

Implementing the Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition

High Quality High Volume Spay Neuter VME 6818

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Need

Hillsborough County residents have lived alongside community cats for decades. While exact population statistics are difficult to confirm, 2016 estimates suggest that 200,000 feral felines roamed the area (Andrews). This large population size has placed a significant strain on the county's local animal shelters, as up to 54% of all animals entering these facilities from 2006 to 2017 were stray or free roaming cats (Hamilton). The Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center is the only open admission municipal shelter in the county and the largest facility of its kind in central Florida (Best Friends). Kitten season and the high volume of community cats contribute to the frequent overpopulation of this facility. The Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center was at 500% capacity for cats as recently as the summer of 2022 (Bowen). The large volume of free roaming cats puts pressure on Hillsborough County's native species as well. One outdoor cat can be responsible for killing more than 100 mammals and birds within a single year (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission). Manatees, *Trichechus manatus*, an endangered and endemic Florida species have been killed by toxoplasmosis (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission). Domestic cats are a primary host for this disease and can transmit it to native species (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission). Ecotourism within the state and Hillsborough County generate significant funds, emphasizing the importance of stability across native species.

The culmination of these community concerns and routine shelter overpopulation have made population control of community cats of paramount importance. The Hillsborough County Pet Resource center and the Humane Society of Tampa Bay collaborate across facilities to provide the community with a Trap-Neuter-Release program. After making an online reservation,

residents pay \$30 per cat, which is surgically sterilized, ear tipped, and provided with a rabies and FVRCP vaccine (Humane Society of Tampa Bay). Humane traps may be rented for \$10 so that cats may be brought to the facility Monday mornings (Humane Society of Tampa Bay). Residents are then able to pick up their feral cat that evening. While this joint effort is invaluable to the community, it places financial and staffing restraints on the participating facilities. Reserving TNR surgeries for only Monday morning limits the number of cats that can participate in the program, which is understandable considering the additional shelter population that must be attended to. To relieve these facilities of these pressures and provide additional medical care to the large community cat population, the Hillsborough County Cat Coalition will focus on providing additional TNR services to the community.

Assessment

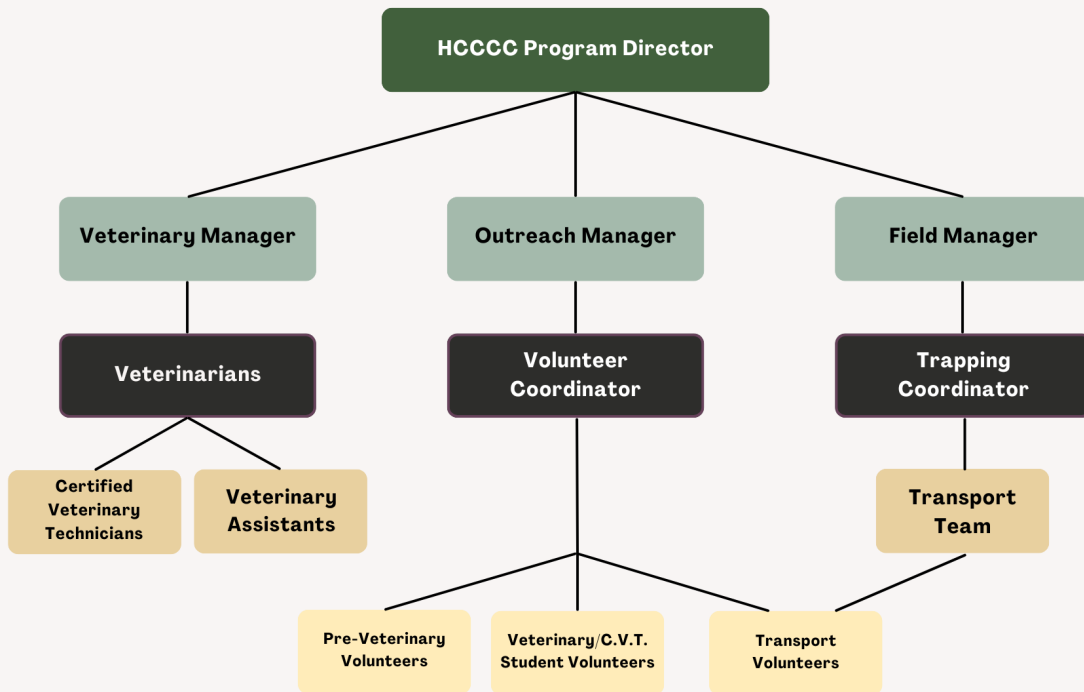
The joint effort between The Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center and the Humane Society of Tampa Bay was established in 2014 (Andrews). Recent population estimates are not available, warranting an updated assessment of the community cat population, especially when considering the recent increase in the county's human population. To establish an estimate on the baseline population in the county, a multimodal data collection method would be employed. This would include visual reporting in high traffic areas and setting up camera traps to document feral cats in areas less accessible or frequented by humans. Obtaining resident perception surveys on how prominent feral cats have been between now and prior to 2014 would provide context on how the general public perceives the progress made on reducing the volume of community cats. While it can take years to determine the success of a TNR program, the updated estimate can be compared to previous population approximations and other county population sizes. This context will determine if the current efforts are competing with the population size.

Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition

The Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition (HCCCC) is a program dedicated to providing TNVR (trap, neuter, vaccinate, and release) services to the community cats of Hillsborough County, Florida. The facility will not focus on housing or adopting cats but will provide a veterinary treatment area to complete high volume, high quality spay and neuter procedures to feral, stray, and outdoor cats. Residents of Hillsborough County may participate in the program by renting traps and bringing community cats to the facility. HCCCC intends to eliminate transportation and financial barriers for residents by offering low-cost services and trap pick up. The facility will collaborate with local foster groups and animal shelters to find homes for cats behaviorally assessed and determined to be appropriate domestic pets or working cats.

Preventing the population from expanding and providing TNVR cats with rabies and FVRCP vaccine additionally protects residents and their pets from zoonotic diseases. HCCCC will operate Monday through Saturday to provide additional opportunities for sterilization and alleviate nearby shelters who provide TNVR services in addition to sheltering and adoption efforts. To accommodate these extended hours, HCCCC will collaborate with veterinary students and veterinary technician students to provide staff veterinarians with experienced veterinary assistance in exchange for clinical experience and wet lab opportunities. Efforts between staff, volunteers, and veterinary students will provide additional TNVR to the community and address the large volume of community cats within the county.

Staffing Structure



A Day at Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition

Transport

The Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition will intake community cats via humane traps set out by Hillsborough County residents or HCCCC staff. Hillsborough County residents, transport volunteers, or HCCCC staff will be eligible to move cats to the facility. To ensure cat safety and reduce stress, several requirements will be made regarding how cats are transported to the facility, regardless of the individual bringing them in. Occupied cat traps will not be stacked on top of each other or placed in the bed of a truck to ensure trap security and optimum airflow and temperature regulation are maintained (DeTar et al., "Animal Transport and Relocation Programs"). Transporters must maintain their vehicle between 64°F and 80°F to promote animal comfort and safety (DeTar et al., "Animal Transport and Relocation Programs"). Residents or volunteers who need a thermometer to display the temperature in their vehicle may borrow a digital reader from the facility. Volunteers and staff transporting animals will be asked to have two individuals in the vehicle to allow for a driver and transport monitor (DeTar et al., "Animal Transport and Relocation Programs"). Residents will not be required to bring an additional individual but will be heavily advised to do so. Auditory stimuli, such as music or talking within the vehicle, will be kept at a low volume to prevent excess stress for patients. Additionally, visual stimuli will be reduced by placing a cover, such as a blanket or towel, over the cat trap for the duration of the car ride.

Residents trapping cats themselves may borrow a humane cat trap from the facility. A deposit of \$81.75 will be made before taking the trap and will only be cashed in if the trap is not returned. This fee covers the price of the trap itself (Tomahawk Live Trap). Residents who wish to use their own trap must receive approval from HCCCC management beforehand. Personal traps must

not be damaged, rusted, or collapsable (Operation Catnip). To be approved, humane traps must be structurally sound, functional, possess a handle, and fit within the size parameters of 9" x 9" x 26" through 10" x 12" x 30" (Operation Catnip). These requirements are not meant to limit the residents who may participate in the program but are focused on maintaining the safety and comfort of the cats involved.

Before traps are set and placed in the field, they should include a tag containing pertinent information. This includes the location of where the trap was set and HCCCC's contact information. This will ensure that cats are returned to the appropriate locations and allow residents to call or locate the facility if they notice an unattended but occupied trap.

