

SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Friday, April 3, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Loudoun County

Program Title: Operation All Paws On Deck

Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Monica Spells

Title: Deputy County Administrator

Signature: Monica N. Spells

Digitally signed by Monica N. Spells
Date: 2026.03.25 20:36:19 -04'00'



ALL PAWS ON DECK

2026 VACo Award Submission

LOUDOUN COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES

Loudoun County, Virginia



Animal Services

Executive Summary

Loudoun County Animal Services (LCAS) developed an innovative and comprehensive emergency plan to handle and drill large-scale animal evacuations and intakes during crises, becoming the first in Virginia to do so. This plan, created in partnership with the Loudoun County Office of Emergency Management, Safety and Security (OEMSS), addresses the needs of both shelter animals and those displaced by disasters, ensuring preparedness and operational efficiency.

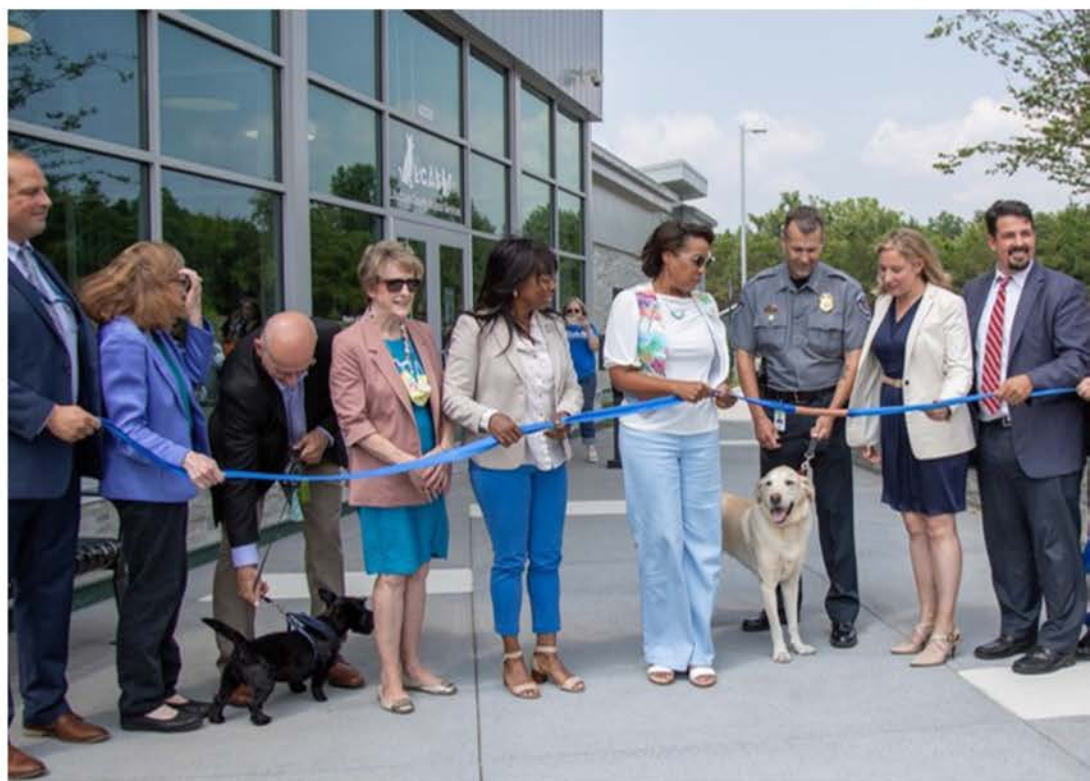
LCAS relocated to a central facility in 2021, sheltering 2,400 animals annually and playing a key role in local emergency preparedness. LCAS found no other Virginia shelters had conducted evacuation drills, and their own existing plans were outdated and inadequate. Key components of the emergency plan and drill included:

