City of Amarillo: Animal Management & Welfare
Amarillo, TX
March 2018

Online Consult Report & Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Target Zero is a National non-profit organization which seeks to help municipal and public animal shelters achieve a 90% or greater live release proportion through the implementation of currently establish best practices. We do so by providing both onsite assessments as well as online consultations, and subsequent ongoing follow up through our Fellowship program. In March 2018, the Target Zero was invited to Amarillo for an onsite assessment. An online consultation had been performed in January, 2018. Prior to the consultation, the Target Zero team performed extensive research, examining current shelter practices and statistics as well as local ordinances, demographics and other community-level factors that affect goings-on at the shelter.

The Target Zero team was encouraged by the City of Amarillo: Animal Management & Welfare team's dedication to their community and willingness to embrace proven best practice strategies.

This report outlines the discussion points and recommendations from the consultation. Strategies focus on four key areas:
1. Fiscally responsible, proactive public policy
2. Productive shelter intake reduction
3. Reducing the amount of time animals spend in the shelter before their live outcome
4. Eliminating barriers to live outcomes.

Overview

Amarillo Animal Management & Welfare (AAM&W) stands poised to achieve a 90%+ save rate in short order; doing so will require a stronger focus on intake mitigation efforts, an increase in spay-neuter capacity for animals in the shelter's care, and an elimination of existing barriers to live outcomes. Not only is this goal in reach for the city of Amarillo; doing so will position the city as a model for fiscally responsible animal management in the Texas Panhandle region. Currently, AAM&W's relationship with the Amarillo Panhandle Humane Society (APHS) presents a challenge to implementing programs and making changes necessary for achieving the City's goals. APHS's leadership does not employ best practices in the programs that APHS oversees. In short, the relationship with APHS seems to be a holdover from a bygone era when AAM&W was less interested in live outcomes; at that time, it made sense to have a 501(c)3 oversee live outcome programming. However, as AAM&W's current staff and leadership have worked hard to incorporate current standard best practices, they have essentially outgrown the relationship with APHS. If the City of Amarillo wants to achieve the aforementioned goals, it will need to completely re-negotiate its relationship with APHS or sever ties with APHS and take over relevant programming (which is possible).

Major Program Areas

This report lays out, in greater detail, actions that need to be taken for the City of Amarillo to bring itself into alignment with current best practices in animal management and sheltering. The following broad steps summarize which measures will yield the most significant impact.

Full Scale Community Cat Diversion

This program addresses the considerable portion of intake of stray cats. This program has been implemented in communities throughout the country, including communities in Texas (Waco and El Paso, for example). This is the most cost-effective live-outcome opportunity and virtually eliminates the challenges associated with seemingly unending intake of stray cats. For AAM&W, the only significant barrier to fully implementing this program is

spay-neuter capacity (discussed below). In addition, current ordinances would ideally be revised to lay out a simpler, more inclusive plan for this program, but many municipalities have engaged in a "pilot program" prior to full ordinance revisions being drafted and taking effect.

Managed Intake & Surrender Prevention Programming

This program addresses owner surrender intake, and seeks to provide constituents with services to enable them to *keep* their animals, rather than positioning the shelter as a "drop off" location. There is no real barrier to implementing this program. The shelter will need to commit to starting to schedule intake of owner surrendered pets and continue to add to its growing list of "Surrender Prevention" resources.

Spay-Neuter

The shelter should provide its own spay-neuter surgery services and not rely on APHS. The current barrier to this is equipment, and -- to some degree -- staff. The shelter's veterinarian stands ready, willing, and able to provide much of the needed surgery volume for shelter animals and community cat diversion. There is a building onsite that could be retrofitted as a surgery area. If the shelter were able to do this, they would no longer be hampered by the humane society's limited surgical services. Looking more long-term, having capacity for public spay-neuter (or contracting with a group to do so) would provide an important intake prevention tool.

Live Outcome Programming

Currently, primary live outcome programming (adoptions and transfers to other agencies and rescues) is the purview of APHS. Under APHS, there are currently significant barriers to live outcomes, including high adoption fees, inefficient adoption processes, a restriction on animals being transferred to rescues, and others. All of these barriers result in prolonged lengths of stay for animals in AAM&W's care, leading to unnecessary increases in sheltering costs. The City of Amarillo has two options if they would like to achieve a 90% live release rate in a fiscally responsible manner and be a leader in the Panhandle region: (1) APHS can align its policies and procedures with current, nationally recognized best practices, or (2) AAM&W can take over the programming that APHS currently oversees. It is important to note that APHS staff works very closely with the shelter staff; a casual observer cannot immediately tell who works for whom. APHS staff is dedicated, and does their jobs well. They work well with leadership from AAM&W. They are simply limited by the policies set forth by APHS's leadership. These policies result in APHS doing a relatively small amount with a large number of people. APHS's leadership stands as a hindrance to success in areas in which it operates.

Technology & Software

AAM&W uses a shelter management software product that is inefficient and not user-friendly. This is significant; it leads to time being wasted on data entry and data management tasks. As shelter management software has developed over the last two decades, there are now multiple platforms available, many of which cost very little and *more than* make up for their cost with efficiency gains. A streamlined, well-designed product contributes to more accurate, complete data entry, which yields for more accurate and reliable metrics; this, of course, is key to determining whether progress is being made toward achieving goals.

The Path Ahead

It cannot be overstated: *Target Zero's team believes strongly that "Amarillo can do this!"* Current leadership at AAM&W combined with the staff's commitment to the people and animals of the city make for an unstoppable combination. The report that follows outlines the steps that need to be taken to realize these possibilities. All of the recommendations in this assessment report are based on core proven best practices shared by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, The National Animal Care and Control Association, and other major animal management

organizations across the country. Target Zero's relationship does not stop with this report; we look forward to assisting the City of Amarillo as it implements best practices and becomes a leader in the Texas Panhandle.

TABLE of CONTENTS

PROCESS & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Before delving into specific shelter practices at City of Amarillo: Animal Management & Welfare, it is worth taking a step back and looking at the sheltering process from the standpoint of goals and associated *key performance indicators* (KPIs). By focusing on goals leadership can define success. Using KPIs, leadership can monitor progress toward success, celebrate achievements, and know when a change of course is needed. Regardless of the specific tactics that are used, the following **primary goals** should be understood by all staff members.

The Sheltering Process: Key Performance Indicators & Goals		
Process Step	**Key Performance Indicators**	**Primary Goal(s)**
Intake - All animals enter the shelter through one channel or another.	**Total intake**, subsetted by species, source, and -- if appropriate -- location or jurisdiction. **Proportional Intake Distribution** by species, source, age group.	**Intake reduction** must be a priority for leadership and all staff members. Programs *must* be designed to mitigate intake. By examining which intake categories contribute most to intake, programmatic priorities can be made.
Shelter Flow - How quickly animals move through the shelter system to their live outcome	**Average Length of Stay** A broad measure of efficiency that can be refined by subsets (intake category, age group, outcome type, etc.) **Average daily census** This is the number of animals in the shelter's care each day.	**Minimizing Length of Stay to Live Outcome** must be a priority for leadership and all staff. Processes and staff time should prioritize this goal. Any self-imposed additions to length of stay must be eliminated. **Keeping average daily census within housing and staff capacities** must be a goal. While a "magic number" for capacity is unrealistic, there are ballpark figures to consider.
Live Outcomes include adoption, returns to owners, return-to-field, transfer to other agencies, etc.	**Live Release Proportion** -- The proportion of animals who leave the shelter alive in a given time period **Save Rate** -- Proportion of animals *not* euthanized in a given time period.	**90% or greater Live Release Proportion and Save Rate** while working within the shelter's physical and staffing capacity. This is a live release proportion that has been reached by shelters throughout the country -- large, small, urban, rural, and across socioeconomic strata.
	It must be noted that there will always be some degree of euthanasia -- dangerous dogs, rabies suspects, and animal who are severely ill or injured. Still, a 90% live release proportion is achievable, and euthanasia as population control is no longer acceptable.	

All aspects of the sheltering process are examined with these three major areas in mind. Factors outside the shelter itself, such as public policy and relationships with other public and private agencies are examined as well.

Recommendations in this assessment report are based on core proven Best Practices shared by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, The National Animal Care and Control Association, Best Friends Animal Society, The Humane

Society of the United States (HSUS), The American Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Alley Cat Allies and The Million Cat Challenge.

