



## **Certification and Recertification Handbook**

November 2024

## Table of Contents

An Introduction to the GFAS Accreditation and Verification Program.....	3
Benefits of Accreditation and Verification.....	3
GFAS Accreditation and Verification Program.....	4
• Who Can Apply.....	4
• Accreditation vs. Verification: What is the difference?.....	5
• Certification Period.....	5
• Application Fees.....	5
• GFAS Standards.....	6
• GFAS Accreditation Committee.....	6
How to Become a GFAS Accredited or Verified Facility.....	7
• Eligibility Guidelines.....	7
• Step 1: Organization Overview Form.....	8
• Step 2: Census of Animals; Animal Care and Operations Applications; Required Documents.....	8
• Step 3: Site Visit.....	9
• Step 4: Review Period and Goal Setting.....	9
• Step 5: Accreditation/Verification.....	10
Appeal Process.....	10
How to Maintain GFAS Accredited or Verified Status for the Three-Year Certification Period..	11
• GFAS Policy on Organizational Updates and Reporting Incidents and Accidents.....	11
• Annual Fees.....	12
• Annual Update Form Submission.....	12
• GFAS Policy on Suspension or Revocation of Accredited or Verified Status.....	12
• Reinstatement of Accredited or Verified Status.....	13
How to Renew GFAS Accredited or Verified Status.....	14
• Re-Verification.....	14
• Re-Accreditation.....	15
• Sanctuary Relocation.....	15
Disclosure and Confidentiality.....	16
Records Retention.....	17
Statement of Non-Discrimination.....	17
Links and Resources.....	17

# **Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries Accreditation and Verification Program - Introduction**

The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) has a mission to accredit and recognize sanctuaries and rescue centers, support them to achieve the highest Standards of Excellence, promote collaboration, and raise awareness of their work.

The primary activity of GFAS is to promote excellence through an internationally recognized accreditation program for animal sanctuary, rescue, rehabilitation and transition center facilities.

Many entities throughout the world describe themselves as a “sanctuary” or “rescue,” but the quality of animal care and sustainability of the organization can vary widely among them. GFAS believes that differentiating the work of true sanctuaries through enhanced public awareness and recognition is essential in directing support where it will be used most effectively. Our accreditation standards evaluate an organization’s humane animal care and organizational operations, allowing sanctuaries a simple, meaningful way to communicate that they are officially recognized as committed, capable, and worthy of support.

For anyone invested in the welfare of animals, including donors, grantmakers, supporters and legislators, there is a need to differentiate the best sanctuaries and rescue operations to determine which sanctuaries warrant robust financial support and other assistance, which sanctuaries are models for others to follow, and which sanctuaries can be turned to in a time of crisis. GFAS fulfills this need to differentiate outstanding organizations within the animal welfare industry and for the public more broadly, certifying that a facility meets Standards of Excellence and recognizing those facilities as “true sanctuaries”.

GFAS also works to raise awareness of the root causes and reasons why animals are brought into captivity, the need and purpose of sanctuaries, and the meaning of true sanctuary. True sanctuaries do not exploit animals for tourism, entertainment, research, or other purposes. We believe that sanctuaries themselves are vital to these advocacy efforts, and that promoting the sustainability of sanctuaries is integral to protecting the animals who depend on the success of these organizations.

## **Benefits of Accreditation and Verification**

Accreditation and Verification with GFAS is a voluntary process that recognizes “true sanctuaries” which have met established standards.

The benefits of Verification and Accreditation are significant. Not only can it give your organization the comfort and confidence that you are giving animals the best in care, but it will also provide clear, objective, measurable outcomes by which your facility can assess its performance, make improvements, and reach out to GFAS for assistance with challenges. Verification and Accreditation also allows sanctuaries, rescues, rehabilitation and transition

centers a simple, meaningful way to communicate that they are officially recognized as committed, capable, and worthy of support. This applies to how they are perceived by donors, law enforcement and lawmakers, grantmakers, and the general public. GFAS Verified and Accredited facilities also have access to exclusive member benefits.

