Animal Emergency Response Toolkit & Playbook

A practical system for coordinating animal response during emergencies

Version 1.0 | April 2026

Boreal Animal Rescue

Northern Saskatchewan

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Boreal Animal Rescue

i. Dedication

This playbook is dedicated to the communities, responders, and volunteers who came together during the 2025 wildfires in northern Saskatchewan. In a time of uncertainty and rapid change, people stepped forward to help — often without clear direction, with limited resources, and under difficult conditions. They searched for animals, shared information, coordinated support, and did what they could, when they could.

Their efforts made a difference.

It is also dedicated, with respect, to the animals who did not make it. Their absence is part of why this work matters.

And to the communities who continue to carry the impact of these events — this playbook is intended to support stronger, more coordinated response in the future.

ii. Why This Exists

In an emergency, decisions are made quickly and often under pressure. Time is limited, information is incomplete, and options can narrow rapidly — especially in northern and remote communities. During evacuation events, animals are frequently left behind. This is not because people don’t care. It is because the system does not include them.

In many communities, evacuation planning is designed for people, not animals. Transportation is limited, timelines are short, and coordination is focused on human safety — which it should be. But without a parallel system to support animals, a gap emerges.

During the 2025 wildfire evacuations in northern Saskatchewan, that gap became visible. Thousands of people were displaced as fires approached communities like La Ronge. As residents evacuated, many animals were left behind without a coordinated system to support them. Community members and volunteers stepped in wherever they could — searching for animals, providing food and water, and organizing transport when possible.

Their efforts were committed and immediate — but they were also fragmented, reactive, and difficult to sustain. Information was coming from multiple directions. There was no shared intake process, no centralized tracking, and no consistent way to prioritize or coordinate response. What became clear was this: **This was not a failure of people. It was a system gap.**

When there is no system, response depends on individuals. And in high-pressure environments, that creates delays, duplication, and preventable risk. This playbook exists to address that gap. It provides a simple, practical system that communities, responders, and organizations can use to coordinate animal response during emergencies — especially when conditions are imperfect and resources are limited.

iii. The Who & How

Who This Is For

This playbook is designed for a wide range of users who may find themselves involved in animal response during an emergency. This includes community members coordinating local efforts, responders working in the field, and organizations such as SPCAs, rescues, and veterinary partners supporting animal welfare.

It is also designed for individuals stepping into coordination roles — whether formally assigned or emerging naturally in response to need. Importantly, this system does not assume large teams or formal infrastructure. It is designed to work with small groups, limited resources, and evolving conditions.

How to Use This Playbook

This playbook is designed to be both practical and flexible. During an active emergency, the most important sections are *Start Here*, *The System*, and *Running the Response*. These provide the core structure needed to coordinate response quickly and effectively. When preparing in advance, the full playbook can be used to understand the system, assign roles, and adapt tools to local conditions. For those supporting response, the tools and checklists referenced throughout this playbook can be used alongside this guide to support coordination and decision-making.

This playbook is supported by a set of practical tools that can be used alongside this guide during response. These include intake and tracking tools, communication guidance, safety checklists, and a priority guide to support decision-making under pressure. These tools are referenced throughout and compiled in Appendix A.

iv. Important Boundaries

This playbook is intended to support coordination and response during emergency situations. It is designed to help communities, responders, and organizations work together more effectively when animals are at risk. At the same time, it is important to understand what this playbook is — and what it is not.

It does not replace formal emergency management systems, emergency services, or legal authority. Instead, it is meant to operate alongside existing structures, helping to fill common gaps in animal-related response. This playbook also does not replace formal authority or liability frameworks. Organizations should apply their own policies and legal considerations where applicable. In practice, this means that all response efforts should remain grounded in safety, coordination, and respect for local context.

Working Within Existing Systems

Emergency response environments often involve multiple layers of authority, including local leadership, emergency management, and public safety personnel. These structures play a critical role in protecting communities and must be respected. Where possible, animal response efforts should align with local leadership and governance; emergency management teams; and fire, police, and other response personnel. Coordination does not need to be formal to be effective — but awareness and alignment are important.

Access and Authority

In many situations, accessing properties or animals may not be straightforward. This playbook does not grant authority for property access or entry. Where possible, access should be obtained through property owners, neighbors or community contacts, and local leadership or housing authorities. If access is unclear or cannot be confirmed, the situation should be escalated through the coordinator and approached with caution. Decisions should be made with care, respect, and awareness of local context.

Safety Comes First

Emergency conditions can change quickly. Hazards such as fire, smoke, unstable structures, and restricted access create real risks for responders. For this reason, these principles apply throughout this playbook: **Human safety always comes first.** Responders should not enter unsafe or restricted areas, and should avoid situations that place themselves or others at risk. If conditions are unclear or unsafe, it is appropriate to pause, reassess, and seek guidance.

Working Within Limits

This system is designed to support action — but not at any cost. There will be situations where information is incomplete, access is limited, resources are not available, and risks are too high. In these cases, decisions may involve delaying action, reassessing priorities, or escalating to appropriate authorities. These are not failures. They are part of working responsibly within real conditions.

A Shared Responsibility

Animal response during emergencies often depends on a combination of community members, volunteers, and organizations working together. This playbook supports that shared effort by providing structure and guidance — but it does not replace the judgment, relationships, and knowledge of the people using it.

v. Evidence and Alignment

This playbook aligns with established emergency management principles and reflects common conditions seen in real-world response. While it is designed for practical, community-based use, the approach reflects widely recognized concepts in emergency management and animal disaster response. These include simplified elements of the Incident Command System (ICS), which emphasizes clear roles, shared information, and coordinated action — even in complex and rapidly changing environments.

It also aligns with broader Canadian emergency preparedness frameworks, including guidance from Public Safety Canada and provincial agencies such as the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA). These approaches prioritize coordination, communication, and adaptability — principles that are essential in any emergency response. From an animal welfare perspective, the playbook reflects guidance and practices used by organizations such as Humane Canada and the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), as well as established disaster response approaches used internationally by groups such as the ASPCA and FEMA.

At the same time, this playbook is not a direct replication of any single framework. It has been shaped by frontline experience during the 2025 wildfire evacuations in northern Saskatchewan, where response conditions included limited personnel, rapidly changing environments, incomplete and inconsistent information, and a lack of formal coordination structures for animals. These conditions required practical, adaptive approaches that could function without ideal systems in place.

Designed for Real Conditions

Many emergency response frameworks assume a level of structure, capacity, and preparation that may not be present in all communities — particularly in northern or remote contexts. This playbook takes a different approach. It is designed to function under conditions where: teams are small, information is incomplete, and systems are still forming in real time. Rather than relying on perfect inputs or fully developed infrastructure, it focuses on creating just enough structure to support coordination and decision-making.

Why This Matters

Experience and research in emergency management consistently show that gaps in animal response can have broader impacts.

When animals are not accounted for:

- people may delay evacuation or refuse to leave
- responders face increased risk when returning to assist
- recovery becomes more complex and prolonged

Supporting animals is not separate from emergency response. It is part of it.

A Practical Approach

This playbook is not intended to be comprehensive or prescriptive. It is a practical framework that communities and responders can adapt based on their own context, capacity, and relationships.
Its purpose is simple: To provide a system that works when conditions are at their most difficult.

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1.0 Start Here: Emergency Animal Response

When an emergency begins, there is rarely enough time, information, or capacity to respond perfectly. Requests come quickly. Conditions change. People want to help — but without coordination, even strong efforts can become fragmented. This playbook provides a simple system to help you move from uncertainty to coordinated action.

How This System Works

Many emergency response frameworks assume a level of structure, capacity, and preparation that may At its core, this response is built on a few essential elements:

- A single place where information is shared
- A consistent way to receive and organize requests
- A small group of people working in defined roles
- A way to safely support and move animals
- Ongoing awareness of safety and changing conditions

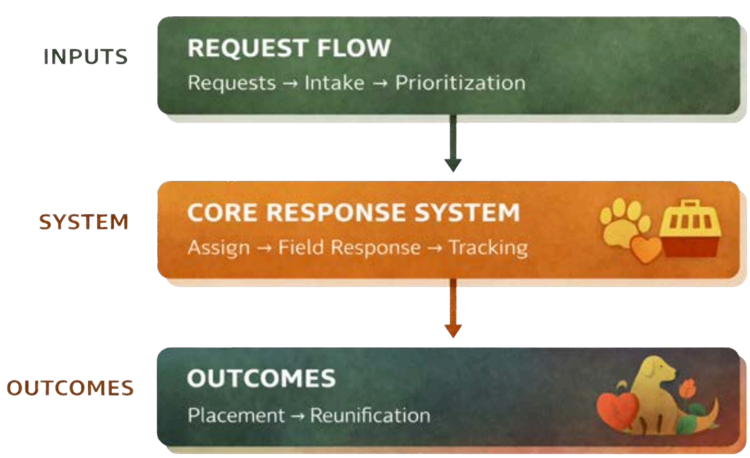
These do not need to be complex. What matters is that they are used consistently.

How This Actually Works in Practice

At first glance, emergency response can feel chaotic — messages coming from everywhere, incomplete information, and pressure to act quickly. The diagram below shows something important: **Even simple responses follow a pattern.** You don't need a complex system to be effective. But you do need a consistent flow. What the diagram on the next page represents is the underlying structure that turns scattered information into coordinated action:

- Requests come in
- Information is captured and clarified
- Situations are tracked and made visible
- Priorities are identified
- Responses are coordinated
- Outcomes are recorded and followed up

This isn't about adding complexity. It's about making what already happens — visible, repeatable, and reliable. Even a small team using basic tools can apply this flow.



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Why This Matters

Without structure:

- Requests get missed
- Urgent situations get delayed
- Effort is duplicated
- Outcomes are unclear

With structure:

- The most urgent needs rise to the top
- Teams act with clarity and confidence
- Everyone understands what's happening
- Animals receive faster, more appropriate care

What to Notice in the Diagram

As you look at the system:

- It is linear and simple — no unnecessary layers
- Each step has a clear purpose
- Prioritization sits in the middle, where decisions are made
- The flow always ends with an outcome and follow-up

This is the foundation the rest of the toolkit builds on.

