



2026-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN



Together, we are the voice for animal welfare in Virginia.

Mission-Aligned Focus

The Virginia Federation of Humane Societies (VFHS) provides progressive leadership, advocacy, resources, and support to individuals and organizations committed to improving animal welfare and addressing animal abuse, neglect, and homelessness in the Commonwealth.

VFHS brings together municipal and private shelters, animal control professionals, law enforcement, rescue organizations, veterinarians, policymakers, volunteers, and advocates. Our statewide role is to connect these sectors, strengthen their collective capacity, and advance practical solutions to the complex challenges facing animals and the communities that care for them.

No single organization can solve cruelty, neglect, overpopulation, limited access to veterinary care, workforce shortages, or persistent shelter crowding alone. Lasting change requires collaboration, shared expertise, evidence-based policy, targeted investment, and respect for the knowledge of local practitioners.

This Strategic Plan guides VFHS through 2027. It strengthens membership and professional development, advances sustainable lifesaving through a three-part statewide strategy, expands advocacy, and supports VFHS as a trusted and financially sustainable organization.

Our Strategic Direction

VFHS will pair immediate lifesaving work with prevention and locally led capacity building: saving animals who need help today, reducing the number who may need help tomorrow, and strengthening the community systems that create lasting progress.

Guiding Principles

Collaboration Before Competition Foster partnerships that strengthen Virginia's entire animal welfare community.	Data-Driven Decision Making Use measurable outcomes, credible data, and practitioner feedback to guide priorities and investment.
Professional Excellence Invest in education, leadership development, practical implementation, and continuous improvement.	Innovation Encourage creative, adaptable solutions to complex animal welfare challenges.
Sustainability Build the financial, organizational, and leadership capacity needed for long-term success.	Community-Led Solutions Build solutions with local practitioners and community partners rather than prescribing programs to them.

The Plan at a Glance

Four strategic priorities organize VFHS work through 2027. The third priority connects immediate lifesaving, prevention, and local capacity building as one coordinated statewide strategy.

PRIORITY 1	Grow and Strengthen Membership Build a larger, more diverse, and highly engaged statewide membership.
PRIORITY 2	Expand Resources and Professional Development Equip members with practical tools, funding, education, peer learning, and implementation support.
PRIORITY 3	Advance Sustainable Lifesaving Continue transfer and transport, prevent future intake through spay/neuter access, and build locally led community capacity.
PRIORITY 4	Strengthen VFHS as Virginia's Trusted Voice Advance policy, agency partnerships, strong governance, and long-term financial sustainability.

A Three-Part Strategy for Sustainable Lifesaving

VFHS recognizes that improving animal welfare outcomes across Virginia requires both immediate lifesaving intervention and long-term investment in the communities experiencing the greatest challenges. Transfer and transport have saved lives and relieved pressure in overcrowded shelters, but transfer alone cannot resolve the conditions that create persistently high intake.

1 Save Lives Now Continue facilitating and funding transfer and transport so animals can reach available veterinary, foster, and adoption capacity.	2 Prevent Future Intake Expand affordable spay/neuter and preventive veterinary services so fewer unwanted litters enter the shelter system.	3 Strengthen Communities Help local leaders in high-intake areas build programs they can lead, adapt, and sustain.
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STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Grow and Strengthen Membership

GOAL

Build a larger, more diverse, and highly engaged statewide membership that represents every sector of Virginia's animal welfare community.

Strategic Objectives

- Increase annual membership recruitment and retention.
- Expand representation among veterinarians, licensed veterinary technicians, animal control professionals, rescue organizations, shelters, students, volunteers, and community advocates.
- Deliver meaningful member benefits that create year-round value.
- Foster leadership opportunities and member engagement through committees, volunteerism, and recognition.

Key Initiatives

- Develop a structured annual recruitment and retention campaign.
- Create clearly defined membership categories with benefits tailored to professional and organizational needs.
- Launch an enhanced onboarding experience with welcome materials, orientation, and clear pathways to engage.
- Expand continuing education and member-exclusive programming.
- Increase member recognition through awards, spotlight stories, digital badges, and organizational recognition.
- Improve communication through webinars, newsletters, the annual conference, social media, and partner communications.
- Conduct an annual member satisfaction and needs assessment to guide future programming.

