



Reduced-Fee Adoption Promotions: Concerns and Responses

Having trouble convincing your board or volunteers about the value of reduced-fee adoption promotions? We've put together this resource to help you talk to your board and your volunteers.

Concern: Reducing the adoption fee devalues the animals and will attract less desirable adopters.

Using a reduced-fee promotion is a form of advertising designed to bring more people to an adoption event. It's a great tactic to use to increase the volume of adoptions, especially when your rescue or shelter is over capacity.

It's also a great tactic to use when adopting out animals who are not as easily adoptable as others. Many shelters and rescues around the country (including Best Friends Animal Society) have special or reduced adoption rates for older animals or in situations when two animals need to be adopted together. It doesn't mean these pets are valued less by the adopter. The idea is to provide incentive for people to take a second look at the animals who are being offered for adoption for a reduced fee.

Some research has been done on the topic of attachment levels of adopters from free and reduced-fee adoptions. The resulting data, published in Volume 12, Issue 4, of the *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science**, indicates that:

- Attachment to cats adopted from the study facility was not decreased when adoption fees were eliminated.
- Eliminating adoption fees does not devalue the animals in the eyes of the adopters.
- Free adult cat adoption programs could "dramatically impact the lives of thousands of shelter cats who would otherwise reside in a shelter for months or be euthanized."

See also this article on the Maddie's Fund website, titled "[The Truth About Free Cat Adoptions.](#)"

Concern: If they can't afford the regular adoption fee, how will adopters afford to care for the cat throughout his/her life?

*For more details, go here: <http://www.aspcapro.org/research-on-fee-waived-adoptions.php>.

Lots of people get their animals (especially cats) from friends or family or from “free to good home” situations. Just because they acquired their pets for little or no money doesn’t mean they can’t afford to care for them or don’t provide good homes. Best Friends wants to encourage the folks who are accustomed to getting “free” pets to look at adoption as an alternative. By attracting new people to adoption events through reduced-fee promotions, rescue organizations have an opportunity to educate people about the benefits of adoption and spay/neuter and the plight of animals currently in shelters.

Also, almost everyone looks for great deals, whether they have lots of money or not. It doesn’t mean they can’t afford the product at full price — they just relish the idea of getting a deal. Best Friends encourages all rescue groups to include the costs of caring for a cat in their literature so that potential adopters are aware of what they are signing up for.

Concern: Our rescue can’t afford to reduce our adoption fee. With the cost of medical care and spay/neuter, we already struggle to make ends meet.

There are several reasons why we feel reduced-fee adoptions are still a good idea:

- 1) Even at the full adoption fee, most rescue groups and shelters adopt out animals at a loss or, at most, break even. Your full adoption fees were set at the current rate because you determined that is what your market will bear — most likely taking into account the current adoption fees in your area. Adoption fees around the country range from free to over \$500 in some cases. For example, a black Lab mix in Salt Lake City can be adopted for \$100 whereas in Boston the adoption rate could be \$300. Regardless of the cost to get the animal ready for adoption, the Salt Lake group would never adopt out a dog if their adoption fee was \$300.
- 2) Consider the cost of keeping an animal with you instead of adopting him/her out. The longer the animal is with you, the more it costs to care for him or her.
- 3) Best Friends’ No More Homeless Pets Network offers sponsorship (ranging from \$500 to \$1,000, based on the promotion) to selected groups for their participation to offset reduced adoption revenues. Of course, in the long term, reduced adoption revenues need to be offset with additional fundraising efforts.
- 4) And most important: By reducing adoption fees periodically, we are encouraging increased adoptions, thereby saving more lives. Too many animals are currently dying in shelters and they need our help to get more animals into homes.

Concern: I’ve been told that you should always charge an adoption fee to avoid attracting “bunchers” — people who collect animals for resale to laboratories.

Adoption screening practices should be maintained to ensure that all animals are going into good homes. We encourage you to let adopters know that you will be following up with them to answer any questions and to ensure that the transition into the home is going well.

You don't have to take our word for it. Here are some quotes from some rescues and shelters that participated in the national \$5 Felines promotion sponsored by Best Friends Animal Society in November 2010. All participating rescues reduced their adoption fees to \$5 for all cats over 5 months of age.

"We have been pretty skeptical about sale pricing our adoption fees. Without Best Friends' leadership, we would still feel that way and would not have had the great experience of the \$5 Felines event. It changed our way of looking at reduced-fee adoptions. It has shown us a new approach and energized our core members. Try the event, even if you're initially as skeptical as we were!"

Friends of Gonzales Animal Shelter

"Participation has really helped us to 'get over ourselves' when it comes to severely reduced adoption fees. It was an eye opener (in a positive way) and we are more comfortable with the fact that the adopters coming to these types of events are not doing it to find lab animals or pit bull bait."

Second Chance Pet Adoptions

"The flurry of activity at our PetSmart adoption fair was incredible! Other groups had been reluctant to participate in the event because they thought the quality of prospective adopters would be less than desirable due to the low adoption fee. We did not adopt out any cats or kittens to anyone that we would not normally have adopted to. Having adopted out 27 cats/kittens over the last weekend has opened up some space to allow us to rescue more this week! It has provided a much-needed injection of morale to our cat foster homes — some of whom had cats they had fostered for over a year!"

Newnan Coweta Humane Society

"We know and love these kinds of marketing endeavors and I encourage other groups to use similar gimmicks to get animals out the door. Lots of newer rescues seem resistant still, though. There needs to be lots more education, I think, about the cost of length of stay and not just about quality of reduced-cost adoptions, to start getting people thinking about reasons to use these kinds of promotions."

Helping Hands Pet Rescue

"I think our board sees that we can do low-cost adoptions and still have great families apply. We are all celebrating a huge adoption event! We were the only ones in Iowa to participate, but I told many of my rescue colleagues and now that they have seen the results, they wish they would have done it, too."

Safe Haven of Iowa County