Roles at a Glance

Even in small responses, clarity of roles makes a difference:

Role	Primary Focus	Key Responsibilities
Coordinator	Information & coordination	Intake, prioritization, assignment, system awareness
Field Responders	Direct action	Check locations, provide support, report updates
Support	System support	Communication, tracking, logistics, placement

Prioritizing Under Pressure

There will almost always be more need than capacity. Focus first on: Animals in immediate danger; Animals without food, water, or shelter; and Situations that are worsening. Stable situations where animals have basic needs are lower priority. These decisions are not about value — they are about reducing the most immediate risk. Priorities should be reassessed as conditions change.

Getting Started

If no system exists, start simple:

1. Identify one coordinator
2. Choose one communication channel
3. Capture all requests in one place
4. Track requests using a simple sheet
5. Focus response on highest-priority cases

The system can grow as more people and resources become available.

2.0 If You Only Do Three Things

In an emergency, it is easy to become overwhelmed. Information is coming from multiple directions. People are asking for help. The instinct is to respond quickly — often to everything at once. But without structure, even well-intentioned efforts can become fragmented. Requests are missed. Work is duplicated. Energy is spent without clear impact. When everything feels urgent, it helps to come back to a few simple principles.

If you only do three things, focus on these:

1. One communication channel
2. Track every request
3. Prioritize highest risk first

1. Keep Communication in One Place

Choose a single channel for requests and updates, and use it consistently. When information is spread across multiple platforms — messages, posts, texts, and conversations — it becomes difficult to see what is happening. Important details are lost, and the same situations may be addressed more than once. A single, shared channel creates visibility. It allows people to see what has already been reported, what is being worked on, and where support is still needed. It does not need to be complex. It simply needs to be clear and consistent.

2. Track Every Request

Do not rely on memory, screenshots, or message threads to manage information. Each request should be captured and tracked in one place, even if the details are incomplete at first. Tracking allows the team to understand what has been reported, what has been checked, and what still needs attention. Without tracking, requests can easily be missed — especially as volume increases. With it, response becomes organized and visible.

3. Prioritize the Highest Risk First

There will almost always be more need than capacity. Some animals will be in immediate danger. Others may be at risk but stable for now. These differences matter. Focusing first on animals that are confined, without access to food or water, or in immediate distress helps ensure that limited time and resources are used where they can have the greatest impact. Prioritization is not about choosing which situations matter. When prioritizing, use the Priority Guide to assess urgency consistently. It is about responding in a way that reduces the most urgent risk.

Why These Three Things Matter

These three actions — keeping communication centralized, tracking requests, and prioritizing effectively — hold the entire system together. Without them, response becomes reactive and difficult to sustain. With them, even a small group can begin to coordinate effectively.

A Simple System, Used Consistently

You do not need to build a complex structure to make a difference. You need a simple system that people understand and use the same way. These three actions are where that system begins.

3.0 The System

In an emergency, information moves quickly and often without structure. Requests may come from multiple sources. Details may be incomplete or inconsistent. People are trying to help, but without a shared way of organizing information and action, response can become fragmented. This system provides a simple way to bring structure to that environment. It does not remove complexity. It makes it manageable.

System Flow

Step	What Happens
Request	Concern is reported
Intake	Information is gathered and clarified
Tracking	Request is logged and visible
Prioritize	Make decisions consistently
Response	Action is assigned and carried out
Outcome	Situation is updated or resolved

How the System Works

At its core, every situation follows the same progression. A concern is raised. Information is gathered. The situation is logged, assessed and prioritized. Action is taken. The outcome is recorded and, if needed, followed up. This can be understood as a continuous flow:

Prioritization sits between intake and response and is supported by a simple Priority Guide. This ensures that decisions are made consistently, even when information is incomplete. Each step builds on the one before it. A request that is clearly captured is easier to understand. A situation that is tracked is easier to coordinate. A response that is coordinated is more effective. The strength of the system comes not from any single step, but from how consistently the full flow is used.

Why Structure Matters

Without a shared system, response depends on individual awareness and memory.

This can lead to:

- requests being missed or forgotten
- multiple responders attending the same situation
- gaps in response where no one is assigned
- difficulty understanding what has already been done

Even a simple structure changes this. When information is captured, visible, and shared, coordination becomes possible — even with limited capacity.

Designed for Imperfect Conditions

This system is intentionally simple.

It assumes that:

- information will not be complete
- time will be limited
- teams will be small
- conditions will change

Rather than requiring ideal inputs, it creates just enough structure to support action under real conditions.

4.0 Core Response Elements

While the system is simple, it depends on a small number of elements working together. These are not optional features. They are the foundation that allows the system to function.

Core Response Elements

Element	Purpose
Communication channel	Centralizes requests and updates
Intake & tracking	Organizes and maintains visibility
Small team	Enables coordination with limited capacity
Mobile approach	Allows response across locations
Safety focus	Protects responders and decision-making
Priority guide	Supports consistent decision-making under pressure

A Single Communication Channel

All requests and updates need a clear, shared starting point. When communication is spread across messages, posts, conversations, it becomes difficult to see what is happening. Important information can be missed or repeated. A single channel creates a shared space where information can be seen, understood, and acted on. This does not require specialized tools — only consistency.

A Clear Intake and Tracking Process

Once a request is received, it must be captured in a way that allows it to be understood and followed. Intake structures incoming information. Tracking keeps it visible over time. Together, they allow the team to see what has been reported, what has been checked, what is in progress, and what still needs attention. Without this step, coordination breaks down quickly.

A Small, Defined Team

Emergency response does not require a large team to begin — it requires clarity. A small group, often three to five people, can coordinate effectively when roles are understood and information is shared. This system is designed to scale with capacity but does not depend on it.

A Mobile and Adaptable Approach

In many emergencies, animals are not in a single location. They may be spread across communities, properties, and changing environments. Response cannot rely on a fixed site or centralized facility — it must be able to move. Responders go to where animals are, and coordination moves with the situation. This approach allows the system to function across conditions and geographies.

A Focus on Safety

Every part of the system must be grounded in safety. Conditions can change quickly, and risks may not be immediately visible. Responders must assess situations, make informed decisions, and stop when conditions are unsafe. Safety is not a separate step — it is part of every decision.

5.0 Roles and Coordination

Even in small or informal responses, clearly defined roles help create consistency and reduce confusion. Roles do not need to be formalized, but they do need to be understood.

Coordination Principles

- All requests move through intake and tracking
- All updates return to the system
- Work is visible to the team
- Response is coordinated — not duplicated

The Coordinator

At the center of the system is the coordinator. This role connects information and action. The coordinator receives incoming requests, ensures they are captured and tracked, assesses priority, and helps assign response based on available capacity. They also maintain an overall view of what is happening — what has been addressed, what is still outstanding, and where attention is needed. There should be one clear coordinator at any given time, even if others are supporting this function.

Field Responders

Field responders focus on direct action. They travel to locations, assess conditions, provide support, and, when appropriate, assist with transport. Just as importantly, they report back. Their updates ensure that information stays current and that the system remains accurate and useful. Working within the system — rather than independently — helps ensure that efforts are coordinated and not duplicated.

Support Roles

Not all response happens in the field. Support roles help maintain the system by managing communication, organizing information, coordinating supplies, and assisting with placement or follow-up. These roles are often less visible but are critical to keeping the response functioning over time.

Working as One System

For the system to function, all roles must stay connected. Requests should move through intake and tracking. Updates should be shared back to the coordinator. Information should remain visible to the team. When each part of the system is used consistently, coordination becomes possible — even in challenging conditions.

6.0 Before an Emergency

In many situations, there is little or no time to prepare before an emergency unfolds. Evacuation orders can come quickly. Conditions can change without warning. In some cases, communities are already responding before a formal system is in place. For this reason, this playbook does not assume a high level of preparedness. It is designed to function even when preparation is limited.

