

**2015 ICMA PROGAM EXCELLENCE AWARD ENTRY:
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AWARD**

ANIMAL CARE SERVICES (ACS) DEPARTMENT- ACS REVISED STRATEGIC PLAN

There are often conflicting focuses when it comes to providing animal care services. For example, some groups will express a need to place added attention to the public health needs of the community and thereby ask that the stray/roaming pets are quickly taken off the streets. Simultaneously, other groups' focus may be to increase humane services and therefore ask that fewer pets be impounded so additional time is provided to find a live outcome for pets already impounded. The goal in this situation is to increase the Live Release rate of the organization. The dichotomy created from these opposing views regularly leads to conflict and can often destroy the ability to create lasting partnerships between entities.

In December 2015, the City of San Antonio reached a historical 90% Live Release rate (the percent of animals that leave shelter facilities alive through adoption, return-to-owner, rescued by another agency, or other live outcome options) while still impounding 30,000 pets annually. This makes the City of San Antonio the largest city in the nation to achieve an industry-accepted and best-practice goal and is enhanced by the fact that in 2004, the City was identified as euthanizing more animals "per capita than any other major American City." One of the biggest factors in achieving the 90% Live Release rate was the City's ability to develop strong and cooperative partnerships.

Problem Assessment:

In 2004, the City of San Antonio was euthanizing over 90% of animals taken in. Shocked by the City's excessive euthanasia rate and stray animal problem, residents demanded change. In 2006, the City worked with community stakeholders to create framework for positive

solutions to the City's long standing animal care related issues. This initial strategic directive aimed towards a 70% Live Release rate by 2012.

However, in September 2011, the City's Live Release rate had only increased to 31% (39 percentage points short of the City's desired goal) and many groups were still expressing frustration towards the services being provided. Despite 5 years of efforts, the City of San Antonio still needed to identify a new solution to increase its Live Release rate without requiring the reduction of pet intake. The solution also needed to keep in mind the fiscal constraints of the City.

Program Implementation and Costs:

In September 2011, ACS partnered with the Office of Innovation and Reform to revise the Department's Strategic Plan and to provide a balanced approach between Enforcement and Live Release. Based on feedback from Council members, the Animal Care Services Advisory Board, citizens, and City Management and staff, the following three (3) priorities were established:

1. Enhanced enforcement of existing laws and codes;
2. Controlling the stray animal population (through spay/neuter); and
3. Increasing the Live Release rate.

As the City worked with these key stake holders to revise its Animal Care Strategic Plan, and as priorities were established, essential partnerships started to immerge to help create a powerful, clear, and lasting framework of success for the City. These relationships also helped foster future partnership opportunities. For example, by establishing a strong partnership with City Management and City Council, San Antonio was able to successfully build support for key

policy change. Likewise, the City was able to strengthen partnerships with local organizations in order to successfully implement those policy changes.

The following are a few initiatives that attributed to the City of San Antonio reaching a 90% Live Release rate and demonstrate the importance of establishing and strengthening local partnerships:

High Volume Pet Partner (HVPP) Program: In 2012, partnerships were established with 10 local rescue groups who committed to a significant increase in the number of animals they would rescue from the city. Understanding the significant cost of this commitment, the City Management and City Council helped offset a portion of the expense for rescuing additional pets by providing to the rescue organizations \$50.00 per pet. The City also established a relationship with Petco to help fund this initiative. In the first year alone, these partnerships helped facilitate a 320% increase in the number of pets rescued compared to the prior year and raise the Live Release rate to 61%.

Community Spay/Neuter Program. In FY 2012 a partnership was established with 5 local spay/neuter clinics to provide free spay/neuter services to pet owners in targeted neighborhoods. Although it did not cover the full cost of a spay/neuter surgery, the City was able to offset a portion of the cost by providing to the partner \$53.00 for every surgery performed. Through this program, over 8,800 free spay/neuter surgeries were performed in FY 2012 and over 13,500 surgeries were performed in FY 2015. Increasing the number of surgeries by FY 2015 was due to increasing available funding through additional partnerships with nationally-recognized funding organizations.

Trap Neuter and Return (TNR): In FY 2012, the City partnered with Best Friends, a nationally recognized organization who agreed to fund an initiative, to work with local residents

and trap stray cats in targeted areas, bring them to a facility to be spayed or neutered, and then return them to the location they were originally found. This TNR program provided to the city a humane outcome for feral cats that were likely to be euthanized because of their behavior and inability to be adopted or rescued. Because of this partnering program, San Antonio saw a reduction in the number of cats being impounded at its facility and was able to reach a 90% Live Release rate for cats in 2014.

Various City Ordinance Changes: Through the internal partnerships with City Management and City Council, San Antonio was able to recommend and approve key policy changes in order to help the City increase its Live Release rate. This includes:

1. Reducing the mandatory stray hold time by 1 day to allow pets with a live outcome to leave earlier so additional time can be provided to those pets did not have an outcome.
2. Requiring any pet roaming the streets to be spayed/neutered after being returned to their owner. This ordinance was designed to help control the stray animal population.
3. Replacing the City's annual licensing tag program with a lifetime registered microchip initiative so that pets can be more easily returned to their owner if found roaming on the streets.

Facility Operational Partnerships: In FY 2013 and again in FY 2014, the City of San Antonio partnered with two not-for-profit agencies to operate new animal care facilities that were recently constructed by the City. These partnerships allowed the city to avoid over \$2,000,000 in annual operational expenses while simultaneously ensure the live outcome of over 5,000 pets annually.

Measurable Outcomes:

Resulting from the revised Strategic Plan, which emphasized the establishment of strong partnerships within the City structure and with key community stakeholders, The City of San Antonio was able to consistently increase its Live Release rate and in December 2015 the City obtained a Live Release rate of 90%. This makes the City of San Antonio the largest city in the nation to reach 90%. In addition to reaching this nationally sought after goal, the many partnerships described above, also helped the City obtain the following desirable outcomes:

- Decreased number of pets that died on the streets from 35,700 in 2011 to less than 22,800 in 2015 (a 36% decrease in 4 years).
- Increased the number of roaming dogs returned to their original owners from less than 1,700 in 2011 to over 3,600 in 2015 (a 200% increase in 4 years).
- Increase the number of adoptions from more than 4,300 in 2011 to over 6,600 in 2015 (a 53% increase in 4 years).
- Increase number of pets rescued from just over 3,000 in 2011 to over 13,200 in 2015 (a 340% increase in 4 years).
- Decrease the number of pets euthanized from just under 20,000 in 2011 to less than 4,300 in 2015 (a 78% decrease in 4 years).

Lessons Learned:

Although any organization will need to ensure that programs are implemented in line with its goals and objectives, the primary lesson learned through the revision and subsequent implementation of the Animal Care Strategic Plan is the value of community partnership. Through the partnerships outlined above, ACS was able to transform into one of the top performing organizations in the nations and demonstrate that effective partnerships can exist despite contradictory focuses that may exist.