IMMEDIATE ACTION STEPS

We recognize that there are a lot of recommendations in this report. All are important, and should ultimately be implemented. To aide in prioritization, the list below offers the most important items. All should be implemented as quickly as possible. ***Items are in no particular order.*** For all steps listed, Target Zero is willing and able to provide guidance on how to move forward. It is important to remember that many other organizations have taken these steps before, so there are people and resources available to assist you as you continue implementing Best Practices.

Action Step	Report Section(s)
Implement a community cat diversion program for all healthy outdoor cats. (*Note: this is not the same thing as "TNR."*)	Community Cat Diversion
Schedule all owner surrender intake	Managed Intake
Further develop "intake diversion" options to provide owners with more options over surrendering pets	Managed Intake
AAM&W should take over responsibility for sterilization surgery of shelter animals. This will require building out the potential clinic space that has been identified.	Medical & Behavior Programs
Eliminate common barriers to adoptions, like excessive fees and invasive application questions.	Adoptions
Increase focus on reducing length-of-stay to live outcome; implement practices that decrease length-of-stay; and monitor length-of-stay as closely as intake and live outcomes	Population Management & Flow
Implement the use of user-friendly shelter management software	Data Reporting & Technology
Reduce fees for live outcomes and increase any fee associated with animals being brought into the shelter.	Align Staffing and Fee Structures with Goals
Invest time and effort in the new volunteer program, particularly as it relates to behavioral enrichment for long-term residents	Foster & Volunteer Program
Expand foster program to include short-term options as well as finite foster periods for specific situations, like animals awaiting a scheduled transport.	Foster & Volunteer Program and Transport

OVERVIEW & CURRENT DATA

Background

The Target Zero team always starts with available data to gain a current "snapshot" of the organization. The city of Amarillo has made great strides in recent years, and stands poised to achieve a 90%+ save rate in short order; doing so will require a stronger focus on intake mitigation efforts, an increase in spay-neuter capacity, and an elimination of live outcome barriers.

As with any shelter, meeting these challenges will best be achieved by adhering to the three primary goals: intake reduction, increased in-shelter efficiency, and maximizing live outcomes. The data summary below serves to help prioritize efforts moving forward.

Status

A six-page "Data Dashboard" containing intake and outcome data for the previous 12 months was constructed and is available for viewing here: https://datastudio.google.com/open/1y4ERmm-YDAc4E-UOLdXM6AosjRZ2RGUL
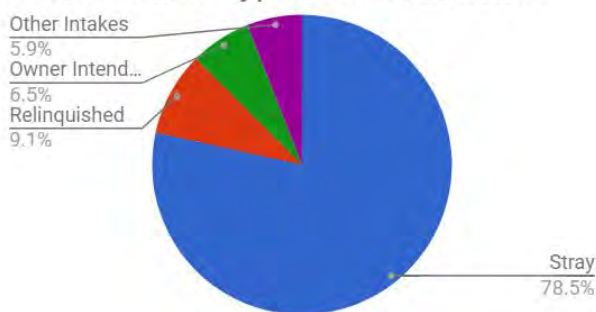
Intake

The overarching goal for intake is intake reduction. Opportunities for the greatest impact are determined by examining which species and/or intake types contribute most to intake.

Total Intake Summary by Type Previous 12 Months

Species	Total Intake	Proportion	Stray	Relinquished	Transfer In	Owner Intended Euthanasia In	Other Intakes
Dogs & Cats	12,409	100%	9,637	1394	0	761	617
Dogs	8,293	66.8%	6,506	751	0	543	493
Cats	4,116	33.2%	3,131	643	0	218	124

Intake Distribution by Type

Canine Intake Type Distribution 2017

Other Intakes 5.9%
Owner Intend... 6.5%
Relinquished 9.1%
Stray 78.5%

Feline Intake Distribution by Type 2017

Owner Intend... 5.3%
Relinquished 15.6%
Stray 76.1%
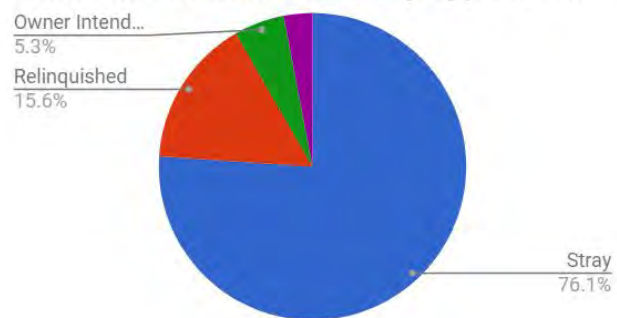
Where Does Intake Need to Be?

The table below attempts to answer the question "*How many fewer animals do we need to take in this year in order to achieve a 90% live release rate?*" It assumes that the number and nature of live outcomes this year stay the same as last year. The *Average Daily Reduction* accounts for the shelter's current operating hours for both stray and owner surrender intakes.

Where does intake need to be?				
	Max Annual Total Intake	Annual Reduction	Monthly Avg Reduction	Daily Avg Reduction
Dogs	5,676	2,617	218	10
Cats	2,244	1,872	156	7

Again, this is only a model, but as can be seen, if the shelter is able to reduce average daily intake of dogs and cats, it will be able to achieve a 90% live release proportion


In-shelter Metrics

The primary goal once animals enter the shelter is reducing the amount of time spent in the shelter to live outcome; this is best quantified through overall length of stay and can be further parsed by examining time-to-event data for key events during an animal's stay at the shelter.

| Average Length of Stay (Days)		
Year	Dogs	Cats
2017	21	10

Live Outcomes

Increasing the proportion of animals who leave the shelter alive is the primary goal when looking at live outcomes. Save rate and live release proportions are helpful metrics. Examining these metrics by species, age groups, and/or intake type can help shed light on areas in need of particular attention.
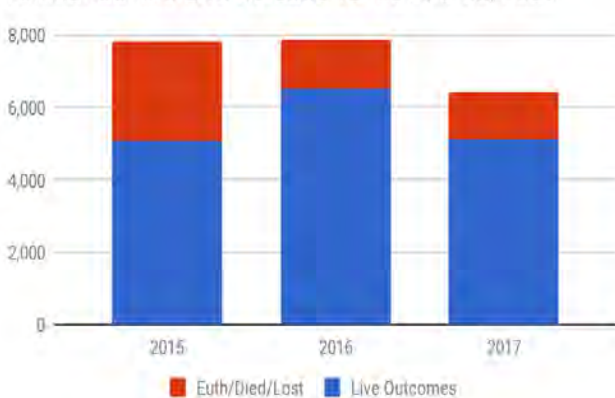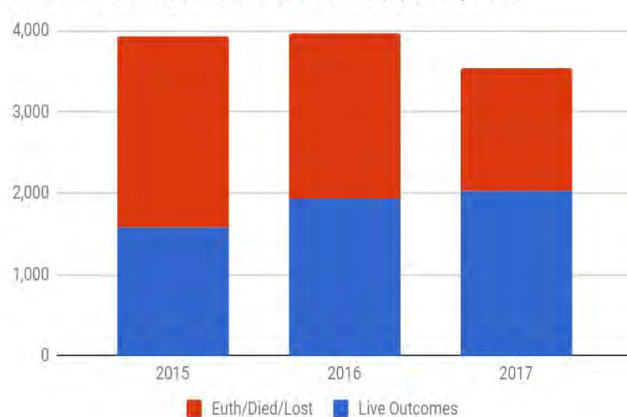
Live Release Proportion and Return-to-Owner Summaries

Annual Live Release Proportion			
Year	Overall	Canine	Feline
2017	71.4%	79.29%	57.00%
2016	71.3%	82.73%	48.84%
2015	56.8%	64.96%	40.40%

Annual Return-to-Owner Proportion			
Year	Overall	Canine	Feline
2017	11.1%	16.4%	0.35%
2016	16.5%	26.4%	0.41%
2015	16.0%	28.5%	0.31%

Where Do Outcomes Need to Be?

The table below attempts to answer the question "*How many more animals do we need to release alive this year in order to achieve and maintain a 90% live release rate?*" It assumes that the number and nature of live outcomes this year stay the same as last year. The *Average Daily Increase* accounts for the shelter's current operating hours for live outcomes.