#### Benefits Include:

- Exclusive use of GFAS Accredited or Verified Sanctuary logo
- Increased brand equity by being recognized as the best of the best
- Provision of an assessment for sanctuaries and their personnel to utilize, containing clear, objective, measurable outcomes by which they can assess their performance, make improvements and reach out to GFAS for help with challenges
- Inclusion in the searchable GFAS Find a Sanctuary Database to enable donors, supporters and the community to provide support
- Access to funding opportunities from Grantmakers who require or prefer sanctuaries who are GFAS certified
- A log-in to the Sanctuary Resources Portal on the GFAS website to access important information, opportunities, and links.
- Monthly GFAS e-newsletters and sanctuary features on GFAS social media
- Free job and volunteer ads on the GFAS website
- Invites to monthly Roundtable webinars to exchange expertise and connect with other GFAS certified sanctuaries and rescues
- Direct access to pro bono legal services for your sanctuary-related needs through an exclusive GFAS collaboration with Animal Defense Partnership
- Exclusive health insurance and related coverage options for you, your family, and your personnel through a GFAS partnership with the LIG Association Health Program
- Eligibility for annual GFAS Carole Noon and Outstanding Sanctuary Awards
- Enhanced opportunities from GFAS partners, such as discounts on educational offerings

## **GFAS Accreditation and Verification Program**

### **Who Can Apply**

The GFAS Accreditation and Verification program is used to evaluate organizations of varying missions worldwide that care for wildlife, equine and farmed animals – all animal species except domestic cats and dogs (both socialized and feral). This includes:

*Sanctuaries*

Sanctuaries provide lifetime care for animals that have been abused, injured, abandoned, or are otherwise in need. These animals often come from private owners, research laboratories, government authorities, the entertainment industry, and zoos.

#### *Rescue and Transition Centers*

Rescue and transition centers temporarily care for animals with the goal of placing them in permanent ownership/foster care with approved members of the public, or with accredited or verified sanctuaries. Rescue and Transition Center animals often include domestic equines, farmed animals, birds, and reptiles.

#### *Rehabilitation Centers*

Rehabilitation centers temporarily care for wildlife so that they can be returned back to their native environments. This includes facilities that provide transitional support as part of a reintroduction protocol, which serves as an important conservation tool.

### **Accreditation vs. Verification: What is the difference?**

Both Verified and Accredited facilities must meet eligibility criteria and standards demonstrating excellence in animal care and safety. Accreditation involves an additional rigorous screening of compliance with GFAS standards regarding governance, finance, and other sustainability issues.

A facility does not have to become Verified first, then Accredited, although some facilities choose that route.

### **Certification Period**

Each Accreditation or Verification is in effect for a period of three years.

### **Application Fees**

Once a facility has had communication with GFAS and it is determined that it is eligible and appropriate to go forward with an application, a modest, one-time, non-refundable application fee is required. This application fee applies to any organization applying for Accreditation or Verification. Application fees for new applicants are based on a sliding scale of an organization's total annual expenses for the last applicable fiscal year. Payment will be required for consideration of application materials. Application fees are valid for a period of one year from the date of payment; facilities should be prepared to submit a complete application package to GFAS within one year, to avoid potentially forfeiting the application fee.

Application fees help offset some of the costs of the certification process, including a portion of site visits, as well as other expenses related to program services for Accredited and Verified facilities (which may include workshops, webinars, GFAS staffing, and other support).

All amounts below are shown in U.S. Dollars.

Up to \$100,000	\$200
\$100,000 - \$250,000	\$300
\$250,000 - \$500,000	\$400
\$500,000 - \$1,000,000	\$600
\$1,000,000 - \$2,000,000	\$1,000
Over \$2,000,000	\$1,200

## **GFAS Standards**

The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) has developed and maintained a set of animal-specific and operations standards that we use to promote excellence in animal care and evaluate organizations' operations. The GFAS Standards were initially developed and reviewed with the input of non-profit professionals, sanctuary managers, animal protection advocates, and veterinarians utilizing existing standards from outstanding sanctuaries as a starting framework and refined/expanded upon based on knowledge and expertise of contributors. GFAS continues to embody the power of collaboration, as we work together with like-minded partner organizations to improve animal care, facility safety and sustainability, and seek feedback on our standards.

The GFAS Standards are considered living documents, as practices continue to progress and change through advancements in knowledge. Comments, feedback, and proposed changes received are directed to the GFAS Accreditation Committee and reviewed during a formalized, annual and regular process for revisions to GFAS Animal Care and Operations Standards.

