



A Guide for Advocates:

Making the Financial Case for Spay/Neuter

Helping advocates show local decision-makers the true cost of sheltering versus the savings of spay/neuter.





Every year, communities spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars housing homeless animals. But the math is clear:

for every dollar spent on sheltering, a fraction of that cost could prevent the problem in the first place

Spay/neuter is a cost-effective, long-term solution that saves money while reducing the number of animals in need.

Elected officials and decision-makers often respond more to dollars and data than to emotion. That's why, when advocating for funding, it's important to highlight the financial benefits. A simple comparison makes this clear:

Sheltering an animal can cost hundreds of dollars per intake, covering the cost of housing, food, staffing, and medical care.



Spay/neuter is a one-time expense that costs significantly less, preventing future litters and reducing shelter intake.

The numbers will vary by community, but the trend remains the same: preventing pet homelessness through spay/neuter is far more cost effective than housing homeless animals.

Ready to make the case for spay/neuter to your local decision-makers? Here's how to gather and interpret key numbers to build a compelling argument for spay/neuter funding.

STEP 1: OBTAIN LOCAL SHELTER INFORMATION

To understand the cost of sheltering animals in your community, start by collecting key data. Here are some ways to find this information:

Contact the Shelter Directly: Reach out to your local animal shelter's administration. Many shelters have annual reports or budget details available upon request.



Check the Shelter's Website: Some shelters publish financial statements, annual reports, or intake statistics online.



Submit a Public Records Request: In many areas, shelter budgets and intake data are accessible through public records laws. Look into your local transparency regulations.



Consult Local Government or Animal Control: City or county animal control departments may have additional insights on shelter operations and funding.



STEP 2: CALCULATE LOCAL SHELTERING COSTS

Now that you have your shelter data, it's time to break down the costs:

Calculate Key Financial Data

- **Total Annual Shelter Budget:** The total cost of operating the shelter, including staffing, facility maintenance, food, medical care, utilities, and administrative expenses.
- **Annual Animal Intake:** The total number of animals housed in the shelter over the year.

Calculate the Per-Animal Cost

Use this simple formula:

$$\frac{\text{Total Annual Shelter Budget}}{\text{Total Annual Animal Intake}} = \text{Cost per Animal}$$

Example: If a shelter operates on a \$500,000 annual budget and takes in 1,000 animals per year, the cost would be:

- $\$500,000 / 1,000 = \text{\$500 per animal}$

That gives you a powerful data point to compare against the cost of spay/neuter.

STEP 3: GATHER SPAY/NEUTER COSTS

To make a compelling case for spay/neuter funding, you'll need to show the cost of prevention versus sheltering.

Be sure to tailor your research to match your request. If you're advocating for a dog-only or cat-only initiative, ensure your data reflects that focus. For example, if your shelter serves only dogs, include only dog-related subsidy data in your analysis. Aligning your data with your request strengthens your case and improves clarity for decision makers.

Determine Subsidized Spay/Neuter Costs

- **Contact Local Rescue Groups and Voucher Programs** – Find out what they pay to subsidize spay/neuter surgeries. These figures reflect what the government could expect to invest.
- **Estimate Cost Calculations** - If organizations are unsure of their average subsidy cost, they can use this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Total Amount Spent on Subsidies (Annual)}}{\text{Total Animals Helped}} = \text{Average Subsidy}$$

- **Understand Cost-Sharing Models** – In many programs, pet owners contribute a portion of the cost – sometimes as a requirement, other times voluntarily. Many are willing to contribute, which helps stretch public funding even further while keeping services affordable.

Example Comparison

If a spay/neuter surgery costs \$100, and the subsidy will cover 75%, then the local government can expect to pay \$75 per pet.

Compare that to the \$500 per-animal cost of sheltering, and the financial argument for spay/neuter becomes undeniable.

Note: These numbers are illustrative only. Your community's figures will vary.

STEP 4: RUN THE NUMBERS!

Now, let's put the cost comparison into perspective. Using the numbers from our examples:

Current Shelter Costs:

- With an average of \$500 per animal, sheltering 1,000 animals per year costs the government \$500,000 annually
- The shelter stays full, and the cycle of intake and overcrowding continues

VS

Spay/Neuter Investment:

- At \$75 per surgery, the same \$500,000 could spay/neuter 6,667 animals
- This doesn't just prevent those animals from entering the shelter – it also reduces future litters in the community

The Long-Term Impact:

- **Fewer intakes** → Fewer animals entering the system
- **Better resource allocation** → Shelters can provide higher-quality support to animals in their care and work to adopt out available animals
- **Sustainable change** → Overpopulation slows, saving money and lives



STEP 5: MAKE YOUR CASE

Spay/neuter is a proven, cost-effective solution that saves money compared to sheltering animals. Now, it's time to share your findings with local decision-makers and make the case for prevention.

Why Investing in Prevention Pays Off

- **Lower Costs for Communities**
 - Prevention through spay/neuter is a smart investment that saves taxpayer dollars over the long term.
 - The cost of a spay/neuter surgery is only a fraction of what communities spend to house, feed, and provide medical care for animals entering shelters.
 - Most shelters also spay/neuter animals before adoption, meaning shelters often absorb both the cost of daily care and the surgery expense.
 - Unaltered animals remain in shelters longer while awaiting surgery appointments, further increasing costs related to housing, staffing, and medical care.
 - By reducing unwanted litters before animals enter the shelter system, communities can decrease overcrowding, lower operating expenses, and direct more resources toward lifesaving care.
- **Community Engagement & Public Health**
 - Many families want to fix their pets, but struggle to find affordable services. Most pet owners are willing to cover some of the costs, which stretches available funding.
 - Spay/neuter is a public health and safety issue. Rabies vaccines are often given at the time of surgery, protecting both people and pets.

- **Reduces Shelter Overcrowding**
 - Fewer unwanted litters mean fewer animals entering shelters.
 - Shelters can focus their limited resources on animals who truly need care.
- **Keeps Pets in Homes**
 - Spay/neuter eliminates behaviors like spraying, aggression, and yowling – common reasons for pet surrenders.
 - When pets stay in homes, fewer end up in shelters. Similarly, when strays are adopted into caring homes, they bypass the shelter system. Strays are most abundant in low-income neighborhoods.
- **Improves Animal Health and Lowers Shelter Costs**
 - Spay/neuter prevents serious health issues like cancers and infections, reducing costly medical emergencies.
 - When families can't afford treatment, pets often end up in shelters – driving up intake and expenses
 - Many families struggle with affordable veterinary care. Spay/neuter is a critical part of making vet services accessible to everyone.
 - Investing in spay/neuter supports public health, animal welfare, and community well-being.



TAKE ACTION: INVEST IN PREVENTION



The benefits of spay/neuter are clear: it is a cost-effective, long-term solution that helps prevent pet homelessness, reduces shelter strain, and saves taxpayer dollars. It's time for local decision-makers to prioritize funding for these life-saving programs. Share this information with them and advocate for a future where every cat and dog has the chance to find a loving home.