Where do Live Outcomes Need to Be?				
	Minimum Annual Live Outcomes	Annual Increase	Monthly Avg Increase	Daily Avg Increase
Dogs	7,464	2,356	196	10
Cats	3,704	3,647	304	16

Data Analysis Process Overview

The data above is used as a starting point. It provides us with a picture that helps determine where efforts should be focused, and provides a baseline to evaluate progress toward goals that will be established. "Take-aways" are summarized below. **The data is summarized "in reverse" (i.e. from Outcome to Intake) because we find that it is helpful to first establish where we want to go, and then determine how best to get there.**

	Data Summary	**Interpretation & Conclusion**
Outcomes	Dogs: Live release rate for dogs is hovering near 80%. This is nearing the 90% goal.	Dogs: LRR is approaching 90%. As the shelter has focused largely on live outcomes in recent years, a stronger focus on intake prevention is warranted. In addition, shelter leadership is encouraged to examine very closely *which* populations of dogs are being euthanized and design programs to address these specific populations. Target Zero can assist with this.
	Cats: More than 40% of cats entering the shelter are euthanized.	Cats: The very low live release rate for cats warrants significant effort; a new method of managing this population *must* be employed if AAM&W is to achieve its goals.
	Return-to-owner rate for dogs is relatively low	Dogs: With the relatively low RTO, it is certainly worth examining the value of the current stray period and consider decreasing it to enable alternative live outcomes more quickly. Likewise, increased efforts to return in the field are worthwhile as are efforts to increase microchipping and use of similar technologies in the community.
	Cats: return-to-owner rate is nearly 0%.	Cats: Given that ~99.5% of stray cats are *never reunited with an "owner"* (whether they have one or not), it is clear that holding them in the shelter in hopes of someone finding them is a practice that is not effective. An alternative management method should be sought.
Shelter Flow	Average length-of-stay for both dogs and cats is relatively low. This indicates that once animals enter the shelter, they move through relatively efficiently. Of course, this can always be improved.	An overarching goal is to decrease average length-of-stay (ALOS) *to live outcome*. ALOS should *never* be used as a reason to euthanize for time/space. Given the relatively low ALOS, we can conclude that the overcrowding in the shelter is more the result of unmitigated intake than it is prolonged LOS. **Therefore, further efforts to decrease intake are warranted.**
Intake	Dogs make up ~ ⅔ of intake and cats, ⅓.	While cats make up a greater proportion of intake, cats are euthanized in greater numbers.
	Strays make up the vast majority of intake.	Stray intake accounts for more than ¾ of the animals entering the shelter. Any program that targets these populations is worthwhile. Community cat diversion can take care of nearly 100% of feline stray intake (~3,000 animals each year). For stray dogs, a combination of approaches including improved RTO, finder-to-foster programming, and a strict focus on sick/injured/dangerous animals will be necessary.
	Though AAM&W is a municipal shelter with a primary charge of protecting public health and animal safety, ~9% of dogs and ~16% of cats entering the shelter are owner surrenders.	Controlling the flow and reducing the influx of owner surrenders will go a long way to reducing the overall shelter population which will reduce overcrowding, disease, behavioral degeneration, and euthanasia.

ALIGN STAFFING & FEES WITH GOALS

The cornerstone of successful implementation of best practices is that underlying staffing, operational policies, and fee structures align with goals. **All efforts must be focused on the three primary goals**:

1. *Proactive intake reductions*
2. *Reducing length of stay to live outcome*
3. *Increasing opportunities for live outcomes*

If a dollar, a staff hour, or a portion of space is *not* being used to further progress toward these goals, this should be corrected.

- All resources should be focused directly on the three primary goals.
- Grant funding should be routinely sought, and specific staff members are responsible for grant writing
- Municipal budget should ideally put funds toward prevention programs, e.g. community cat diversion and income-targeted spay-neuter

- Staffing should align with primary goals -- e.g. staff devoted to intake prevention, efficient flow through, and live outcomes
- Organization should allocate more open hours to live outcomes than it does to intakes.

The table below illustrates that operational hours and fees generally favor entry to the shelter over live outcomes. By aligning operational hours and fee structures with the goals of proactive intake reduction and increased live outcomes, much can be done to reverse this.

		Intake	Live Outcomes
Weekly Hours	**Shelter**	39 hours/week	39 hours
	Field Services	50 hrs/week	~5 hours/week
	Total	89 hrs/week	44 hours/week
Costs	**Surrender fee**	$0	
	Reclaim Fee		~$50 +
	Adoption Fee		$50 - $125 (sometimes more)

- **Reduce any fees associated with live outcomes and increase any fees associated with intake--** Currently, fees structure encourages intake over live outcomes. While some of these fees are discussed specifically elsewhere, the overall concept is that adoption fees should be lowered; reclaim fees should have a clear option for a waiver, particularly for "first time offenders;" rescues and transfer partners should receive discounts or fee waivers when "pulling" animals; and a ***surrender fee should be put in place for anyone wishing to surrender a pet.***
- **Hours of operation should align with goals** -- The shelter should ideally have more hours available for live outcomes than intake; this is discussed in greater detail elsewhere.

DATA REPORTING & TECHNOLOGY

Background & Benchmarks

"You can't manage what you don't measure!" -- This adage is as true in sheltering as it is anywhere else. As computer systems, software, and internet access become increasingly available, technology is now an integral part of the sheltering process. Best practices involve using technology to manage your shelter population and streamline communication both inside and outside the shelter. Shelter-specific management software should be in place in any shelter wishing to achieve best possible outcomes for the animals and people in its community.

- Shelter should use specific shelter management software and protocols should be in place to ensure consistent data entry
- Staff should be trained in the use of shelter software functions relevant to their roles

- Specific key performance indicators should be monitored routinely.
- Shelter should use social media and other web-based tools

Status

Strengths

- **Shelter leadership pays close attention to data and trends --** This is to be commended. It is vital that shelter leaders establish measurable goals and monitor metrics to evaluate progress toward them.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **AAM&W's software is cumbersome, inefficient, and not user-friendly. --** Currently, AAM&W uses a shelter management software product that is difficult to use with regard to data entry, navigation, and data retrieval. The use of such a system is not necessary as there are several user-friendly options available. A well-designed software system is vital for maximizing shelter efficiency and for giving the shelter the ability to easily use metrics to monitor progress toward goals.

- **AAM&W and APHS are on two different systems --** Using separate management systems makes for unnecessary complication and confusion. This was observed -- in a small way -- as the two organizations were discussing how to use paper to track animals brought to offsite adoption events. Such challenges and discussions would be eliminated if the organizations were both on the same system.

Recommendations

- **Implement the use of a streamlined, well-designed shelter management software product --** There are several common options listed in the "resources" section of this document. In particular, using cloud-based software enables easy access from anywhere and does not require the use of an in-house server. If AAM&W and APHS continue to work together, both should ideally be operating on the same software system.

Resources

- Shelterluv.com
- Petpoint.com
- ShelterBuddy.com
- How to input *Shelter Animals Count* data: https://youtu.be/9gOICADQGfw

13

PUBLIC POLICY

Background & Benchmarks

Public shelters were created to protect people from dangerous animals and animals from dangerous people; city and county codes should be reflective of those responsibilities. Very often, municipalities put policies in place that are well intentioned but have unintended consequences that impede implementation of best practice strategies. Similarly, policies are frequently put in place in reaction to isolated incidents. Policies should ideally align with what occurs the majority of the time and not the rare "exceptions."

- Policies and ordinances should truly protect people from dangerous animals and animals from dangerous people, while simultaneously allowing for best practice strategies.
- Community cats -- policies should allow for the implementation of community cat diversion programs
- There should be no breed-specific legislation

- Stray Hold periods -- municipalities and organizations should not voluntarily extend the stray hold period beyond that which is required by the State
- Shelter fees (for adoption, reclaim, etc.) should not be strictly codified in ordinances. They should be left up to the discretion of the shelter director
- Pet limits should not be in place

Status

Strengths

- **Current ordinance defines "community cats" and outlines a program for their management --** The language in the local ordinance defines "community cat." Though revisions will be needed to allow for a full-fledged program, this is an important first step

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Community cat portion of ordinance makes a streamlined program challenging --** The ordinance outlines a relatively complicated set of requirements for the community cat diversion program (including registering colonies), and ultimately makes the program rather restricted.
- **Impoundment fees are explicitly stated in ordinance --** Specific fees are laid out in the ordinance. Codification of such fees can make it challenging for shelter leadership to work with citizens to reduce and waive fees.
- **There is no mention of a surrender fee in ordinance --** Stating the existence of a surrender fee in ordinance (without necessarily stating a particular fee) gives shelter leadership a necessary tool for implementing best practice strategies.