Intake

Once the cats are transported to the facility, they will be kept in their traps and placed on the ground in a designated holding area in the facility. The holding area is set aside from the surgical suite and general treatment area to promote a calm and quiet environment (DeTar et al., "Behavior and Mental Well-Being"). Cats will be housed in the holding area until their operation, which will occur Monday through Saturday. Cats will be provided with food and water while in the facility, but the amount will vary depending on whether their operations are on that day or the following morning. Cats arriving in the facility in the late afternoon and are surgical candidates for the following morning will not be fed after midnight (ASPCA). Traps will be lined with newspapers or puppy pads prior to being set out to collect urine and fecal matter during this time. A trap divider will be used to position the cat to one side of the trap so that staff may remove any food, or cans present and change out the newspaper liner (ASPCA). A trap divider will be utilized whenever the newspaper is changed, which will occur if it has become soiled prior to surgery and in the evening if the cat stays overnight (ASPCA). While a

litterbox cannot be provided to TNR patients, changing the newspaper lining regularly reduces the risk of zoonotic disease spreading and keeps the animals more comfortable during their stay.

Preoperative Exam

While obtaining a medical history on TNR cats is not likely, each cat will receive a visual and physical examination by a veterinarian prior to their operation (DeTar et al., "Medical Health").

Prior to a physical exam, each cat will receive a visual examination by a veterinarian. This opportunity will allow veterinary staff to assess if a cat already has an ear tip and is no longer a surgical candidate. Additional consideration during this assessment include symptoms of lethargy or illness, as well as determining a general body condition score. During the physical examination, the veterinarian will assess mucus membrane color, status of ocular and nasal discharge, the presence of injuries, breathing effort, and if a female patient is pregnant or lactating (ASPCA, *Special Considerations for Community Cats at Spay/Neuter Clinics* 1–14).

Pregnant patients, in any stage of pregnancy are still acceptable candidates for sterilization as long as the uterus is kept closed during the procedure so that the fetuses die humanely (DeTar et al., "Shelter Surgery"). Healthy kittens as young as six weeks old, weighing at least two pounds, may be eligible for sterilization as indicated by a veterinarian (DeTar et al., "Shelter Surgery").

This exam will allow the veterinarian and certified veterinary technician to assess the cat for an ear tip or spay tattoo to prevent unnecessary anesthesia. Fractious cats that do not allow physical handling will receive injectable sedation beforehand for a more thorough and less stressful physical exam. The injectable sedation used in the facility will be a combination of Dexdomitor, Ketamine, and Buprenorphine, which will be calculated by a certified veterinary technician and confirmed by a veterinarian prior to administration. Sedation will be injected to fractious cats while still in their traps, while compliant cats in a secure towel wrap may be injected on an exam

table with experienced veterinary staff. Once the patient is initially sedated, a small identification card will be placed on the cat and secured around the cat's chest with a loose-fitting paper band. This ID card will include the cat's weight and sex, as well as a checklist for medical treatments to be done after surgery (ASPCA, *Special Considerations for Community Cats at Spay/Neuter Clinics* 1–14). After the patient is sedated and the preoperative exam has been completed, the patient can be intubated and their surgical sites prepped.

Surgery and Medical Treatments

A certified veterinary technician will monitor patients while a veterinarian conducts the sterilization procedure. Surgeries will be conducted in a sterile environment using surgical tools from sterilized surgical packs. Each patient will receive their own surgical pack (ASPCA, *Special Considerations for Community Cats at Spay/Neuter Clinics* 1–14). During the procedure, veterinary assistants and volunteers will change out the newspaper lining in the trap and update residents who brought in a cat. Cats will receive a vertical blue surgical tattoo once the incision site is sutured closed as a means of visual identification (DeTar et al., "Shelter Surgery"). Afterward, the cat's left ear will receive a notch. Each cat will receive their own sterilized instruments for this procedure, including straight hemostats, a sterile blade, and a nitrate stick (ASPCA, *Special Considerations for Community Cats at Spay/Neuter Clinics* 1–14). The ear tip and surgical tattoo will be visual identification for the community to relay that the cat has been sterilized. While still under sedation, each cat will receive a rabies vaccination and microchip from a veterinarian and an FVRCP vaccine by medical staff (ASPCA, *Special Considerations for Community Cats at Spay/Neuter Clinics* 1–14). Each cat will receive a dose of Revolution while under sedation and an ear cleaning if indicated. Unless a cat's nails are growing into their paw pad, a nail trim will not be done to preserve their ability to defend themselves. Antibiotics may

be administered if indicated by the veterinarian. The veterinarian and technicians will complete the ID card as medical treatments occur.

