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Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and Colony Care

Workshop Script

1. Introduction *(5 minutes)*

* **[Slide 1:** *Share each presenter’s name, organization, and background*]
* **[Slide 2]** We will have a Q&A period at the end. Please hold your questions until then. Most questions will be answered during the course of the workshop. Also, note that the handbook and local resource handouts give detailed information on everything we discuss here.
* In this workshop, you will:
  + Learn about feral cats, their history and behavior
  + Learn the steps of humane trapping and post-surgery care
  + Practice using a box trap and trap divider
  + Learn the basics of caring for a cat colony
  + Learn how to build good relationships with neighbors and help the cats be good neighbors
  + Gain the information you need to plan your own TNR project.

[*Post the learning objectives on a flipchart so attendees can refer back to them*]

* **[Slide 3]** Please raise your hand if you:
  + Are already familiar with feral cats
  + Have you trapped cats before?
  + Are you affiliated with a shelter or rescue group?
  + Do you want to network with others and make connections with other community cat caretakers? (This is the place!)
  + [Optional: Which neighborhood/town are you from?]

2. Feral Cats *(20 minutes)*

**[Slide 4]** This video provides an overview of feral cats, their behavior, and why we do TNR:

**Video: *Helping Community Cats***(4 minutes)

[*Write benefits of TNR on flipchart: Less noise, less smell, fewer cats, natural rodent control, healthier cats*]

**[Slide 5]** To highlight a few points from the video:

1) The cats were there first, because there was already a food source; we don't "create" colonies.

2) The evidence is mixed on how effectively cats control rodents, but many caretakers report that rodents stay away from their cat colonies.

3) With a stable colony population, caregivers save money – no new mouths to feed every summer.

***Talking Points***

**[Slide 6] *Feral vs. Stray Cats***

* “Feral” and “Stray” are behaviors – feral and stray cats are both domestic cats. Another term for outdoor cats is “community cats.”
* Feral cats are unsocialized to humans. They are timid and fearful around people. They avoid human contact. Adult feral cats usually can’t be socialized and are not suited to living indoors with people.
* Stray cats are cats who have been abandoned by people or who have strayed from their human homes and become lost. Stray cats can usually be re-socialized and adopted back into human homes.
* Feral kittens can be socialized if they're handled at an early age – 8 weeks or under. Typically, the older a kitten is, the longer it will take to socialize her, and it is intensive work requiring proper time and space. In attempting to socialize an older kitten who seems borderline feral, we recommend giving it 2 weeks maximum – if the kitten isn’t making progress by then, it’s best to return her to the colony before it becomes unfamiliar to her.
* Tips on how to identify the difference between feral and stray cats (Note: this is covered in pp. 54-56 of the handbook):

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| **STRAY** | **FERAL** |
| May approach people, houses, porches, or cars | Will not approach and will likely seek hiding places to avoid people |
| May be vocal, meow, or “answer” your voice | Unlikely to meow, beg, or purr |
| Will be visible primarily during the daytime | More likely to be nocturnal; occasionally out during the day |
| Will probably be dirty or disheveled. | Will probably have a clean, well-kept coat (unless ill or injured). |
| Less likely to have an eartip | Will likely have an eartip if neutered as part of a TNR program |

**[Slide 7] *Where do (your) community cats come from?***

* Female cats can become pregnant at 4 – 5 months of age.
* Abandoned or lost pet cats are often intact – it may be why they’re outside.
* Based on data from a North Carolina TNR study, one female cat and her offspring could produce between 100 and 400 cats by the end of 7 years.
* While most owned cats are neutered (80% nationwide), only a small percentage of community cats are neutered (3% nationwide).