Recommendations

- **Ordinances should be revised to allow for a streamlined community cat diversion program --** While there is no such thing as a "model ordinance," there is language that should (and should not) be included to allow for effective and efficient management of animals in the community. Target Zero has assisted over a dozen communities with ordinance revisions and can assist. Resources below offer guidance.
- **Impoundment fees should be left to the discretion of the shelter director --** This enables shelter leadership to work with citizens, and determine if/when to charge impoundment/reclaim fees.
- **A surrender fee should ideally be mentioned in ordinance --** Ideally, the existence of a surrender fee should be mentioned in ordinance with the specific fee(s) being left up to the discretion of shelter leadership.

Resources

- ***Target Zero has available pro bono legal assistance to help with ordinance revisions and related issues.***
- Alley Cat Allies Ordinance Drafting Guidelines
- Best Friends Animal Society Community Cat Programs: Public Policy and Legal Considerations
- ASPCA's Guide to BSL

14

- [Effective Animal Management for Building Humane Communities](#)
- [Out of the Past: Updating Your Animal Control Ordinance, Taking Action for Animals](#)
- [Trap Neuter Return Ordinances and Policies in the US: The Future of Animal Control, Alley Cat Allies](#)

ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

Animal control officers are skilled staff members whose time is best used to address issues related to public health and animal safety. Too often, shelters utilize ACOs for non-essential functions, wasting valuable taxpayer dollars. Responsible public policy creates the foundation for an effective animal control department to provide for public and animal safety. Animal control duties are an integral part of how those services are delivered. Tasks should be focused on these priorities while simultaneously aligning with the shelter program's lifesaving efforts.

- Public health and animal safety should be top priorities
- Should focus primarily on community-minded humane law enforcement rather than punitive strategies.
- Policies should align with with the three primary goals, particularly as it relates to intake prevention

- Officers should not pick up owner surrenders in the field
- Officers should not pick up healthy outdoor cats
- Officers should have access to technology needed to efficiently do their jobs

Status

Strengths
- **Field Services leadership understands the importance of intake reduction and actively promotes returning pets in the field, microchipping in the field, and offering alternatives to intake.**
- **Officers recently stopped picking up healthy outdoor cats and do not pick up owner surrenders.**

Opportunities for Improvement
- **Officers from other areas still pickup healthy outdoor cats, owner surrenders, and generally do not engage in intake mitigation efforts --** While AAM&W's ACOs have embraced intake mitigation efforts, other communities with which the shelter contracts have not. This is a significant contributor to the overwhelming stray intake at the shelter.
- **Animal control officers do not use the same software as the shelter --** This leads to double entry of information and similar associated inefficiencies.

Recommendations

- **Continue with intake mitigation efforts --** AAM&W's humane officers are encouraged to continue intake mitigation efforts (returning pets in the field, offering resources to help owners keep pets), and to engage with surrender prevention staff as the surrender prevention program grows. This is a key aspect of community-minded animal control.
- **Require ACOs from other areas to adhere to follow the same standards as AAM&W with regard to intake mitigation and which animals are taken in --** AAM&W should revisit all contracts that are held with other animal control agencies. Contracts should include language to ensure best practices; at the very least, AAM&W should *not* accept healthy outdoor cats or owner surrendered animals from other areas. Ideally, ACOs from other areas should be required to make efforts to return animals in the field and should focus efforts on sick/injured/dangerous animals and not healthy strays.
- **Aim to have animal control officers on the same software system as the shelter --** The shelter needs to implement the use of shelter-specific software (discussed in the *Data Reporting & Technology* section of this report). In order to increase efficiency, ACOs should be on the same software system as the shelter and be trained in relevant data entry. ACOs should be equipped with laptops so that they can enter data/records in the field.

Resources

- [**What should 21st Century Animal Control Look Like?**](#) **--** An excellent, short overview of the current approach to animal control services.

PROACTIVE INTAKE REDUCTION

The most effective way to humanely maintain a manageable population is to prevent animals from entering in the first place. It is a common finding in shelter data that intake and euthanasia numbers parallel each other closely; thus decreasing intake sharply decreases euthanasia. Specific strategies for mitigating intake are discussed below, but overall, it is important that leadership and staff view the shelter as a "MASH Unit" that is used to house animals only as a last resort after other options have been exhausted.

Proactive Intake Reduction: Managed Intake and Safety Net

Background

Managed Intake

Managed Intake refers to the concept of the shelter taking control of the flow of animals coming through the door. It is simple, but powerful. With a managed intake program, the shelter no longer accepts owner surrenders passively, simply allowing the public to bring animals for surrender without an appointment and without having exhausted other alternatives. Instead, when an owner wants to surrender an animal, they are first engaged in a discussion about what might be needed to enable them to keep their pet. If they do ultimately decide to surrender the pet, an appointment is scheduled with a lag time of at least 10-14 days. This provides an opportunity for Safety Net staff to intervene, identify the challenge and provide a solution. So as not to simply tell people. "No!" the Managed Intake program *must* be paired with a Safety Net program.

Safety Net Programs

An ASPCA study showed that 30-40% of pet owners who surrendered to a shelter just need temporary assistance. safety programs aim to make surrender a last resort rather than the first option. *The Safety Net* program is the collection of resources and tools that provide alternatives to surrender and intake. They can be volunteer and/or staff driven and include a call back service for pet owners needing assistance before arriving at the shelter. Services for Safety Net programs may be in-kind, donated, or associated with a cost that requires funding. Safety Net programs may include the following, but remember that you do not necessarily need all these items to get started. The first step is simply saying, "What can we do to help you keep your pet?"

Status

Strengths

- **AAM&W staff is honest with public about shelter challenges for pets --** This is subtle, but very important. While we never want to frighten the public or be threatening, it is important that we are honest with the public regarding the realities of surrendering pets to the shelter. We must always let the public know that no matter how great our staff is at their jobs, the shelter is not an ideal place for a pet. As difficult as it can be staff must make it clear that stress, fear, and disease are all very real possibilities as well as euthanasia.
- **Staff members sometimes offer alternatives to surrender --** The purpose of managed intake and surrender prevention programs are to offer citizens a real set of alternatives to bringing pets to the shelter. The shelter is already offering some, including: free pet food, and re-homing assistance. This is a start to a hopefully growing set of alternatives to surrender. This program is a way to **serve the citizens of Amarillo.**
- **Staff report that many community members offer to keep strays at home if possible --** This is remarkable, and indicates that the community is willing to help with this community-level challenge.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Days/hours available for owner surrender are equivalent to hours available for live outcomes** -- The shelter currently accepts intakes for approximately the same amount of time each week as it is open for live

outcomes. As part of a managed intake program, it is important to limit intake hours. Doing so does not lead to abandonment or other negative outcomes, but rather, it gives community members an opportunity to work with shelter staff to find alternatives to intake.

- **Owner surrenders are not scheduled --** Limiting days and hours for owner relinquishments is in keeping with best practices. Animal shelters were established primarily for public health and animal safety, and allowing for owner relinquishments is a convenience service that the community should be prepared to schedule, rather than expecting it "on demand." Limiting the number of hours during which intakes can happen decreases the opportunity for animals to be relinquished to the shelter and increases the likelihood that owners will take advantage of the shelter's safety net resources.
- **There is no fee charged for surrendering a pet --** It is common for public shelters to express being "undervalued" in the community; at the same time, they often fail to charge for their services! This is the case with accepting owner surrenders. Citizens *must* recognize that the ability to surrender a pet to a shelter represents a service being performed by the shelter, and a significant one at that. Charging a fee for surrender is in keeping with best practices; it places a value on the work that the shelter performs and can make people think twice before jumping to relinquishment. Of course, in extenuating circumstances, such fees can be waived.
- **Humane Society leadership has proposed barriers to surrender prevention** -- Leadership at APHS has actually proposed putting programs in place that make surrender prevention more difficult (e.g. charging for pet "food bank" food instead of giving it away)**.** This would be counterproductive to intake mitigation.
- **There is currently a limited list of safety net options --** While some staff members offer alternatives to intake, many still view coming into the shelter as s the "default," and are limited in what can be offered to citizens who think that relinquishing a pet is the only option.
- **There is not a formal "finder to foster" program in place --** Currently stray animals are accepted from the public without a strong effort at diverting this significant source of intake. Shelters across the country have been happily surprised at how willing citizens are to assist in temporarily caring for pets that are found on the street. This is an example of the fact that this challenge is a community -level one and, as such, needs to be addressed by the whole community, not just the shelter. ***Given the fact that citizens already offer to assist with fostering animals, the shelter is especially encouraged to put this program in place.***

