

How to convert adopters to donors



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Introduction

Animal welfare organizations face an interesting challenge: The animals you help can't write a check to say thank you or send you an email with an update on how they're doing. But with a little assistance from you (and their new families!) they can still pay it forward to help you save more lives.

You know that adoption fees rarely cover the full cost of caring for a homeless animal. That's why it's crucial for your organization to have a strategy in place to convert adopters into donors. With each adoption, you have the opportunity to cultivate a new donor and build support for your mission.

An adoption day means a dog or cat is leaving the care of your organization, but that doesn't mean the relationship is over. Wouldn't you love to receive more photos and updates about these adopted animals in their new homes? Those updates are valuable content and can be used to encourage other adopters to share stories and inspire people to choose to adopt a shelter pet or donate in support of your mission.

Explore how your organization connects with adopters

Think of the time and effort that go into promoting an animal for adoption:

- Taking photos and capturing video
- Writing a biography that strikes just the right tone
- Selecting the perfect venue for off-site adoption events and putting together clever event promotions

You pull out all the stops to make sure the animals in your care find loving families. Now take a moment to consider how you communicate with those adopters.

Many organizations make post-adoption calls to check in and see how things are going during the first couple of weeks. You might add your adopters' names to your e-newsletter mailing list. Maybe you even mail your year-end appeal letter to adopters. All that is great!

But there's even more you can do to engage your adopters and raise money for your organization. Let's consider what you need in order to connect with these potential donors.

Getting Started

To engage your adopters, it's vital that you have access to their complete and up-to-date contact information. How do you currently store your adopters' contact data—in shelter management software, on paper records, or in an Excel spreadsheet? If you have donor management software, do you add the adopters to your database? If you don't have a donor database, it might be time to consider using a donor management system like Little Green Light.

Wherever that data is, make sure you use it! Your adopters are the key to collecting powerful stories and images that demonstrate the impact of your work. Moreover, their stories can inspire others to adopt from your organization and donate in support of your mission. In order to cultivate meaningful relationships with your adopters, their contact information needs to be easily accessible so that you can ask them for updates.

While Facebook is often the go-to tool to use to ask adopters to share photos and updates, it has limitations. When adopters share photos directly on Facebook, you don't collect key information like up-to-date email addresses. If the adopters take a Facebook hiatus or deactivate their accounts, how will you keep in touch with them?

You can use a tool such as LGL Forms to build a simple webform that adopters can use to submit their stories to you. The form doesn't have to be complex. In fact, the simpler it is to fill out, the more likely your adopters will be to submit it. But you'll want to capture some key information:

- Adopter's name, mailing address, and email address (Though you likely have these details from the adoption contract, you may have outdated or partial information. For example, a woman may have completed the adoption paperwork using her email address, but it's really her husband who takes endless photos of their dog and is eager to share them!)
- The name of the dog at the time of adoption, and the new name
- Approximate date of adoption
- An update on what the pet is up to in his or her new home
- Photo upload

Make sure you include language on your form so adopters know their photos and words may be used in your organization's communications and promotions.

Here's an example of a simple form to help you get started:



Happy Tails

Tell us about your dog or cat

We love to receive updates on your adopted pets!

Name of your pet *

If you've renamed your pet, please include his/her name at the time of adoption as well his/her new name.

Date of adoption

If you can't remember the exact date, a guess is good!

Tell us what your dog is up to in his or her forever home with you!

Share a photo of your pet!

No file chosen

We love to see photos of your pets in their happy new lives!

Contact Information

Name *

First Name

Last Name

Email *

Address

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

City

State/Province

ZIP/Postal Code

By submitting your photo and/or text to the Second Chance Humane Society, you grant the Second Chance Humane Society permission to use your text and/or photo(s) in future communications, including fundraising purposes.

You'll also need a plan for how you'll store these submissions when you receive them. If you have a donor database, great! Think about how you'll get this data into your database so you can easily reach out to these adopters to follow up on their submission, and to cultivate them as donors.

A friendly note on when to use donor management software versus shelter management software:

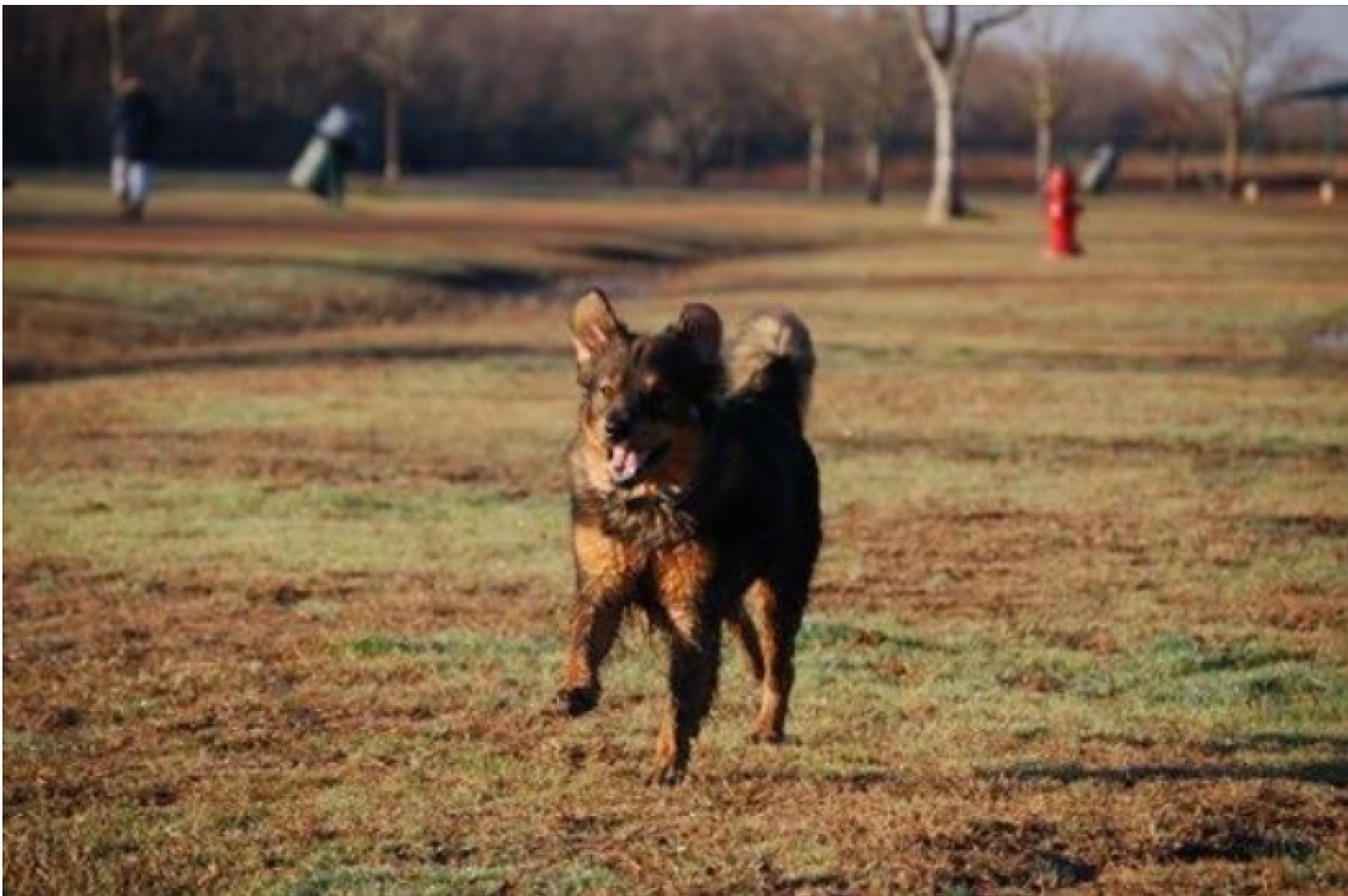
While it may be tempting to store animal-related data in your donor management system, it's important to store only information that will be used for donor stewardship purposes. For example, you may choose to track the name of an adopted dog and the date of adoption in the adopter's constituent record in your donor database. Those details can be used to personalize your appeals and communications, such as sending a card on the adoption anniversary or mentioning the dog by name in your year-end appeal letter. But details such as rabies vaccination date and cat weight are best kept exclusively in your shelter management software.

How to collect stories

Now that you have a form that adopters can use to submit stories and a way to store the data, you're ready to collect submissions and use them to build support for your organization.

It's ideal to have adopters complete your webform rather than post their updates directly to social media so that you can collect complete, up-to-date contact information for them. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't post your form on social media to ask for submissions! See an example post below:

Irving is having a blast at the dog park today! What are you and your adopted dog up to this weekend? Share your update here: <http://bit.ly/2oFBnMJ> We love to hear from adopters!



👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

Here are some ideas for collecting adopters' stories:

- Post a call for submissions on Facebook, and link it directly to your webform. You can even add a tab so adopters can complete your form without leaving Facebook
Tip: Consider using a free service like bitly.com to shorten your link.
- Include a link to your form in your e-newsletter
- Send an email to adopters to debut the form and ask them to share stories

You can encourage adopters to submit updates by providing prompts. Consider these suggestions:

- What is your pet's favorite summer activity?
- Does your pet help with, or hide from, household chores?
- How do you like to relax with your pet on the weekend?
- Share your pet's favorite napping spot

Here's an example of how to collect stories using a form:

Dog Days of Summer

What is your dog's favorite summer activity?

Some dogs love to play in the sprinkler, go for swims, or roll in the grass during the summer months. Others prefer to take it easy and snooze in the shade.

Tell us about your dog's favorite summer activity

Name of your pet *

If you've renamed your pet, please include his/her name at the time of adoption as well his/her new name.

Date of adoption

If you can't remember the exact date, a guess is good!

Share a photo of your pet

No file chosen

We love to see photos of your pets in their happy new lives

Contact Information

Name *

First Name

Last Name

Email *

Address

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

City

State/Province

ZIP/Postal Code

How to use adoption stories

Once you've received some submissions, you can incorporate them into your communications plan:

- Share photos on social media
- Feature them in your newsletter
- Consider using a story as part of an appeal letter

Depending on the content of a submission, it could be used to promote adoptions, as part of a fundraiser, or to encourage other adopters to share their stories.

