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Maddie's Fund

A Treat for 2027!

10 Tomahawk Traps will be given away to winners of cat trivia!

Sponsored by The Community Cat Fund (A Program of Waggle)

Saturday, January 23, 2027

10:00 - 10:15 AM ET

Welcome Remarks

Stacy LeBaron, Founder, Head Cat and Host, Community Cats Central & The Community Cats Podcast

10:15 - 11:15 AM ET

Beyond Firefighting: Why the Same Problems Keep Coming Back

Harry Eckman, Global Advisor for Cat Population Management, International Cat Care

Most animal welfare organisations spend their time responding to what's in front of them. A cat needs help, a shelter is full, a crisis needs managing. This work matters, but it rarely leaves room for a harder question: why does the same problem keep coming back? Firefighting isn't a failure of effort or commitment. It's what happens when there is no shared way of understanding a problem's underlying causes, agreeing what a better future looks like, and building towards it deliberately.

This session introduces Beyond Firefighting, a framework designed to help organisations move from constantly reacting to problems to addressing what causes them. The framework sets out eight stages across three phases, and this presentation will show what each stage involves, why the sequence matters, and how organisations can use it to move from managing problems day to day to changing what happens next.

About Harry Eckman | Harry Eckman is an animal welfare strategist with over 25 years of international experience. He has worked with hundreds of animal welfare organisations worldwide, focusing on capacity building, upstream thinking and strategy, human behaviour change, and turning ideas into action. His programmes and campaigns have spanned humane dog and cat population management, disaster response and resilience, ending the dog and cat meat trade, protecting marine life, tackling wildlife trafficking and captivity, and improving shelter and veterinary conditions.

He currently serves as Global Advisor for Cat Population Management at International Cat Care, Disaster Resilience Consultant for the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), and co-founder and CEO of Change For Animals Foundation (CFAF). Originally from London, he lives in Portugal with his wife and three cats.

11:15 - 11:30 AM ET • Break

11:30 AM - 12:15 PM ET

Cool Tool- Kitten Multiplier Demonstration

Cory Piland, Grant Writer and Volunteer, Operation Catnip of Richmond

Every community cat advocate knows how quickly “a couple of cats” can become fifteen. Colonies multiply fast, and much of our work is spent trying to catch up. But most population estimates rely on one-size-fits-all numbers that don’t reflect what’s actually happening on the ground. In reality, how quickly a colony grows depends on local conditions such as overall colony health, geographic location, and access to veterinary resources.

This session introduces The Community Cat Multiplication Table, a tool that calculates how many offspring one or more cats can produce while adjusting for the conditions specific to your community. This presentation will walk through each of these variables, explain how they affect a colony’s growth, and share examples of how rescues, TNR organizations, and community cat advocates can use the tool to plan their work and make the case for early intervention.

About Cory Piland | Cory Piland is a grant writer and volunteer for Operation Catnip in Richmond, Virginia. A data enthusiast, she oversees data collection and analysis for their monthly TNR Spay/Neuter clinics, which allows them to measure progress and the success of their mission.

She has also been a kitten foster for Richmond Animal Care and Control, the city's municipal shelter, for 17 years and counting, with experience in bottle babies, pregnant/nursing mothers, and socializing spicy community kittens. Cory is a recent graduate of the Community Cats Program Management Certification Program through the University of the Pacific.

12:15 - 1:00 PM ET • Lunch Break

1:00 - 2:00 PM ET

How to Read a Room Like a Cat: A 60-Second Method for Seeing What Your Cats Already See

Jodi Belongié, RVT, Registered Veterinary Technician & Founder, Nine Lives Strategies

A cat labeled “unfriendly” in one room may be curious and affectionate in another. The behavior is real, but it isn’t context-free, and sometimes what needs to change first isn’t the cat. It’s the room. Alex, a terrified kitten who survived a severe cruelty incident, spent nearly six weeks hiding in a single cat tree. Instead of taking it away, the team at Chico Cat Café gradually moved the tree into new spaces, and by adoption day, Alex was exploring every room and sitting in laps. His tree wasn’t the obstacle. It was the bridge.

