

8 Steps to Holding a Successful Gelding Clinic



Follow these eight steps to provide a low-cost or free gelding clinic that will increase your organization's exposure and help your community's equines at the same time.

ASPCApro.org/equine

Offering a free or low-cost gelding clinic is one of the most effective ways to help low-income horse owners. Not only does a clinic provide crucial services to clients in need, it spreads the word about your organization throughout the community.

For horses and their owners, the benefits are tangible. The most obvious benefit is fewer stallions, which translates into fewer chances of accidental breeding. And, because geldings are typically easier to manage than stallions, they are able to thrive in a greater variety of situations – which can reduce the chances of abuse and neglect.

Here are eight steps to take and the timeliness to consider. More information on finding funding and dealing with the unexpected are at the end of the booklet.

All photos courtesy of Kentucky Humane Society



This document is provided solely as an example for use as a guide in your gelding clinic. This example and any information contained herein does not in any way constitute legal advice and is not guaranteed to be correct, complete or up-to-date. This document is to be used for informational purposes only.



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Step One:

Assemble Your Planning Committee

Timeline: 8 to 10 months in advance

The core planning committee will be responsible for all facets of the clinic and will provide leadership and make decisions around:

- Number of animals to be served
- Recruitment of veterinarians and other service providers
- Location and date(s)
- Any additional services to be offered (vaccinations, teeth floating)
- Marketing and promotion
- Fundraising
- Identifying community partners (i.e. local horse councils, animal control agencies, others with an interest in horses)
- Volunteer recruitment, training and safety
- Procurement of supplies
- Managing registration and the event schedule
- Following up with vendors and clients after the event

A planning committee that works well together is integral to a successful event. This is equally true whether considering such straightforward matters as dates and locations, or more complicated matters like fundraising and safety protocols.

Here are some key leadership roles to consider for the planning committee:

- **Overall Event Lead:** This person will be responsible for keeping everyone else on track. She'll schedule planning meetings, capture and assign action items, and be the "go to" for any and all questions, comments, and concerns about the planning efforts.

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- **Marketing and Promotion Lead:** Her main responsibility will be to get the word out about your event across multiple media outlets. She'll need to have an up-to-date understanding of the community and where and how your key target audience receives information (and the time and motivation to push the message out).
- **Volunteer Coordinator:** Enthusiasm for details and the ability to interact with all sorts of people are essential qualities for the volunteer coordinator. This person will be tasked with recruiting appropriate volunteers and creating a schedule that considers all facets of the clinic while allowing room for flexibility.
- **Veterinary Logistics Lead:** This role is best filled by someone who has experience as a veterinary technician – or even better, someone who works with one of the veterinarians providing services at your clinic. As a liaison between veterinarians and the planning committee, this person will be charged with ensuring clear communication around topics such as the flow of horses from entrance to post-surgery, physical exam protocols, surgery supplies and protocols, after-care instructions and criteria for surgery candidates.
- **Registration Coordinator:** Capturing essential information from registrants and working closely with other team members are key roles for this planning committee member.
- **Horse and Human Safety Lead:** This person will be the main point of contact for various captains (covered later) and will be tasked with ensuring safe techniques are used in the various stations. She will also be responsible for swiftly responding to any emergencies that arise involving humans or horses.



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Step Two:

Choose the Type of Clinic

Timeline: 6-8 months in advance

There are several different ways you can offer gelding services to your community.

- **On-site clinic:** Horses are transported to a specific location on a specific date for gelding services.
- **Mobile clinic:** Veterinarians and helpers make house calls to perform geldings.
- **Gelding vouchers:** Your organization works directly with veterinarians and owners to cover part or all of the cost of gelding. These services could be provided at a veterinary clinic or at the horse's home, depending on the individual circumstances of the horse and his owner.

Considering the demographics of the community will help you decide which approach will have the most success. An on-site clinic is often the way to serve the largest number of horses, but if access to trailers/transportation is a concern, a mobile clinic might be the better approach.

Flexibility is key here: Be prepared to change your approach if you find that your audience would benefit from a different type of clinic.