The purpose of these standards is to assist facility directors and personnel, other animal welfare agencies and professionals, and the public regarding best practices and appropriate criteria for the effective and efficient operations of an animal sanctuary, rescue, rehabilitation or transition center. These standards are voluntary, but provide the basis for GFAS Accreditation and Verification.

Standards for all species as well as General Animal Care and Operations Standards can be found on the GFAS website, at <https://www.sanctuaryfederation.org/accreditation/standards/>

## **GFAS Accreditation Committee**

The GFAS Accreditation Committee is the Federation's governing body for the certification

program. As such, it is empowered by the GFAS Board of Directors to develop, revise and interpret standards and procedures. It also holds the authority to grant or deny certification to facilities, based upon their compliance with applicable standards.

The Committee consists of voluntary members, including GFAS Board members, senior staff, and other outside experts with experience in animal care, safety, and sanctuary sustainability. Particular care is taken to ensure that Committee composition is representative of the diversity of GFAS. The Committee meets monthly, from January-December of each year.

## **How to Become a GFAS Accredited or Verified Facility**

### **Eligibility Guidelines**

In addition to adherence with GFAS Standards of Operations and Animal Care, basic eligibility for GFAS Accreditation and Verification includes:

- New applicant organizations must have non-profit /non-commercial status
- Sanctuaries must endorse a policy of 'no captive breeding' (with a potential exception for only those organizations having a bona fide release/reintroduction program to return wildlife to their native habitat)
- No commercial trade in animals or animal parts
- No tours allowed that are not guided and conducted in a careful manner that minimizes the impact on the animals and their environment, does not cause them stress, and gives them the ability to seek undisturbed privacy and quiet
- Animals are not exhibited or taken from the sanctuary or enclosures/habitats for non-medical reasons, with some exceptions for certain animal species, such as horses, under approved circumstances
- The public does not have direct contact with wildlife (with some limited exceptions as outlined in the Standards for some birds and small reptiles)

### **The GFAS Accreditation and Verification process has five (5) steps:**

Facilities are highly encouraged to thoroughly review the GFAS Operations and Animal Care Standards. Familiarity with the scope and complexity of the standards will enable the facility to make an informed and reasoned decision about beginning the Accreditation or Verification process.

GFAS Standards: <https://www.sanctuaryfederation.org/accreditation/standards/>

### Step 1: Organization Overview Form and Application Fee

Facilities interested in the GFAS Accreditation or Verification program can initiate the process by registering on the GFAS online application portal and completing the Organization Overview Form. This form collects basic contact and organizational information, takes just 10-15 minutes to complete, and can be accessed through a link on the GFAS website. Facilities are also welcome to make an e-mail or telephone inquiry to GFAS for more information.

Application Portal: <https://gfas.smapply.io/>

GFAS staff review the Organization Overview Forms and may contact facilities with follow-up questions before advancing the application process. Eligible candidates will be directed through the online application portal to remit an application fee.

### Step 2: Census of Animals; Animal Care and Operations Applications; Required Documents

During step two, GFAS gathers more information, including:

#### *Animal Census Form*

A detailed listing of all animals which a facility is currently caring for, with supplemental information regarding each animal such as animal identification, species/breed, gender, estimated year of birth, sanctuary intake date, source/origin of intake, and each animal's current status.

#### *Operations and Species-Specific Application Package*

Facilities complete an Application Package consisting of narrative and checkbox questions regarding their operational and animal care practices. Applications collect valuable information on practices surrounding housing, enclosure and fencing, diet, veterinary care, and well-being and handling of resident animals. In addition, applications allow facilities to document operational practices such as staffing and governance, safety training and protocols, financial practices, education and outreach, adoptions and foster care placements (if applicable), and rehabilitation and release (if applicable).

#### *Required Documents*

Facilities upload a variety of supportive documents, written policies, and written standard operating procedures which support animal care, safety, operations, and governance, as further proof of compliance with applicable GFAS Standards. Oftentimes, facilities may have to establish, prepare or modify written policies and procedures to meet GFAS Standards' requirements. As facilities work on this step of the application process, GFAS staff will gladly



make available samples and templates of many of these documents, upon request. Please note, the required documents differ for Verification and Accreditation.

Required Documents: [Application Documents - Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries](#)

### Step 3: Site Visit

After facilities submit all items in steps one and two, GFAS staff will review all materials and reach out to arrange an in-person site visit.