- Plan components and system revisions: The plan includes protocols for intake, communications, transportation, medical triage, volunteer use, and staff welfare, replacing outdated procedures.
- Leveraging hoarding case experience: LCAS adapted protocols from hoarding investigations, which involve sudden intake of many animals with varied needs, to emergency scenarios.
- Comprehensive emergency plan elements: The plan covers intake processes, foster care networks, communication templates, veterinary triage, facility maps, kennel setups, partner lists, staffing schedules, multilingual forms, and updated service provider lists.
- Training and practical exercises: Staff received evacuation training and attended FEMA NIMS courses, culminating in a day-long exercise simulating evacuation and intake scenarios with complex challenges and volunteer involvement.
- Cost: The planning and exercise costs were under \$800, mainly for materials, with volunteer support integral; the plan resulted in a comprehensive, adaptable resource library for emergency operations.



The Problem

In 2021, Loudoun County Animal Services (LCAS) relocated to a new facility, centrally located in the County, while providing shelter to 2,400 animals and hosting more than 50,000 visitors annually. Though the agency is well-established in their animal sheltering and humane law enforcement functions, the staff also play a key role in local emergency preparedness initiatives. During the Department's strategic planning process that year, the importance of having facility plans for both evacuations, and a mass animal intake during a crisis were emphasized as priorities. However, staff were unable to find any Virginia animal shelters, other than Loudoun, who had any history of drilling an exercise of this nature, and the local plan was long out of date and inadequate for the Department's current capacities and community needs.



Innovation, Collaboration and Modeling

Starting in 2024, LCAS staff began to develop a comprehensive plan with the Loudoun County Office of Emergency Management, Safety and Security (OEMSS), becoming the first in the Commonwealth known to do so. The goal was to ensure that the County was not only prepared to evacuate a large number of animals from the shelter under a variety of circumstances but also create a strong system for intake of animals in the event of a large-scale disaster such as a natural disaster or multi-unit residential structure fire in which people and pets could be displaced.

During the process, LCAS evaluated and revised existing systems to include intake protocols, radio communications, records management, facility maps, evacuation paths and prioritizations, transportation plans, medical intake/triage (for sick/wounded animals), donations management, volunteer utilization, and staff welfare, gutting existing plans and developing comprehensive new ones.

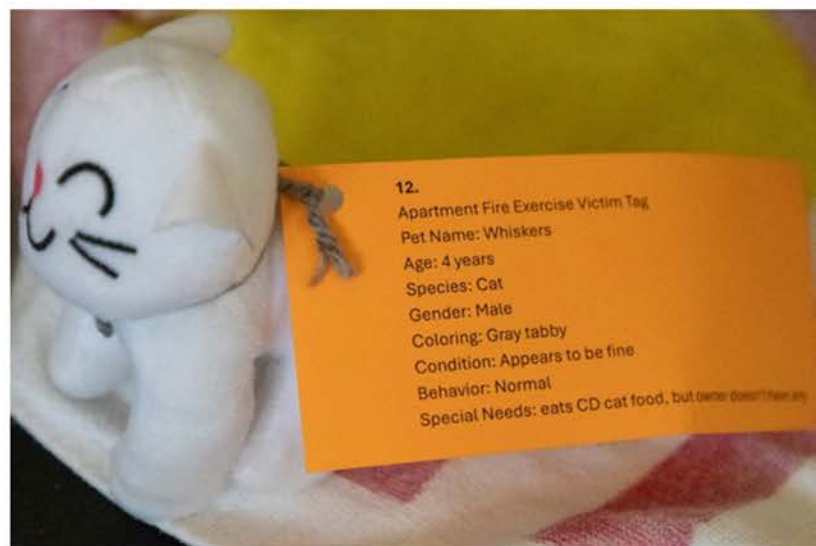


While natural disasters and other large-scale emergencies are uncommon, LCAS personnel were already familiar with handling high-volume intakes through the regular humane law enforcement activities associated with hoarding investigations. (LCAS receives an average of 2 hoarding cases a year with 20 or more animals received from a single source in a single day, giving the staff relatively frequent opportunities to handle intaking larger volumes of animals, typically without notice.) Through application of protocols associated with intaking animals from hoarding cases, much of the animal intake and triage portion emergency plan was easily adapted, as in both scenarios of hoarding and local disaster, there is typically little warning or advance information, and animals arrive with varying states of medical and behavioral needs.