FY2027 Success Measures

Measure	FY2026 Baseline	FY2027 Target
Total membership	252 members	264 members (+5%)
Membership renewal	95%	Greater than 90%
Veterinary Professional members	4	At least 5 new members
Annual conference attendance	220	Increase by 5%

Lead: Membership Committee

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Expand Resources and Professional Development

GOAL

Equip Virginia's animal welfare community with practical tools, education, funding opportunities, peer collaboration, and implementation support that strengthen organizational effectiveness.

Strategic Objectives

- Increase access to Virginia-specific educational resources and operational guidance.
- Improve awareness and use of established national best practices without duplicating existing work.
- Expand grant opportunities, technical assistance, and peer learning.
- Position VFHS as the primary statewide hub for practical animal welfare resources.
- Pair training with follow-up support so organizations can apply and sustain what they learn.

Key Initiatives

- Develop an online resource library featuring templates, recorded webinars, operational guides, and curated best practices.
- Deliver regular webinars addressing Virginia-specific issues, including VDACS requirements, legislative updates, animal cruelty investigations, shelter administration, municipal contracting, and organizational management.
- Partner with subject-matter experts and experienced practitioners to create field-tested resources.
- Promote grants and other funding opportunities available to members.
- Expand regional networking, peer learning, and problem-solving sessions.
- Develop follow-up implementation support for organizations using VFHS training and resources.
- Track emerging needs and adjust programming based on statewide data and member feedback.

FY2027 Success Measures

Measure	FY2027 Target
Online resource hub	Launch by Jan 2027
Educational webinars	Deliver 6-8 annually
Website and resource engagement	Increase over 2026
New funding opportunities	Secure at least 2
Post-training value rating	At least 85% positive
Member grant applications + funded projects	Increase of 5% over 2026

Lead: Education & Grants Committee; Website Owners Ryan Barker & Dianna Brown

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Advance Sustainable Lifesaving

A coordinated strategy to save lives now, prevent future intake, and strengthen community capacity.

GOAL

Improve animal welfare outcomes across Virginia by sustaining transfer and transport, expanding access to spay/neuter and preventative veterinary care, and helping high-intake communities build locally led and sustainable solutions.

Strategic Objectives

- Maintain transfer and transport as essential immediate lifesaving infrastructure.
- Increase access to affordable spay/neuter and preventive veterinary services.
- Identify communities experiencing consistently high intake, limited local capacity, or heavy dependence on transfer.
- Support local shelters, rescues, animal control agencies, and community leaders in designing programs that respond to their own conditions and priorities.
- Reduce long-term dependence on transfer as the only available population-management strategy.
- Use statewide and local data to direct investment, evaluate outcomes, and adapt VFHS programming.

Community-Led, Practitioner-Directed

VFHS will build solutions with communities, not prescribe solutions to them and not operate local programs on their behalf. Local practitioners will identify priorities and lead implementation; VFHS will listen, convene, connect, fund, mentor, and support.

Operating Principles for Priority 3

Immediate lifesaving and long-term change happen together.	VFHS will not withdraw support from animals currently at risk while building sustainable solutions.
Resources follow data and local priorities.	Investment will reflect intake trends, access barriers, program capacity, and practitioner knowledge.
Local ownership is essential.	Participating communities will select priorities and designate local leaders.
VFHS supports rather than supplants.	The Federation will provide technical assistance, partnerships, funding, and mentorship without taking over local operations.
Learning is part of implementation.	Programs will be evaluated and adapted when an approach does not work as intended.

Pillar 1: Save Lives Now Through Transfer and Transport

Many shelters, particularly in rural, geographically isolated, or under-resourced areas, do not have enough local adoption demand, veterinary capacity, foster homes, or rescue partnerships to place every healthy and treatable animal within their own communities. Receiving organizations may have placement capacity but lack the staff, vehicles, and funding required to travel repeatedly to distant sending shelters.

Transfer and transport connect these organizations. A confirmed placement does not become a lifesaving outcome until the animal reaches the receiving organization. VFHS will continue supporting the infrastructure that makes those transfers possible.

