

Paws & Applawse Together, We Save Lives

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our sponsors and partners whose generosity makes this conference possible. Your commitment to protecting animals and strengthening communities drives real, lasting impact. Together, we are building a future where every animal is safe, valued, and loved.

Sponsors & Partners



Rescue & Shelter Partners



Because of You, Change Happens

To everyone who gives their time, heart, and hands—thank you!



"It takes nothing away from a human to be kind to an animal."

-- Joaquin Phoenix

"Those who protect and save other animals lead the way in protecting and saving humanity and Earth." – Anthony Williams

"You can do something big, you can do something small, because whatever you do is better than nothing at all. If you cannot do great things, do small things in a great way." – Napoleon Hill

Presentations

Start-Up Success: Building a Solid Foundation for Your Animal Welfare Nonprofit

Description: Explore what it takes to start a rescue or animal organization—from forming a board and creating a mission, to choosing a name, budgeting, and getting insured. Avoid common pitfalls and start with confidence.

Paw & Protect: No One Left Behind — Not Even the Family Pet

Description: For many survivors of domestic violence, fear for a beloved pet's safety can be a barrier to leaving. This session addresses the critical intersection of animal welfare and domestic violence, offering practical solutions for shelters and advocates to support both people and pets.

From Passion to Proposal: Grant Writing Basics for Animal Rescuers

Description: New to grants? This beginner-friendly session walks you through the fundamentals of finding, writing, and submitting grant proposals. Learn how to identify the right funders, craft compelling narratives, and avoid common mistakes.

Winning Big: Advanced Grant Strategies

Description: Already writing grants and ready to level up? This session dives into writing for major funders, building long-term relationships, collecting data to prove impact, and tailoring your proposals for greater success.

Cats 101: TNR and Beyond

Description: Get the facts on Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), community cat care, strategies to increase adoptions, and how to develop programs that reduce cat populations humanely and effectively.

Legislation & Public Policy for Animal Welfare

Description: Learn how to influence local and state policy to protect animals. Hear from advocates who have led successful campaigns and discover how you can make a difference in your community.

Strategic Storytelling & Social Media Metrics: Driving Impact Through Digital Outreach-Advanced Information

Description: Take your digital promotion efforts to the next level with data-driven strategies that boost adoptions, donor retention, and effectiveness. Ideal for staff and volunteers managing social media or communications roles.

“In rescuing animals, we rescue ourselves.”

Caren Kahan is an animal transport advocate who has moved countless pets to safety across states while supporting shelters and rescues. A former Mrs. Utah, she uses her platform to promote community giving and animal welfare. Caren lives with her husband, Chris, and her Bernese Mountain Dog.

Dr. Merik Metos is a veterinarian with 12+ years' experience and trained at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and attended the Chi University of Florida and obtained additional certifications in Chinese Herbal Medicine and Tui-Na. She specializes in emergency care, surgery, exotics, and holistic medicine and is the only veterinarian in Idaho for apiary (honeybee) medicine.

Autumn Wagner is the Community Cat Coordinator for Best Friends, Utah, and has worked in animal welfare since 2006. She focuses on TNR & helping communities find solutions for outdoor cats. She loves to come up with solutions for community cats and the people who care for them. Her motto is, "See cats outside? Let's talk about it!"

Mary Wilson's is the president of Operation Community Cats, has spent 12 years championing TNR. Under her leadership and with a strong team beside her, OCC has fixed over 1,500 cats in recent months, reducing overpopulation and supporting caregivers across the Treasure Valley.

Melissa Yencko, the Social Media Coordinator for SNARF, blends her 20+ years in federal project management with her passion for animal rescue. She uses storytelling and strategy to connect audiences with lifesaving work.

*“Every stray deserves a chance at love,
a home and a warm bed to sleep at night.”*

Join us for a no-host after-conference dinner at
Smoky Mountain Pizza

(415 E Parkcenter Blvd, Boise) at 6:00 p.m.

The room is reserved under Gwen, & it's
just 10 minutes from the conference center.

“Be the person your rescue pet thinks you are.”

Presenters

Arlyn Bradshaw is Associate Deputy Mayor of Salt Lake County and former Executive Director of Best Friends Utah. He has served on the Visit Salt Lake Executive Board, the Salt Lake County Board of Health, and as chair of the Redevelopment Agency of Salt Lake County. He was the Assistant Dean of Students at the U of U. He has a BA in Political Science and an MA of Public Administration.

Katie Boucher is President of Norris Ark Training and Recovery Center with 30+ years of experience in humane, science-based animal training specializing in LIMA (Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive) training methods. Katie has worked extensively with horses, dogs, cats, birds, and numerous other species.

Rena Campbell is a dedicated animal welfare advocate who serves as a skilled transport coordinator and transporter, organizing lifesaving “freedom rides” to connect animals of all kinds with rescue. Outside of her rescue work, she is a pharmacist and a proud parent of her beloved fur-children.