**[Slide 8] *Taking cats to the shelter won’t help you or the cats.***

* Feral cats cannot be adopted into human homes, so when they are brought to a shelter they are often killed.
* In some communities, animal control does not pick up healthy community cats, only those who are injured, sick, in danger, or a danger to humans.
* [*Describe the local animal control policies that apply to your town or region.]*
* Catch and kill, and trap and relocate, won’t keep an area free of cats because these practices create a vacuum. Once the cats are removed, other cats move in to take advantage of the resources in the area. Since they’re intact, they breed prolifically and quickly form a new colony. This is called the “vacuum effect.”

3. How to perform Trap-Neuter-Return *(60 – 90 minutes)*

**[Slide 9]** This video shows a TNR effort from start to finish and provides an overview of the ins and outs of the process:

**Video: *Trapping Cats: How to Trap an Entire Colony***(8 minutes)

[*Write the steps of TNR on a flipchart: Planning, Trapping, Pre-surgical and Post-Surgical Care, Colony Care, and Community Relations*]

**[Slide 10]** Next we’ll go into more detail on the steps of TNR, and you’ll get to handle the traps.

***Talking points and instruction***

* TNR is the most humane and effective approach to feral cat management, whereby entire colonies of free-roaming cats are trapped, sterilized, vaccinated, eartipped, and returned to their colony of origin.
* TNR halts reproduction and many of the nuisance behaviors associated with unneutered cats such as yowling, fighting, and marking territory. Cats are healthier, free from the stresses of mating and motherhood.
* Box traps are the tools of choice – they make the whole experience safe for both cats and humans. In TNR, cats stay in the traps before and after surgery, right up until they are released, so there is no need for caregivers to handle them.

**[Slide 11] *Create a plan***

* *Count and assess the cats.* While feeding, start a log of each cat and kitten you see, and note any possible medical issues. Taking photographs of each cat will help you catalogue each cat, especially if they look alike. A tracking sheet is also useful – see p. 90 of the handbook.
* *Line up a veterinarian.* Make appointments for the number of traps you have, though you may not catch a cat in every trap. See the NYC Resources brochure for spay/neuter options.
* *Identify and set up your holding/recovery area***.** Choose a dry, temperature-controlled (about 70 degrees), and safe holding/recovery area for use before and after the cats’ surgeries (2-6 days total).
* *Gather all of the appropriate equipment.* You must have at least one trap per cat. We suggest having more traps than cats, because you never know which locations will be most attractive to the cats or if a trap will malfunction. We recommend box traps that have both front and back doors and are 36” long by 12” high.

Other essentials include bait (usually canned fish), trap covers, and newspaper. See pages 26-29 of the handbook for a full list of recommended supplies.

* *Pay attention to the weather.* If inclement or extreme weather is a possibility, plan for an extra trapping day to ensure you will get all the cats in time for your surgery appointment. Never trap in extreme temperatures, hot or cold.
* *Find and coordinate with the other caregivers about your plans to trap.* Withholding food before trapping and leaving traps undisturbed during trapping are essential to your success, so you need to ensure cooperation from **everyone** involved with the colony.You'll find sample flyers and door hangers in the **Resources** section at the end of the handbook. [*Also mention any literature your organization has created to hand out.*]
* *Communicate with neighbors around the colony.* Open communication and education are essential to successful TNR and to a colony’s sustainability going forward. Many people are not aware that feral cats live and thrive outdoors and that neutering improves their lives—and they may have concerns about the cats that can be easily addressed. See the **Community Relations** chapter of the handbook beginning on page 45.
* *Feed on a schedule at least two weeks prior to trapping.* To get the cats used to coming out and eating while you are there (and help with your assessment process), establish a set time and place to feed the cats every day.
* *Withhold food for at least 24 hours prior to trapping.* Make sure that all the feeders know which day to withhold food, even if they only feed occasionally.

*Tip:* Feed out of unset traps for one to two weeks prior to the trapping day, to get cats used to seeing and walking into them.