Key Initiatives

- Continue funding transfer and transport through High Five and related programs.
- Prioritize shared routes that serve multiple sending shelters and receiving organizations.
- Support established multi-shelter transport partners and collaborative regional routes.
- Encourage coordination among shelters, rescues, transport organizations, and receiving partners.
- Track animals transported, organizations served, routes supported, and average cost per animal.
- Identify geographic gaps where animals have confirmed placement opportunities but limited access to transportation.
- Preserve flexibility to address urgent transfer barriers involving veterinary care, boarding, sponsorship, or temporary holding.

Important Principle

Transfer is not the end goal of sustainable animal welfare reform, but it remains an essential lifesaving intervention while longer-term community solutions are developed.

Pillar 2: Prevent Future Intake Through Spay/Neuter Access

Reducing shelter intake requires preventing unwanted litters before animals enter the shelter system. VFHS will expand investment in affordable spay/neuter and preventative veterinary services, particularly in communities with high intake, limited veterinary capacity, geographic barriers, and populations with limited access to care.

Key Initiatives

- Sustain and expand SpayVA and other veterinary-access grant programs.
- Use shelter intake, altered-status, geographic, and program data to identify areas with the greatest unmet need.
- Fund locally appropriate service models, including low-cost clinics, mobile services, surgery vouchers, transportation, community cat programs, and partnerships with private veterinary practices.
- Pursue additional funding for spay/neuter and preventive care.
- Encourage coordination among shelters, rescues, veterinary providers, local governments, and community organizations.
- Improve outcome reporting so VFHS can measure surgeries completed, communities served, and changes in shelter intake over time.

Multiple Models, One Goal

VFHS will not require every community to use the same service-delivery model. Effective programs will reflect local veterinary capacity, geography, available partners, community trust, and the populations being served.

Pillar 3: Strengthen Local Leadership and Community Capacity

Communities experiencing a continuous flow of animals into their shelters often face complex challenges that cannot be solved through transfer alone. These may include limited veterinary access, insufficient foster and volunteer capacity, inconsistent disease-prevention practices, limited local adoption demand, staffing shortages, weak community partnerships, insufficient data, or a lack of resources to develop and sustain new programs.

VFHS will work alongside shelters, rescues, animal control agencies, and community leaders to identify the conditions driving local intake and develop solutions that fit the community. VFHS will not operate shelters, clinics, or community programs on behalf of participating organizations. Instead, VFHS will help the people already doing the work become stronger, more effective, and better equipped to serve their communities.

Key Initiatives

- Identify communities experiencing persistently high intake, limited local placement capacity, or significant dependence on transfer.
- Begin with listening sessions and collaborative assessments led by local practitioners.

- Provide technical assistance, consultation, and mentorship based on priorities identified by each organization and community.
- Connect local leaders with experienced shelter, rescue, animal control, veterinary, nonprofit, and government professionals.
- Develop peer networks through which practitioners can exchange practical advice, proven tools, and direct support.
- Offer workshops, regional convenings, and training designed around the realities of rural and under-resourced communities.
- Build cross-sector partnerships with local government, public health, social services, emergency management, veterinary providers, community foundations, and educational institutions.
- Coordinate with existing organizations and resources to avoid duplicating work already available.
- Provide limited implementation funding when a community has identified a clear need, a local lead, an achievable plan, and a path to sustainability.
- Document lessons learned and share adaptable models with other Virginia communities.

VFHS Will

- Listen to local leaders and understand local conditions.
- Help organizations identify realistic priorities.
- Connect practitioners with mentors and peer organizations.
- Provide training, technical assistance, templates, and implementation support.
- Build cross-sector partnerships and identify funding.
- Help communities evaluate progress and adapt.
- Elevate rural and under-resourced perspectives statewide.

VFHS Will Not

- Enter a community with a predetermined solution.
- Require programs that do not fit local staffing, geography, or resources.
- Take over daily operation of a local program.
- Judge success only by adoption of one preferred model.
- Provide short-term assistance without considering sustainability.
- Create dependence on VFHS for routine local operations.

Community Partnership Model

1. Listen and Assess	Meet with local practitioners and partners to understand conditions, strengths, and barriers.
2. Establish Local Priorities	Participating communities determine which challenges should be addressed first.
3. Connect Resources and Expertise	VFHS identifies mentors, trainers, partners, funding, and existing resources.
4. Support Local Implementation	Local practitioners lead implementation with VFHS consultation and problem-solving support.
5. Evaluate, Adapt, and Sustain	Partners review results, adjust the approach, and establish a plan for continued local ownership.

