**OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION**

**Adoption of Research Animals Covered by the USDA Animal Welfare Act Regulations**

Date: June 27, 2018 Guidance Document: AR2018-001

*For questions regarding this guidance, contact the office of the Chief Veterinary Medical Officer (CVMO).*

1. **Summary.** VA has historically taken, and continues to take the position that whenever possible, animals retired from participating in approved VA research protocols are to be placed through adoption as pets. This guidance is intended to assist VA animal research programs in arranging adoptions that promote the safety and well-being of the retired animals, and to maintain compliance with all regulatory and legal requirements, including federal surplus property procedures. VA’s responsibility for the animal ends when the animal is transferred to the organization that will manage placement of the animal with an adoptive family. VA Medical Centers must consult with appropriate authorities to ensure that all applicable federal, state, and/or local regulations are met. The office of the Chief Veterinary Medical Officer must be contacted, and that office will then arrange with the General Services Administration (GSA) for adoptions to placement organizations of retired research animals in compliance with applicable federal laws and regulations regarding federal property. A “placement organization” is defined as an organization that arranges placement of surplus research animals in adoptive private homes.

2. **Background.**  Although the value of much research with animals depends on the analysis of tissues, organs, or data that can only be collected after euthanasia, some of the research does not require euthanasia. VA has an ethical obligation to arrange for placement of healthy and socially adjusted animals with suitable adoptive families whenever possible through placement organizations, and fully supports efforts to do so.

3. **Issue.** VA must provide adequate information about the temperament and health status of the animal to assist the placement organization with arranging a suitable and streamlined adoption. This includes VA providing information and records required for compliance with all applicable regulatory and legal requirements for transfer of ownership of the animal to the adoptive family. Best results are expected when:

a. Local VA responsibility for arranging for adoption is shared by the:

* Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) of record,
* Attending Veterinarian (whether a Veterinary Medical Officer or a Veterinary Medical Consultant), and
* Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development of the VA Medical Center overseeing the research.

In case of any disagreements about the eligibility of specific individual animals for adoption, or significant difficulties with the adoption process, the Office of the CVMO must be contacted.

The VA Medical Center is responsible for providing the documents listed in Section 4 below to the placement organization in coordination with the CVMO’s office. Any documents required by GSA will be provided by the CVMO’s office after consultation with the VA Medical Center.

b. Species-appropriate socialization and exposure of animals to circumstances and experiences common in private households are to be considered in the facility’s husbandry procedures. For example, training dogs to walk on a leash and to respond to basic commands will facilitate eventual transition to an adoptive home as well as promote ease of handling while they are at the research facility or with the placement organization. This is particularly important when it is known in advance that an animal is to likely become a candidate for adoption.

c. Additional suggestions for adoption programs are available from the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine (<https://www.aclam.org/about/position-statements>).

4. **Recommendations**. Research animals are considered to be government property, and the GSA must approve the adoption as an excess property transaction. The CVMO’s office will coordinate with GSA regarding the excessing process and the VA Office of General Counsel for legal review as applicable. The animal may not be transferred to the placement organization until GSA provides approval. Because of the complexity of the adoption process, it is highly recommended that each VA program that conducts animal research with USDA species to establish a Standard Operating Procedure for adoptions, that addresses the following:

1. Full disclosure of the current health status and behaviors of the candidate animal to the placement organization prior to its transfer to the placement organization. This disclosure will increase the likelihood of the placement organization arranging a successful adoption.

1. A pre-adoption veterinary medical examination (including a physical examination, bloodwork (for animals larger than rabbits), and an examination for parasites) conducted by a qualified veterinarian helps to ensure that information about the health status of the animal is current and accurate. Generally, only healthy candidates are eligible for adoption, but some with chronic health conditions, even if they may involve costly or intensive care, may be suitable for adopters with appropriate experience, skills, and interest. Note that a health certificate may be required per item f.2 below.
2. It is important to confirm that the animal is socially compatible with people and other animals, and has shown no signs of aggression toward people or other animals that would pose undue risk to the placement organization or another pet in the final adoptive home. Before the animal is placed, it is important for the placement organization to acknowledge in writing that VA has no further legal responsibility or liability for the animal and/or its behavior.

d. Regarding dog and cat adoptions, to promote responsible pet ownership, VA generally considers as eligible for adoption only those dogs and cats that have been spayed or neutered, and animals of any species that are up-do-date on vaccinations according to current veterinary standards.

e. Consultation with appropriate authorities is necessary to ensure that any local and state regulations are met, if not in contradiction to and to the extent permitted under federal law and regulations.

f. For dog and cat adoptions, compliance with the USDA Animal Welfare Act Regulations in Section 2.35 paragraphs (b), (c), and (e), and Section 2.38 is required:

1. The VA Medical Center must maintain records that correctly record the following information required for adoption (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) forms 7006 and 7001 may optionally be used to record the required information):

* The official USDA tag number or tattoo or microchip (see Page A-30 of the USDA Animal Welfare Inspection Guide);
* A description of the dog or cat (date of birth or approximate age, species, breed, sex, color/markings);
* Any additional ID numbers or marks assigned by the research facility
* The name and address of the placement organization;
* The date of departure of the animal from the facility;
* The name of the owner of the private vehicle by which the placement organization will transport the animal from VA;

2. If a dog or cat will be transported across state lines as part of the transfer to the placement organization, VA must furnish a health certificate which states that a licensed veterinarian inspected the dog or cat on a specified date not more than 10 calendar days prior to delivery of the animal for transportation. The veterinarian must find that the animal appears to be free of any infectious disease or physical abnormality that could endanger the animal, other animals, or public health. APHIS Form 7001 may optionally be used for this purpose.

3. The VA Medical Center must provide the placement organization one copy of the information in items f.1 and f.2 above, and must keep one copy in the VA facility for at least 3 years.

4. The transfer to the placement organization must take place at the VA Medical Center.

5. Acceptance by VA of any financial compensation from the placement organization will be interpreted by USDA as VA taking on the role of a “dealer,” which requires compliance with many more regulatory requirements. Such activities are not covered by this guidance, and are prohibited.

g. For USDA species other than dogs or cats, the relevant sections of the Animal Welfare Act Regulations must be consulted.

h. Agreement by the placement organization that VA cannot accept the return of an animal that has been adopted.

i. The expectation that any placement organization that accepts responsibility for the adoption process also agrees to arrange the final adoptions in keeping with VA’s intention to encourage suitable adoptions by private citizens that promote the safety and well-being of both the animals and the adoptive families.

5. **Reporting.** Information on the status of each research dog and cat will be collected annually as part of the online Veterinary Medical Unit report software.