* *Confirm the right transportation.*If the clinic you are using offers transportation service, you can reserve that at the time you make the spay/neuter appointments. If using private transportation, be sure the vehicle comfortably fits all the traps inside its climate-controlled area.
* *Consider bringing help*. Trapping by yourself, especially for your first time, can be overwhelming and exhausting. Having a companion is also a good safety precaution if you are trapping at night or in an unfamiliar area.
* *Contingency Plans.* Plan for the possibilities of trapping kittens and/or nursing mothers, ill or injured cats, and cats who are friendly to humans.Some guidelines follow on the next slides:

**[Slide 12]** If you find you’ve trapped a *nursing mother*, get her spayed and then release her as soon as she is recovered from anesthesia. This may be your only chance to stop her from having future litters – if you release her unspayed, you may never get her in a trap again. Kittens, even young ones, can generally go for 36 hours without feeding, sometimes even as long as 4 days. However, if you know a certain cat is nursing and you’d prefer to wait until the kittens are bigger, a selective trapping method might make sense (see p. 74 in the handbook).

**[Slide 13]** We also recommend spaying *pregnant cats*. This can be a difficult aspect of TNR for some, but it is in the best interest of the cats (especially the mother) to prevent the litter. Also, if you trap a pregnant cat and release her without spaying, you may never catch her again. (See p. 75 in the handbook.)

**[Slide 14]** *Kittens* who are 8 weeks old or younger are generally young enough to be socialized in a short period of time and put up for adoption. Removing and taming the youngest kittens for adoption when a TNR project is just getting under way, or is still incomplete, can be an "easy win" – the community sees an instant reduction in the number of cats, and the caretakers have fewer mouths to feed.

If you intend to remove kittens for adoption, be sure to trap them, not grab them, so they won’t have negative associations with human hands. The handbook discusses kitten trapping in detail, beginning on p. 62.

**[Slide 15]** *Ill or Injured Cats:* Plan ahead to ensure you can provide immediate care to, and make decisions about, an ill or injured cat. Verify what services are available at the clinic where you made the spay/neuter appointments. (See p. 39 in the handbook.)

**[Slide 16]** *Friendly Cats:* Have a plan in place for how to help friendly cats (socialized to humans). Decide in advance whether you will try to find homes or will eartip and return socialized cats even if you hope to later bring them in off the street. Eartipping doesn’t negatively impact a cat’s adoptability. Alley Cat Allies has useful tips on finding homes for socialized cats at alleycat.org. (See p. 52 in the handbook.)

**[Slide 17] *Trapping*** *(page 10 in the handbook)*

**[PRACTICE SESSION – SETTING TRAPS]**

* **Set up and Prepare for Trapping.** Do all of your setup and preparation away from the colony site. Trapping will go more smoothly if you don’t disrupt the cats’ feeding area during preparation.
* Don’t forget to test the traps before setting them out in the trapping area.
* **Label the traps and line the bottom if desired.**
  + **Tip:** When using a trap with a narrow trip plate, some trappers like to tape on a cardboard extender to make it more difficult for a cat to step or reach over the trip plate to eat the bait. [Point to illustration on p. 11 in the handbook, or demonstrate the extender live.]
* **Place the traps**. When placing each trap on the ground, make certain it is stable and will not rock or tip—cats will not enter an unstable trap.
* **Bait the traps.** Place approximately one tablespoon of bait (tuna, sardines, mackerel, or other strong smelling food—usually the ones in oil work best) at the very back of the trap, so that the cat will step on the trigger plate while attempting to reach the food. Also drizzle juice or tiny bits of food at the entrance.
* **Set the traps.** Watch for: clearance of trapdoor; back door securely locked.
* **Keep track of the traps at all times.** Traps should never be left completely unattended, especially in an unsafe area. Check frequently and keep quiet.
* **After the cat has been trapped, spring into action.** Move calmly but promptly and cover the entire trap with a sheet or piece of cloth before moving it.   
    
  It is normal for cats to thrash around inside the trap. The cover will calm them down -- be calm and patient.
* Move trapped cats to the vehicle as appropriate. It's best to leave trapped cats in place if other cats in the immediate area are still investigating traps.