Innovation, Collaboration and Modeling Cont.

For the greater need, however, a master emergency plan was developed, specific to the needs of an animal sheltering operation. Included in the plan were elements such as:

- Animal intake processes with and without known owner information;
- Development and deployment of a local pet foster care network to house animals in a crisis;
- Communication plans and templates for dissemination of information to manage public expectations and concerns;
- Veterinary triage staffing and supply plans;
- Facility and operational maps to designate animal, human and vehicle traffic flow under various circumstances;
- Sample kennel setups for large numbers of companion animals;
- Comprehensive lists of local and national partners to support longer distance evacuation paths;
- Sample staffing schedules for all teams at LCAS to allow for plug-and-play employee coverage in the cases of an emergency event lasting 1 day, 3 days or 7 days.
- Digital and physical intake/reunification forms for pet owners in the top five languages spoken in Loudoun County;
- Updated lists of animal-related service providers in and around the county, to include veterinarians and boarding kennels



In addition to planning for a large-scale in-shelter emergency response, Animal Services staff were trained in evacuation procedures and routes for various scenarios such as fire and active shooter with employees at all levels required to take FEMA NIMS courses to understand incident command systems.

Innovation, Collaboration and Modeling Cont.

The culmination of the plan development was a day-long exercise in which evaluators, leaders and supporters were present from the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, Loudoun County Fire and Rescue, and Fairfax County in addition to staff from OEM and LCAS. The morning exercise practiced a full-facility evacuation (utilizing stuffed animals for safety) in which 80 animals were removed from the facility and transported to offsite care providers in anticipation of a prolonged power outage in sub-freezing temperatures. The afternoon exercise simulated an intake of over 100 animals following a fire at a large apartment complex while the facility was occupied by a typical shelter population. Many of the afternoon's arriving animals were "injured" in the fire, the owners were in a state of distress, and volunteer role players created a number of complex scenarios including aggressive communication, inability to read/speak English, experiencing a medical crisis, and pets getting loose from handlers. In both scenarios, staff took the time to identify learning opportunities and immediately make improvements to operational plans in order to be prepared to best serve the customers and the animals while supporting each other and the ongoing operational needs.



Costs and Staffing

Costs of execution of the event and planning process were minimal beyond staffing. Although all LCAS staff were scheduled for the day of the event for training purposes, wage expenses were still in normal range, as schedules were flexed throughout the week. Other expenses were minimal, in total, less than \$800, and those costs were primarily for printing of materials (to prepare for a “power outage”), and other minor supplies needed for the exercise day. Additional supplies were not considered to be purchased, as staff wanted to ensure that an emergency intake or evacuation could be handled with normal facility and supply availability, as they would have to be if there were a real-life event.



Volunteers were a significant part of the exercise execution, as they would be in a real-life scenario, and were incorporated into all aspects of the plan.



Throughout the course of the day, 30 animal shelter volunteers supported the exercise.



Results

The emergency plan went well beyond was incredibly comprehensive, not only discussing the applicable processes for a large scale intake and evacuation, but also developing a library of graphics, signage, how-to diagrams for kennel setups, and covering emergency responses for humans as well. Overall, evaluator and staff feedback was exceptional, with the team experiencing a sense of cohesion and confidence in emergency preparedness.



The end result was a comprehensive catalog of materials and protocols that could easily be adapted to facilities of various resource levels and population sizes. Following the PETS Act of 2006, many municipalities remain unprepared to handle large numbers of companion animals in the event of a disaster, however, this complete and shareable resource library creates a model that would allow many jurisdictions to have a plan in place, even without a large facility or staff.