Recommendations

- **Implement managed intake to pair with a safety net program   --**Managed intake works hand-in-hand with the safety net program to decrease the flow of animals into the shelter while simultaneously offering the community ways to keep pets in their homes. Managed intake involves scheduling all owner surrender intakes at least 7-10 days in advance, even if the shelter has room. This should be paired with a Safety Net program to provide owners with alternatives to intake
- **Reduce number of days available for owner surrender intake to 2-3 weekdays each week, and none on weekends** --As part of a managed intake program, it is important to limit intake days and hours for owner surrenders. Ideally, owner surrenders should be limited to 2-3 days each week, and there should be no slots available on weekends; the weekends should be a time to focus on live outcomes. There should be 3-4 hours for surrender appointments on days when they are held. Limiting the time available for intake does not lead to abandonment or other negative outcomes that people often fear, but rather, it gives community members an opportunity to work with shelter staff to find alternatives to intake.
- **Align staff with goals; allocate staff members to intake diversion --** Intake diversion takes more time *on the front end* than simply allowing pets to enter the shelter. But it is important to align staff with goals. As intake prevention measures are put in place, staff who may have been involved (say) in extensive cleaning and daily care can be shifted toward intake prevention. As this is an area of interest for many funders, there is often grant money available to "kick start" an intake diversion program.
- **Further develop options for diversion resources --** The shelter has established a good core set of safety net resources, and is strongly urged to continue adding to this. Resources should be tailored according to need,

but consider any and all of the following: low/no-cost veterinary preventative care, behavior assistance, and options for temporary housing. ***Importantly, it should not be up to the shelter alone to provide these resources.*** Many communities have worked with local businesses and supporters to help provide some of these things through in-kind donations and partnerships.

- **Implement a finder to foster program, enabling the shelter to involve a community who wants to help --** Intake management is not just for potential owner relinquishments; similar tools can be applied to strays that citizens bring in. While not everyone who finds a pet will be willing to take the animal home to foster, many people will. The first step in developing this program is simple: staff must be trained to ask "finders" for help as part of the intake process. By making this part of the intake protocol, there is suddenly an opportunity to obtain help that did not exist before. Shelters typically provide intake services (vaccine, dewormer, picture posted on lost and found site) and finder cares for animal for a predetermined length of time.
- **Spay neuter capacity--** Increasing spay-neuter capacity is vital to intake management. This is discussed elsewhere in this report.

Resources

- [Managed Intake & Safety Net Protocol Template](#) -- Copy, Paste, and Edit for your shelter
- [Turn Finders into Fosters](#) -- Video
- [Changing the Culture](#)
- [Best Friends Animal Society](#)
- [ASPCA Pro -- Managed intake](#)
- [Adopt-a-Pet's Direct Rehoming Site](#)-- A great option for those surrendering a pet to rehome the pet outside the shelter system.
- [Alternatives to Intake -- Million Cat Challenge](#)

Proactive Intake Reduction: Community Cat Diversion

Background

Community cat diversion (CCD--aka "Return to Field" or RTF) is arguably the single most effective method to address overcrowding, disease, euthanasia, and perceived under-staffing in any animal shelter. It provides an alternative to intake for all healthy cats found outdoors. Rather than being brought into the shelter, where cats are likely to experience overcrowding, disease, and worse, cats are sterilized, vaccinated and returned to their outdoor homes. CCD is considered best practice with regard to management of outdoor cats. Importantly, it is *not* the same thing as traditional trap-neuter-return (TNR). TNR focuses on *colonies* of cats and typically involves identified caretakers. In contrast, CCD *prevents* the formation of colonies. It focuses on the outdoor cats who are simply found and brought in usually one or two at a time. By sterilizing these "ones and twos," shelters are able to prevent the formation of outdoor cat colonies. In addition, CCD greatly increase the likelihood of cats being reunited with their owners; cats are 7-10 times more likely to find their homes if they are put back where they were found as opposed to being housed at the shelter.

- All clinically healthy outdoor cats (non-owner-surrender) should be sterilized, vaccinated, and returned to their outdoor homes
- Program should apply to "friendly" cats as well as those who are fearful or not socialized to humans

- Cats must be returned to the location where they were found, but a specific housing location is not required for cats to be included in the program
- A specific caretaker should not be required for cats to be included in the program

Status

Strengths

- **Staff and shelter leadership understands the importance of this program --** This is the first step toward implementing this very important program. While challenges remain with infrastructure, particularly spay-neuter capacity, the shelter has already put cats through the program, demonstrating its potential.
- **The municipal shelter employs a veterinarian who is skilled in high-volume surgery (but is currently not performing surgery due to a lack of facilities) --** The shelter is fortunate to employ a veterinarian who understands the value of this program and has skills in high-volume surgery. Unfortunately, this skill set is currently being underused due to a lack of spay-neuter facilities.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Spay-neuter capacity is extremely limited due to reliance on APHS for service --** All surgeries are currently performed by a veterinarian from APHS. Humane society surgeon does not have high-volume-high-quality (HQHV) experience and will not spay pregnant cats. Surgeries are limited to ~15 per day, total. This includes shelter animals being sterilized prior to adoption. ***This represents the most significant barrier to implementing this program.*** For reference, a typical high-volume clinic operating with one well-trained HQHV vet and two or three vet assistants (or technicians) performs approximately 4-5 canine surgeries per hour and 8-10 feline surgeries per hour. A typical ~6-hour surgery day yields approximately 32-40 surgeries daily, depending upon the distribution of dogs, cats, males and females.
- **Current practice of housing cats long-term in hopes of adoption or transfer is not as cost-effective as a full-scale community cat diversion program --** There is a cost associated with the daily care of animals in the shelter. A well-run community cat diversion program minimizes length of stay (usually to ~3 days), and saves on associated staff hours for care of these animals. Looking further, long-term, population-dense housing of any species leads to increased stress and associated risk of infectious disease, thus increasing costs further.

- **Community cat portion of ordinance lays out a plan that is cumbersome, making a streamlined program challenging --** (This is discussed in the *Public Policy* section of this report).

Recommendations

- **Put the necessary infrastructure in place to enable AAM&W's veterinarian to perform spay-neuter surgery -- ** This will have multiple benefits, not only for cats. *Taxpayers in Amarillo are currently paying for a skilled veterinarian but these skills are not being fully utilized due to a lack of equipment and support staff.* Allocating funding and/or securing grant funds for setting up a small spay-neuter area will be a very worthwhile investment in realizing the potential of AAM&W's staff.
- **Revise ordinances to codify a streamlined return-to-field program -- ** (See *Public Policy* section)

Resources

- [Million Cat Challenge: Return to Field](#)
- [Million Cat Challenge: Municipal Guide to Managing Community Cats](#)
- [Maddie's Fund -- Community Cats Webinar](#)
- [Community Cat Diversion Inclusion Criteria Template for staff](#)

SHELTER OPERATIONS

Shelter Operations: Population Management and Flow

Background

Population management refers to the combination of policies and protocols that collectively work to move animals through the shelter system as quickly as possible, ideally to their live outcome. *Flow* or *Flow through* refers to the ease (or difficulty) with which animals move through the shelter system from the moment of intake to the moment of their outcome. Length of stay is simply the amount of time -- from the moment of intake to the moment of final outcome-- that an animal spends in the shelter system. **The Association of Shelter Veterinarians and all other major animal welfare organizations agree that decreasing length of stay to live outcome is essential for decreasing stress, associated risk for disease and other negative outcomes.** Minimizing length of stay to live outcome is a key concept for staff, volunteers, and stakeholders to understand. **Any self-imposed additions to length-of-stay must be removed.**

