

# FREE-ROAMING CAT MANAGEMENT: A FUNDER'S GUIDE TO BETTER IMPACT

*Summary of Report*

*John D. Boone + Stacy LeBaron*

Trap-neuter-return (TNR) has prevented countless births, helped free-roaming cats (FRCs) live healthier, longer lives, and reduced the number of cats entering shelters. But are we making real headway in trying to solve the problem of cat homelessness? Are there, in fact, fewer homeless cats living in our communities than there were decades ago? Or has the remarkable fecundity and adaptability of cats forestalled – so far – our best efforts to reduce their overall numbers? What will it take to adequately address this proverbial “wicked problem”, create real momentum, and ultimately break the cycle of cat homelessness?

***“Targeting is our best tool for reducing the risk of the “backsliding” that can occur when a TNR effort has to work against the counterforce of reproduction by the remaining intact cats, immigration, and abandonment.”***

TNR field practitioners, animal welfare thought leaders, and researchers have explored various approaches to TNR and FRC management and have developed recommendations for creating more lasting change. Increasingly, TNR funders are expressing interest in these “next generation” approaches in hopes of achieving better returns from their investments.

The Summerlee Foundation, a well-established funder of TNR programs, commissioned the preparation of a report that summarizes where we are now and offers specific suggestions for this next generation of impact-focused management to reduce FRC numbers in communities. It is directed primarily to funders and animal welfare professionals to assist them in evaluating current funding approaches and to encourage



constructive discussions and deliberations about alternative approaches. None of the topics discussed in this report are new, but to our knowledge they have not yet been compiled and integrated with this specific intent. The report has been peer reviewed by multiple subject matter experts and is available to all interested parties. Below we summarize its key points.



**In order to produce significant population declines over time as efficiently as possible, FRC management should incorporate four critical elements: integration, targeting, duration, and basic cat counting**

**Integration** involves combining several “layers” of effort that support and reinforce one another.

An example might be combining TNR with removal for adoption, spay-neuter subsidies for owned indoor-outdoor cats, and a coordinated feeding program. Integration is our best tool for overcoming the multiple pathways by which cats can be added to an FRC population. Through education, support, and sharing of information, integrated management can make cat owners more substantive contributors to FRC management goals, a critical prerequisite to large scale change.

**Targeting** involves concentrating effort in a series of phased steps. The most common example is performing intensive TNR in a well-defined subset of the overall project area to rapidly reach high sterilization percentages before moving on to a neighboring area, but the targeting concept can apply to other elements of integrated management as well. Targeting is our best tool for reducing the risk of the “backsliding” that can occur when a TNR effort has to work against the counterforce of reproduction by the remaining intact cats, immigration, and abandonment.



**Project duration** is critical because FRC populations respond to sterilization-based management slowly, even when it is well-targeted. If the management effort stops prematurely, any progress made can quickly come undone.

Finally, **simple, periodic cat counting** tells us in “near real time” what is working and what is not while it is still possible to course correct. The best example is using basic cat counts to estimate sterilization percentage, which provides critical and immediately actionable information about the sufficiency of effort.

Collectively, these approaches offer the best opportunity to reduce FRC populations at larger scales.

Transitioning to this approach will require rethinking current funding models, creating exploratory pilot projects, and encouraging more organizational collaborations and mentoring

---

**For questions or to request a full copy of the report, visit [thecatreport.org](http://thecatreport.org) or contact:**

**Stacy LeBaron - [stacy@unitedspayalliance.org](mailto:stacy@unitedspayalliance.org)  
John D. Boone - [boone@gbbo.org](mailto:boone@gbbo.org)**

---