Postoperative Monitoring

Cats will be returned to their clean humane traps before becoming conscious. This will reduce the stress associated with human interaction. The ID card will be removed from the cat and secured to the trap. Cats will be visually monitored by veterinary assistants to ensure a smooth recovery. Blankets placed over the traps will assist in thermoregulation and blocking out visual stimuli. Veterinarians on site will be notified if a cat displays signs of postoperative complications, such as incision site bleeding, decreased appetite, diarrhea, or lethargy (ASPCA, *Feral Cat Sterilization Guidelines*). These symptoms will warrant a recheck from a veterinarian, which may require additional sedation if indicated. During recovery, cats will be provided food and water and have their newspaper cleaned at least twice a day (ASPCA, *Feral Cat Sterilization Guidelines*).

Return/transfer to shelter (behavioral assessment)

Depending on their recovery status, healthy cats will be monitored in the facility for 48 to 72 hours (ASPCA, *Feral Cat Sterilization Guidelines*). Lactating females may be released to their trapping location after 24 hours if recovery goes smoothly (ASPCA, *Special Considerations for Community Cats at Spay/Neuter Clinics* 1–14). Recovering cats will be behaviorally assessed using the Feline Spectrum Assessment (FSA). This assessment will help shelter management determine which cats may be candidates for adoption as pets or as working cats (ASPCAPro). Cats whose score indicates they are "extremely likely to be socialized" are candidates to be transferred to a shelter for adoption. Cats that score "extremely unlikely to be socialized" will be

returned to where they were trapped. Residents who brought in a cat will be notified via phone with a pickup time a day before release. These residents will also go home with a packet describing additional symptoms that indicate difficulty recovering and when to contact HCCCC for additional assistance.

SOPs/Policies and Medical Records

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Low Stress Cat Handling and Restraint

Identification Number

H-01

Effective Date

08/1/2024

Purpose

This document is designed to describe handling techniques used within the facility to ensure minimal stress of community cats participating in the Trap-Neuter-Release program at the Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition. Low Stress handling techniques promote patient wellbeing and staff safety through intentional and pre planned restraining methods and human-cat interactions.

Revision History

- 07/22/2024. Edited
- 07/20/2024. Created

Persons Affected

- Veterinarians
- Veterinary Technicians
- Veterinary Assistants
- Volunteers
- Transportation staff

Policy

The Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition strives to provide low cost spay and neuter services to stray and feral cats in the area to promote animal and public safety. Low Stress Handling is a cost-effective tool to ensure program efficiency while prioritizing patient comfort and staff safety.

Definitions

TNR: Trap-Neuter- Release programs sterilize cats by humanely trapping them so they may be brought to the shelter. Once in the shelter, community cats are anesthetized so they may receive an examination, vaccinations, and be surgically sterilized. Following recovery, these cats are then returned to the location they were originally trapped in (White 496).

Free Roaming Cat: A cat not restricted solely to an indoor lifestyle. Subcategories include pets allowed some outdoor access, lost or abandoned pets, feral cats, or outdoor exclusive pets (White 477–478).

Towel Wrap: A low stress handling technique that uses a towel firmly wrapped around a cat to safely examine and transport them. Placing the towel over the cat's head and restraining the cat behind the neck provides safe and humane control for veterinary personnel (CattleDog Publishing®).

Pole Syringe: An extending pole with a syringe located at the end to allow for the injection of unsocialized cats. Pole syringes are to be used only by experienced veterinarians or veterinary technicians.

Responsibilities

Veterinarian: Perform examinations, administer vaccinations, and conduct surgery while utilizing low stress handling techniques. Assess cats behaviorally to determine if an examination and surgical premedication administration can be completed using a towel wrap or if sedation using a pole syringe or trap barrier is required.

Veterinary Technicians: Use low stress handling techniques while restraining patients during preoperative exams and post operative monitoring. Utilize a towel wrap or pole syringe as indicated by a veterinarian after behavioral assessment. Sedated patients should be transported from wire cat traps to surgical tables and back using a towel wrap to ensure the patient is secure.