Site visits are primarily conducted by GFAS staff, but occasionally volunteers who are experienced animal welfare professionals in related fields work on behalf of GFAS and the GFAS accreditation program to assist with visits. All site visitors are required to sign confidentiality agreements and keep all information concerning the visit confidential. The visitors will sign waivers/releases as might be required by the facility to be visited.

The site visit will generally consist of a tour of all physical facilities, interviews with facility personnel, and a review of any application materials which may require further clarification. It is helpful if a dedicated workspace can be made available to the site visitor, while they are on site, for a review of records and reports. Site visits typically take one day to conduct, although this can vary, depending on the size and scope of each organization. After the visit, the site visitor will prepare a written report and submit it, along with photographs taken during the visit, to the GFAS Accreditation Committee.

#### *Site Visitor Expenses*

Although application and annual fees help offset some of the costs of the certification process, including a portion of site visits, at this time, additional travel expenses are incurred by GFAS. GFAS is greatly appreciative to our supporters, whose contributions subsidize the Accreditation/Verification program, helping to keep the costs down for the sanctuaries, rescues, rehabilitation, and transition centers we serve.

### Step 4: Review Period and Goal Setting

After the full application process has been completed, GFAS staff will review all materials and may be in contact with additional requests and follow up questions. A summary of the application package will be presented internally to the GFAS Accreditation Committee.

If the Accreditation Committee is satisfied that the facility has met all compliance criteria, the Accreditation Committee will recommend the facility be Accredited or Verified. Often, the Accreditation Committee identifies compliance requirements and recommendations which need to be completed prior to Accreditation or Verification. These requirements and recommendations are meant to bring the facility in alignment with GFAS Standards and may include, but are not limited to, areas of concern or challenges noted during the site visit or items

that will strengthen the organization in general. GFAS staff will notify facilities of any such items and assist personnel through the completion of requirements and recommendations. Unless the Accreditation Committee has recommended an alternate, specific timeline, facilities have one year to complete compliance requirements, from the time of review by Committee.

#### Step 5: Accreditation/Verification

If the Accreditation Committee grants the facility Accredited or Verified status, the organization will be notified via letter; a Certificate of Accreditation or Verification will also be mailed.

GFAS staff works with facilities to create a press release announcing the approval of status, as well as a listing for the organization on the GFAS website. Facilities will then have access to the benefits of GFAS Accredited/Verified status. Congratulations!

## **Appeal Process**

### *New Applicants*

Applicants who have been deemed ineligible to apply for GFAS Accreditation or Verification may file an appeal with GFAS. The applicant must submit a written response to the GFAS Executive Director via the GFAS office, along with any applicable supporting documentation. The appeal will be reviewed and notification of a final decision shall be delivered, in writing, within 30 days.

### *New and Renewing Applicants*

Should an organization meet basic eligibility guidelines for Accreditation or Verification, proceed through the application process, yet disagree with any of the compliance requirements or recommendations identified by the GFAS Accreditation Committee, the facility should first discuss this with their GFAS staff Program Director. If the matter can be resolved at that time to the satisfaction of the facility and the Program Director, the compliance item(s) may be clarified, modified, or considered closed.

If the matter cannot be resolved at that time, the facility should submit a written appeal within 60 days of receipt of the compliance requirements/recommendations, to the GFAS Board of Directors via e-mail to the GFAS office. The written appeal should list the compliance requirement or recommendation in question with a detailed explanation including:

- Why the item is being questioned
- How the facility is either:
  - meeting the Standard;
  - implementing or proposing an alternative with similar benefit/outcome; OR
  - believes the Standard is not applicable and/or appropriate to its situation.

Facilities should also be sure to include any relevant documentation as an accompaniment to the written appeal. The GFAS Board of Directors will thoroughly review the facility's appeal; any

GFAS Board members who also serve on the GFAS Accreditation Committee will be excluded from the review. The GFAS Board of Directors will make a decision as to whether the item(s) may be modified, considered closed, or removed from the list of compliance requirements and recommendations or must remain, to be addressed by the facility prior to being granted Accreditation/Verification or renewal of status. The GFAS Board of Directors shall deliver notification of this final decision, in writing, within 30 days of receiving a written appeal.