In this practical session, Registered Veterinary Technician Jodi Belongié teaches the 60-Second Room Read, a simple method for scanning a cat’s environment, reading the cat and the people around it, and making one small change to see what happens. Drawing on 25+ years in veterinary medicine, Jodi will also introduce SAFE (the Sentinel Adoption Framework Environment) and its central idea: a cat’s response to an environment is information, not identity. Ideal for anyone who has ever said, “This cat just doesn’t like people.”

About Jodi Belongié | Jodi Belongié is a Registered Veterinary Technician with more than 25 years in animal health and a career spent asking one question: Is this environment giving a cat a fair chance to show us who she is? As co-founder of Chico Cat Café, she led a cage-free adoption lounge that helped more than 350 cats find homes. Watching those cats change when their surroundings changed inspired SAFE, the Sentinel Adoption Framework Environment.

Jodi serves on the FelineVMA Feline Welfare Committee, advises the National Animal Foster Network, and is NAVTA's Government Relations Liaison for District 7. She holds Fear Free and Cat Friendly certifications, is completing her Advanced Shelter Care Specialist certification through UC Davis, and is the founder of Nine Lives Strategies, an animal welfare strategy practice. She lives in rural Northern California, where she still checks the exits before she looks at the cat.

2:00 - 2:30 PM ET • Break

2:30 - 3:30 PM ET

PAWS Before You Prompt: Ethical AI for Cat Welfare Organizations

Elizabeth Finch, Educational Strategist, Community Cats Central

AI is already in your organization, whether you invited it or not. Volunteers are using it to write adoption bios, adopters are asking chatbots for health and behavior advice, and AI-generated "rescue" photos and videos are turning up in fundraising scams. For stretched teams, these tools can be a real time-saver, but without clear guidelines, they can also quietly erode the trust your work depends on.

This practical session explores where AI can help your team, where it can cause harm, and how to tell the difference. You'll leave with four questions to ask before anything AI-assisted goes out the door, along with a simple framework for creating a one-page AI policy for staff and volunteers.

About Elizabeth Finch | Elizabeth Finch is an educational strategist at Community Cats Central, where she helps to shape and promote educational offerings and opportunities that empower the folks in the field to do better work for cats. She co-instructs the Community Cat Program Management Certificate Course at University of the Pacific and handles post-production for podcasts serving animal welfare organizations.

She came to this work after more than seven years in senior leadership at a metro-Atlanta cat shelter, where she helped set the organization's direction, led its public voice, and built community cat work into its mission. Elizabeth has used AI in her daily work since the very early days of ChatGPT, and she has watched these tools—and the use of them—change firsthand, which is exactly why she has opinions about where they belong and where they don't.

3:30 - 3:45 PM ET • Break

3:45 - 4:45 PM ET

Fundraising for Community Cats

Bryan Kortis, National Programs Director, Neighborhood Cats

TNR saves lives, but it can be a tough sell to donors. Rescue groups and shelters have heartwarming adoption stories, while TNR organizations are asking people to fund the work of trapping cats, fixing them, and putting them back where they came from. Who wants to give money for letting cats go? As it turns out, lots of people, if you craft the right message.

Neighborhood Cats has been successfully fundraising for community cats for more than two decades. In this workshop, they'll share donor pitches unique to TNR, the tools you need to fundraise like a pro, the channels most worth your investment, and how to strike the right balance between hard data and heart-tugging stories. Because when it comes to fundraising, what you say, what you leave out, and how and when you say it make all the difference.

About Bryan Kortis | Co-founder of Neighborhood Cats and current National Programs Director, Bryan is a leading advocate of TNR. He introduced a community-wide program in New York City, worked as a grants manager for PetSmart Charities, has authored several books about Trap-Neuter-Return and regularly presents

live and online trainings, including basic training workshops and advanced webinars in partnership with the Community Cats Podcast.

He has personally trapped thousands of cats and co-designed many of the most popular traps and TNR equipment available today.

4:45 - 5:00 PM ET

Cat Trivia & Closing Remarks

Stacy LeBaron, Founder, Host & Head Cat, Community Cats Central

Sunday, January 24, 2027

10:00 - 10:15 AM ET

Welcome Remarks

Stacy LeBaron, Founder, Head Cat and Host, Community Cats Central & The Community Cats Podcast

10:15 - 11:15 AM ET

Not Us vs. Them: Creating Real Partnership Between Clinics and Rescues

Paula Escobedo, Practice Manager, Community Cat Clinic

Veterinary clinics, rescues, and TNR programs all share the same goal: helping cats. Yet even the strongest partnerships can feel strained when surgery days fall behind, expectations go unspoken, and each side only sees its own part of the process. Most of that friction doesn't come from a lack of commitment. It comes from the pressures and misunderstandings that build up when partners don't have a clear view of each other's work.

