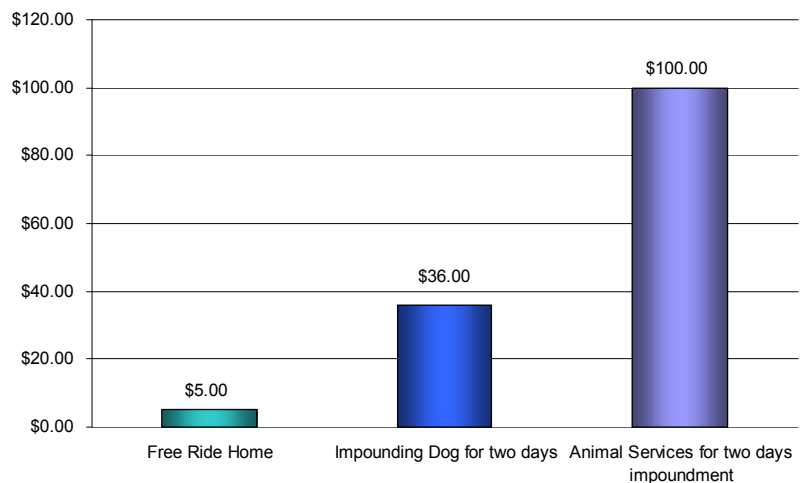


The Animal Services Unit officers' on board computers give the officers access to the database. When an officer locates a pet with a "Free Ride Home" tag, they access the database to retrieve the information. The officer then calls the citizen listed and makes arrangements to meet the citizen to turn over their pet.

There are other methods of identifying a dog, cat or other animals. The uses of microchips have a long history in assisting owners find their lost pets. The Animal Services Unit officers have chip readers assigned to them so that every animal, dog or cat, that come into their custody is scanned. If a microchip is found, a number appears in the scanner window. The number is specific to the company using that chip. A call to the company's help line will reveal the person who is on the registration form. Once the officer has a contact for the owner, the owner receives a call. The officer then makes arrangements to meet the citizen to deliver their pet.

No matter if the pets have a "Free Ride Home" tag, microchip or other means of identification the officers will offer the free ride home to reunite the lost pet with the owner.

The cost of the "Free Ride Home Program" is very low in respect to the Animal Services Unit. The Chesterfield County Humane Society purchased the identification tags for the program and sells them at the shelter for \$5.00 to cover the cost of the purchased tags. Humane Society volunteers at the shelter and Animal Services staff enter the



information into a Microsoft Access database. The officers in the field can access the information from their on board computers. Other forms of identification are purchased by the owner of the companion pet.

The Animal Services Unit does save in budget funds because the companion pet is not housed at the shelter. When the companion pet is reunited at no fee to the owner the Animal Services Unit does not collect funding however it does not spend budget funds to take care of the animal at the shelter. A simple way to look at this is no funds were spent taking care of the animal at the shelter and the citizen did not pay a fee for housing the animal at the shelter. This is a low cost program with many benefits.



A flyer that was presented through the media such as The Chesterfield Observer in March, 2014 and the Chesterfield County Police Department's Newsletter during the first week of April, 2014. The flyer highlights the goals of the program as well as emphasizing the savings to the citizens should their pet be impounded. Citizens are also directed to contact the Animal Services Unit for more information on obtaining the identification tags.

On April 2, 2014, the flyer was posted to the Chesterfield County Police Department's Animal Services Facebook page. It reached 2,762 people almost immediately.



THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

The "Free Ride Home" program began in March, 2014. One year of data resulted in 446 dogs and cats that were reunited with their owners and were not transported to the Animal Services shelter. Animal Services staff was able to concentrate on finding homes for the dogs and cats at the shelter instead of trying to make room for more incoming homeless animals. Working together with the Chesterfield County Humane Society to address a need in the County provided a positive experience to volunteers in our community. The citizens in the County now have more contact with officers to address issues in the community while having a family pet returned at the same time. All this was accomplished at almost zero cost to the Animal Services budget.

2013 Impoundments	2,472
2014 Impoundments	2,215
Differences	- 257

2013 Free Ride Home	0
2014 Free Ride Home	446
Differences	+ 446

This reduction of incoming pets, dogs and cats, allows for additional time to provide life saving measures of those that were not claimed and are awaiting adoptions. In addition, it gives the companion pets housed at the shelter more time in the shelter which results in finding them a home. It reduces the transportation costs, fuel for trucks, and the 30 to 40 minutes time officers drive to reach the shelter to impound the companion pet. It also reduces the veterinary cost to those animals that were injured during this unsupervised time by having the owner meeting the officer at the veterinarian.

The "Free Ride Home" program not only reunited companion pets to owners, it united a three way partnership to help companion pets in Chesterfield County. The Animal Services Unit created a database to track the Chesterfield County Humane Society "Free Ride Home" low cost tags that are sold to the public. County employees and Humane Society volunteers ensure that the information of each tag sold is in the database so the information is available to the Animal Services officers. Citizens who buy the tags enjoy the security that if their pet is found by Animal Services it will be returned to them at no fee. The advertisement for the "Free Ride Home" program received positive responses.

WORTHINESS OF AWARD (Model for other localities)

This program enhances partnerships in the County of Chesterfield while providing a new service to the citizens. The Chesterfield County Police Department's Animal Services Unit, Chesterfield County Humane Society and the citizens in Chesterfield have come together to ensure companion pets make their way home and not end up in a public shelter. Citizens are able to take advantage of a service at no fee by just simply following a few simple steps which include making sure your pet has the proper identification. In return, the Animal Services Unit's population in the shelter is reduced and staff can concentrate on finding pets a home rather than moving animals to make room for more.

The cost of the program had very low impact to the Animal Services budget if any at all. The efforts of the Humane Society volunteers reduced the funds the Animal Services Unit might have spent in the purchase of tags and data entry. The positive response in the media and with citizens in the County was and continues to be positive. The response by the lost companion pets returned to there owners, priceless.

