



## Kitten Tutor™: Should Our Organization Start a Kitten Nursery?

As we race our way through “kitten season,” some of us may be wondering whether a kitten nursery would be right for their organization. We read nearly every week about a new nursery opening its doors, and it does seem like an amazing way to save more lives.

As many of you know, The National Kitten Coalition visited five state-of-the-art kitten nurseries located around the country that are reflective of a variety of unique local conditions. From in-depth interviews with each, coupled with our own knowledge of how best to care for at-risk kittens, we compiled and released a manual, [Launching and Operating a Successful Kitten Nursery](#). We thought it would be useful to review an abbreviated version of our four “big picture” recommendations to guide your thinking. For lots of detail, please download the full manual from our website - for free!

- 1. Do not start a nursery without a well-functioning kitten foster program in place** – and, ideally, one with fosters who can care for unweaned kittens (“bottle babies”) and certain sick kittens. If at all possible, a nursery should be a brief (one to ten day) stopover for kittens headed to foster care, not a space for kittens to spend their entire developmental time in until they are ready to be spayed/neutered and put up for adoption. Keeping all kittens that come to the nursery *in* the nursery can quickly overrun most small facilities’ resources. So, a kitten foster program is an important and essential pre-condition for organizations that will be unable to afford caring for all kittens for an extended period of time (typically up to eight weeks of age).
- 2. Be flexible.** Expect to change many of your approaches every year. Nurseries are fluid operations. You need to embrace what works and reject what does not. Reevaluate your procedures and policies at least once a year at the end of each kitten season, or even periodically throughout the year. More often than not, some things that worked one year may not work the next, and you need to be prepared to adjust your facility, staff, protocols and budgets accordingly.
- 3. Set the nursery’s capacity based on the number of fosters, volunteers and staff that you have available to care for kittens, not the size of your facility.** Then, appoint a “gatekeeper” who can manage kitten intake numbers and is able to say “no more” even though she/he knows it means the turned-away kittens could die. It is easy to get overwhelmed by taking in too many kittens, which could lead to disease outbreaks that could threaten the lives of many kittens in the nursery. Everyone needs to know capacity limits and the chain of command so that no one picks up kittens before knowing whether there is space for them in the nursery or in foster care.
- 4. Identify your “village.”** You will succeed only if you partner with a range of organizations and individuals who are also intent on saving kitten lives. No one organization will have sufficient staff or money to do it all themselves. You will need to partner with animal control, volunteers, fosters, donors, grant-giving organizations, local veterinary practices, community groups – and many more.

Kitten nurseries are, in fact, lifesavers, and the kittens in your community could benefit from such a place, but only if you have adequate resources, established protocols and enough staff and volunteers available, ready and willing to jump in. Visit our website to [download](#) our 100+ page “how to” kitten nursery manual for free, and thanks for saving kittens' lives!