Status

Strengths

- **The shelter does not voluntarily extend stray period --** This is in keeping with best practices. Extended stray periods do not improve life-saving. Owners who do reclaim pets from the shelter typically do so within 24-48 hours, so anything beyond this needlessly delays a live outcome. The shelter is right to maintain this minimal stray period, and given the very low return-to-owner (RTO) rate, a further reduction would be warranted to enable expedited live outcomes.
- **Multiple staff members do "walk-throughs" to help expedite path to live outcome --** Staff members currently walk through the shelter independently and communicate various findings/needs via email.
- **Shelter practices open selection --** Open selection involves making all animals visible to the public (with the exception of legal cases, bite quarantines, and truly dangerous dogs) as soon as they enter the shelter. This program expedites live outcomes because it allows the public to view animals during the stray period. It recognizes the fact that the majority of animals entering the shelter will ultimately be made available for adoption or transfer to another agency. This program is ideally paired with a "foster to adopt" program to enable animals to get out of the shelter as quickly as possible.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Shelter is frequently overcrowded, often housing multiple dogs to a single run. --** The dog runs at the shelter can accommodate one dog; the guillotine door should be left open at all times with the exception of a few minutes during cleaning. Housing multiple dogs in these runs does not provide adequate space and can lead to stress, disease, fights and injuries. The only exception to the "one dog per kennel" rule would be a pair of dogs who enter the shelter together or a female with a litter of puppies; even still, moms and puppies should ideally be housed outside the shelter due to the risk of disease for this vulnerable population.
- **While the ASPCA transport program provides live outcomes, it causes a bottleneck in housing --** The ASPCA transport program provides a very good live outcome option. However, due to program requirements, large groups of animals frequently have to be housed at the shelter for two weeks or more. An alternative form of housing for animals in this program should be sought in order for it not to create a bottleneck in flow-through
- **Staff does not perform daily rounds as a group--** While multiple staff members walk through the shelter at different times during the day, they do not do so at the same time. This leads to inefficiencies in communication and potentially longer stays than necessary (with associated).

Recommendations

- **Monitor and report Average Length of Stay** -- "You can't manage what you don't measure." Leadership is encouraged to monitor average length of stay (ALOS) to *live outcome* as closely as they monitor live release,

intake, and other key performance indicators. Aligning all staff members on the importance of reducing length of stay will make it easier to achieve related goals.

- **Establish a team and schedule for daily live outcome rounds --** Performing "Daily Population Rounds" is the most effective way to ensure that each pet has a plan of action to live outcome. To achieve effective population management, daily rounds should be done by a team of staff who are empowered to make decisions about flow and live outcomes. Ideally, during daily rounds, the team does a cage check on each animal and ensures that there is a plan of action in place for the best live outcome. Tasks are assigned and delegated for completion with follow up the next day. This may mean scheduling surgery, moving the pet to the appropriate space, ensuring the pet has received appropriate preventative care, posting a pet for a rescue transfer, etc. Daily Rounds may initially be laborious as the team becomes familiar with each pet and the process, but will become much quicker in a short time and will ultimately save the staff a great deal of time.
- **Implement Pathway planning --** This goes hand-in-hand with *Daily Rounds*. Pathway planning is the practice of determining which live outcome opportunities are most likely for a given animal and determining what needs to be done to get the animal there. The team does not need to wait until the end of the stray period ; pathway planning should begin the moment an animal enters the shelter. Pathway planning is part of the "bigger picture" of population management and involves setting animals up for success from the moment they walk in the door. For example, the plan for a four-month-old puppy may simply be "spay neuter and place for adoption ASAP." An older dog may involve a veterinary evaluation and possibly networking with rescue groups if this population doesn't tend to be adopted quickly at the shelter. Regardless of the population or specific plan, pathway planning should begin the moment an animal enters the shelter; there is no need to wait for a stray hold to be up before a plan is made. If staff and leadership determine that a live outcome is not an option, euthanasia is performed expediently so as not to let animals suffer unnecessarily.
- **Establish a "one dog per kennel" goal--** The Target Zero team appreciates that this is a challenge. Overcrowding is a symptom of all of the other issues discussed during the consult and in this report. The shelter should establish its daily holding capacity (Target Zero can assist with this) and use all of the other policies, programming and procedures discussed in this report to keep within this number *without* resorting to euthanasia as a form of population control.
- **Establish alternative housing, like short-term foster, for animals in the ASPCA transport program --** During the consult, leadership and staff discussed the concept of *short-term foster care* for animals in the transport program. This is an *excellent* idea. Short-term foster programs have grown in recent years and have proven effective for expanding the shelter's capacity for care. Offering potential fosters a solid timeline for their commitment appears to make recruitment of fosters easier. This program should absolutely be put in place.
- **Eliminate bottlenecks in flow--** The most common *cause* for "bottlenecks" in the sheltering process is actually unmitigated intake. This is addressed in other sections of this report. Other bottlenecks are any points in the sheltering process where a backup occurs. The most common in-shelter bottle neck is typically spay-neuter surgery; this is just one example and is addressed elsewhere. It is important to identify these slow-downs in flow-through and work to correct them. Again, reducing intake will have a great effect.

<div style="background-color:green">Resources</div>

- [Open Selection: The Fast Track to Adoption](#) -- Video
- [Maximizing Movement Through Your Shelter](#): Fast tracking, open selection, and other key programs
- [Daily Population Rounds](#): UC Davis Shelter Medicine Program
- [Daily Rounds Protocol Template](#): Google Doc
- [Daily Rounds Action List Template](#): Google Doc

Shelter Operations: Medical & Behavior Programs

Background & Benchmarks

A shelter medicine and surgery program is key to maximizing the lifesaving in any shelter. Like any aspect of the shelter, processes must be examined to ensure that they are necessary and contributing to the overarching goals of proactive intake reduction, decreased length-of-stay to live outcome, and increased opportunities for live outcomes. To achieve these goals, the shelter medicine and program should be designed with the concept of maximizing flow through while maintaining the highest level of animal welfare.

- Shelter should have written protocols for common conditions
- All staff should understand that "getting out of the shelter" is the ideal "medication" for almost any condition.

- Primary focus should be on necessary procedures (e.g. spay-neuter), while additional procedures are only performed if time and resources allow.
- Behavior program should focus strongly on enrichment, particularly for long-term residents
- Behavior evaluations should not be required for all animals

Status

Strengths

- **Intake procedures include necessary components, including a photo upload to lost-and-found site --** A comprehensive medical and administrative intake procedure is key to setting animals up for success. The shelter's procedure includes all necessary components, notably a photo is immediately uploaded to a lost-and-found website.
- **"Dogs Playing for Life" program is an excellent way to provide enrichment and increase adoption potential --** This is a terrific program and the shelter is commended for recently starting it. Enrichment programs like this help to decrease length of stay (dogs in these programs tend to be more adoptable), give dogs a positive outlet for their energy, and involve the community as volunteers help run the program.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **The shelter currently relies on APHS to perform all sterilization surgeries --** All surgeries are currently performed by a veterinarian from the humane society. Humane society surgeon does not have high-volume experience and will not spay pregnant animals. Surgeries are limited to ~15 per day, total. This is inadequate for the volume of animals that AAM&W handles and will continue to handle in the short- and medium terms.
- **Currently, not all animals leave shelter spayed/neutered --** Ensuring that all animals leave the shelter sterilized (with very rare exception) is a cornerstone of best practices. This should be rectified as soon as possible.
- **Current practice of allowing pregnant animals to have puppies/kittens completely negates spay-neuter efforts --** This is simply unacceptable. While the Target Zero team appreciates the emotional challenges that spaying pregnant animals can bring up, the fact is that the shelter is still euthanizing thousands of animals every year for time and space. Spaying animals who are pregnant is safe, and is practiced in veterinary clinics throughout the country. The humane society's unwillingness to do this negates the efforts it is making and severely hinders AAM&W and the City of Amarillo from achieving their goals.
- **AAM&W's shelter veterinarian spends considerable time on non-veterinary tasks--** The shelter's veterinarian is not currently performing surgery, and instead spends a considerable amount of time on shelter management tasks, like walking through and assisting with decisions regarding which animals will be placed on transport. This is not a good use of this staff member's valuable skill set.

- **AAM&W veterinarian lacks dedicated support staff--** Currently, the AAM&W veterinarian does not have dedicated support staff. This will be vital if the shelter moves forward with enabling the veterinarian to perform surgery and other veterinary-specific tasks.
- **"Dogs Playing for Life" and other enrichment programs are limited by size of the volunteer program --** Right now, the limit on expanding this program -- and establishing other enrichment programs -- is the number of available volunteers.

