



# Volunteer Handbook

Revised August 2024

## New Mexico House Rabbit Society

New Mexico House Rabbit Society (NMHRS) is a statewide non-profit organization (registered 501c3) made up entirely of volunteers dedicated to rescuing domestic rabbits in need.

### Philosophy

- New Mexico House Rabbit Society believes that ALL rabbits are valuable as individuals, regardless of breed purity, temperament, state of health, or relationship to humans. The welfare of all rabbits is our primary consideration. We do not, and cannot, align ourselves with rabbit breeders, rabbit exhibitors, or other individuals or groups who promote the interests of particular breeds of rabbits over others, or who exploit rabbits for profit. This includes individuals who keep rabbits exclusively for spinning, those who show rabbits, those who use or promote rabbits as lab animals, and those who breed rabbits.
- Except for unique situations in which wild animals are being nursed or rehabilitated, it is in the best interest of wild rabbits that human intervention be held to a minimum.
- Domestic rabbits are not the product of natural selection, but rather of human interference by means of breeding programs, and the product is a human-dependent animal who needs protection. It is therefore a human responsibility that these animals be cared for in a manner appropriate to their needs.
- It serves the best interest of domestic rabbits to be neutered or spayed, to live in human housing where supervision and protection are provided, and to be treated for illnesses by veterinarians. ALL companion rabbits and foster rabbits, unless there is a medical situation that precludes safe surgery, must be spayed or neutered. We cannot allow unneutered or unspayed adult rabbits to be adopted out. To do so, even for financial reasons, goes against this basic philosophical point. Additionally, our rabbits must be kept in human housing. Human housing is defined as either living in our home with us, or in housing which is temperature controlled and has a human-sized door and which is easily accessible to the human home. NMHRS representatives, are expected to take an active stance in encouraging others to spay and neuter their rabbits, and to house them indoors. This also means that we need to actively discourage the breeding of rabbits, and the keeping of rabbits in hutches, or outdoors in the yard.
- Domestic rabbits are companion animals and should be afforded at least the same individual rights, level of care, and opportunity for longevity as is commonly afforded to dogs and cats who live as human companions. When we speak of rights for rabbits, we're discussing the right to be provided with a safe living arrangement, nourishing

food, a loving environment, and the ability to exercise and play. We're also referring, however, to a more fundamental right: the right to exist as rabbits without having to fulfill some other human-stated purpose. When we expect rabbits to provide education for children, to sit on our laps while we watch TV, or to be perfectly well-behaved, non-destructive creatures, we do not allow them this right. When we portray rabbits as always cute and cuddly, or when we demand that they look or behave in ways that are not appropriate to them as a species and as individuals, then we deny them this right.

- Rabbits are intelligent, social animals who require mental stimulation, toys, exercise, environmental activity, and social interaction (from, as appropriate, people, other rabbits or other animals).

#### Chapter Manager and the Board of Directors

The NMHRS Chapter Manager is appointed by national HRS. The role of the Chapter Manager is to manage the chapter, including all operations and anything related to a rabbit. Volunteers may not do anything in the name of NMHRS without the Chapter Manager's approval.

The board is elected every January by the current board, but throughout the year the president may appoint people to fill empty positions. The board is less involved in the day-to-day decisions of the group but plays a large role in maintaining our mission.

Here are some examples of what each role oversees:

#### Chapter Manager

- Vet care
- Events
- Volunteers
- Digital, social, and print media
- Chapter communications
- Foster rabbits

#### Board

- Major financial decisions
- Staying within the mission
- Legal matters
- Reviewing chapter performance

### **The Google Group E-mail**

Once you have become a volunteer you will be added to the volunteer email group which is used to send out communications from the Chapter Manager, such as event announcements and foster requests. If you have not received any emails within two weeks of becoming a volunteer, please contact the Chapter Manager.

### **Shelter Support**

NMHRS volunteers must follow the rules and protocols of any shelter they are volunteering at. It is important to remember that while NMHRS has partnerships with local shelters, they remain separate entities. Volunteers should not use their NMHRS volunteer status to host events, perform actions, or create materials for a shelter without the consent of the Chapter Manager. We try to provide the Albuquerque and Santa Fe shelter with the following help:

- Volunteers to clean cages and care for and socialize the rabbits
- Foster homes

- Medical care for rabbits who can no longer be helped by the shelter
- Promotion of shelter rabbits
- Information packets for adopters
- Cages and other supplies
- Training to staff

## **Fostering**

Fostering is an area of volunteering that we are always in need of. NMHRS urges all volunteers to consider fostering.