Veterinary Assistants: Approach cats calmly and ensure a blanket or towel is placed over their wire cat traps prior to preoperative examination and sedation. Collaborate with veterinary technicians and veterinarians to limit the amount of handling each cat experiences. Visually monitor recovering cats in their traps and document progression of alertness.

Volunteers: Speak softly to maintain a quiet environment in the facility. Place towels in the bottom of wire cat traps before a post operative cat is placed inside to recover.

Transportation Staff: Do not remove cats from wire cat traps in the field or during transportation. Place blankets or towels over traps to limit environmental stressors. Do not stack traps with cats in them on top of each other.

Procedures

- Transportation
 - Approach occupied cat traps in the field calmly and speak softly
 - If not already present, cover the trap in a blanket or towel
 - Place trap in transportation vehicle, do not play loud music or leave the windows open to reduce excess sound
 - Do not stack occupied cat traps on top of one another
 - Contact facility management 5 minutes before arrival to ensure volunteers are ready for intake
- Intake
 - Volunteers and veterinary assistants should use both hands to transport traps from the transport vehicle to the veterinary treatment area.
 - Ensure the treatment area is quiet and that traps are covered
- Preoperative Exam
 - Veterinarians are to visually assess the behavior of the cats to determine the best method of restraint.
 - Veterinary technicians are to administer premedications and sedation to unsocialized cats using either a pole syringe or trap barrier as indicated by the veterinarian.
 - Veterinary technicians may restrain socialized cats or sedated unsocialized cats with a towel wrap to allow veterinarians to complete their intake examination and administer vaccines and dewormer.
- Postoperative monitoring
 - Ensure wire traps have been cleaned and lined with fresh newspaper before moving the cat back for recovery.
 - Utilize a towel wrap for cats being placed back into the wrap following surgery.

- Veterinary Assistants are expected to visually monitor cats during recovery.
 - § Veterinarians will be alerted for symptoms such as vomiting, labored breathing, or incision site bleeding.

Return

- Transport recovered cats back to location they were trapped in.
- Ensure traps are not opened near a road.

Medical Record



Spay & Neuter Medical Record

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY CAT CARE COALITION

(813) 123 4567 
CatCare@HillsboroughCounty.org 
www.HillsboroughCounty.com/Cat-Care 

Patient Information

Animal ID Number: _____ Age : _____
Animal Species: _____ Sex : _____
Breed : _____ Color/Markings: _____
Weight: _____

Pre-Surgical Findings

Surgery Information

Date: _____ Procedure: _____
Surgical Start Time: _____ ET Tube Size: _____
Surgical End Time: _____ Cuffed [Yes/No]: _____

Pre-Medication

Drug/Concentration	Drawn Up (mL)	Admin (mL)	Route/Location	Time	Initial	Bottle #

Induction

Drug/Concentration	Drawn Up (mL)	Admin (mL)	Route/Location	Time	Initial	Bottle #

NSAID

Drug/Concentration	Drawn Up (mL)	Admin (mL)	Route/Location	Time	Initial	Bottle #

Antibiotic

Drug/Concentration	Drawn Up (mL)	Admin (mL)	Route/Location	Time	Initial	Bottle #

Intraoperative Complications

Extubation Time: _____

Name of Practicing Veterinarian: _____

Signature: _____

Important Resources

Job Description

The Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition is eagerly seeking out Certified Veterinary Technicians to assist with surgical care associated with the trap-neuter-and release of local community cats. We are looking for individuals who are passionate about providing premium medical care to feline patients, proficient in their technical skills, and comfortable working with a high volume of patients. Primary responsibilities will include administering premedications and vaccines to patients as indicated by veterinarians on staff, handling and restraining patients during examinations, and monitoring patients during surgery and postoperatively. Additional responsibilities include maintaining and stocking the surgical suite with supplies and ensuring surgical equipment is maintained routinely.

The Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition aims to protect the health of and wellbeing of the residents and community cats of Hillsborough County. By trapping, sterilizing, and releasing community cats in the area, we seek to minimize the spread of zoonotic diseases and environmental impacts caused by unowned outdoor cats. Cats that enter our facility are handled using low stress handling techniques to reduce patient stress and provide optimum medical care. Our staff and partnering volunteer veterinary students collaborate with veterinarians to spay and neuter cats, as well as provide vaccinations to patients.