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On-Site Clinic Considerations

An on-site (trailer in) clinic is usually the best way to go if you're planning to serve a large number of horses (25 or more). While this approach will definitely yield greater numbers, it also will be more expensive and take much more logistical planning. To help safely accommodate, seek a site that meets as many of the following criteria as possible:

- An area for safe loading/unloading of horses
- A pre-surgery exam station
- Enough space for several surgery stations
- A post-operative recovery area
- Ample parking for trucks, trailers and regular vehicles
- Restrooms
- Electricity
- A water source
- Protection from the elements, or at the very least, a source of shade

If your community has a fairground or other horse show venue nearby, ask the manager if it's possible to rent the facility for the clinic. If this sort of venue isn't readily available, a large, grassy field can easily be turned into a clinic with the use of some corral panels, event tents and chemical toilets. Just remember, the more infrastructure you need to bring with you, the more you'll need to budget for this part of the clinic. No matter what venue you choose, be sure to obtain a written consent from the owner.

Mobile Clinic Considerations

Many equine veterinarians have mobile practices and are accustomed to making house calls for their patients. A mobile clinic has some unique benefits that a trailer-in clinic can't offer. A mobile clinic allows the veterinarian to see the horse and his owner in their natural environment. This approach has the added benefit of reducing the horse owner's need to plan for trailering and eliminates the stress of transport for the horse.

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Before taking registrations, consult with participating veterinarians to find out what their minimal requirements are for performing surgery. Have this conversation up front to gather the best possible information from your participants.

Timing

When choosing a date, two major factors should be considered:

- Weather
- Other community events

Generally, cooler weather is preferred. This reduces the chance of flies irritating fresh incisions and is more comfortable for all involved – veterinarians, volunteers and horses alike. In many parts of the country, spring and autumn are the optimal seasons for gelding.

One resource to consult is the Farmer's Almanac, which includes a calendar that predicts the best times for various animal husbandry tasks, including castration. Be mindful of other events in your community to be sure your clinic doesn't fall on the same date. If offering additional services, like Equine Infectious Anemia (Coggins) testing or vaccinations, it's worth investigating whether there might be a community trail ride or other horse-related event that could impact attendance at your clinic – for better or for worse.



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Step Three:

Determine the Goal

Timeline: 6 months in advance

How many horses you plan to serve will be the key factor when it comes to budget planning, followed by the type of clinic and, finally, any additional services offered.

In general, a good rule of thumb is to take the cost of a typical gelding surgery in your region and add \$50 per horse. This number provides a good cushion to accommodate both the gelding services and the supplies the veterinarians and volunteers will need throughout the day.

A rough estimate of the number of horses you hope to serve will drive how many veterinarians you'll need to participate. A typical castration for a horse with two fully descended testicles takes about 20-30 minutes. Factoring in unloading and registration, the initial physical exam and post-operative recovery, allow approximately one hour per horse.

Using this formula, if one veterinarian is performing all pre-operative exams and two veterinarians are performing castrations, estimate four castrations per hour, with a total of 32 surgeries over an eight-hour period. It's always good to try to schedule one more veterinarian than you think you'll need, so if one has to cancel at the last minute or there's a sudden last-minute surge of registrations, accommodating clients won't be an issue.

Most veterinarians prefer to bring their own veterinary technicians with them, especially if additional services are being provided like Equine Infectious Anemia (Coggins) testing or vaccine administration.

In any case, plan for at least one additional volunteer per veterinarian to help record information, fetch supplies and refreshments and provide assistance with keeping horses comfortable and safe both during surgery and in recovery.

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Step Four:

Recruit Veterinarians

Timeline: Initial conversation 6-8 months in advance
Confirm participation: 3 months in advance

The most essential partner for your gelding clinic will be veterinarians. When approaching them about partnering for a gelding clinic, keep in mind that this is a big ask: Participating means a substantial amount of time away from their own practice to perform surgeries in less than ideal conditions. Don't be offended if some veterinarians decline to participate – and be prepared to offer a modest stipend to cover transportation and lodging costs if necessary.

When recruiting veterinarians, start with established relationships. This first conversation will drive much of the forward momentum for the planning, so be sure to listen closely to the veterinarian's input and honor her requests/advice as much as possible.

They will know best which other veterinarians might be interested in helping and can give advice on what other services are feasible/ most needed in the community.



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They'll also be able to offer assistance with information about what sorts of supplies (vaccines, drugs, de-wormers etc.) might be able to be donated/sourced at a reduced cost.

Follow up (within seven days) with a letter that includes the following details:

- Thanking them for their willingness to help
- Reminding them of the date and location of the clinic
- Stating the next steps (i.e. our next committee call will be XX date and we're hoping to get your input on XX topic)

Remember to ask if they or one of their staff members will be willing and able to serve on the planning committee.