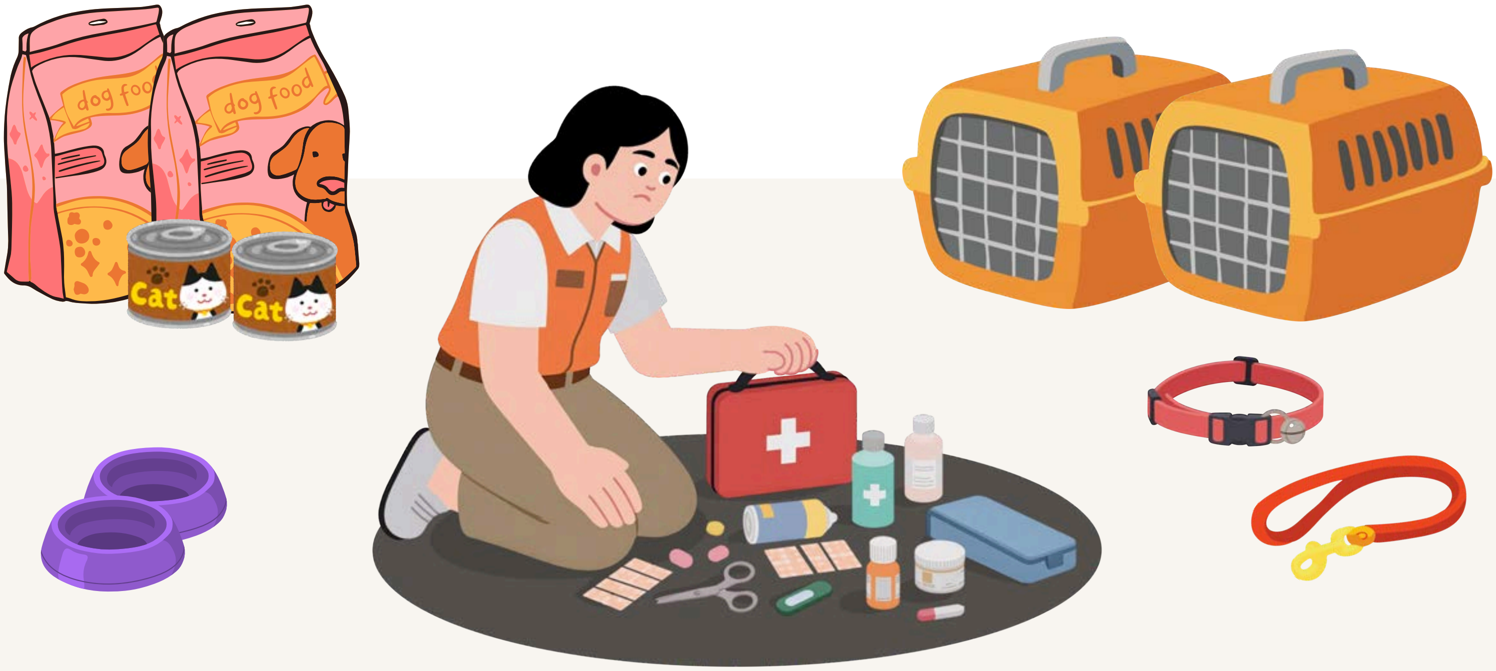
What Preparation Can Look Like

Where time and capacity allow, a small amount of preparation can make a meaningful difference. This does not require formal planning or extensive resources. Instead, it involves identifying a few basic elements that can support coordination if and when an emergency occurs.

This may include identifying a primary communication channel that people can use to report concerns or request help. It may involve identifying one or two individuals who are willing to take on a coordination role if needed. It can also include creating a simple list of local contacts — such as veterinary clinics, rescues, or community members who may be able to assist. Basic supplies, such as food, water containers, leashes, or protective gear, can also support early response efforts. None of these steps need to be complete or formalized to be useful. Even partial preparation can reduce confusion when response begins.

For Residents and Animal Owners

Individual preparation is not always possible, especially when evacuation timelines are short. However, where it can be done, even small actions can help. People may choose to leave information about animals that remain behind, identify a trusted contact who can check on them, or ensure that animals have access to water if possible. These actions are not always feasible, and they are not expected in every situation. This system is designed to support response even when little or no preparation has taken place.



7.0 During an Emergency

Once an emergency is underway, conditions often become fast-moving and unpredictable. Information may be incomplete or conflicting. Communication can become fragmented. The volume of requests may exceed the capacity to respond. At the same time, there is pressure to act quickly and to help as many animals as possible. This combination of urgency and uncertainty can make it difficult to know where to begin.

What This Will Feel Like

For many people involved in response, the experience is intense. Requests come in from multiple directions. Some are urgent, others are unclear. Details may change as new information becomes available. There may not be enough people to respond to everything. Decisions need to be made quickly, often without full information. This is not a sign that something is wrong. It is the nature of emergency response.

How to Work Within It

The purpose of the system is to create enough structure to make decisions possible under these conditions. Rather than trying to resolve everything at once, the focus shifts to:

- creating clarity through shared information
- prioritizing based on risk
- coordinating actions through the system
- maintaining awareness of safety and limits

This allows response to move forward, even when conditions are not ideal.

Working With Limitations

It is important to recognize that not every situation can be addressed immediately. Some animals may need to wait. Some situations may require follow-up rather than immediate action. In some cases, it may not be possible to respond at all due to safety or access constraints. These limitations are part of the environment — not a reflection of effort or intent. The goal is not to eliminate these challenges, but to navigate them in a way that improves outcomes where possible.

8.0 After an Emergency

When the immediate threat begins to pass, response does not end — it shifts. The urgency of initial response may decrease, but many needs remain. Animals may still require care. Owners may be trying to locate or reconnect with pets. Responders may be managing fatigue after extended periods of activity. This stage is often less visible, but it is an important part of the overall response.

Reunification and Follow-Up

One of the primary focuses after an emergency is reconnecting animals with their owners. This may involve using records, photos, communication channels, and community networks to identify and locate owners. Some situations may require ongoing care, particularly where animals have been displaced, injured, or separated for extended periods. Follow-up efforts help ensure that animals are not lost in the transition from response to recovery.

Supporting the Community

Emergencies affect people as well as animals. For many, animals are part of their family. The stress of evacuation, separation, and uncertainty can be significant. Clear communication, updates, and small acts of support can make a meaningful difference during this time.

Learning and Adapting

Once conditions have stabilized, there is an opportunity to reflect on what occurred. This does not need to be formal or structured. Simple conversations about what worked, what was difficult, and what could improve can strengthen future response. Each experience contributes to a better understanding of what communities need and how systems can evolve.

Transitioning Forward

As response activity decreases, the system naturally winds down. Requests become less frequent. Coordination shifts from urgent action to ongoing support. Teams begin to step back. This transition is an important part of sustaining both the response and the people involved in it. As response activity slows, review the tracking system to identify any requests that remain open, unclear, or incomplete. Where possible, ensure each case has been reviewed, updated, or clearly documented before the system is wound down.

Closing Out the Response

As the response begins to wind down, it is important to ensure that no situations are unintentionally left unresolved. In active response, the focus is on urgency — responding quickly, prioritizing risk, and managing incoming requests. As conditions stabilize, the focus shifts to completeness. This includes reviewing the tracking system and identifying any requests that remain open, unclear, or incomplete. Some situations may have been partially addressed but require follow-up. Others may not have been reached due to capacity or access limitations. Taking time to review and close out these cases helps ensure that animals are not overlooked as response activity decreases.

This does not mean that every situation can be fully resolved. In some cases, conditions may still limit what is possible. However, ensuring that each case has been reviewed, updated, and clearly documented provides a more complete and responsible transition out of the response phase. Where appropriate, unresolved situations may be handed off to local organizations, community members, or longer-term support structures.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9.0 What This Looks Like in Practice

It is often easier to understand the system by seeing how it works in a real situation.

A post appears in the community communication channel. Someone has shared that two dogs were left behind at a home after their owner evacuated. The animals are tied up outside. There is no clear indication that they have access to food or water, and no one is currently at the property.

At first, the information is incomplete. The exact condition of the animals is unclear, and there may be details missing about access or timing. Rather than responding immediately in an uncoordinated way, the information is first reviewed and clarified. Additional details are gathered where possible — confirming the address, the number of animals, and any relevant access information.

Once the situation is understood as clearly as possible, it is entered into the tracking system. Now, it is visible. The request is no longer just a message. It becomes part of a shared picture of what is happening. Based on the information available, the situation is assessed. The animals are confined, without confirmed access to food or water, and the owner is not present.

This is identified as a high-risk situation. At this point, the coordinator assigns the request to available responders. Those responders travel to the location, remaining aware of conditions along the way. On arrival, they assess the environment for safety, confirm the condition of the animals, and determine what action is appropriate.

In this case, they are able to provide food and water and confirm that the animals are stable, but will require follow-up or potential transport. This information is then communicated back. The tracking system is updated. The status of the request changes. The situation is no longer unknown — it is understood, and it has a clear next step. From there, the case may move toward follow-up, continued support, or transport and placement, depending on how conditions evolve.

What This Will Feel Like

- Requests coming from multiple directions
- Incomplete or conflicting information
- Pressure to act quickly
- Limited capacity to respond

What Matters Most

At each stage, the system is doing the same thing: It is taking something uncertain and making it visible, organized, and actionable. The request is not lost in a stream of messages. The response is not duplicated. The situation is not forgotten.

10.0 Intake and Tracking

In an emergency, information is constantly moving. Requests come in through posts, messages, conversations, and referrals. Some are clear and detailed, while others are incomplete or uncertain. As volume increases, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep track of what has been reported and what has already been addressed. Without a consistent way to capture and organize this information, important requests can be missed, and multiple people may respond to the same situation without realizing it. This is where intake and tracking become essential.

Capturing Information Clearly

Every request should be reviewed and captured as clearly as possible before action is taken. This does not mean waiting for perfect information. It means taking the time to understand the situation well enough to respond appropriately. At a minimum, this includes identifying the location, the number and type of animals involved, their current condition if known, and any relevant details about access.
In many cases, some of this information will be missing. That is expected. Additional details can be gathered as the situation develops. What matters is that the request is captured in a consistent way so that it can be understood by others.

Minimum Intake Information

Information Needed	Why It Matters
Location	Enables response
Animal type & number	Determines approach
Condition	Supports prioritization
Access details	Enables safe entry
Contact info	Supports follow-up

Working With Simple Tools

This process does not require complex systems. A simple intake form and a shared tracking sheet are often enough to support effective coordination. What matters most is not the tool itself, but how consistently it is used.

Tool Tip

Use the **Intake Form** to capture requests and the Tracking Sheet to maintain a shared, up-to-date view of all situations.

This information does not need to be complete to be useful. It provides a starting point for coordination.

Creating a Shared View

Once a request is received, it should be logged in a single, shared tracking system. This is what allows the team to move from individual awareness to collective understanding. Instead of relying on memory or scattered messages, the tracking system creates a clear picture of ***what has been reported, what has been checked, what is currently in progress, and what still needs attention***. Each request becomes part of a larger, visible system.

Maintaining Visibility Over Time

As response continues, situations evolve. Some requests are resolved quickly. Others require follow-up. New information may change priority or approach. Tracking allows these changes to be recorded and shared. It ensures that situations are not forgotten as new requests come in, and that response remains coordinated over time.

11.0 Prioritization

In most emergencies, the number of requests will exceed the capacity to respond. This is one of the most difficult realities of emergency response. It means that decisions must be made about where to focus time and resources, often with incomplete information and under pressure. Prioritization provides a way to make those decisions more consistently and effectively.

Understanding Risk

Not all situations carry the same level of urgency. Some animals may be in immediate danger — confined, injured, or without access to food or water. Others may be at risk, but stable for the moment. Some may have access to basic resources and can safely wait while higher-risk situations are addressed. Recognizing these differences allows the team to direct attention where it will have the greatest impact.