During a quiet moment when no other cats are investigating the set traps, or if the trapped cats are making noise and deterring other cats from approaching the traps, remove the full traps and put them in the holding vehicle.

Rebait any traps that have had the bait eaten but have not sprung, and check to be sure the trip plate is in working order – but be careful to catch the door when testing the trap so it does not make a startling noise.

* **Hard-to-trap cats.** Cats can become trap-shy—frightened to go near or enter a trap, or trap-savvy—mastered the art of removing food without triggering the trap. Don’t be discouraged. There are several unique but straightforward techniques to humanely trap hard-to-trap-cats. [Read](http://www.alleycat.org/page.aspx?pid=340) these tips in the **Selective Trapping and Trap-Shy Cats** section of the handbook.
* **Count your traps** when you are finished to ensure you didn’t leave any traps behind.
* **Safe transport.** Never put trapped cats in a car trunk or open truck bed. To keep the transport vehicle clean, place sheets of thick plastic, or plastic and newspaper, under the traps in case any of the cats eliminate in transit. Avoid stacking traps – if you must, then secure the traps with bungee cords and place protective plastic, etc. under the top traps.

**[Slide 18] *In-Trap Care***

**[PRACTICE WITH DIVIDERS, COVERS, AND STUFFED CATS]**

**Pre-surgical care:** When the cats arrive at the holding area, make them comfortable ASAP. They may not have eaten for a couple of days and despite the trap covers, all the strange sounds, smells, and movement must be stressful. If surgery is a day or more away, check for lactating females!

* Note that the video recommends against having cats eat in traps because it's assumed they will go straight into surgery. However, trapping 1-3 days in advance of surgery gives more time to ensure all cats are trapped, and time to log any issues a vet might need to look at while the cat is under anesthesia.
* Keep cats in fully covered traps – this reduces stress.
* Line with clean newspaper. Use enough layers so the cats can't feel the bars at the bottom of the traps.
* Feed wet food & change newspaper 2x daily. A clean environment and adequate food will reduce stress and aid recovery.
* *Always* use a trap divider to feed & clean – 2 dividers is best. We recommend inserting at least one divider horizontally. A divider inserted vertically is not as secure, and a cat may be able to push past it and escape the trap.
* Use trap cover to get the cat to move to other end of trap for cleaning and feeding. Some cats will hide in the covered end of the trap; others will move toward the uncovered end.
* You may need to nudge a cat with the divider, but never touch the cat!
* Place food & water after cleaning to minimize spillage.
* Remove all food the night before surgery per vet’s instructions.
* Kittens <4 months may eat within a few hours of surgery; check with the vet.
* After feeding/cleaning, make sure all traps are fastened securely!

**[Slide 19] Separating two cats caught in one trap (Page 16).** This is best done as a two-person job – use a helper and/or a wall to hold the traps securely in place as you transfer one cat to the second trap.

**[Slide 20] Take the cats to a veterinary practice or a spay/neuter clinic.**

* When you bring the cats in, reconfirm what the vet will be doing: sterilization, vaccination, and left eartipping. Ask the clinic about the duration of the rabies vaccine (1 year or 3 years).
* Confirm that only dissolvable sutures will be used, eliminating the need for a followup visit to remove stitches.
* If you have special requests, such as no eartipping for an adoptable kitten, be sure to make this clear, preferably in writing.
* If a particular cat has a condition needing special attention, such as an injury, make sure the clinic has the ability to provide medical treatment other than spay/neuter.
* Ask the clinic how to reach them if surgical complications occur after the cats are returned to you.

