
Dog Enrichment Program Overview

At APA! we address unique challenges for long-term in-kennel care. With multiple long stay animals, we rely on kennel enrichment to stimulate, de-stress, and engage them.

Currently, we have a team of over 30 volunteers who volunteer every day to assist in the enrichment program. Their primary task revolves around our kong program. Our kong program involves washing, stuffing, and distributing kongs and ice treats to over 150 dogs at TLAC. With limited resources, this requires a labor-intensive process and commitment to the task.

For example, the way we schedule our volunteers is based on the number of kong toys we have. We schedule our kong washing team (typically 2-3 people) early in the day after our cleaners have collected the previous night's dirty toys. Next, our kong stuffers come in to stuff the kongs they clean. The kong distribution team comes in around 6-8pm to give out the previous day's stuffed and frozen kongs.

We coordinate these 30 volunteers through our Volunteer Impact page. There, volunteers can sign up for their shift in advance and log their hours under dog enrichment. Volunteers are trained by other experienced team members. They are paired up via email and then meet the volunteer at a time that works for them.

Once they complete their training shift, they're given follow up materials and access to the dog enrichment Facebook group and asked to come in for a specific shift each week. In addition to our kong program, we also rotate iCalm music devices on each building that houses our dogs and use aromatherapy/scent therapy as frequently as possible.

How to Start Your Own Enrichment Program

Part 1. Assessing Your Shelters' Needs

- How many dogs are in your care?
- What type of enrichment are your dog's receiving now?
- What type of enrichment is your shelter in most need of? (Scent, physical, auditory etc. See the holes and work to fill them in)

Part 2. Types of in-Kennel Enrichments

Kongs/taste puzzle

Stuff and freeze kongs to stimulate natural behaviors like chewing, scavenging, and working for food. Puzzle toys are excellent for dogs with higher energy or working dogs who require more interaction with their food.

Scent

Aromatherapy is great for enclosed shelters. Use spray bottles filled with a mix of 4 parts water, and 2-4 drops of essential oils like lavender. Shake, and then spritz the areas in front of the kennels to provide a calmer scent than shelter smells. Other scents include cedar and lemongrass (stimulates mental clarity), but food scents can also be a welcomed change for shelter pups.

Sound

We use iCalm devices in each building. iCalm devices have preset, scientifically proven, classical music playlists that reduce stress for both cats and dogs. For a low-maintenance auditory stimulation alternative, hang wind chimes outside kennels.

Visual

What dogs can see has a serious impact on their stress levels. Liver or peanut butter scented bubbles can offer both visual and taste stimulation in a simple, low-cost way.

Taste

Aside from kongs, we also make large ice block treats. These bucket treats have toys, rawhides, and broth frozen together for a long-lasting, tasty treat.

Part 3. Logistics

How frequently can enrichments be given?

Depending on your shelter, you might not be able to logistically provide daily enrichment. However, that's the ideal goal. For example, if you can't do daily kong enrichment, you could do scent work with essential oils. Try to implement the most reasonable enrichment on a daily basis for the greatest impact on the animals in your care.

Who will handle enrichment?

At Austin Pets Alive, the dog enrichment team is solely volunteers. Virtually any daily enrichment program would require a consistent volunteer base. Washing, stuffing, and distributing enrichments is a time-consuming process. That may or may not be an option for your shelter.

Supplies

You'll need kong toys, peanut butter, kibble, treats, buckets, music devices and countless other items to implement a consistent enrichment program.

Equipment

For 150 plus dogs, we use 1 refrigerator, 1 upright freezer, and 1 chest deep freezer to house supplies like broth and ice cube treats and toys like our frozen kongs.

Personalizing Enrichment

We have several dogs who have shown in-kennel resource guarding tendencies, and those dogs receive ice cube treats as a replacement for guardable treats and toys. We avoid giving them rawhides, plastic toys, or anything they are known to guard. We also provide customized enrichment for dogs with dietary requirements such as grain allergies. Those dogs receive grain free kibble in their kongs along with pumpkin instead of peanut butter to differentiate.

Part 4. Getting Donations

There are several ways to get the donations to fund your enrichment program. These include:

Reach out within volunteer network.

If you already have a strong volunteer base, simply reaching out to them with a weekly or monthly email could be enough to keep your enrichment program funded.

Gather data to track how much of each item you need every month.

For example, our enrichment program goes through about 6 large jars of peanut butter each day. We use that to base our donation needs on. When we're running low, we send out

an email to our network to request in-kind donations. This has enabled us to maintain a steady stream of supplies.

Hold kong and peanut butter drives.

Ask volunteers to hold a peanut butter drive at their local business or partner with small businesses to see if they'd donate to your shelter.

Reach out to local schools for support

Schools and Scouts are always looking for a way to give back to non-profits, reach out to see if they'd be willing to ask for donations like peanut butter, treats, or even monetary donations.

Use an Amazon Wishlist to encourage in-kind donations when needed

APA! Has an Amazon wishlist to direct folks to when they'd like to donate. They are free to set up and are a simple way to get the donations you need.

Keep gifters in the know.

You can do this with weekly or monthly emails showing what you do with the donations and how their monetary or in-kind donations are used. Pictures and video are soo important!

Apply for grants

A simple google search will turn up tons of grants available from a variety of foundations across the country. Don't forget to apply for the Kongs Cares program to get discounted kong toys. <https://www.kongcompany.com/pet-partner-programs/shelter-registration/>

Part 5. Organization

Organization is critical to maintaining your dog enrichment program. These are the biggest trouble areas for organizing an enrichment program that works.

If you're using volunteers, how will you keep them scheduled?

For us, we get folks on a set schedule each week. They are asked to stay in contact with the Enrichment Coordinator if they cannot make it in for their service. With the help of the Vol2 system we use, we keep volunteers scheduled.

Believe in the power of checklists.

Checklists communicate the most important tasks for volunteers to follow when they arrive for their shifts. They also allow other volunteers on the team to know what tasks are needed next.

Stay in contact with volunteers.

We use a Facebook group and emails to stay connected with volunteers who are committed to a specific shift.

What time of day will dogs receive enrichment?

For example, we do our kongs in the evening. Figure out the best time of day for your shelter and stick with that.

Customizing enrichments

If possible, get to know each dog's dietary needs and customize in-kennel enrichment for each dog to ensure the desired effect of the enrichment items.

Communication

To communicate which dogs can receive what enrichment items, we use a kennel checklist card on the inside of each kennel. That check list shows whether the dog is a shelter resource guarder, has dietary restrictions, can't have plastic, or if they prefer a specific type

of enrichment. That empowers volunteers to swiftly provide enrichments to the animals in our care.

Next Steps

To start an enrichment program at your shelter there are at least 4 basic needs to work out. These include:

- Budget (grants/funding required to get started)
- The number of dogs in your care
- Resources
- Logistical support (volunteers etc.)

Consider the information provided above and think about how it could work with your shelter.

Additional Resources

If you have any questions about our enrichment program or how to start your own, feel free to email Alanna Sharp at apadog.enrichment@austinpetsalive.org

<http://gsltc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Shelter-Dog-Enrichment-handout.pdf>

<https://bestfriends.org/resources/enrichment-dogs-shelters>

<https://animalfarmfoundation.org/category/shelter-and-rescue/enrichment-and-training/>

<https://www.kongcompany.com/pet-partner-programs/shelter-registration/>