## **How to Maintain GFAS Accredited or Verified Status**

Once Accredited or Verified, a facility is expected to continuously advance its professional operation and constantly maintain, or surpass, all professional standards. All GFAS Accredited and Verified facilities must also follow all local, state/provincial, and federal laws and/or regulations. In recognition of the responsibility inherent in the delivery of services provided by animal sanctuaries, rescues, rehabilitation and transition centers, GFAS asks all Accredited and Verified facilities to subscribe to, and acknowledge, the following policies:

### **GFAS Policy on Organizational Updates and Reporting Incidents and Accidents**

Although GFAS certification status is for three years, it is important for facilities to submit any major organizational changes throughout this period to the GFAS office and/or their GFAS staff Program Director. Please note that the reporting of an update or an occurrence such as an incident or accident to GFAS by a facility does not take the place of reporting such to appropriate and required legal and/or governmental authorities. GFAS is to be notified in the event of any of the following:

- There are updates to the organizational contact information (e.g. email, mailing address, phone number).
- There is a change in the position of the CEO/Executive Director or Sanctuary Director (vacancies or new hire).
- The facility has made a determination to move to a different location.
- Significant facility damage that impacts facility functions (e.g. fire, natural disaster) has occurred.
- The organization has been named in a lawsuit or other proceeding by one of its current or former staff, volunteers, interns, Board members or by the general public regarding a matter related to GFAS standards.
- A staff member, volunteer, or other person on facility grounds has suffered death or serious injury as a result of accident, animal escape, or other animal-inflicted injury.
- Animal escapes from sanctuary property and is not able to be recaptured.
- There has been a serious disease outbreak among the sanctuary animals, which has resulted in animal deaths.

- The facility has been cited by a national, state/province, or local authority for non-compliance with legal or regulatory requirements (for example, has been issued violations for noncompliance by the USDA in the United States).
- The facility's license to operate (including any state/province or local licenses, and a USDA exhibitor license in the United States) has been revoked, or an attempt to renew such a license has been denied.
- Nonprofit status has been revoked.
- Some other event or circumstance makes the facility noncompliant with GFAS standards.

## **Annual Fees**

GFAS requires an annual fee for all Accredited and Verified facilities based on a sliding scale of an organization's total annual expenses for the last applicable fiscal year. Annual fees help offset some of the costs of the certification process, including a portion of site visits, as well as other expenses related to program services for Accredited and Verified facilities (which may include webinars, GFAS staffing, and other support).

Annual fees are due by June 30th, of each year. Fee invoices are distributed to Accredited and Verified facilities on May 1. Please note there is no annual fee for the first year of Accreditation or Verification; this is to avoid a facility remitting both an application and an annual fee in the same calendar year.

All amounts below are shown in U.S. Dollars.

Up to \$100,000	\$200
\$100,000 - \$250,000	\$300
\$250,000 - \$500,000	\$400
\$500,000 - \$1,000,000	\$600
\$1,000,000 - \$2,000,000	\$1,000
Over \$2,000,000	\$1,200

## **Annual Update Form Submission**

GFAS requires that each Accredited or Verified facility complete a yearly update form. This is an online form, a link to which is distributed to facilities in May of each year, alongside the annual fee invoice. The annual update form ensures that GFAS has current contact information for each facility, and that GFAS is apprised of any updates. The form also gives another opportunity for facilities to check in with GFAS to share updates and victories, offer ideas and feedback, and seek assistance with challenges.

## **GFAS Policy on Suspension or Revocation of Accredited or Verified Status**

In certain circumstances, Accredited or Verified status may be suspended or revoked by GFAS, if GFAS concludes that its standards are not being consistently met and maintained. Decisions to suspend or revoke GFAS Accreditation or Verification will be made by a vote of the full GFAS Board of Directors upon recommendation by the GFAS Accreditation Committee, and may occur in circumstances including, but not limited to, the following:

- GFAS has received a complaint about the organization and the organization either fails to respond to notice from GFAS about the complaint or to cooperate in GFAS' investigation of the complaint.
- Allegations in a complaint are sufficiently serious (such as animal abuse or unethical conduct by the Executive Director), even if the organization has cooperated with GFAS after receiving notice of the complaint and has put a plan in place to remedy the areas of noncompliance.
- GFAS has learned that the organization has been cited by a national, state/province or local authority for noncompliance with legal or regulatory requirements.
- GFAS has learned that the facility has lost a necessary operating license or has lost nonprofit status.
- A facility has been without the services of a permanent CEO/Executive Director for longer than six (6) months.
- A facility is without the services of, or lacks access to, an attending licensed veterinarian and/or veterinary support personnel with suitable training and experience for the animals housed at the sanctuary.
- A facility is without the services of a sufficient number of qualified and trained personnel to provide humane care and ensure human and animal safety, at a level commensurate with GFAS Standards.
- Significant facility damage that impacts facility functions (e.g., fire, natural disaster).