Applying Priority in Practice

When a request is first received, it should be assessed based on the information available. If the situation suggests immediate risk — such as confinement without food or water — it should be treated as a high priority. Situations that may deteriorate over time can be addressed next, while those that are stable can be monitored and revisited as capacity allows. These assessments are not permanent. As new information becomes available, priorities can and should be reassessed.

To support real-time decision-making, responders should use the Priority Guide included in the toolkit. This provides a clear and consistent reference that can be applied quickly in the field or during coordination. The guide is designed to reduce uncertainty, support shared understanding across the team, and ensure that prioritization decisions are aligned — even when conditions are changing.

Working Within Limits

Prioritization is not about deciding which animals matter. It is about responding responsibly within the limits of what is possible. In practice, this means accepting that some situations will need to wait, even when they are important. This is not a failure of the system. It is part of working within real conditions.


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12.0 Field Response

Field response is where planning and coordination turn into action. It is also where conditions are most uncertain. Responders may be working in unfamiliar environments, with limited information, and in situations that are changing in real time. For this reason, field response must remain both coordinated and adaptable.

A Mobile Approach

In many emergency situations, animals are not located in one place. They may be spread across properties, neighborhoods, or communities. Access may change depending on conditions, and there may be no centralized facility to bring animals to. This system is designed to work within that reality. Rather than depending on a single location, response moves to where animals are. Responders travel, assess, and act based on the situation in front of them. Coordination and support move with the response, rather than remaining fixed in one place.

Assessing the Situation

On arrival, the first priority is to understand the environment. This includes assessing safety, confirming the details provided during intake, and observing the condition of the animals. From there, responders determine what action is appropriate. This may involve providing food and water, documenting the situation, arranging follow-up, or preparing for transport.

Acting Within the System

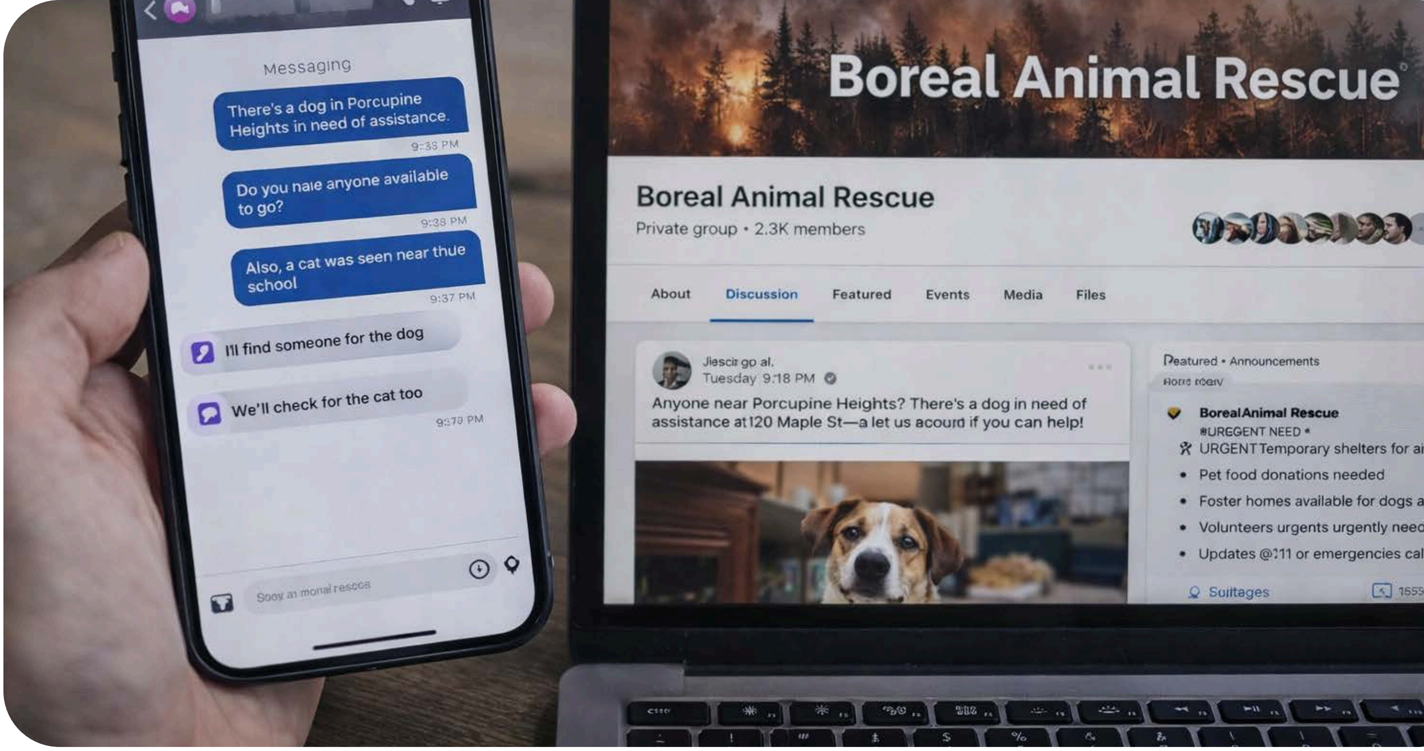
Even in the field, coordination remains essential. Responders should stay connected to the system by:

- confirming assignments before acting
- communicating updates as situations change
- reporting outcomes clearly

This ensures that information remains current and that efforts are not duplicated. Priority assessments should continue in the field. Responders may encounter conditions that differ from initial reports. In these cases, the Priority Guide should be used to reassess urgency and update the system accordingly.

Working With Care

Animals in emergency situations may be stressed, frightened, or injured. Responders should approach each situation with caution, patience, and awareness of their own limits. Where conditions are unsafe or unclear, it is appropriate to pause and reassess. Refer to the Safety Checklist in the toolkit to support field decisions.



13.0 Communication

Communication is one of the most challenging aspects of emergency response. Information moves quickly, often across multiple channels, and can easily become fragmented or inconsistent. Without a clear approach, it becomes difficult to understand what is happening, what has already been addressed, and where help is still needed.

Communication Rules

- Use one channel
- Capture all requests
- Do not rely on memory
- Share confirmed information only

Keeping Communication Clear

The system depends on maintaining a single, consistent communication channel for requests and updates. This creates a shared space where information can be seen, understood, and acted on. When multiple channels are used, information becomes scattered and coordination breaks down. Clarity does not require complex tools — it requires consistency.

From Communication to Action

It is important to recognize that communication alone is not enough. Messages, posts, and conversations are not a reliable way to manage response over time. Every valid request should be moved into the system by being captured and tracked. This is what allows communication to become actionable.

Sharing Information Responsibly

Public updates play an important role in keeping communities informed. These updates should be:

- clear and consistent
- based on confirmed information
- focused on what is known and what is needed

It is also important to avoid overpromising timelines or outcomes, especially in rapidly changing conditions. Where possible, priority level should be included when requests are shared or updated. This supports clearer coordination and helps ensure alignment across the response team.

Maintaining a Single Source of Truth

As response continues, the tracking system becomes the most reliable source of information. It reflects what has been reported, what has been addressed, and what still requires attention. Maintaining this single source of truth helps prevent confusion and supports better decision-making.

Tool Tip

Use the **Communication Guide** to help structure requests and updates in a consistent way.

14.0 Responder Safety

Emergency environments are unpredictable. Conditions can change quickly, and risks are not always immediately visible. Fire, smoke, damaged structures, poor visibility, and restricted access all create hazards that responders must navigate in real time. In these situations, it is natural to focus on the animals that need help. However, the ability to respond depends on the safety of the people involved. For this reason, one principle applies throughout this playbook: **Your safety comes first.**

Safety Guidance

Do:
- Assess environment
- Stay aware
- Communicate with team

Do Not:
- Enter unsafe areas
- Act beyond your ability
- Ignore changing conditions

Understanding Risk in the Field

Risk is not always obvious. A location that appears safe at a distance may contain hidden hazards. Conditions that were stable earlier may change without warning. Animals themselves may behave unpredictably when stressed, injured, or frightened. Responders must constantly assess their environment and adjust their actions accordingly. This is not a one-time decision. It is an ongoing process.

Approaching Each Situation

Before taking action, take a moment to understand the situation. Consider:

- the condition of the surrounding environment
- the presence of fire, smoke, or debris
- the stability of structures
- access points and potential exit routes

If something feels uncertain or unsafe, it is appropriate to pause.

Working Safely

In practice, working safely means:

- maintaining awareness of changing conditions
- moving carefully and deliberately
- recognizing personal limits
- staying connected to the team

Where possible, responders should avoid working alone in higher-risk environments and maintain communication with the coordinator. Safety is strengthened when it is shared.

Knowing When to Stop

One of the most important decisions a responder can make is to stop. If conditions are unsafe, access is unclear, or risk becomes too high, stepping back is the right decision. This does not mean the situation is abandoned. It means it is reassessed.

Tool Tip

Use the **Field Safety Checklist** before and during response to support consistent decision-making.

15.0 Key Decision Limits

Emergency response involves making decisions quickly, often without complete information. These decisions can carry real consequences — for responders, for animals, and for the overall coordination of the response. This section provides guidance for navigating those moments.

Decision Considerations

Information Needed	Why It Matters
Location	Enables response
Animal type & number	Determines approach
Condition	Supports prioritization
Access details	Enables safe entry
Contact info	Supports follow-up

Staying Within the System

The system works because information and action are connected. When decisions are made within the system — through intake, tracking, and coordination — response remains visible and organized. When actions are taken independently, information becomes fragmented and coordination breaks down. For this reason, it is important to confirm assignments before acting, communicate updates as situations change, and ensure that all activity is reflected in the tracking system. This is what allows the system to function as a whole.