**[Slide 21] *Post-Surgery***

* Do a complete check when the cats return from the clinic:
  + Traps securely fastened shut and fully covered.
  + Traps are lined with puppy pads or newspaper. Replace any soiled lining.
* Temperature control is especially important now. Tip for keeping warm: get traps up off the floor using tables, sawhorses, or pieces of lumber.
* Feed adults 8 hrs post-op; kittens <4 months can eat after waking up, per vet's instructions.
* Feed & clean as usual after surgery day
* Monitor cats carefully in first 24 hrs post-op for any bleeding, swelling, lethargy, vomiting, difficulty breathing, or not waking up. Check often after that. Small amounts of blood spotting is normal; see pages 18-19 of the handbook for more information on what to look for and when to call the vet.
* Check incisions on females daily. During cleaning when you have removed the dirty newspapers, have a buddy hold the trap up or place the trap on sawhorses so you can see the cat's belly from underneath.
* Hold males 24-48 hrs per vet's instructions.
* Hold females 48-72 hrs per vet's instructions (*exception:* nursing moms can go after 24 hrs as long as they are fully awake).
* Make sure all cats are clear-eyed & conscious, and check surgical sites before release.
* Be sure to release cats in the same location where they were trapped – it's important to return them to their own familiar territory.

**[Slide 22] Thoroughly clean and disinfect the traps after each cat is returned.**

* This is a two-step process. First, scrub off all food, paper, and feces from all of the surfaces of the trap. Only then can the trap be effectively disinfected to prevent disease transmission.
* A solution of one part bleach to 10 parts water is a very effective and safe disinfectant. The bleach solution should remain on traps for 10 minutes before being rinsed off.
* Alternatives to plain bleach include Clorox Germicidal Bleach and Accel, a one-step hydrogen peroxide based disinfectant cleaner that works in 5 minutes.
* Never mix or spray any cleaning products when cats are present.

**[Slide 23]** *Caveat:* It is Trap-Neuter-Return, not Trap-Neuter-Adopt.

* Always keep in mind that the goal of this project is to spay or neuter and then return cats to their outdoor homes. If you don’t think that you have the discipline to return the cats to their colony, then consider whether you should begin doing TNR. You don’t want to end up with many terrified feral cats living (and mostly hiding) in your house.

4. Local Resources *(5 minutes)*

**[Slide 24]** [*Mention any handouts you have provided attendees about local trap banks, clinics, colony registry, etc., and who caretakers can contact for advice and/or support for TNR and enhancing neighbor relations.*]

Where can participants:

* Obtain traps?
* Find low-cost spay/neuter services?
* Find trapping help?
* Make connections?

5. Colony Care – Best Practices *(10 minutes)*

**[Slide 25]** TNR doesn't mean "trap-neuter-run"! Good colony care will address many common complaints that arise over community cats while providing high quality care for the colony. See page 30 of the handbook.

The basic elements of good colony care are: [*WRITE ON FLIPCHART*]

1. **Completing Trap-Neuter Return of the Entire Colony**
2. **Conducting Maintenance Trapping on New Cats**
3. **Providing Food and Water**
4. **Providing Shelter**
5. **Monitoring Members of the Colony and Providing Ongoing Health Care**
6. **Planning for Consistent Colony Care: Establishing a Network of Caretakers**
7. **Helping Cats and People to Coexist**

1. *Completing Trap-Neuter Return of the Entire Colony.* Keep in mind that TNR is most effective if you employ targeted or mass trapping. This is the trapping of whole colonies in a single geographical area or a single neighborhood to allow for complete population control. Benefits of mass trapping include:

* Makes most efficient use of volunteer time and resources
* Creates quicker results than staggered trapping of a colony over months or even years
* Lends credibility to your humane approach to colony management – by keeping medical records and tracking your colony’s population decline after TNR, you’ll have persuasive evidence that TNR works.

2. *Conducting Maintenance**Trapping on New Cats.* Newcomers may periodically appear in your colony; they should be trapped, neutered and vaccinated as soon as they appear. **Newcomers to a colony are often tame strays, so you need to decide whether you are equipped to expand your TNR project to include rescue and adoption of tame cats, or to enlist the help of an experienced rescue or adoption organization.**

3. *Providing Food and Water.* Provide adequate food and water for the cats on a regular basis, year-round. Feed during daylight hours for your safety and so that you can easily assess the members of the colony.