- **Shift staff roles to provide support for shelter veterinarian --** While several staff members expressed an interest in shelter medicine, and have clearly received hands-on training, there are currently no dedicated staff for veterinary support. Defining at least two staff members as "veterinary assistants," and allowing the veterinarian to further train them, medical bottlenecks will be reduced. Ideally, these staff members should be trained to provide support when the shelter veterinarians starts performing "in-house" spay-neuter surgery.
- **Shelter veterinarian should be utilized for veterinary-specific tasks: surgery, disease diagnostics, protocol oversight, etc. --** The current setup is not an efficient use of the veterinarian's skills. It is common for shelter staff to wear "multiple hats." However, when it comes to a highly trained and skilled staff member, like a veterinarian, staffing and time blocking should be such that the veterinarian focuses nearly entirely on things that truly cannot be done by other staff members.
- **Build out the spay-neuter clinic in the shelter as planned -- there is grant-funding available for this --** As discussed elsewhere, spay-neuter is a major bottleneck right now. There is a space that has been identified as a potential spay-neuter clinic for shelter animals. It is *strongly recommended* that the shelter allot budget or seek funding to build this space out. Given that the shelter currently has a veterinarian would could perform surgeries and staff who could potentially be trained, the physical space is the last major barrier to overcoming this significant hurdle.
- **Shelter's veterinarian should perform spay-neuter for shelter animals --** This has been mentioned previously, but its importance cannot be overstated. All shelter animals should leave the shelter spayed/neutered and length-of-stay should, ideally, not be extended due to animals having to wait for spay-neuter. The most practical and expedient solution to this problem is to enable the shelter veterinarian to perform surgeries.
- **Work to increase size and scope of enrichment program --** At the time of the onsite assessment, *Dogs Playing for Life* was operating 2-3 days per week, and the only barrier to running playgroups more often was volunteers. The shelter is encouraged to devote time to volunteer recruitment and training for this and other behavior/enrichment programs. In addition to *Dogs Playing for Life*, it is recommended that a structured shelter-wide enrichment program be introduced as well. *Open Paw* is a good option and can be fully staffed and administered by volunteers. Of course, if possible, it would be ideal for AAM&W to allot budget for a behavior coordinator who could oversee these programs.

- *Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff* -- A "must have" book for all animal shelters
- *Animal Behavior for Veterinarians and Staff* -- Another "must have"
- Open Paw -- Online behavior and enrichment program "in a box." Great for a motivated group of volunteers
- *Reconsidering Canine Behavior Evaluations in Animal Shelters* -- Academic article that calls into question the value of canine behavior evaluations, particularly with regard to predicting aggression

Shelter Operations: Foster & Volunteer Programs

Background & Benchmarks

The value and importance of a formal volunteer program cannot be overemphasized and advocates should be educated honestly about the risk of overcrowding, infectious disease and importance of finding the appropriate live outcome placement as soon as possible for shelter pets. Volunteers can provide enrichment, socialization, exercise, behavior modification, enhance the care of the shelter pets, assist with adoptions, surgery preparation/recovery and rescue group transfer, walk, bathe and groom dogs, fundraise and more.

Likewise, a foster care program is an effective tool for significantly increasing lifesaving capacity without changing the physical size of the shelter. Foster care programs are crucial for achieving all of the major goals of the sheltering process; they help to proactively reduce intake, decreasing length-of-stay to live outcome, and provide an expeditious avenue for live outcomes.

Status

Strengths

- **New volunteer coordinator role has already had a positive impact on the shelter --** The Target Zero team was very glad to hear that a volunteer coordinator role had recently been created. A dedicated volunteer coordinator is vital for tapping into the community's desire to help with a range of tasks and activities.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Foster is under the purview of APHS, which leads to inefficiency and a lack of alignment regarding goals --** The foster program is relatively limited and hampered by the various processes and requirements put in place by the humane society. Foster is an important tool for expanding housing capacity, decreasing disease incidence, and maintaining behavioral health.

Recommendations

- **Continue to expand volunteer pool --** This was discussed elsewhere, particularly the *Medical & Behavior* section of this report. The shelter is encouraged to expand their use of volunteers, particularly in areas that directly impact quality-of-life for the animals, and those that aid in pursuit of any of the three primary goals.
- **Shift responsibility of the foster program to the shelter, ideally with associated staff support --** Shelter leadership and staff seem to understand the value of foster care, and should ideally take over this program. Doing so will increase efficiency as shelter staff will more easily be able to communicate and take action with regard to animals needing to be placed into foster care
- **Introduce Short-Term Foster Options** -- Short-term foster is an excellent tool for giving animals a "break" from the shelter, particularly large dogs and others who tend to stay in the shelter longer. Short-term foster options include "weekends away" and "overnights." This is an area that is currently of great interest to a number of funders as the benefits of these programs have been more widely recognized relatively recently.
- **Implement Foster Program for the ASPCA Transport** -- This is discussed in the *Transport* section of this report as well. Shelter leadership has a discussed a plan for a specific finite foster program (14 days or less) for animals who are awaiting transport. This is an *excellent* idea, and should be implemented as soon as possible. Providing short-term and finite foster periods tends significantly increase the pool of potential caregivers.

LIVE OUTCOME PROGRAMS

Live outcomes include adoptions, returns to owner, return-to-field, transfers to other organizations, and any other channel through which animals leave the shelter alive. In decades past, shelters took on a "sanctuary" mentality, holding animals for excessive periods of time, only allowing them to be released to the "right" person. This type of mentality serves only to prolong length of stay, which leads to overcrowding. *Any barriers to live outcomes must be eliminated and any untapped opportunities for live outcomes should be explored*.

Live Outcome Programs: Adoptions

Current best practices involve *Open Adoptions*. This refers to a collection of policies and practices that seek to eliminate unnecessary barriers to adoption. Importantly, it is recommended that adoptions take place through a conversation rather than through an extensive application process. Equally as important, adoption fees should never be seen as a major source of revenue for the shelter. High adoption fees serve only to prolong length-of-stay, which ultimately leads to increased costs that will never be offset by adoption fees, regardless.

- Low Adoption fees -- there is no evidence that high adoption fees lead to better homes.
- Same day adoptions
- Conversational process instead of a lengthy application

- Open selection -- Animals made visible before stray hold is up so that adoptions can happen more quickly.
- Animals clearly displayed on website with good photos
- Satellite adoption locations

Status

Strengths

- **There is an adoption program, and the program provides live outcomes to animals in the shelter's care**

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Adoption fees are extremely high and adoption fees are seen as a primary revenue source --** Adoption fees are seen as a primary revenue source. APHS recently raised adoption fees in an effort to close a budget gap. Similarly, APHS has put tiered pricing in place in an effort to raise more money via adoptions. Such practices have been seen in other communities to ultimately decrease adoptions, and increase length of stay; of course, this leads to a greater overall cost of care.
- **APHS chooses to put counterproductive practices, like "landlord checks" into practice --** Landlord checks and other invasive questioning and processes serve only to decrease the potential pool of adopters. While these practices were common in previous decades, starting 5-10 years ago, shelters moved toward a conversational adoption process, typically referred to as "open adoptions."
- **Adopters were seen being "routed" to PetSmart for adoptions rather than adopting at the shelter due to a funding relationship with PetSmart --** This is a specific but significant barrier to adoption and represents a misalignment of goals. While APHS seeks to make more money from adoptions, practices like these are in direct conflict with the shelter's goal of reducing length-of-stay and increasing live outcomes.

Recommendations

- **Ideally, AAM&W should take control of adoptions program--** The separation of the adoptions program from AAM&W's sheltering activities appears to be a holdover from a time when AAM&W may not have been focused on live outcomes. Now that AAM&W is *strongly* focused on the goal of increasing live outcomes, a goal that the citizens of Amarillo reportedly agree with, the complication of administering an adoptions program through APHS is a hindrance to success rather than a help.
- **Eliminate high adoption fees and tiered pricing --** So as to decrease the length of stay to live outcome, which ultimately helps to lower the cost of care, it is recommended that adoption fees for cats be free or very low ($10 or less). Dog adoption fees should not exceed ~$35 , regardless of age or breed-mix. Instead of charging high adoption fees, leadership is encouraged to simply ask adopters for a donation at the time of adoption;

recent data from a major shelter management software provider finds that consistently asking for donations from adopters lead to an average additional donation of $22. In addition, as this is currently an area of interest to many funding agencies, the shelter is encouraged to seek grant opportunities for offsetting the cost of adoptions.