Access and Authority

In many situations, gaining access to animals may involve uncertainty. Properties may be vacant, owners may be unreachable, and access points may be unclear. This playbook does not provide authority for forced entry. Where possible, access should be obtained through appropriate means, such as contacting property owners, working with neighbors, or engaging local leadership.
If access cannot be confirmed, the situation should be documented and escalated through the coordinator. These decisions should be made carefully, with consideration for safety, legality, and community context.

Supporting or Removing Animals

Not every situation requires removing animals from their location. In some cases, providing food, water, and monitoring may be the most appropriate response. In others, transport and placement may be necessary. These decisions depend on several factors, including the condition of the animal, the level of risk, the availability of placement options , and the capacity of the response system. There is rarely a single correct answer. What matters is that decisions are made thoughtfully and communicated clearly.

When Not to Act

There will be situations where action is not possible or not appropriate. This may include cases where conditions are unsafe, access cannot be confirmed, and the risk to responders is too high. In these moments, choosing not to act is a responsible decision made within the limits of the situation.

Handling Unclear Situations

Some situations will not fit neatly into categories. Ownership may be unclear. Information may be incomplete. Conditions may change between intake and response. In these cases, documentation becomes especially important. Recording what is known, what has been observed, and what decisions have been made helps ensure continuity and accountability.

16.0 The Tools That Support This System

This playbook is built around a simple idea: A system is only useful if it can be applied in practice. The tools that accompany this playbook are what make that possible. They translate the structure described in these pages into something that can be used in real time — under pressure, with limited capacity, and often with incomplete information.

Each tool supports a specific part of the response. They create a shared way of capturing information, coordinating action, and maintaining visibility across the system. When used together, they create a clear and connected flow from request to outcome.

How Tools Fit the System

Information Needed	Why It Matters
Location	Enables response
Animal type & number	Determines approach
Condition	Supports prioritization
Access details	Enables safe entry
Contact info	Supports follow-up

A Practical Approach

These tools are intentionally simple. They do not require specialized training or complex platforms. In many cases, they can be used with familiar formats such as forms, spreadsheets, and shared documents. What matters most is not the format of the tool, but the consistency with which it is used. When tools are applied consistently, they create structure. When structure is present, coordination becomes possible.

Core Tools

At the center of the system are six core tools:

1. **Communication Guide:** The communication guide provides a simple structure for sharing information clearly and consistently. It supports both intake and public updates.
2. **Intake Form:** The intake form provides a consistent way to capture incoming requests. It ensures that key information is collected and can be understood by others in the system.
3. **Tracking Sheet:** The tracking sheet creates a shared view of all requests. It allows the team to see what has been reported, what is in progress, and what still requires attention.
4. **Priority Guide:** The priority guide supports consistent decision-making under pressure. It provides a simple way to assess urgency and determine where to focus limited capacity. It is designed for quick use in both coordination and field response.
5. **Safety Checklist:** The safety checklist helps responders assess risk and operate safely in the field.
6. **Placement Tracker:** The placement tracker supports decisions about where animals can go when transport is required. It helps identify available space and manage capacity over time.

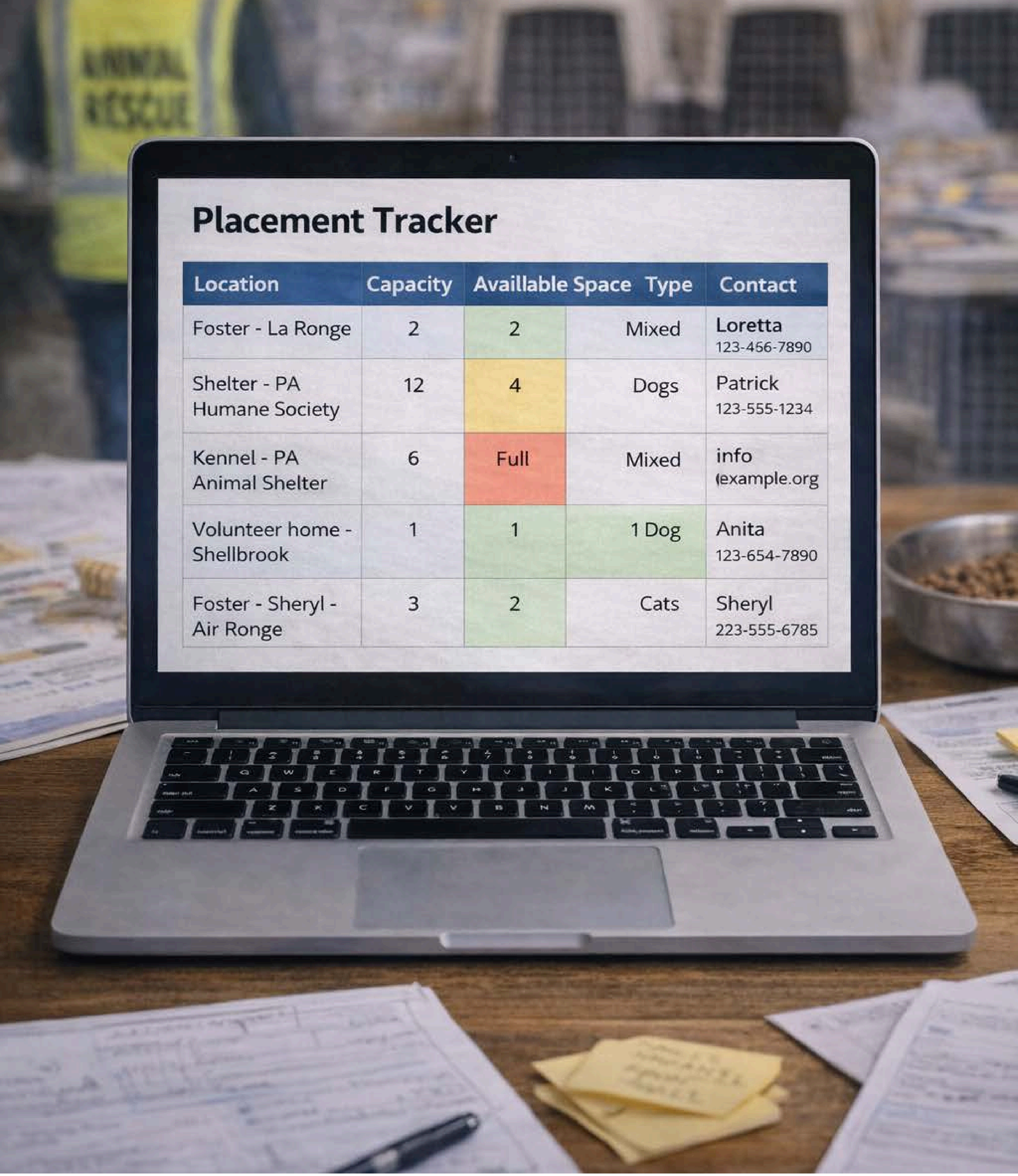
Designed to Work Together

These tools are not meant to be used in isolation. Each one supports a different part of the same process, and their value increases when they are used together.

The **intake form** feeds into the tracking sheet.
The **tracking sheet** informs response.
The **communication guide** supports how information moves.
The **priority guide** supports how to assess urgency during response.
The **safety checklist** supports how response is carried out.
The **placement tracker** supports what happens next.
Together, they create a connected system.

Accessing the Tools

All tools are available through **Boreal Animal Rescue's website** (borealanimalrescue.ca). They can be downloaded and adapted as needed to fit different communities, organizations, and response environments.


ANIMAL
RESCUE
Placement Tracker
Location
Capacity
Availlable Space
Type
Contact
Foster - La Ronge
2
2
Mixed
Loretta
123-456-7890
Shelter - PA Humane Society
12
4
Dogs
Patrick
123-555-1234
Kennel - PA Animal Shelter
6
Full
Mixed
info
(example.org
Volunteer home - Shellbrook
1
1
1 Dog
Anita
123-654-7890
Foster - Sheryl - Air Ronge
3
2
Cats
Sheryl
223-555-6785

17.0 Using the Tools in Practice

Understanding how the tools fit together is just as important as understanding what each one does. In practice, they follow the same flow described earlier in this playbook. A request is received. It is captured, organized, and acted on. The outcome is recorded and, if needed, followed up. The tools support each step in that process.

From Request to Response

When a request comes in, the first step is to capture the information in a consistent way. This is where the intake form is used. Once captured, the request is added to the tracking system. At this point, it becomes part of a shared view that the team can see and act on. As the situation is assessed, it is prioritized and assigned. Responders act based on that assignment, and updates are communicated back into the system. Throughout this process, communication is guided by a shared structure, and safety considerations remain present in each decision. If animals need to be moved, the placement tracker helps identify available options and manage capacity.

Consistency Over Complexity

It is common to feel that more tools or more detailed processes will improve response. In practice, the opposite is often true. What makes a system effective is not complexity, but consistency. Using a small number of tools in a consistent way creates clarity. It allows people to understand what is happening and where they fit within the response.

Starting Where You Are

In some situations, not all tools will be available at the start. That is acceptable. A response can begin with a single communication channel, a simple intake process, and a basic tracking system. Additional tools can be introduced as capacity grows. The system is designed to build over time.

Maintaining a Single Source of Truth

As the response continues, the tracking system becomes the most reliable source of information. It reflects what has been reported, what has been addressed, and what still needs attention. Maintaining this single source of truth helps prevent confusion, reduces duplication, and supports better decision-making.

La Ronge Wildfire Animal Response Team, 2025.
This response did not begin with a fixed structure. As needs emerged, the team adapted — mobilizing supplies, coordinating transport, and supporting animals across multiple locations. What made the response effective was not complexity, but the ability to organize information, prioritize needs, and act together in real time.

18.0 What This Looked Like in Practice

In early June 2025, wildfires moved quickly across northern Saskatchewan, threatening communities including La Ronge and surrounding areas. Evacuation orders were issued with little notice. People left quickly, often with only what they could carry. Transportation was limited, timelines were short, and the focus — appropriately — was on human safety. As a result, many animals were left behind.