Jenn Hernandez is the Outreach and Fundraising Program Manager at Simply Cats, Boise’s cageless, no-kill feline adoption center. With a background in marketing and feline behavior certification, she blends data-driven strategy and storytelling to help shelter cats thrive and inspire community support.

Candice Hopper is a Veterinary Technology graduate, who has worked across equine, general, and shelter medicine, as well as nearly every role in rescue. Her passion lies in expanding access to low-cost spay and neuter. She now serves with the SNIP team to provide affordable, life-saving care for pets and families.

Gwen Hernandez is an RN with a BA in Psychology and additional studies in Health Science at BSU. With more than 35 years in the rescue community, she helped found HSUV in Idaho Falls and SNARF (Spay, Neuter, Adopt, Rescue, Foster) in Boise. Over the years, she has worn nearly every hat in rescue, but her greatest joy—aside from her children—is helping cats & dogs get “fixed.”

Julie Jacobsen is the Co-founder of Elevate Training & Solutions. Julie has 30+ years in victim advocacy, grant writing, and animal rescue. She helps nonprofits secure funding and has trained law enforcement agencies to help train officers in victim advocacy and effective grant writing. Julie is a transport coordinator and has many pet children of her own.

Healing from the Inside Out: Holistic Care for Senior & Newly Rescued Pets

Description: Discover how integrative medicine can transform the lives of older animals and pets fresh from rescue. Dr. Metos will share practical, compassionate approaches, including mushroom therapy, homeopathic remedies, Chinese herbal medicine, food therapy, and gentle at-home massage—to help address anxiety, Cushing’s disease, cancer, osteoarthritis, urinary tract infections, and more. Perfect for fosters, volunteers, and advocates who want to bring comfort, healing, & hope to the animals they love.

Tail Wagging Transitions: Reducing Stress and Finding Success From Shelter to Foster Home

Description: This session equips shelter staff, volunteers, and fosters with practical tools to help animals transition from trauma to home life. Learn stress-reducing techniques, positive reinforcement training, and how to read animal body language. Through real-world examples and demonstrations, attendees will gain simple, effective strategies to build trust, ease anxiety, and support successful placements.

Pawsitive Promotion: Social Media & Storytelling That Saves Lives

Description: New to social media or just want to help more pets get adopted? This session will show you simple ways to share powerful stories, create engaging posts, and use free tools to make a difference. Perfect for volunteers, fosters, or anyone who wants to use their voice to help animals.

Heroes on the Highway: Mastering Animal Rescue Transport

Description: Be the lifeline animals need on their journey to safety! This session is focused on transport drivers, coordinators, and volunteers who make lifesaving moves happen. Learn how to plan safe, efficient trips, follow critical animal care protocols, & build strong partnerships with shelters and rescues. Whether you’re behind the wheel or behind the scenes, you’ll gain the tools necessary to ensure every transport has happy tails.

Compassion Fatigue: Supporting the Heart of Animal Care

Description: Fostering, rescuing, and shelter work requires endless compassion—but the emotional toll is real. This session helps fosters, volunteers, and shelter staff recognize the signs of burnout and compassion fatigue, while offering practical tools to protect your well-being. Learn how to recharge, set healthy boundaries, and support one another, so you can keep making a difference for the animals who need you most.

“Saving one dog or cat will not change the world,
but surely for that one dog or cat, the world will change forever.”



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

RIVERSIDE HOTEL



TIMES	SAPPHIRE ROOM	EMERALD ROOM	GARNETT ROOM
8:00am - 9:00am	REGISTRATION AND NETWORKING		
9:00am - 9:50am	OPENING ANNOUNCEMENTS AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER		
10:00am- 11:20am	START UP SUCCESS	LEGISLATION & PUBLIC POLICY	TAIL WAGGING TRANSITIONS
11:30am 12:50pm	PAW AND PROTECT	CATS 101	POSITIVE PROMOTIONS
12:50pm - 1:50pm	WORKING LUNCH		
2:00pm - 3:20pm	GRANT WRITING BASICS	STRATEGIC STORYTELLING	HEROES ON THE HIGHWAY
3:30pm - 4:50pm	ADVANCED GRANT WRITING	HOLISTIC HEALING	COMPASSION FATIGUE
5:00pm - 5:30pm	CLOSING REMARKS, DRAWING, SWAG BAGS		

Join us for a no-host after-conference dinner at Smoky Mountain Pizza (415 E Parkcenter Blvd, Boise) at 6:00 p.m.
The large room is reserved under Gwen, and it's just ten minutes from the conference.



THANK YOU



THANK YOU

**Thank you for presenting at the
Saving Lives: Be Their Hero
Conference. Your willingness to
share your expertise made a lasting
impact on our attendees and the
animal welfare community.**

**We're so grateful for your time
and support with the Saving
Lives: Be Their Hero Conference.
Your efforts truly made a
difference—for the event, for
the people, and for the animals.**