Providing Additional Services

Participating veterinarians will be best equipped to guide decisions about providing additional services. Keep in mind that many of the horses who participate in the clinic may have never had any veterinary care before, so this is a great opportunity to both provide them with needed services and share information with their owners on how to keep them thriving going forward.

It's important to decide about additional services before getting too far along in planning. This information will be helpful for a variety of purposes:

- Recruitment of other veterinarians/service providers
- Scheduling, ordering supplies and paperwork
- Advertising and PR – and additional services will help entice more participation
- Budget planning

Additional offerings could include:

- **Equine Infectious Anemia (Coggins) Testing:** Offering free Coggins testing could be a incentive to encourage participation. Keep in mind, this means your veterinarians will need to be prepared to submit the blood samples for testing and send the final results to participants.

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- **Vaccinations:** While vaccine protocols vary by region, offering some basic vaccinations might be a good option. Try to avoid those that require follow-up boosters, as sending teams to administer boosters is an added layer of planning and expense.
- **Teeth Floating:** Dental care is one of the most neglected aspects of equine health and also one of the most important. Providing this service to a horse who has never had such attention could exponentially improve his quality of life. A benefit of providing teeth floating during a gelding clinic is that this can be easily done while the horse is still recumbent and sedated for the surgery. An important consideration is who will provide the service. While most veterinarians are trained in how to float teeth, many do not include this as a routine part of their practice. If available and legal in your state, you may wish to invite an equine dental practitioner to participate in the clinic.
- **De-worming:** Most effective when done on a rotational schedule, consider offering some information related to the benefits of de-worming along with some tubes of paste de-wormer. These can often be economically purchased in bulk. Be sure to check with the participating veterinarian to find out which parasites are concerns in your area and what they recommend for treatment.



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Step Five:

Plan Marketing and Promotion

Timeline: Ongoing, development of materials 4-6 months in advance and continue until event

Use as many different avenues as possible to get the word out. Starting early is important and will allow ample time for people to save the date on their calendars.

The majority of your marketing blitz should start three months in advance. Being flexible with your registration close date will yield better results than a “hard” close date. Expect last-minute registrations and be ready to accommodate them.

Promote your clinic by:

- Flyers in local feed stores, other places horse people frequent
- Announcements in church bulletins and via other community organizations
- Newspapers (daily, local, free publications like Pennysavers)
- Social media: Facebook, Twitter, website
- Craigslist: make sure to cross-post under events, farm services, other related categories
- Flyers at events like flea markets and horse shows

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Step Six:

Hold Registration

Timeline: 3 months in advance

There are lots of different ways to help people sign up for the clinic, so keep in mind two important tips:

- Keep it simple
- Offer it in a format people will actually use

While your organization and planning team might all be very tech savvy, some clients might be more comfortable registering with a paper form or over the phone. Whichever approach (or combination) of approaches you use, the key is to ensure the information gathered is consistent.

Registration Ideas

- Paper forms can be picked up and dropped off at a community location (i.e. a feed store, veterinary clinic, church).
- Phone registration can be made simple by having a pre-recorded message where people can leave their name and number. A volunteer can return calls to fill out the registration form over the phone.



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- Online registration utilizing a simple form in Constant Contact or a similar system will allow people to register themselves and has the added benefit of enabling a volunteer to enter information from the paper forms and phone registrations in one central place.

Capturing the Right Information

Keeping the form simple and straightforward will translate into a successful registration process. Plan to do a confirmation phone call about two days before the clinic. Use this time to capture any additional information and reiterate important details.

The registration form should include the following information:

- Name of horse owner
- Physical address
- Best phone #
- Email (if applicable)
- Name of horse to be castrated
- Age of horse
- Breed of horse/type of equine
- Preferred time (Offer time slots to choose from such as 9 - 11 a.m., 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., etc.)

Ask additional questions when registering participants for a mobile clinic to avoid any unnecessary delays or complications the day of the clinic. Get detailed directions to and from the property from the horse's owner, complete with landmarks. If clients live in very rural communities, be sure to capture details about how to safely and accurately locate and access their property. Get a name and contact information for whoever will meet the veterinary team the day of the clinic and set expectations clearly.

Build in an extra buffer of time to allow for travel between locations, and to account for any delays/surgical complications. Assign someone to be the primary point of contact between the veterinarians on the road and the scheduled clients. It's ideal if the same person who handles registration can be the point of contact the day of the clinic. This will help ease any confusion around who clients should contact if they have any concerns or questions.