All foster rabbits must be approved by the NMHRS Chapter Manager prior to being taken in. Any bunnies taken in by a volunteer without proper approval become the sole responsibility of said volunteer. Fosterers are required to attend a Bunny 101 class and to abide by the requirements outlined in the foster agreement/contract (separate document given to all foster parents).

Fostering requires time, dedication, and commitment. Foster homes must be committed to caring for their rabbits until a suitable adoptive home is found or for the duration of the rabbit's life. In some cases when fostering for a shelter, the fosterer will have the option to return the rabbit to the shelter once the foster is considered adoptable. The foster home is expected to pay for food and general supplies and whatever special items they choose for their home. It is also expected that the fosterer has basic rabbit medical supplies.

The fosterer is NOT expected to pay for the foster's spay/neuter surgery. Other vet bills will be paid for by NMHRS ONLY if the Chapter Manager has previously approved the treatment, which includes the practice at which the treatment was performed. The Chapter Manager has the right to refuse to pay for or reimburse a fosterer for any vet bills that were not approved.

All foster homes are responsible for providing the Chapter Manager with photographs and bios of their adoptable rabbits within a week of the foster becoming eligible for adoption. Foster parents must also bring their available fosters to adopter meet and greets and adoption events when requested.

We understand that fosterers often form a connection with their foster rabbit and don't want to give them up. We encourage you to remember that when you adopt out your foster to a great home, you are then able to help another rabbit who needs a foster home. As this cycle continues, you have now helped multiple rabbits instead of just one.

## **Courtesy Listings**

In the event that someone wants to rehome their pet rabbit without surrendering them to a shelter, NMHRS offers a courtesy listing. The rabbit MUST be spayed/neutered to be eligible, and proof of spay/neuter must be submitted to the Chapter Manager. After the Chapter Manager approves, the rabbit is promoted on NMHRS's PetFinder page. The rabbit is also allowed to attend NMHRS adoption events if they can provide an RHDV2 vaccination certificate or invoice from their veterinarian.

## **Intake Policies**

Our policy is to rescue rabbits only from shelters and not from the general public. We take in rabbits as we have space in open foster homes.

## **Adoption Events**

NMHRS periodically hosts adoption events on Saturdays from 11:00am-2:00pm (location varies, though they are often at the Albuquerque Eastside Shelter). Volunteers are asked to arrive at 10:30am to help set up and to plan to stay until 2:30pm to help pack up. We offer free bunny nail trims for vaccinated rabbits at each event and always need volunteers to help trim nails. We can train you on how to trim nails if you are interested. Volunteers are also needed to answer questions from the public, supervise speed dates, and assist with caring for the rabbits in attendance.

Fosterers who want to bring their foster rabbit to an adoption event must inform the event organizer to ensure that there are enough supplies brought for the foster. NMHRS fosters (fosters who belong directly to NMHRS and not to a shelter) get priority space at every adoption event.

Volunteers are welcome to organize adoption events, but the event must be approved by the Chapter Manager. Volunteers may not use their status as an NMHRS volunteer to promote non-NMHRS events.

## **Other Events**

NMHRS often hosts or attends other events throughout the year that require volunteers. See below for a non-exhaustive list. This is a volunteer-run organization so if you think we should have a certain event, plan it! Make sure to communicate with the Chapter Manager. See next section for guidance.

Garage Sale - Typically our largest fundraiser for the year, the annual garage sale requires a volunteer to host the sale and then lots of volunteers to help out at the sale. Everything we sell is donated, so as you tidy up around your house throughout the year, consider setting items aside for our garage sale.

Humane Society Camps - The humane society in Albuquerque hosts children's day camps in the summer and the winter where we are invited to speak. Volunteers spend about an hour talking with the children about responsible rabbit care and rabbit facts. Volunteers also bring rabbits with them (either fosters or personal) for the children to sit in an x-pen with and pet.

Paint Night Fundraisers - While these don't typically require volunteers at the event, we welcome any ideas for a location to host a fundraiser where attendees paint a canvas in an instructor-led class.