This session offers a behind-the-scenes look at clinic workflow, why surgical days run behind schedule, and what helps partnerships thrive for the long term. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for improving communication, setting mutual expectations, building trust, and creating collaborative systems that strengthen the relationship and help more cats.

About Paula Escobedo | Paula Escobedo is a veterinary practice manager and advocate for improving access to care for cats, with a strong background in leadership, team development, and organizational management. She combines her expertise in people operations with a passion for advancing quality feline care. Through her work with the Community Cat Clinic, Paula focuses on building sustainable partnerships between clinics, rescues, and TNR organizations while fostering compassionate leadership, positive workplace culture, and patient-centered care. She is dedicated to creating collaborative solutions that support veterinary teams, rescue partners, TNR efforts, and the communities they serve.

11:15 - 11:30 AM ET • Break

11:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET

From 0 to 1,000 Cats: Starting & Scaling a Volunteer-Run TNR Program in a Resource-Limited Community

Victoria Partridge, Founder and Executive Director, Street Cats Club

Across the United States, communities are struggling to keep up with growing community cat populations while working with limited funding, staffing, and access to veterinary care. For many small organizations, building a TNR program that makes a real dent can feel out of reach. But it doesn't take a large budget or paid staff to create lasting change. It takes a plan that can grow.

This session presents a replicable case study of Street Cats Club, a 100% volunteer-run nonprofit in Emporia, Kansas, that built a high-impact TNR program from the ground up. What began with just 10 cats in 2019 has grown to more than 1,000 cats sterilized each year and over 3,000 cats served overall. Attendees will leave with practical, data-driven strategies for launching, funding, marketing, and sustaining a scalable TNR program in a resource-limited community.

About Victoria Partridge | Victoria Partridge is the Founder and Executive Director of Street Cats Club, a volunteer-driven nonprofit dedicated to reducing feline overpopulation and improving the lives of stray, abandoned, and homeless cats throughout Lyon County, Kansas, and beyond. Since founding the organization in 2019, she has led the growth of one of the state's most impactful TNR programs, helping thousands of cats through spay/neuter services, emergency medical care, foster care, and programs that make veterinary care more affordable for low-income pet owners.

Victoria brings more than a decade of nonprofit leadership experience in marketing, communications, fundraising, and strategic planning, along with a bachelor's degree in Communications and a master's degree in English. She regularly speaks with local organizations and government leaders about the impact of TNR, responsible pet ownership, and the value of investing in preventative programs that improve life for both animals and communities.

12:30 - 12:45 PM ET • Break

12:45 - 1:30 PM ET

Go Big or Go Home: The Mass Trapping Toolkit

Kristen Petrie, Tech Tabby and Correspondent, Community Cats Central

Mass trapping is one of the most powerful tools in community cat work. Trapping a few cats at a time can leave a colony reproducing faster than you can keep up, while a well-planned mass trapping event can fix most or all of a colony at once. But pulling one off takes more than a stack of traps and good intentions. Without the right planning, even the most dedicated teams can end up with missed cats, overwhelmed volunteers, and stressed animals.

This session walks you through the full process, from assessing a colony and building your team to trapping, post-op care, and release, so you can run a high-impact TNR event that's safe, humane, and actually works. Whether you're tackling a suburban neighborhood or a rural barn, you'll leave with a clear roadmap and the confidence to make it happen.

About Kristen Petrie | Kristen Petrie is the Tech Tabby and Correspondent at Community Cats Central and the Community Cats Podcast. Since 2005, she has worn many hats in animal welfare, including adoption counselor, trapper, litter-scooper, lecture coordinator, and marketing consultant. She served on the board of the Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society for nearly a decade and is currently board secretary for Community Cat Champions.