What We Learned: ***Information must be centralized***, ***roles must be clear***, ***response must be mobile***, *and* ***safety must be build in***.

What Responders Encountered

In the days that followed, requests began to emerge. Posts appeared in community groups. Messages were shared between residents, responders, and organizations. Information came in fragments — some detailed, some incomplete, and some difficult to verify. There was no single place where these requests were being collected or tracked. People stepped in to help wherever they could. They checked on properties, provided food and water, and transported animals when possible. Some coordinated informally. Others acted independently, responding to what they saw or were told. The effort was immediate and deeply committed. But it was also difficult to sustain.

Where the System Broke Down

Without a shared system:

- information was scattered across multiple channels
- requests were difficult to track over time
- responders were not always aware of each other's actions
- prioritization was inconsistent
- some situations were addressed multiple times, while others were missed

These challenges were not the result of a lack of care or effort. They were the result of a missing structure.

What Became Clear

Through this experience, several patterns emerged. Coordination became easier when information was centralized. Response became more effective when roles were clear. Effort was more sustainable when actions were visible and shared. It also became clear that response needed to be mobile. Animals were not in one place, and conditions changed quickly. Systems that depended on fixed locations were difficult to maintain. At the same time, safety remained a constant consideration. Responders were navigating uncertain environments, often without clear guidance or support.

What This Playbook Changes

This playbook is built from those observations. It does not attempt to replace what already exists. Instead, it introduces a simple structure that can be applied in the moment, using the people and resources that are available. It focuses on creating a single, shared view of information , supporting consistent intake and tracking, enabling coordinated action, reinforcing safety and decision-making, and allowing response to remain mobile and adaptable.

19.0 Next Steps

You do not need a fully developed system to begin. In most emergencies, response starts with what is available — people, information, and a willingness to help. What matters is creating enough structure to move from scattered effort to coordinated action.

Start Today:

1. Identify a coordinator
2. Choose one channel
3. Begin tracking requests

Starting Where You Are

If no system is currently in place, begin with a few simple steps. Identify someone who can take on a coordination role, even if only temporarily. Establish a single communication channel where requests and updates can be shared. Begin capturing and tracking information in one place. From there, focus attention on situations where risk is highest. These steps do not need to be perfect or complete. They simply need to be consistent.

Using the Toolkit

The tools that support this playbook are designed to make coordination easier in practice. They provide simple ways to capture information, track requests, communicate clearly, and support safe response. These tools can be used as they are, or adapted to fit the needs of a specific community or organization. They are available through Boreal Animal Rescue.

Sharing the Approach

This system is most effective when it is shared. Communities, responders, and organizations can benefit from working from a common understanding of how animal response can be coordinated during emergencies. Sharing this playbook and the tools that support it can help create that shared approach. Even small groups, working with limited resources, can make a meaningful difference when their efforts are aligned.

Additional Resources

For those seeking further guidance, the following organizations provide information related to emergency preparedness and animal response:

- Public Safety Canada
- Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA)
- Humane Canada
- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA)
- Disaster animal response organizations such as the ASPCA and FEMA

These resources can provide additional context and support, but they are not required to use this system.

A Final Note

Emergency response is rarely complete or predictable. There will be situations that cannot be resolved immediately. There will be limits to what can be done. But when information is shared, tracked, and acted on together, response becomes more coordinated, more effective, and more sustainable
This work is not about perfection. It is about doing what is possible — with clarity, coordination, and care.

20.0 References and Sources

This playbook draws on established emergency management principles, animal welfare guidance, and real-world response experience.

Emergency Management

Public Safety Canada.
An Emergency Management Framework for Canada.
Government of Canada.

Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency.
Emergency Response and Recovery Guidelines.
Government of Saskatchewan.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
Incident Command System (ICS) Overview.
United States Department of Homeland Security.

Animal Welfare and Emergency Response

Humane Canada.
Animal Emergency Preparedness and Response Resources.
National federation of SPCAs and humane societies.

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA).
Animal Welfare and Emergency Care Guidance.

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).
Disaster Response Field Protocols and Operational Guidance.

Research and Practice

Heath, S. E., Kass, P. H., Beck, A. M., & Glickman, L. T. (2001). *Human and pet-related risk factors for household evacuation failure during a natural disaster.* Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Irvine, L. (2009). *Filling the Ark: Animal Welfare in Disasters.* Temple University Press.

Glassey, S. (2018). *Did Harvey Learn from Katrina? Initial Observations of the Response to Companion Animals during Hurricane Harvey.* Animals Journal.

Field Experience

Northern Saskatchewan Wildfire Response (2025). Community-led and volunteer-supported animal response efforts in La Ronge and surrounding regions.

Appendix A — How to Use This Toolkit (Quick Guide)

How the Tools Fit the System

The tools in this toolkit are designed to support each stage of the response system described in this playbook. Rather than being used independently, each tool is applied at a specific point in the process — from receiving a request, to coordinating response, to tracking outcomes over time. Used together, they create a simple, connected system that allows information to move clearly and consistently from intake through to resolution.

Which Tool to Use and When

The table below provides a quick reference for how each tool fits into the response.

Step in Response	What You Are Doing	Tool to Use
Receiving a request	Capturing information	Intake Form
Organizing requests	Logging and tracking	Tracking Sheet
Sharing updates	Communicating clearly	Communication Guide
Prioritizing	Prioritize request	Priority Guide
Responding in field	Ensuring safe action	Safety Checklist
Moving animals	Coordinating placement	Placement Tracker

This structure reflects the same flow used throughout the playbook. Each tool supports a step in the process, helping to ensure that information remains clear, visible, and actionable.

How the Tools Fit the System

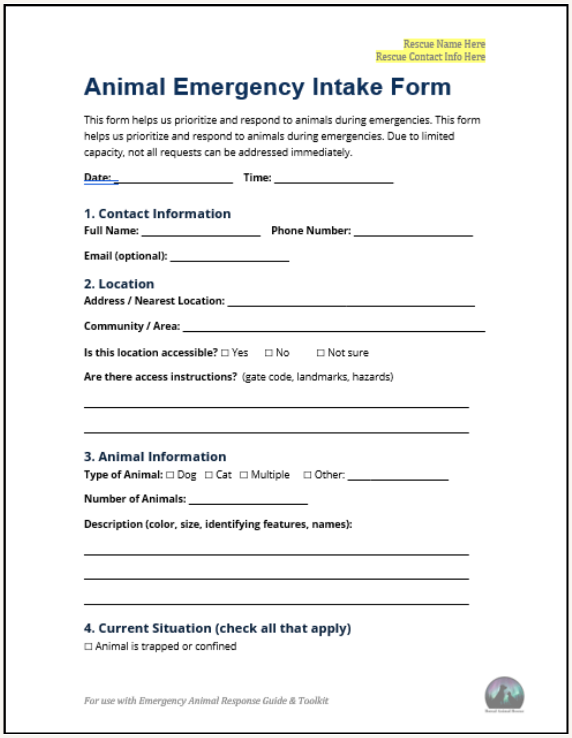
The tools in this toolkit are designed to support each stage of the response system described in this playbook. Rather than being used independently, each tool is applied at a specific point in the process — from receiving a request, to coordinating response, to tracking outcomes over time. Used together, they create a simple, connected system that allows information to move clearly and consistently from intake through to resolution.

What Each Tool Looks Like

The following examples provide a general sense of how each tool is structured and used in practice. These are intended as reference points to support familiarity and consistency.

Intake Form

The intake form is used to capture incoming requests in a clear and consistent way. It ensures that key information — such as location, animal details, and access — is recorded so that others can understand and act on it.



Rescue Name Here
Rescue Contact Info Here

Animal Emergency Intake Form

This form helps us prioritize and respond to animals during emergencies. This form helps us prioritize and respond to animals during emergencies. Due to limited capacity, not all requests can be addressed immediately.

Date: ____________ **Time:** ____________

1. Contact Information
Full Name: ____________ **Phone Number:** ____________
Email (optional): ____________

2. Location
Address / Nearest Location: ____________
Community / Area: ____________
Is this location accessible? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
Are there access instructions? (gate code, landmarks, hazards)

3. Animal Information
Type of Animal: ☐ Dog ☐ Cat ☐ Multiple ☐ Other: ____________
Number of Animals: ____________
Description (color, size, identifying features, names):

4. Current Situation (check all that apply)
☐ Animal is trapped or confined

For use with Emergency Animal Response Guide & Toolkit

Tracking Sheet

The tracking sheet provides a shared, up-to-date view of all requests. It allows the team to see what has been reported, what is in progress, and what still requires attention.