Examples of Locally Selected Programs

Community Programs

- Foster recruitment, onboarding, and retention
- Volunteer development and management
- Vaccination and disease-prevention protocols
- Intake diversion and pet-retention services
- Lost-pet reunification and return-to-owner practices
- Local adoption and marketing programs
- Community cat management

Organizational Capacity

- Affordable veterinary and spay/neuter access
- Transport and rescue coordination
- Shelter data collection and analysis
- Fundraising and grant readiness
- Municipal and veterinary partnerships
- Public education and community outreach
- Staff leadership and management development

Lead: Education & Grants Committee and designated High Five and program leads

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Strengthen VFHS as Virginia's Trusted Voice for Animal Welfare

GOAL

Ensure VFHS remains a sustainable, respected, and influential statewide leader through strong governance, strategic advocacy, financial stewardship, and collaborative leadership.

Strategic Objectives

- Strengthen relationships with state agencies and elected officials.
- Expand VFHS leadership in statewide animal welfare policy and practice.
- Promote humane, data-driven dialogue across the profession.
- Elevate the experiences of rural and under-resourced communities in statewide decisions.
- Ensure long-term organizational sustainability through sound governance and financial planning.

Key Initiatives

- Build strategic partnerships with VDACS, VDH, DWR, and other agencies affecting animal welfare.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive annual legislative advocacy agenda.
- Increase engagement with legislators and legislative staff.
- Promote VFHS's position supporting collaborative, lifesaving language and evidence-based decision making.
- Bring practitioner and rural perspectives into policy, funding, and program conversations.
- Develop a multi-year financial plan that includes reserve targets and diversified revenue.
- Implement board succession planning and leadership development.
- Publish an annual summary of VFHS impact, progress, and statewide outcomes.

FY2027 Success Measures

Measure	FY2027 Target
Board succession planning	Complete by end of FY2027
Multi-year financial sustainability plan	Create/Adopt
Legislative priorities advanced	2 or more
Agency and legislative engagement	At least 2 documented meetings or briefings
Annual impact reporting	Publish one statewide progress summary

Lead: Executive Committee and Legislative Committee

2026-2027 Strategic Plan Dashboard

The dashboard provides a concise board-level view of the plan. Detailed workplans may adjust tactics while preserving these goals and measurable commitments.

Priority	FY2027 Goal	Key Targets	Lead
1. Membership	Grow and engage a representative statewide membership.	264 members; >90% renewal; +5% conference attendance; 5 new Veterinary Professional members	Membership Committee
2. Resources	Increase access to practical tools, education, funding, and implementation support.	Resource hub; 6-8 webinars; +10% engagement; 2 new funding opportunities	Education & Grants
3. Sustainable Lifesaving	Save lives now, prevent future intake, and build local capacity.	Sustain or increase transfers; +5% veterinary funding; 5% grant funding growth (SPAY VA);	Program and committee leads
4. Trusted Voice	Increase influence, governance strength, and financial sustainability.	Succession plan; financial plan; 2 legislative priorities advanced; Increased Legislative Committee engagement	Executive & Legislative

Organizational Health Indicators

Indicator	FY2027 Target	Review Frequency
Membership growth	+5%	Quarterly
Membership renewal rate	>90%	Annually
Annual conference attendance	+5%	Annually
Educational webinars delivered	6-8	Quarterly
Member satisfaction	>90% positive	Annually
Grant funding secured	+5%	Quarterly
Legislative priorities advanced	2 or more	Quarterly
Board succession plan	Complete	Quarterly
Operating reserve	Board-approved target achieved	Quarterly

Implementation and Review

- The Board will review the strategic dashboard at least quarterly and identify areas requiring attention or additional resources.
- VFHS will publish an annual progress summary describing activities, measurable outcomes, lessons learned, and next steps.
- Tactics may be adjusted as data, funding, and community feedback evolve, but changes will remain aligned with the strategic goals and guiding principles.
- The FY2027 evaluation will inform the next multi-year strategic plan and the future design of VFHS community-capacity programming.

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