A storyteller at heart, Kristen uses graphic design, photography, and writing to promote animal welfare and feline-friendly culture. She is a Salem State University graduate, Fear Free™ certified, and holds a certificate in Animals, Self & Society from the University of Colorado. She fosters quirky, behaviorally challenged cats who need a little extra patience, and when she's not, you'll find her on road trips, at haunts, on rollercoasters, or in tiki bars.

1:45 - 2:30 PM ET

Finding Grants to Fund Your Work

Stephanie Mathers, CEO, Grants 4 Animals

Grant funding can make a big difference for community cat programs, but finding it is often half the battle. The large, national grants tend to get the most attention, while the opportunities best suited to community cat work can be smaller, more local, and much harder to track down. For busy teams, the search alone can feel like a full-time job.

In this session, Stephanie will demonstrate how to research grants for your organization using a variety of tools and techniques. You'll see the process in action and leave with practical strategies for uncovering funding opportunities that are a strong fit for your community cat work.

About Stephanie Mathers | Stephanie Mathers is the Founder and CEO of Grants 4 Animals, LLC. Her involvement in animal welfare began when she adopted her first cat, Shakespeare, in 2002, and soon grew to rescuing more cats (along with a few house bunnies) and doing TNR for community cats in Williamston, Michigan. In 2021, after more than 20 years in education, she launched Grants 4 Animals to meet the growing need for grant-writing support among animal-related nonprofits.

Today, Stephanie works with a small group of grant-writing clients and provides training, tools, and courses to help animal-related nonprofits earn grants and build additional income streams. Since its founding, Grants 4 Animals has earned, managed, and reported on more than $5 million in grants, all for animal-related nonprofits.

2:30 - 2:45 PM ET • Break

2:45 - 3:30 PM ET

The Spicy Cat Project: A Better Way to Manage Fearful and Aggressive Cats

Berlin Waters, MS, Founder of The Spicy Cat Project

Fearful and aggressive cats are some of the hardest to help. Whether they're shut down in a shelter kennel or defensive in a TNR program, the usual approach is often to give them space and wait, but prolonged fear takes its own toll on a cat's welfare. What if a brief, carefully controlled interaction could help them feel safer faster?

This presentation introduces innovative, evidence-based techniques for handling and socializing fearful and aggressive cats, including applications for improving the welfare of feral cats in TNR programs. Through live demonstrations of the Superman Towel Wrap and Bundle and Bond methods, attendees will see how intentional out-of-kennel socialization can reduce fear and improve behavior within minutes. You'll learn why brief, controlled stress can be more humane than prolonged fear, how to support cats through difficult transitions, and how these techniques can help shut-down or defensive cats become confident, loving companions.

About Berlin Waters | Berlin is a third-year veterinary student at the University of Florida with a master's degree in shelter medicine and over a decade of experience as a veterinary technician. Drawing on years of research and hands-on experience into shelter and feral cat behavior she founded The Spicy Cat Project to advance safe, humane, and effective handling techniques for fearful, misunderstood, and behaviorally challenging cats.

3:30 - 3:45 PM ET • Break

3:45 - 4:45 PM ET

Using Social Media to Build Awareness, Engagement & Collaboration for Community Cats

Kendall Jang, Digital Support & Communications Coordinator, United Spay Alliance

Social media is more than a place to share updates. It's a powerful tool for raising awareness, connecting advocates, and inspiring action for community cats. In this session, explore how animal welfare organizations and advocates can use social media to amplify their message, engage their communities, and strengthen partnerships.

Drawing from her experience in nonprofit communications and digital marketing, Kendall will share practical strategies for creating engaging content, telling impactful stories, and collaborating with other organizations to expand reach. Whether you're managing an organization's social media accounts or advocating independently, you'll walk away with actionable ideas to help get the word out and make a greater impact for cats.

About Kendall Jang | Kendall Jang is a freelance digital marketing and communications professional with experience supporting nonprofits, small businesses, and animal welfare organizations. She currently works with United Spay Alliance, where she manages social media, website content, and digital outreach to promote accessible spay/neuter services nationwide. With a background in marketing, event coordination, and nonprofit communications, Kendall is passionate about using storytelling, social media, and collaboration to connect communities, amplify advocacy efforts, and inspire meaningful action for animals.

4:45 - 5:00 PM ET

Cat Trivia & Closing

Stacy LeBaron, Founder, Host & Head Cat, Community Cats Central & The Community Cats Podcast

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