

# Establishing an Animal Care Committee

Classroom animals depend on people for their well-being. With proper research and planning, the experience can be both safe and rewarding for all involved. It is recommended that a school establish an Animal Care Committee (ACC) to oversee the acquisition and welfare of the animals housed at the school and the humane care of these animals, both on and off school premises. The role of the committee may be expanded to support the education of students and teachers on topics of animal welfare and stewardship. The ACC can function within one classroom or on a school-wide basis.

The ACC should be comprised of individuals from different backgrounds who can offer a variety of perspectives and expertise. Consider the following recommendations for committee membership: school faculty and staff, a local veterinarian, school nurse, teacher advisor, and most important, interested students familiar with the species being discussed. Ideally, the committee should meet early in the school year before the animals come to school.

The committee has a valuable role in helping students and teachers carefully think through the decision to bring an animal into the classroom and all aspects of care that will be required. By

asking key questions, teachers and students are encouraged to examine important issues that relate to the responsibility, care, and welfare of animals.

A strategy a school may find helpful for overseeing classroom animals is a Classroom Animal Plan. A school may consider adapting any of the following suggestions.

Students or faculty who would like to have a classroom animal would submit a written document, the Classroom Animal Plan, which addresses critical points of classroom animal welfare and serves as a practical guideline for the daily care and use of the animal. The ACC would review the proposed plan, perhaps at a convened meeting. In this review, information described in the plan would be discussed and verified, and questions may be raised on any information omitted.

Once the ACC approves the plan, the animal may be acquired. Then the ACC would have the responsibility of monitoring all plans in operation for appropriate care and use of the animals. Monitoring activities may include periodically visiting areas where animals are housed and observing husbandry and other animal activities. The ACC may request reports of animal activities



from individuals responsible for a Classroom Animal Plan.

The ACC may consider communicating summary information within the school community so that students observe the ongoing system of care for the animals and learn principles about animal welfare.

Writing the Classroom Animal Plan is ideally done as a class activity, giving students the opportunity to research, learn, and share their knowledge with others. Students on the ACC will have the experience of reviewing, verifying, and monitoring plans. At right is a suggested guideline for writing the Classroom Animal Plan.

## Other Recommendations

The ACC can develop and maintain a catalogue of species-specific fact sheets and a weekly care log. The ACC can also collect samples of home care instructions, permission slips to provide weekend/holiday care, and other useful documents to establish a comprehensive animal care program.

## Resources

1. The New Jersey Association for Biomedical Research (NJABR) hosts an educational site called Animals, Science and Know-how (ASK!), which offers training and resources to teachers who bring animals into the classroom to create a living, learning environment. For more information, visit <http://www.njabr.org/programs/ask>.
2. For information about the use of animals in research, visit [www.kids4research.org](http://www.kids4research.org).
3. Contact your veterinarian or a local veterinary school or veterinary technology program to get more information about a specific animal species.

# CLASSROOM ANIMAL PLAN

1. Animal Species and number (what animal do you plan to keep, and how many?)
2. Nutrition
  - a. What is the appropriate diet?
  - b. How much food is required? How often?
  - c. Are there special vitamin or mineral needs for this animal?
  - d. Is fresh or live food required?
  - e. How will the food be stored?
3. Habitat
  - a. What kind and size of container/cage is needed?
  - b. Is there room for the animal to move around without hurting itself?
  - c. What is the environment for the animal? What is the ideal temperature? What is the ideal humidity? Is there adequate light or darkness?
  - d. Where in the room will you place this animal so that it will have constant temperature and humidity?
  - e. Will any enrichment be provided for the animal, such as toys, exercise wheel, or a tunnel?
4. Care
  - a. Who will pick up the animal and handle it?
  - b. What special things do handlers need to know about the animal? (For example, towels, gowns, or gloves may be needed for holding animals that have nails or urinate and defecate frequently.)
  - c. Does the animal bite or scratch? If yes, how will you prevent the handler(s) from being bitten or scratched?
  - d. How will students be trained to care for and handle the animal? Who will provide the training?
  - e. Animals don't like changes in their environment. How will you accustom your animal to the new surroundings, food, and water? How will you acclimatize your animal to make sure it is not frightened?
  - f. What will you use to clean the cage, food, and water dispensers? How will you rinse these items to make sure the animal is not exposed to the cleaning agent?
  - g. What kind of bottle or bowl will you use for water? Who will be responsible for giving the animal clean water and how often?
  - h. Who will take care of the animal on weekends and holidays? If going to a home, how will the animal be transported? What kind of container will be used? Can the animal escape? Write a plan describing what to do if the animal escapes at home or in school. If the animal does not go home on weekends or holidays, who is responsible for the animal's care during that time? Is the room temperature appropriate to leave the animal there when school is out?
  - i. If the animal needs veterinary care, which veterinarian will you use? Where will emergency contact information be posted?
  - j. If the animal dies, how will you dispose of the body? How will you address grief issues?