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Step Seven:

Recruit Volunteers

Timeline: 6 weeks in advance

Use volunteers you have worked with in the past and whose ability you trust to:

- Represent your agency professionally
- Follow directions/work in a team environment
- Show sensitivity to cultural differences

Handle horses safely and appropriately

All volunteers will need to sign waivers specific to the clinic and should undergo an on-site orientation before the first horse is checked in. There are many needed duties at the clinic that don't require direct handling/interaction with horses; however, volunteers should still be familiar with basic horse behavior and feel safe and comfortable working in the field.

Since there will be lots of moving parts the day of the clinic, designate several captains to serve as main point persons for various aspects of the clinic. The leads can be drawn from the planning committee, as they will be the most familiar with the ins and outs of the particular areas they've worked on and will have good working relationships with the other captains.

Roles Can Include:

- Parking/horse loading, unloading captain
- Registration/client services captain
- Volunteer services captain
- Veterinary services captain
- Floating captain
- PR/media captain
- Overall safety captain

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Volunteer Roles Under Captains:

- Greeting
- Parking
- Registration
- Horse handling
- Veterinary support
- Volunteer support
- Photography
- PR/media
- Floater
- Runner
- Client waiting area/kid area
- Set-up and cleanup crew

Help volunteers feel invested in the success of the clinic early in the process. Recruit early and get them involved in procuring supplies, handing out flyers in the community, helping with phone calls to confirm appointments, etc. This will help them to have a clearer understanding of what goes into putting together a project of this scale and will make them more competent and confident going forward.



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Step Eight:

Design the Day

Timeline: 2 weeks in advance

The more time and attention put into planning the flow of the day, the better prepared you'll be to handle any unexpected issues (walk-ins, emergencies, volunteer no-shows, etc.).

Factors to Consider

- **Entrances and Exits:** Clearly map how people will enter and exit the facility. Factor in the need to accommodate horses and trailers of all different shapes, sizes and handling abilities. Try to create a system where trailers can pull in, complete registration, unload their horse into a designated holding area, and then park until the horse is ready to reload.
- **Check-in/Check-Out System:** A system for quickly getting people signed in to the clinic and then moved on to the next station is imperative. At check-in, require horseowners to sign any necessary paperwork/waivers. Samples can be found at aspcapro.org/geldingtoolkit. At check-out, provide aftercare instructions, anything specific to the individual horse, and general information such as emergency numbers if there are complications or questions. If possible, you can also include a goody bag with things such as hoof picks and grooming items.
- **Sources of Water and Electricity:** If possible, a location with hot and cold water and electricity is ideal. When designing the clinic setup, be sure to take into account where the electric and water sources are located. If you are planning to offer teeth floating, electricity may be necessary, as some equine dental practitioners prefer electric dental tools. If lighting or weather issues are anticipated, you'll want electricity. Sterilization, cleaning of tools, wounds and personal hygiene is much improved if a water source is available. However, if this is not possible, accommodations can be made by bringing in water.

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Initial Exam Area

Here, each horse will get an initial physical exam by the attending veterinarian to note his overall physical condition and determine his fitness for surgery. The exam area can be constructed with corral panels, as they will allow the vet to easily move around all sides of the horse and talk to whoever is assisting them without having to shout through stall doors.

It's always best to allow at least a stall's distance between stallions to reduce the tendency to vocalize and fight.

Supplies Needed for Exam Area May Include:

- Intake forms
- Exam gloves
- Disinfectants
- Weight/height tapes
- Stethoscope
- Digital thermometer
- Betadine solution
- Rubbing alcohol
- Sterile gauze
- Thrush medication
- Blood draw equipment (if offering EIA testing)
- EIA (Coggins) testing forms
- Blood storage container
- If offering vaccines, pre-readied doses
- Hoof pick
- Extra ropes and halters of various sizes
- Clipboards
- Extra pens
- Camera
- Duct tape

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If vaccines and Coggins testing will be administered, it may make sense for these to be provided at the intake station. This is something to discuss with the veterinary team in advance of the clinic.

This is another area where flexibility is key – if a horse is fractious in the initial exam, it doesn't make sense to upset him more by trying to draw blood. Keeping horses as calm as possible should drive decision-making.