A few months ago, Lilly was underweight and homeless. Today, she's happy, healthy, and loving life in her new home. Her adopters write that Lilly "loves walks, stuffed toys, and naps on the couch. She brings so much happiness to our family!" Thank you to all the adopters who welcome rescued animals into your lives. You can share your adoption story here: <http://bit.ly/2oE9keW>



👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Be sure to thank the adopters who submit stories and let them know how much the update means. Remind them that you're always happy to hear updates!

Now that you have a plan for using adopters' data, collecting updates, and sharing those updates, you're well on your way to engaging adopters and building support for your organization.

Converting adopters to donors

Your adopters are undoubtedly grateful to your organization for helping them find their pet. Their financial support can help save more lives, and most would be happy to make a donation. But unless they're asked, adopters may not think to make a gift.

With the groundwork you've laid by engaging with your adopters, you have a great foundation to successfully incorporate them into your year-end appeal. Here are the key steps to converting your adopters to donors:

1. Identify your prospective donors and make sure their data is accessible

As we covered earlier, adopters are a fantastic pool of potential donors for your organization. Your adoption contract collects their name and contact information, and that gives you a valuable head start on soliciting this group of prospects. Make sure that these details are stored in your donor management system, and make it easy to identify your adopters by including them in a group called "Adopters," for example.

2. Create a segmented approach and personalize your appeal letters

Adopters have a special relationship with your organization. Your organization couldn't fulfill its mission without these big-hearted families who welcome a rescued animal into their lives, right?

It's also true that personalization plays a big role in the success of an appeal. So when it comes time to solicit your adopters, make it clear that you recognize and value the important role they play in your organization's work. Rather than sending your standard appeal letter to adopters, take a segmented approach and send a targeted letter specific for adopters. You don't have to write a whole new appeal letter for your adopters, but you can tweak the content to recognize the adoption and include the name of the adopted animal. Here's an example.

Melissa Garcia
12 Main Street
Springfield, IL 62629

Dear Melissa,

Happy Holidays to you and Pickles!

Thanks to caring people like you, 615 animals have been adopted so far this year! As the year draws to a close, we hope you will help more animals enjoy bright futures by making a year-end gift to Second Chance Animal Society. Your gift will make it possible for homeless animals to know what it means to be safe and loved – just as Pickles is with you.

This strategy demonstrates to adopters that you are both grateful to them and that you recognize the impact they've made by choosing to adopt.

Once you've crafted an appeal letter, the finishing touch is to add a handwritten note to each. These notes can be written by development staff, your executive director or board chair, or your adoption counselors. A handwritten note such as, "Thank you for giving Buddy a wonderful home!" can really make your letter stand out. If you've collected adoption updates, you can incorporate those details into the handwritten notes. For instance: "We loved your photo of Irving at the dog park. Looks like he hit the jackpot with you!"

3. Develop a stewardship and cultivation plan

It's important to engage with adopters multiple times throughout the year in order to convert them to donors. You can create a stewardship and cultivation plan specifically for adopters. Here's an example of a plan leading up to a year-end appeal:

Date	Activity
Ongoing (three weeks post-adoption)	Thank-you card to adopter
8/1	Eblast with link to adoption update form
9/30	Fall newsletter mails
10/15	Year-end appeal mails
12/1	Send holiday cards
12/15	Year-end reminder mails
12/31	Year-end reminder eblast

The goal of this plan is to make your adopters feel appreciated and invested in your mission, and to ensure they will make a gift to your organization.

4. Send a personalized acknowledgment letter

Once your appeal letter has been mailed and the donations start arriving, it's time to thank your donors. Just as you personalized your appeal letter for adopters, you can craft a thoughtful thank you letter so your adopters feel great about their donation and are inspired to give again. Here are tips to evaluate your thank you letter and make sure it's meaningful for adopters.

Explain how the donor's gift will be used, and make sure the focus is on the end result of the donation on the animals involved rather than on how the gift is helping your organization.

This approach helps your donor feel a strong connection to the impact of their gift. So instead of writing...

“Your gift to Second Chance Humane Society will help our staff provide shelter food and medical care to hundreds of homeless animals in the year ahead.”

...take your organization out and connect the donor directly to the purpose of the gift:

“Your gift is saving the lives of homeless animals. Thanks to your generosity, these animals have the second chances they deserve.”

Add a note at the end of your letter to make it more personal. Make sure you include the adopted pet's name:

“Thank you for paying it forward to help other homeless animals! Happy New Year to you and Sparky!”

Conclusion

Whether you're new to nonprofit fundraising or are just looking for some fresh ideas, we hope this guide inspires you to implement a strategy to convert adopters into donors and gives you practical tips that you can use right away. Your adopters are potential donors who can help your organization further its life-saving mission.

And finally, thank you for the work you do on behalf of homeless animals. We enjoy working with animal welfare organizations, humane societies, and rescue groups who are fundraising to save more lives. If you'd like to learn more about Little Green Light, please visit us at www.littlegreenlight.com.