4. *Providing Shelter.* Providing a shelter for cats means they will not have to go looking in neighbors’ crawl spaces or porches for a warm, dry place to rest. It can keep them safe from the elements and help you control their location and deter them from seeking shelter where they are not wanted.

5. *Monitoring Members of the Colony and Providing Ongoing Health Care.* Keeping track of members of your colony, their health, new cats who have joined the colony who may need to be neutered, and your ongoing Trap-Neuter-Return program allows you to monitor your progress and provides you with evidence of your ongoing, post-TNR responsible care of the colony.

Have a plan with your veterinarian for how to handle any health problems and for ongoing colony care. When a health problem occurs, speak with your veterinarian first and describe the symptoms so that you can decide together if a sick cat needs to be trapped and examined.

6. *Planning for Consistent Colony Care: Establishing a Network of Caretakers.* We recommend recruiting a caretaking buddy, or better yet, a team of colony caretakers to share the work. At the very least, you should have someone who can be a substitute or “feral cat sitter” so you can take a vacation once in a while, and ideally that person could take over colony management if you become unable able to do so. This team approach will yield the double benefit of reducing stress on you and of ensuring continuity of care in case anything happens to one of you.

6. Community Relations – the 7th element of good colony care

*(20 minutes)*

**[Slide 26]** This video covers how to collaborate and cooperate with even the most difficult neighbors and provides strategies for being proactive and alleviating community concerns.

**Video: *Community Relations: How to Talk about Feral Cats [7 minutes]***

**[Slide 27] *Talking Points (page 45 of the handbook)***

* *Educate Your Neighbors*. As you perform TNR or colony care, or even if you simply care about the welfare of your neighborhood cats, educating your neighbors and community members about the cats will begin a dialogue with them. For one thing, neighbors will know who “speaks for the cats” if a problem arises—and won't call animal control. For another, you begin to build goodwill toward your work and your cause. The handbook will point you toward materials and tools.
* *Preventive Measures.* Practicing good community relations is often as easy as following standard feral cat care. These are steps you can take preemptively that may help you avoid potential questions or concerns altogether. And, if you happen to run into concerns from neighbors, there are some easy fixes that may allay their worries.
  + Performing TNR is a good start, as it will eliminate nuisance behaviors.
  + Following responsible feeding protocol will also eliminate or prevent many complaints.
* *Humane deterrents.* Trespassing is one unwanted behavior that TNR does not solve in cats. But there are many safe, low-tech methods to discourage feral cats from hanging out where they are not wanted, like neighbors’ gardens, yards, porches, or vehicles. Examples are:
  + Motion-activated sprinklers and ultrasonic deterrents (ScareCrow® and CatStopTM)
  + Covering sandboxes when not in use
  + Deer netting over gardens
  + Placing plastic forks or bamboo chopsticks in soil
  + Chicken wire under mulch
  + More ideas are available online (search on “humane feline deterrents”)
* Providing shelter for cats means they will not have to go looking in neighbors’ crawl spaces, porches, or sheds for a warm, dry place to rest.
* Provide litterboxes. To keep cats from using neighborhood gardens as litterboxes, provide one or more outdoor litterboxes.
* Maintain colony records. Always maintain current, accurate health records, including vaccination data and photographs, for all of the cats in your colony. The Alley Cat Allies tracking sheet is available under Resources in the handbook.
* Troubleshooting. Even with education and preventive measures, you may find yourself facing potential conflicts with neighbors or other local stakeholders. Remember to remain calm and constructive in all of your dealings, and be prepared to list the benefits of and facts about TNR and community cats. Above all, listen to others’ concerns and determine exactly what their issue or complaint is, then work toward a mutually agreeable solution. You will give neighbors confidence that you know what you are doing and care about their interests. Alley Cat Allies’ online Community Relations Resource Center (alleycat.org) has tools to help you resolve issues with a neighbor, community member, or official.

7. Question and Answer Period *(30 minutes or longer)*