Surgery Stations

Have one dedicated area for each veterinarian. While surgeries can be performed in stalls, it is usually better to have a wide, grassy area available. The grass makes for a better surgery surface for horses (as opposed to shavings or sand), and a wider area allows for safer maneuvering around both standing and recumbent horses.

This is another place where corral panels can come in handy. Use them to separate off a designated surgery area large enough for your veterinarians, their teams and the patients, while creating a safe boundary for managing recovery as well as any unexpected issues. This also will help keep curious onlookers and others who do not need to be in this area at a safe distance.

If teeth floating is on the docket, ensure your dental provider and his tools have access to the surgery stations.

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Recovery Area

This area should be located on the far end of the surgery area. Dedicate a team whose sole responsibility is to monitor the horses as they come out of sedation, help them safely stand up, and then walk them until they are awake enough to be transported home.


Restrooms

If they aren't available on site, plan to rent at least two chemical toilets.

Comfort Station

This is a place where volunteers, veterinarians and their assistants can take their breaks, get out of the elements for a while, grab snacks and drinks and have access to any additional supplies.

Keep this area organized, well-stocked and pleasant so the team feels appreciated and they are able to find the things they need throughout the day.



If the community you serve is one that you expect will bring children or other animals such as dogs along with them, considering designating an area with some coloring books and crayons to keep the kids busy and bring along some extra water bowls/leashes for the dogs.

Waiting Area

Provide a place with protection from the elements for horse owners to wait while their horses are being treated. Many owners want to watch the procedure. Their best option is to observe by standing on the outside of the corral panels around the surgery area.

Signage

All areas of your clinic will benefit from clearly labeled signage. Check out the appendix for some examples of signs on aspcapro.org/geldingtoolkit

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Planning for the Unexpected

A smoothly running clinic could quickly screech to a halt if some planning around handling unexpected circumstances hasn't been built in.

Some common scenarios:

- **Turning Away a Horse:** If a horse arrives at the clinic showing obvious signs of illness or a serious injury, you will need to have a plan. One option would be to simply turn the horse away. Another would be to have one of the veterinarians examine the horse and decide on a course of action. At the very least, have a communication/containment protocol in place to reduce the risk of cross contamination, have an effective communication line between the parties who will be charged with making the call and have the right supplies for decontamination, if that becomes necessary.
- **Handling a Surrender:** This will need to be decided by the planning committee well in advance of the clinic day. If you decide to accept an owner surrender at the clinic, you'll want to make sure to be equipped with appropriate paper work as well as have someone on staff who can correctly and compassionately explain the process to the horse owner.
- **Accommodating Walk-Ins:** While not an emergency per se, you'll want to arrange your schedule so you can accommodate this possibility without mucking up the entire works. You'll also want to ensure you have enough extra paperwork, supplies, etc. to handle some additional clients.
- **Cryptorchids:** A cryptorchid is a horse with one or more testicles that are not fully descended. Typically, this type of situation is not able to be dealt with in the field – the horse would need to be taken to a veterinary hospital for the procedure. This surgery is typically much more expensive than a regular gelding. If a cryptorchid arrives at the clinic, you can provide a voucher for the horse to be gelded at the closest veterinary hospital. Be flexible – if the horse needs other services, allow him to take part and follow up with the owner.

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Finding Funding

There are a variety of resources that can help defray clinic costs. Below is a list of some national and local grantmakers and other organizations that might be able to provide funding.

- ASPCA Equine Fund
- State horse councils/coalitions
- American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP)
- Unwanted Horse Coalition Operation Gelding
- Breed Associations
- Donation of services from equine veterinary clinics or schools
- Donations/discounts of drugs/supplies from vet clinics or vet suppliers

By investigating these options early on in the planning, you won't be in danger of missing deadlines. Remember, while some organizations may be willing to support the clinic, that doesn't necessarily mean that you will have all promised funding in hand before the event.

Partnering

Partnerships can play an integral role when looking for funding and support. Possible partnerships include:

- Collaborations with local/regional groups for increased exposure and greater sponsorship donations
- Larger state and national groups
- Veterinary offices
- Veterinary supply stores
- Horse supply and farm stores (local and chains)
- Veterinary schools with interns

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Find downloads and templates at:

aspcapro.org/geldingtoolkit

Calendar Listing Template

Media Advisory Template

Press Release Template

Gelding Clinic Booklet

Horse Check-in Forms

Horse Identification Form

Trailer Parking Forms

Crowd Photo Release

Gelding Aftercare Steps