When GFAS makes a determination to suspend or revoke a sanctuary's Accredited or Verified status, it will notify the organization in writing and will request that the organization remove all reference to GFAS Accreditation or Verification, including the GFAS logo, from its website and written materials (including materials used for fundraising). GFAS will remove the sanctuary's listing from the GFAS website.

## **Reinstatement of Accredited or Verified Status**

If a sanctuary's GFAS status has been suspended, GFAS will reinstate its status upon receiving evidence from the sanctuary that it has made substantial progress under the compliance plan that has been approved by the GFAS Accreditation Committee. Sanctuaries generally have a maximum of one (1) year to complete any such compliance actions. Upon reinstatement, GFAS

will return the sanctuary's name to the listing of Accredited and Verified organizations listed on its website, and will notify the sanctuary that it may again identify itself as GFAS Accredited or Verified and use the appropriate GFAS logo.

If a sanctuary's GFAS status has been revoked, the sanctuary may re-apply for GFAS Accreditation or Verification after one (1) year has passed from the date of revocation. During that time, GFAS may offer to provide resources and logistical advice to the facility to assist it in taking the necessary steps to cure its areas of noncompliance.

## **How to Renew GFAS Accredited or Verified Status**

GFAS Accreditation and Verification are in place for a period of three years, and expire at the end of that period. Accredited and Verified facilities must complete a renewal assessment within one year of the end of that period, to avoid a lapse in GFAS status. A facility will be issued a new three-year certification upon completion of a renewal assessment. Through the renewal process, GFAS confirms that the facility is continuing to meet GFAS Standards. Facilities undergoing renewal assessment are subject to any new or higher Standards, policies, or guidelines adopted by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries. Even though a facility may have been Accredited or Verified previously, there is no guarantee that certification will be granted during subsequent assessments. GFAS Standards are subject to continuous review and enhancement.

GFAS tracks expiration dates for Accredited and Verified sanctuaries. All Accredited and Verified facilities will be notified of upcoming renewal three months in advance of the due date to begin submission of renewal materials.

GFAS will request submission of documents, to include:

### **Re-Verification**

- An updated Organization Overview Form
- An updated Animal Census Form
- List of current Board of Directors/Trustees
- Confirmation of current General Liability Insurance coverage (unless not available in country)
- Updated property lease agreement, if applicable
- Updated MOU with government authorities, as applicable
- Budget for the current year
- Most recent documents filed to maintain non-profit status, if applicable (e.g., IRS Form 990 and state charity registration in the United States)
- Permits for the current year, as applicable
- Confirmation of a financial reserve/explanation of status of reserve

- Any updated animal care Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's)
- Any updated safety protocols (e.g., disaster, escape, human first aid)

## **Re-Accreditation**

Sanctuaries applying for Re-Accreditation must submit all documents as required for Re-Verification, PLUS:

- Confirmation of current of Directors and Officers insurance coverage (unless not available in country)
- Copy of any changes to by-laws
- Most recent financial statements (statement of activities and statement of financial position)
- Updated strategic plan
- Updated long-term financial plan

GFAS also asks sanctuaries to advise us of any other significant changes over the last three years (e.g., change in veterinary staff, addition of new enclosure, addition of new visitor program, significant increase/decrease in animal population), as well as progress made on any goals or recommendations that were documented and presented at the time of a sanctuary's original Accreditation or Verification, or the most recent renewal assessment. GFAS may request further documents and updates, as needed.

After facilities submit all items, GFAS staff will review all materials and reach out to arrange an in-person site visit. Following the visit, a summary of the renewal assessment materials will be presented internally to the GFAS Accreditation Committee.

If the Accreditation Committee is satisfied that the facility has met all renewal criteria, the Accreditation Committee will recommend the facility be Re-Accredited or Re-Verified. The Accreditation Committee may identify compliance requirements and recommendations which need to be completed prior to Re-Accreditation or Re-Verification. These requirements and recommendations are meant to bring the facility in alignment with GFAS Standards and may include, but are not limited to, areas of concern or challenges noted during the site visit or items that will strengthen the organization in general. GFAS staff will notify facilities of any such items and assist personnel through the completion of requirements and recommendations. Unless the Accreditation Committee has recommended an alternate, specific timeline, facilities have one year to complete compliance requirements, from the time of review by Committee.