## **Planning an NMHRS Event as a Volunteer**

All volunteers are encouraged to take initiative and plan an event. We want volunteers to truly own their event from beginning to end. Here is what is expected (not everything may apply to your event):

- Get the event approved by the Chapter Manager
- You are the main point of contact and will coordinate with other volunteers and any applicable parties (such as the shelter for an adoption event or a vendor for a fundraiser)
- You are responsible for ensuring that all necessary event supplies are at the event (this usually just includes the event kit that is in our storage unit but can also include special supplies that the Chapter Manager will purchase)
- You should be the first person there and the last to leave

## **RHDV2 Vaccine Clinic**

NMHRS was the first rabbit rescue in the country to host a vaccine clinic for rabbits, and we continue to offer this important event for our community every year. The vaccine clinic is always two Saturdays, 3 weeks apart between late April and mid May. Volunteers play a crucial role at the clinic and are always needed.

## **Logo and Media**

Any use of the New Mexico House Rabbit Society logo, in any of its forms, must be approved by the Chapter Manager.

All public-facing NMHRS materials must be approved by the Chapter Manager.

Any volunteers assisting with the management of an NMHRS social media channel must post appropriate content and communicate with followers professionally. Volunteers may not promote events, products, services, etc. that are not sponsored by NMHRS unless approved by the Chapter Manager. When communicating with followers, volunteers must ensure they are stating facts on behalf of NMHRS and not personal opinions. If someone wants to donate to, volunteer with, or complete any other charitable act for NMHRS, the social media volunteer may not try to persuade the person to complete the act for another organization. Such messages received on the channel in addition to any messages requesting something from NMHRS should be directed to the Chapter Manager. Violation of the policies stated in this paragraph will result in the volunteer losing management privileges of the channel.

## **Trappings**

NMHRS receives reports of stray rabbits very frequently. When this happens, we go trap the rabbit(s) and bring them to the local shelter. We need volunteers to set traps and/or to collect the rabbit that was trapped and deliver it to the shelter.

Sometimes the area is very large and/or there are too many rabbits, so a roundup is called. Roundups are larger groups of volunteers who work together to trap the rabbit(s). Roundup calls are emailed to the volunteer group. No experience is needed to attend a roundup, but please be prepared for physical activity.

## **Behind-The-Scenes Volunteering**

As a 100% volunteer-run statewide organization, it takes a lot more than rabbits to keep NMHRS running. There are a lot of opportunities for volunteers to make an impact without

needing to leave their home. For example, volunteers with graphic design skills can help make event posters, or volunteers with Microsoft Office skills can help create or maintain internal documents. From web development to project management, there is an area in NMHRS where you can comfortably use your talents. Let the Chapter Manager know what you like to do so they can find the right project for you.

### **Bunny 101**

Do you have a passion for education? Volunteer to teach our Bunny 101 class to members of the public. The class is usually done online via Zoom or Google Meet and the schedule is up to you. You will be trained on the material.

### **Hopline**

To further assist the community, NMHRS has a hotline (referred to as the 'hopline') for the public to call. Volunteers are needed to listen to the messages and return calls. You will be given a guide on how to answer the most common questions. If there is ever a question you can't answer, just reach out to the Chapter Manager for assistance.

### **Website**

Our website ([www.newmexicohrs.org](http://www.newmexicohrs.org)) provides resources and information on both rabbit care and NMHRS to the public. If you have webmaster skills, contact the Chapter Manager to work on improvements to the site.

### **Bunny Sitting**

NMHRS maintains a list of bunny sitters on our website. If you would like to be added to the list, contact the Chapter Manager. Note that these are all independent parties and are in no way endorsed by NMHRS. This also means that you charge your own fee and keep 100% of it.

### **Vet List**

NMHRS maintains a list of veterinary clinics across the state that see rabbits. We try to update the list every year by having volunteers call the clinics to confirm that the information is still accurate.

### **Policies**

All volunteers must agree with and abide by the policies stated above. Any volunteer found in violation will not be permitted to volunteer in the areas of violation and/or to continue working with the rescue.

Volunteers representing NMHRS should act accordingly. Familiarize yourself with the policies in this document. If you are ever asked a question that you don't know the answer to, please direct the asker to the Chapter Manager.

**You are not considered an official New Mexico House Rabbit Society volunteer until you have signed and returned the following page.**



## Volunteer Contract

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the NMHRS volunteer packet and agree to comply with the volunteering policies and philosophy of New Mexico House Rabbit Society.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in volunteering in the following ways (select as many as you'd like):

- Volunteering at the shelter
- Trapping stray rabbits
- Graphic design
- Web design/building
- Teaching Bunny 101 classes
- Hopline
- Fostering
- Bonding
- Helping at events (adoption or other)
- Fundraising
- Project management
- Other (please specify below)

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Please sign this page and return to the Chapter Manager via email at [kirstin@newmexicohrs.org](mailto:kirstin@newmexicohrs.org).