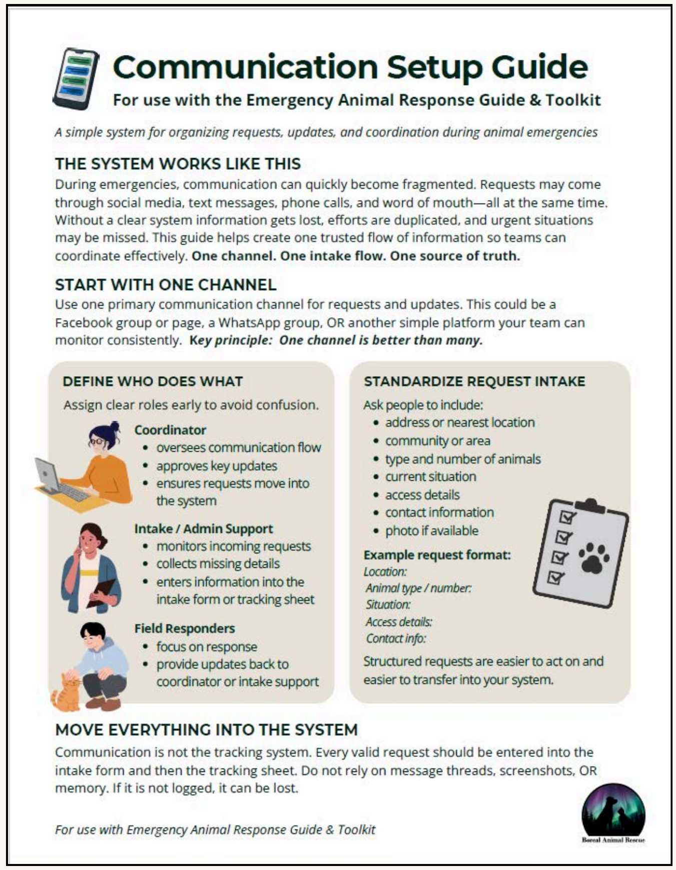
Animal Emergency Tracking Sheet

TOTAL REQUESTS	3
HIGH PRIORITY:	1
IN PROGRESS:	1
COMPLETED:	1

ID	Date Reported	Time Reported	Location	Community	Animal Type	# of Animals	Priority	Status	Assigned To	Contact Info	Situation Summary
1	12-Sep	10:15 AM	123 Pine Rd	La Ronge	Dog	2	HIGH	In Progress	J. Cardinal	306-555-1122	2 dogs left behind during evacuation, tied in yard
2	12-Sep	10:45 AM	Near Highway 102 marker	Sucker River	Cat	1	MEDIUM	New	S. Smith	306-555-1544	No exact address, roaming ar
3	12-Sep	11:05 AM	45 Lakeview Cres	Air Ronge	Mixed	4	LOW	Completed	S. Smith	306-555-7789	Family evacuated, 2 dogs and secured inside home

Communication Guide

The communication guide supports clear and consistent messaging. It helps structure how requests and updates are shared, reducing confusion and improving coordination.



Communication Setup Guide

For use with the Emergency Animal Response Guide & Toolkit

A simple system for organizing requests, updates, and coordination during animal emergencies

THE SYSTEM WORKS LIKE THIS

During emergencies, communication can quickly become fragmented. Requests may come through social media, text messages, phone calls, and word of mouth—all at the same time. Without a clear system information gets lost, efforts are duplicated, and urgent situations may be missed. This guide helps create one trusted flow of information so teams can coordinate effectively. **One channel. One intake flow. One source of truth.**

START WITH ONE CHANNEL

Use one primary communication channel for requests and updates. This could be a Facebook group or page, a WhatsApp group, OR another simple platform your team can monitor consistently. ***Key principle: One channel is better than many.***

DEFINE WHO DOES WHAT

Assign clear roles early to avoid confusion.

Coordinator
- oversees communication flow
- approves key updates
- ensures requests move into the system

Intake / Admin Support
- monitors incoming requests
- collects missing details
- enters information into the intake form or tracking sheet

Field Responders
- focus on response
- provide updates back to coordinator or intake support

STANDARDIZE REQUEST INTAKE

Ask people to include:
- address or nearest location
- community or area
- type and number of animals
- current situation
- access details
- contact information
- photo if available

Example request format:

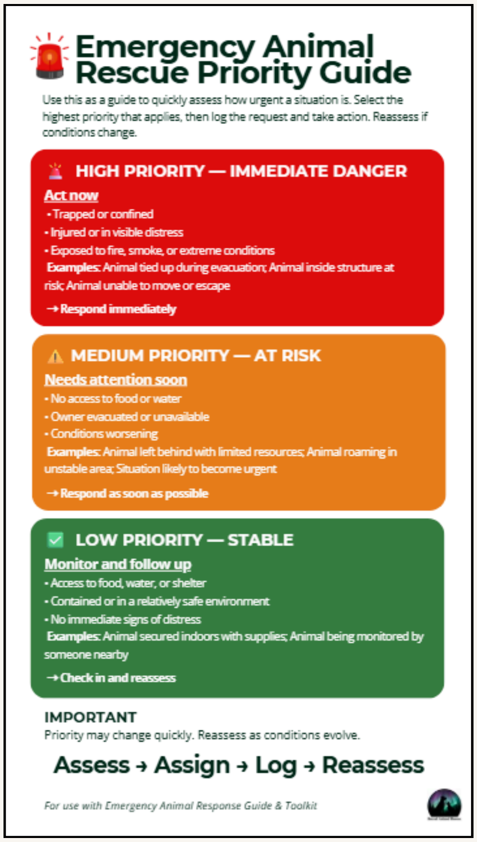
Location:
Animal type / number:
Situation:
Access details:
Contact info:

Structured requests are easier to act on and easier to transfer into your system.

MOVE EVERYTHING INTO THE SYSTEM

Communication is not the tracking system. Every valid request should be entered into the intake form and then the tracking sheet. Do not rely on message threads, screenshots, OR memory. If it is not logged, it can be lost.

For use with Emergency Animal Response Guide & Toolkit



Emergency Animal Rescue Priority Guide

Use this as a guide to quickly assess how urgent a situation is. Select the highest priority that applies, then log the request and take action. Reassess if conditions change.

HIGH PRIORITY — IMMEDIATE DANGER

Act now
- Trapped or confined
- Injured or in visible distress
- Exposed to fire, smoke, or extreme conditions

Examples: Animal tied up during evacuation; Animal inside structure at risk; Animal unable to move or escape

→ **Respond immediately**

MEDIUM PRIORITY — AT RISK

Needs attention soon
- No access to food or water
- Owner evacuated or unavailable
- Conditions worsening

Examples: Animal left behind with limited resources; Animal roaming in unstable area; Situation likely to become urgent

→ **Respond as soon as possible**

LOW PRIORITY — STABLE

Monitor and follow up
- Access to food, water, or shelter
- Contained or in a relatively safe environment
- No immediate signs of distress

Examples: Animal secured indoors with supplies; Animal being monitored by someone nearby

→ **Check in and reassess**

IMPORTANT

Priority may change quickly. Reassess as conditions evolve.

Assess → Assign → Log → Reassess

For use with Emergency Animal Response Guide & Toolkit

Priority Guide

The priority guide provides a simple visual reference for assessing urgency during response. It supports consistent decision-making when multiple requests are coming in and capacity is limited.

Safety Checklist
The safety checklist provides a simple way to assess risk and operate safely in the field. It reinforces key considerations before and during response.

Emergency Animal Rescue Field Safety Checklist
For use with the Emergency Animal Response Guide & Toolkit

KEEP YOURSELF SAFE SO YOU CAN HELP OTHERS
Emergency environments are unpredictable. This checklist helps reduce risk while responding to animal-related situations. ***Remember: Your safety comes first. Helping animals is important—but not at the cost of your own safety.***

BEFORE YOU GO & INITIAL ASSESSMENT
- Wear appropriate clothing
- Bring a charged phone
- Let someone know your location
- Review the situation before arriving

On arrival:
- Look for fire, damage, or hazards
- Watch for traffic or active zones
- Do not enter unsafe areas

If it feels unsafe, do not proceed.

APPROACH ANIMALS CAREFULLY
- Assume animals are stressed or scared
- Move slowly and stay calm
- Do not chase or corner animals
- Use a leash, crate, or barrier if possible

DO NOT
- Put yourself at risk
- Enter unstable or restricted areas
- Handle aggressive animals alone
- Attempt rescues beyond your ability

USE CAUTION & STAY SAFE
- Use caution with injured or frightened animals, multiple animals, and distressed owners.
- Beware of changing conditions
- Stay aware of your surroundings
- Communicate with your team

If conditions change, stop, reassess, and contact the coordinator.

NEXT STEP
Download the Emergency Animal Response Guide & Toolkit. boreolanimalrescue.ca/resources

For use with Emergency Animal Response Guide & Toolkit

Placement Tracker
The placement tracker is used when animals require transport or temporary care. It helps coordinate available space and ensures that placement decisions are visible and organized.

Emergency Animal Placement Tracker

TOTAL CAPACITY:	28
TOTAL AVAILABLE:	1
LAST UPDATED:	

Location Name	Type	Contact Name	Phone	Total Capacity	Available Space	Status	Animal Type Accepted	Notes
Smith Residence – La Ronge	Foster	Sarah Smith	306-555-2145	3	2	Open	Dogs	Can take small/medium dogs only. Has fenced yard.
Jonas Community Hall	Temporary Shelter	Mike Cardinal	306-555-8872	20	6	Full	Mixed	Crates required. Volunteers on-site 8am–8pm. No aggressive animals.
Northern Vet Clinic	Clinic	Dr. Lisa Grey	306-555-3321	5	1	On Hold	Dogs/Cats	Injured animals only. Call ahead required.

Accessing the Toolkit

All tools are available through Boreal Animal Rescue and can be adapted to fit local needs and conditions. They are designed to be flexible, accessible, and easy to use in real-world environments. To access the toolkit:

- Website: borealanimalrescue.ca
- Resource Page: borealanimalrescue.ca/resources
- Contact: borealanimalrescue@gmail.com

SCAN ME!

Get the toolkit!

Using the Tools in Practice

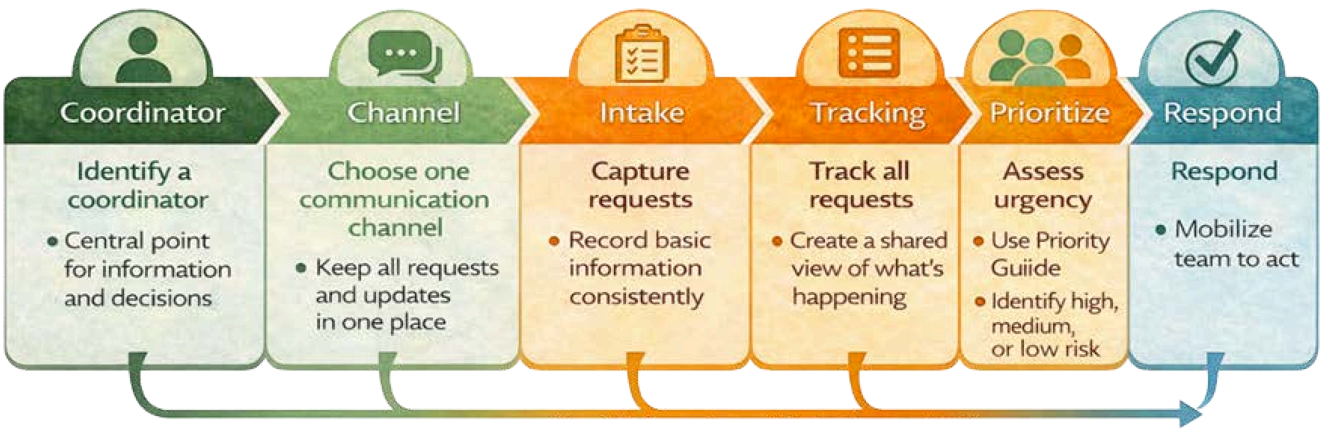
It is not necessary to use every tool perfectly or all at once. A response can begin with a simple intake process and basic tracking. As capacity grows, additional tools can be introduced to support coordination, communication, and placement. What matters most is consistency. When tools are used in a shared and consistent way, they create structure. When structure is present, coordination becomes possible — even in fast-moving and uncertain conditions.

