


# Fetch The Facts

 A Step-by-Step Guide to Verifying Animal Rescues and Shelters using the 990 Form 

**Confirm if they are a physical shelter or a home-based foster/rescue.**

This will help determine how you search their business.

**(10 seconds)**

<p><b>Physical Shelter:</b> Check out the website and social media pages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address, phone, and email <b>should</b> be listed on website or social media accounts</li></ul>	<p><b>Home-based foster/rescue:</b> Check out the website and social media pages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address may or may not be listed on website or social media accounts but they should have a phone and email listed</li></ul>
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**Confirm the organization's legal name**

Using the IRS Database: <https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/> Search the rescue/shelter name, aliases, and address.

**(1 minute)**

- Search by name or EIN number.
- If the IRS database returns 0 results by searching the name, contact the organization and ask if they are listed under a different name.
- A rescue or shelter may operate publicly under a DBA ("Doing Business As") name while using a different legal name in IRS or state records. Addresses may also vary for legitimate reasons, such as using separate mailing, administrative, or facility locations. However, organizations should generally be able to clearly explain why names or addresses differ across records, websites, social media pages, and official filings.

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**Verify nonprofit status**

- Confirm whether it is a 501(c)(3), whether it is active, and whether it has filed returns.

**(10 seconds)**

Ensure You're Adopting From A Legitimate Rescue or Foster  
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## **Read the Form 990**

Review mission, revenue, expenses, salaries, board members, contractors, Schedule O, Schedule L, and Schedule R. Tax-exempt nonprofits generally must make recent Form 990 filings available for public inspection. Use the 9 questions below.

**(15-20 minutes)**

### **1. Does the spending match the mission?**

Example: The rescue claims most donations go directly to animal care, but large amounts are spent on consulting, management fees, or fundraising instead.

### **2. Are administrative costs unusually high?**

Look for large management fees, consulting payments, excessive office expenses, and heavy fundraising costs compared to direct animal care expenses.

### **3. Is revenue growing rapidly without a clear explanation?**

Example: The donations suddenly increase dramatically, but there is little explanation of expanded programs or services.

### **4. Are expenses vague or difficult to understand?**

Look for broad categories with little explanation, such as “other expenses”, “professional services”, “consulting”, or “miscellaneous”, especially if the amounts are large.

### **5. Are large payments going to outside contractors?**

Ask who is receiving the money, what services are being provided, and whether the businesses are connected to insiders.

### **6. Are salaries or compensation unusually high?**

This will vary, but generally, salaries are based on organization size, number of animals served, and the stated mission.

### **7. Does the organization report large fundraising revenue but little program activity?**

Example: High donation income but limited evidence of animal care operations.

### **8. Do numbers change dramatically from year to year?**


Sudden increases or decreases in revenue, contractor payments, salaries, grants or fundraising expenses may deserve explanation.

### **9. Are related organizations receiving money?**

Check whether money moves between connected nonprofits or businesses.

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**Compare public claims to official records**

Check whether the website, social media, adoption listings, and fundraising language match what appears in the 990.

**(5 minutes)**

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**Check state registration and licensing**

Look for state charity registration, kennel/shelter licenses, inspection records, or enforcement actions. Pennsylvania shelters and/or rescues can be searched here:

<https://www.pda.pa.gov/PADogLawPublicKennelInspectionSearch/KennelInspections/Index/SearchForm> or Search PA Department of Agriculture Kennel Inspections Search

**(5 minutes)**

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**Evaluate animal sourcing and outcomes**

Ask where animals come from, whether they use auctions, breeders, brokers, imports, transports, or owner surrenders, and whether they publish intake/adoption/return/euthanasia data.

**(5 minutes)**

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**Look at transparency**

A reputable organization should be able to clearly explain its finances, leadership, animal care practices, sourcing, veterinary policies, adoption process, and legal status.

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### Dig Deeper (optional)

**Research leadership and related businesses:** Search directors, officers, founders, addresses, LLCs, breeders, transporters, pet stores, and related nonprofits.

**Review complaints and legal history:** Search court records, attorney general actions, consumer complaints, news articles, animal control reports, and local government records.

**Find the local Facebook Groups:** If you are unfamiliar with the rescue, go to the local Facebook groups and post your questions. Local people will have the best insight on a rescue's legitimacy.

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