If the Accreditation Committee renews the facility's Accredited or Verified status, the facility will be notified via letter; a new Certificate of Accreditation or Verification will also be mailed.

## **Sanctuary Relocation**

In the event of a complete relocation of an Accredited or Verified sanctuary's facilities, it is GFAS policy to complete an assessment of the new facility. This will include a site visit to the new location, as well as a request for updated application information and documents, where changes have occurred. The organization will remain listed on the GFAS website as "relocation assessment in process." Once the organization has relocated, it will have one year to complete the new assessment.

If your Accredited or Verified organization has relocated or a relocation is impending, please notify the GFAS office or GFAS staff Program Director.

## **Disclosure and Confidentiality**

### **Statement on Confidentiality**

The GFAS staff and Accreditation Committee maintains the confidentiality of information collected during the certification process. Certification materials are considered confidential, with the necessary exception that suspected animal neglect, cruelty, abuse, or other illegal activity will be reported to the appropriate authorities. Staff, GFAS Board, and Accreditation Committee members and all site visitors are required to sign a confidentiality statement. Accreditation Committee meetings are considered closed meetings and the minutes are kept confidential.

Statistical summaries that do not specifically reveal information about individual facilities may be disclosed.

### **Statement on Disclosure**

Information regarding the Accreditation Committee as described in official GFAS documents is available to certified facilities and the general public. Relevant policies and procedures are disseminated to facilities on a regular basis.

GFAS continuously updates a list of all currently Accredited and Verified facilities on its website and elsewhere. If inquiries, written or verbal, are received regarding the certification status of a facility, the inquirer is told whether the facility is Accredited or Verified, along with the date such status was originally granted and the date of the most recently completed renewal assessment and site visit.



GFAS will, with the explicit permission of an Accredited/Verified facility, also release application information to foundations, donors, etc. for the purposes of helping an organization to obtain funding, with an exception of reports that must be provided to the GFAS certification program's major funder(s).

## **Records Retention**

GFAS application and renewal assessment materials will be retained by GFAS indefinitely. It is advised that applicants for GFAS Accreditation and Verification and status renewal retain copies of the application materials and Accreditation Committee requirements and recommendations, for their own records.

GFAS' online application system, SurveyMonkey, securely stores information in SOC 2 accredited data centers that adhere to security and technical best practices. SurveyMonkey ensures that collected data is transmitted over a secure HTTPS connection, and user logins are protected via TLS. GFAS also utilizes Dropbox to store files. Dropbox is designed with multiple layers of protection which are regularly tested for security vulnerabilities, including Secure Sockets Layer (SSL)/Transport Layer Security (TLS) to protect data in transit between Dropbox apps servers; SSL/TLS creates a secure tunnel protected by 128-bit or higher Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) encryption.

## **Statement of Non-Discrimination**

GFAS recognizes its responsibility to administer all policies in a manner consistent with federal, state and local laws and regulations. This includes equal opportunity for all individuals and organizations pursuing GFAS Accreditation and Verification. All administrative practices and procedures will be applied free of discrimination on the basis of race, creed, national origin or heritage, age, religion, sex, gender or gender expression or identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, medical condition, genetic information, ancestry, marital status or service in the uniformed services.

## **Links and Resources**

### **Quick Links**

[Benefits of GFAS certification](#)

[Animal Care and Operations Standards](#)  
[GFAS Application Portal](#)  
[Required Documents for Accreditation/Verification](#)

Contact GFAS  
[Contact@sanctuaryfederation.org](mailto:Contact@sanctuaryfederation.org)

## **Additional Resources**

Note: facilities are NOT expected to purchase/obtain any of these resources in order to successfully complete Accredited or Verified status.

[Reputational Risk and Crisis Communications Workbook](#)  
[The Open Sanctuary Project's Care Program Evaluation Checklist](#)  
[Building Sustainable Sanctuaries](#)

How to Start and Run a Rescue, Jennifer Williams, Ph.D. (2007) - available on Amazon: [How to Start and Run a Rescue: Jennifer Williams: 9781929164363: Amazon.com: Books](#)