Intriguing Job Post



Certified Veterinary Technician

Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition
Tampa FL, 33647

\$18-22

Full Time

Monday - Saturday

JOIN THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY CAT CARE COALITION

The Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition aims to protect the health of and wellbeing of the residents and community cats of Hillsborough County. By trapping, sterilizing, and releasing community cats in the area, we seek to minimize the spread of zoonotic diseases and environmental impacts caused by unowned outdoor cats. Cats that enter our facility are handled using low stress handling techniques to reduce patient stress and provide optimum medical care.

Responsibilities

- Proficient in administering injectable sedation and premedications
- Confident in monitoring patients during and after surgery
- Competency in preparing patients for surgical procedures
- Handling and restraining cats during examinations.
- Maintaining surgery suite and stocking equipment regularly
- Completing patient charts
- Administering vaccines and dewormer to cats

Qualifications

- Certified Veterinary Technician (CVT, LVT, RVT)
- Minimum of 1 year of experience
- Flexibility to work every other Saturday
- Ability to comfortably lift 50 lbs
- Strong understanding of feline behavior and handling
- Comfortable handling and restraining fractious cats

Benefits

- Paid time off and holidays
- Opportunities for continuing education
- Competitive salary



Send your CV and portfolio to:

✉ CatCare@HillsboroughCounty.org

For more information, visit our web at

🌐 www.HillsboroughCounty.com/Cat-Care

Training Checklist

- Fear Free Shelter Program (must be completed in the first 60 days of employment)
- Operating and maintaining the anesthesia, oxygen, and monitoring systems
- Uploading and editing patient records into ShelterLuv
- Administering injectable premedication and sedatives
- Administering vaccines and dewormer
- Handling and restraining fractious cats

Compensation/Benefits

Staff members will have paid time off and holidays while working full time at the Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition. Staff members will also have opportunities to learn in their positions with room for financial growth. Our full-time salary is competitive when comparing it to other local shelters seeking certified veterinary technicians. As the facility grows and establishes financial stability, health insurance will be offered. HCCCC's prime location provides easy access to local beaches and is an hour drive away from Florida's theme parks. Close proximity to the airport and cruise ship port provides ease of travel for vacations.

Retention Strategy for Certified Veterinary Technicians

Certified Veterinary Technicians seeking additional education related to the field will have tuition paid for in certification programs and workshops. The program will honor requested time off and will not contact employees when they are not clocked in to promote work life balance. HCCCC will offer mental health resources, such as discounted therapy sessions to further promote mental health and overall employee wellbeing

Volunteer Recruiting

The Hillsborough County Cat Care Coalition will partner with local collegiate pre-veterinary society and veterinary technician programs to cultivate a volunteer base. The University of South Florida and the University of Tampa each have their own pre-veterinary societies that actively seek out volunteer opportunities for their undergraduate student body. Hillsborough County Community College offers a veterinary technician certification course, which requires volunteer experience prior to acceptance and partners with animal shelters in the area throughout the program. Prioritizing this volunteer base will provide individuals interested in joining the field an environment to cultivate their skills under staff supervision. HCCCC will benefit from having experienced volunteers familiar with the field who will assist with handling and caring for the cats. With time, HCCCC hopes to grow its volunteer program to the magnitude seen at Operation Catnip, which offers veterinary students wet labs, fellowships, and clinic experience. HCCCC will have a prominent social media presence and a relationship with local media outlets to bring community attention to the program. These marketing opportunities will allow the program to reach a wider audience, which will foster educational opportunities regarding the importance of spaying and neutering.

Budget Spreadsheets

Please see attached Excel sheets.

Grant

In an effort to provide veterinary care and sterilization services to the community cats in Hillsborough County, FL, The Hillsborough County Cat Coalition is asking for financial support from Florida Animal Friend. HCCC admires and upholds the same regard for high quality spay and neuter as FAF and intends to dedicate grant funds to increasing sterilization procedures performed in the county. Grant funding provided by Florida Animal Friend will partially cover the initial cost of establishing the facility and corresponding equipment. HCCCC intends on purchasing equipment for two surgical tables and corresponding equipment to allow for two procedures to occur simultaneously in an effort to increase productivity. Creating this foundation will set HCCCC up for greater efficiency and allow our team to make surgery a priority.

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