Appendix B — Minimum Setup for Response

Start the System

Emergency response rarely begins with ideal conditions. There is often limited time to prepare, incomplete information, and uncertainty about who will be involved. In many cases, communities begin responding before any formal system is in place. You do not need a fully developed system to begin coordinating animal response. If you have people willing to help, you can begin. This appendix outlines the minimum structure needed to move from scattered effort to coordinated action, while still allowing the system to grow over time.

Minimum Set Up Flow



Quick Guidance

Each step in the flow represents a simple action that helps create structure in the early stages of response.

Coordinator

Identify one person to act as the central point for information and decisions. This creates clarity and reduces confusion, especially as requests begin to increase.

Channel

Choose a single communication channel for requests and updates. Keeping information in one place ensures it remains visible and reduces the risk of requests being lost across platforms.

Intake

Capture incoming requests in a consistent way. Even basic information — such as location, animal type, and condition — helps create a clearer picture of the situation.

Tracking

Maintain a shared view of all requests. This allows the team to understand what has been reported, what is in progress, and what still requires attention.

Prioritize
Prioritization can be supported using the Priority Guide, which helps determine where to focus first when multiple requests are received.

Respond
Begin response by focusing on the highest-risk situations and assigning action based on available capacity.

What This Looks Like in Practice

In many situations, this setup can be created in less than an hour. One person begins coordinating. A communication channel is selected. Requests start being captured and tracked using simple tools. From there, response begins. Roles may overlap, and individuals may take on multiple responsibilities. This is expected in early response conditions. The system does not need to be complete to be effective — it needs to be shared and consistently used.

Minimum Requirements

At a minimum, an effective response can begin with:

- One person coordinating
- One shared communication channel
- A way to capture requests
- A way to track them

Additional resources — such as equipment or supplies — can support response but are not required to begin.

Working With Available Capacity

In the early stages of response, capacity is often limited. There may be only a small number of people available to coordinate or respond. As a result, roles may not be clearly defined, and individuals may need to take on multiple functions at once. This is a normal part of emergency response. The system described in this playbook is designed to function at a small scale and expand as more support becomes available. As additional people join, roles can become more defined, and coordination can become more structured.

Creating Structure Over Time

As response continues, the initial setup can evolve. Additional tools may be introduced, communication processes may be refined, and coordination roles may become clearer. What begins as a simple system can develop into a more structured and resilient approach. This evolution does not need to happen all at once. What matters is that the response begins with a shared structure that people understand and use consistently.

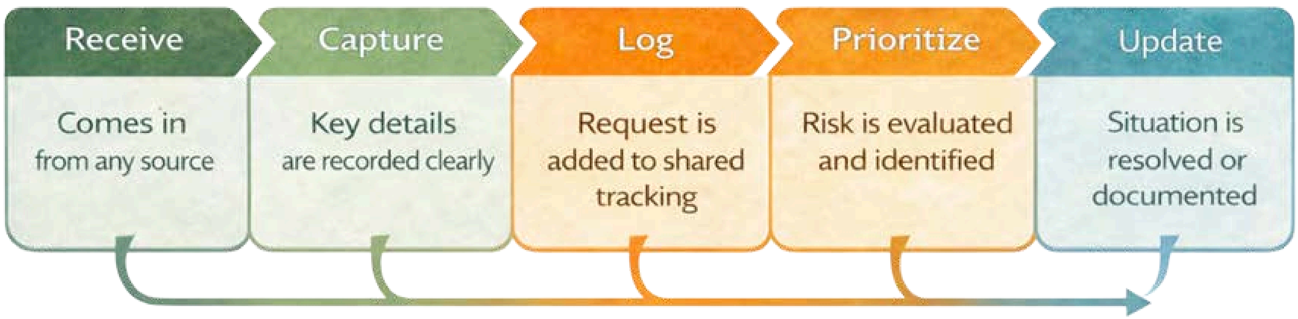
Appendix C — Documentation & Tracking

Keeping Information Clear and Shared

In emergency response, the focus is often on action. However, as the number of requests increases, it becomes more difficult to rely on memory, informal updates, or scattered messages. Information can become inconsistent, duplicated, or lost. Documentation is what allows the response to stay coordinated as it grows. It does not need to be complex. It needs to be clear, shared, and consistent.

How Information Moves Through the System

All information follows a simple path — from first report to final status.



From Information to Action

Most requests begin informally. They may come through social media, text messages, or conversations. At this stage, the information is often incomplete and not immediately actionable. Documentation creates structure. By capturing information in a consistent way and placing it into a shared system, individual pieces of information become part of a coordinated response. This is what allows multiple people to work together without confusion.

What Needs to Be Documented

Request → Intake → Tracking → Prioritize → Response → Outcome

Documentation should remain simple and focused. At a minimum, each request should include:

- a description of the situation
- location or approximate area
- type and number of animals involved
- any known risks or access issues
- current status of the request

This level of detail is enough to support coordination without slowing down response.

Where Documentation Happens

In this system, documentation is already built into the tools. The intake form is used to capture information at the point of entry. The tracking sheet is used to maintain a shared, ongoing view of all requests. Together, these tools create a simple but effective record of the response. There is no need to create additional systems unless required.

Keeping Information Current

Information changes quickly during an emergency. Conditions shift, access changes, and situations evolve. For this reason, documentation should be updated as new information becomes available. This does not require constant updates, but it does require awareness. When a request has been addressed, updated, or can no longer be acted on, that status should be reflected in the tracking system. This helps prevent duplication of effort and ensures that attention remains focused where it is most needed. Priority level should be recorded in the tracking system and updated as conditions change.

Supporting Continuity

Emergency response is rarely static. People may join or leave the response, roles may shift, and coordination may change hands. Documentation allows others to understand what has already happened and what still requires attention. This continuity is especially important in longer or more complex situations.

Respecting Privacy and Context

Documentation should always be handled with care. Requests may involve private property, personal circumstances, or sensitive community dynamics. Information should be recorded respectfully and shared only where appropriate. The goal is to support coordination, not to create unnecessary exposure.

After the Response

Documentation continues to play a role as the response winds down.
It supports:

- reviewing unresolved or incomplete cases
- coordinating follow-up where needed
- understanding what occurred during the response

Even simple records can provide valuable insight for future planning and improvement.

Appendix D — From Request to Response (Example)

How a Request Becomes Action

In most emergency situations, information about animals in need does not begin in a structured way. It often comes through social media posts, text messages, or conversations between community members. At this stage, the information may be incomplete, unclear, or difficult to act on directly. This appendix shows how a single request moves from informal information into coordinated response.

From Message to Action

Example Scenario

A message is shared in a community Facebook group indicating that two dogs have been left behind at a residence following an evacuation. The animals are reportedly tied outside, and there is no confirmation that they have access to food or water. At this stage, the situation is concerning — but not yet fully clear.

Clarifying the Information

The next step is to gather additional details where possible. This may include confirming the location of the property, the number and type of animals, their visible condition, and whether the site can be accessed safely. Even if some information remains unknown, the goal is to build a clearer understanding of the situation.

Capturing and Tracking the Request

Once the available details are understood, the information is recorded using the intake form. This ensures that the request is structured in a consistent way and can be understood by others involved in the response. The request is then entered into the tracking system, where it becomes visible to the broader team. At this point, the request is no longer just a message — it becomes part of a shared system.

Assessing and Prioritizing

With the request now visible, the situation is assessed alongside other incoming requests. Based on the information available — animals confined, no confirmed access to food or water, and no owner present — the situation is identified as high priority. Using the Priority Guide, the team is able to make this assessment quickly and consistently, even with incomplete information. This step ensures that limited capacity is directed toward situations where risk is most immediate.

Assignment and Coordination

Once prioritized, the coordinator assigns the request to available responders. Because the request is tracked and visible, the assignment is clear. This reduces duplication and ensures that efforts are focused and coordinated. At this stage, the response is no longer reactive — it is organized.

Field Response and Updates

Responders travel to the location, remaining aware of conditions along the way. On arrival, they assess the environment for safety, confirm the condition of the animals, and determine what action is appropriate. In this case, they are able to provide food and water and confirm that the animals are stable, but will require follow-up or potential transport. This information is communicated back to the coordinator. The tracking system is updated to reflect the current status of the situation.

Outcome and Follow-Up

Once the immediate needs have been addressed, the request is updated to reflect the outcome. In some cases, animals may be removed and placed in temporary care. In others, follow-up may be required to monitor conditions or support reunification. Even when a situation cannot be fully resolved, documenting the outcome ensures that it is understood and not left unclear.

Why This Matters

Without a structured process, information can remain informal and difficult to act on. Requests may be missed, duplicated, or left unresolved. With a simple system in place, even incomplete information can be clarified, tracked, prioritized, and responded to in a coordinated way. This is what allows multiple people to work together effectively, even in fast-moving and uncertain conditions.