- **Employ an open adoptions process --** An open adoptions policy is rooted in the idea that our goal is to match people and pets, not put up barriers to adoption in an effort to protect animals from the public. Rather than looking to *eliminate* potential adopters through lengthy applications and invasive questions, the shelter is encouraged to learn about how to employ a more current practice of working *with* potential adopters to find the right match. See *Adopters Welcome* in the *Resources* section for more information.

Resources

- *Adopters Welcome* -- This free guide is *the* resource for modern adoption strategies. It dispels old myths about adopters and the adoption process. It is a "must read."
- Adopters Welcome DIY Action Plan
- Reducing adoption fees to save lives and expenses -- Video
- How shelters can save lives with low- and no-fee adoption programs -- Webinar
- Open Selection: Putting dogs and cats on the fast track to adoption -- Video

Live Outcome Programs: Return to Owner

Background & Benchmarks

Effective Return-to-Owner (RTO) programs begin in the field, as soon as law enforcement picks up an animal. Effort should be made to reunite pets in the field if possible and officers should have working microchip scanners and communication tools to follow up with any identification found. Reclaim fees should not hinder return-to-owner efforts, especially for "first time offenders." Reclaim fees should be up to the discretion of the shelter director. As discussed throughout the report, return-to-field programs for cats are the most effective method for reuniting cats with owners.

- Return-to-Owner proportion should be closely monitored
- Policies should make returns to owner as easy as possible, with rare exception

- Photos should be posted to website as soon as animals arrive (part of intake procedure)
- Officers should be encouraged to return animals in the field

Status

Strengths

- **Leadership encourages ACOs to return to owner in the field if possible --** Allowing for officers to return pets in the field is in line with best practices. It eliminates the inefficiency associated with bringing pets to the shelter before returning them.
- **Leadership adjusts impound fees at times to enable reclaims --** Reclaim fees can present a significant impediment to reuniting pets with their owners. Reducing reclaim fees and empowering staff to further reduce or waive them is in line with best practice, and with the goals of increasing live outcomes and reducing length-of-stay.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Reclaim fees are high for many citizens and represent a barrier to live outcome --** High reclaim fees represent a misalignment of fee structures an goals. Such fees can make the most expedient live outcome (return-to-owner) unnecessarily difficult.
- **Reclaim rate for cats is very low (~0.5%) --** This is in keeping with what is seen throughout the country. People, with rare exception, simply do not come to the shelter to look for lost cats. This is yet another reason to implement a full-scale return-to-field program for cats, particularly those who are friendly. Friendly cats have outdoor homes and people who care for them; they are far more likely to return to these homes if sterilized, vaccinated, and then returned to the locations where they are found.
- **Reclaim rate for dogs is low (~9-11%) --** It is difficult to dissect exactly *why* the reclaim rate for dogs is relatively low. Regardless, AAM&W is encouraged to set a minimum goal of ~%15-20 for dogs; this has been achieved in communities throughout the country, including Texas.

Recommendations

- **Reduce or eliminate reclaim fees except for "repeat offenders." At the very least, ordinance should clearly leave reclaim fees up to the discretion of the shelter's leadership --** While reclaim fees aim to deter people from allowing animals to run at-large, they often end up simply raising a barrier to a live outcome. Especially in the case of "first time offenders," it is important that shelter leadership is able to waive or lower fees. Many shelters have implemented policies that allow for a waiver of fee if owners of un-sterilized animals elect spay-neuter prior to reclaim. This should be strongly considered.
- **Lower RTO proportion for cats is largely remedied by return-to-field program --** (see *Community Cat Diversion*)
- **Take steps to improve and RTO rate for dogs**
  - Increase microchip placement and consider a *"Lifetime License" program* -- The shelter is encouraged to continue with low-cost microchip placement for owned pets. In addition, ACOs should

be trained to microchip pets who are returned in the field. Finally, consider tying licenses to microchips through "lifetime licensing." Cities who have done this have seen 50% and higher RTO rates for dogs.

- o Be sure that all ACOs are trained to return pets in the field rather than bring them to the shelter -- All ACOs should be trained to look for owners rather than bringing animals to the shelter. In addition, if a home can be identified and there is an obvious escape method (e.g. open gate or broken fence) ACOs should be encouraged to return the pet. Some jurisdictions have gone so far as to equip ACOs with basic tools and supplies for temporarily repairing broken fences in these cases; doing so is a more efficient use of time than bringing animals to the shelter and housing them.
- o Encourage the use of *Finding Rover* -- This platform uses facial recognition technology to identify lost pets. Photos can even be uploaded after a pet has been lost (unlike a microchip which needs to be placed before a pet is lost).

Resources

- **Lifetime License Programs --** These programs are becoming more common throughout the country.
  - o [Cumberland County, PA](#)
  - o [Port St. Lucie, FL](#)
- **[Finding Rover](#)**

Live Outcome Programs: Rescue and Transport Partnerships

Background & Benchmarks

Rescue and transport partners are a critical life saving pathway for shelter pets. Rescue and transport partners should be encouraged to transfer as many adoptable pets as they wish on a first come, first serve basis. Some organizations express discontent that rescues and transport partners "only take the highly adoptable animals." This should not be a concern; getting animals out alive as quickly as possible is more important than having a varied "inventory" of pets.

- Rescue and transport partnerships should exist
- Process for partners should be efficient
- Rescues and transport partners should be encouraged and allowed to take whichever animals they choose
- Fees for partners groups should be reduced or waived
- Shelter should employ a system to communicate needs with partners and facilitate easy release and placement of animals

Status

Strengths

- **Transport currently provides live outcomes to 30% of all animals who leave the shelter --** This live outcome makes up an impressive ~45% of all live outcomes. The shelter is encouraged to continue to grow this program as it has done in recent years.
- **Local rescue groups are key partners and are willing to help --** Shelter staff and leadership identified a number of different active rescue partners. These partnerships should be nurtured and grown so as to spread the community-wide challenge across a greater portion of the community.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **The current out-of-state transport program causes a bottleneck due to the need to house animals for upwards of 14 days prior to departure --** The ASPCA transport program is a wonderful tool for live outcomes that would otherwise not occur. However, as the program requires a ~14 day or greater holding period, this results in a prolongation of length-of-stay that contributes to overcrowding.
- **APHS is noted to choose to "hold" animals for adoption rather than allow rescues to pull them --** The shelter should not be viewed as a "pet store" or a source to provide "inventory" for a retail-oriented endeavor. While it is certainly the case that shelters should use marketing techniques to better promote pets to the public, "holding on" to specific animals who have a live outcome available is antithetical to the collective goals of increasing live outcomes and reducing length-of-stay to live outcomes.

Recommendations

- **Enact short-term foster program for out-of-state transport --** This was discussed elsewhere as well. The current bottleneck created by the out-of-state transport program's holding requirement is, to some degree, a "necessary evil." By developing a short-term, finite foster program for animals awaiting transport, AAM&W stands to eliminate the housing challenges associated with this otherwise life-saving and cost-effective program.
- **Shift control of transport program to AAM&W --** Like the adoption program described above, AAM&W's current relationship with APHS leads to unnecessary barriers to transport and transfer. By enabling the shelter to oversee these programs, they will ultimately be more efficient.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

City of Amarillo: Animal Management & Welfare has made great strides in recent years, and is now positioned well to achieve even more by staying focused on the three primary goals: (1) Proactive intake reduction, (2) decreasing length of stay to live outcome, and (3) increasing opportunities for live outcomes.

Moving forward, the City of Amarillo: Animal Management & Welfare is encouraged to begin implementing recommendations immediately, and the *Action Steps* section of this report can serve as a summary. The Target Zero team serves to help shelters implement changes, and we can do so in whatever way is most appropriate. We can connect you with other similar shelters who have already implemented these programs; provide subject-matter experts, like attorneys or shelter veterinarians, where appropriate; and we can provide onsite assessments as well.

This report does not represent an endpoint, but rather a beginning. Consider it your roadmap to sheltering success! Target Zero looks forward to working with City of Amarillo: Animal Management & Welfare as you continue to make progress in helping the people and animals in your community. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. Thank you for your time.