



ACS Leadership Interviews Summary

The following report summarizes the interviews conducted with the Animal Care Services Leadership Team, which is made up of eight operational and administrative managers, the Department Fiscal Administrator, Human Resources Employee Relations Business Partner, Assistant to the Director, Chief Veterinarian, Chief Operations Officer, Assistant Director, and Director. The report includes successes and shortcomings, ACS-related issues in the community, and suggested areas of improvement.

Spay/Neuter

The need to increase spay/neuter (S/N) capacity remained consistent throughout all the Leadership interviews. Methods for expansion included opening spots in free zip code surgeries, expanding partnerships with S/N clinics, streamlining how S/N clinics are managed, and removing barriers to obtaining an appointment. Leadership also mentioned the future possibility of redirecting Community Cat Program (CCP) surgeries to the new hospital that was recently approved with the City's 2022 Bond.

An emphasis was also made on the need to address the current State laws that prevent ACS from sterilizing or providing medical treatment on owned pets. These legislative restrictions inhibit ACS from moving forward by reducing the stray population, reducing shelter intake, and increasing the live release rate.

Program Capacity & Resources

Leadership consistently expressed the desire to expand and strengthen low-cost services provided in the community, especially services for those reached by the case management program (CASA) and its partners. These services include resources to help pet owners address violations and keep pets in their homes (such as fencing repairs and tethers). The community is also in need of more microchip and vaccine events, more accessibility to microchipping onsite, and a greater awareness of how vaccines help prevent the spread of disease. Additionally, the interviews relayed a consistent theme among Leadership to focus on strengthening, streamlining, and mastering existing programs and processes (such as training, the volunteer program, CCP, rescue/foster, etc.).

Organizational Responsibility

The Leadership interviews suggested that ACS should remain involved in resolving nationwide shelter problems such as the national veterinarian shortage. ACS could help identify and train high-volume veterinarians and act as a teaching hospital to address the veterinarian shortage. Transitioning to a teaching hospital would also increase the ability to provide more S/N surgeries. Additionally, ACS should serve on the front lines of tackling legislation issues such as a S/N mandate and enforcement of new and existing laws.

Organizational Growth

Due to the sometimes-conflicting nature of responsibilities between each division, the need to identify a unified goal and mission was a dominant focus for ACS to move forward. Currently, goals and priorities between divisions are set that naturally result in divisions often working in



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO **ANIMAL CARE SERVICES**

different directions. Stronger communication and coordination is needed across all divisions within the department so that team members will have a better, more big picture sense of everyone's responsibilities, reducing conflict among them. Additionally, the interviews showed a clear desire for team member training/development (with buy-in from supervisors), shadowing in different divisions, training on domestic animal behavior and handling, and obtaining certifications, such as the "Fear Free Certification."

Staffing

Generally, Leadership expressed concern over staffing, specifically current short-staffing levels across the department. Leadership expressed feeling that teams are consistently running low and unable to sustain current operational needs. ACS should have a clear understanding of staffing needs, including an established minimum staffing level needed to maintain operations and continued evaluation as operations change. This means that there should be an analysis of current ACS staffing and a plan for how to move forward. There is also a desire to ensure Leadership is reflective of the community ACS serves, as well as to incorporate and encourage an increase in bilingual staff members. There is a need not only for more staff but also for a focus on staff retention. Leadership reports a need for more development and training of current employees, including supervisory support for this. There is also a need for a better work/life integration, so that staff can avoid working late, accruing overtime, and developing fatigue.

Animal Care Needs

Leadership has identified a need to develop and expand animal behavior and enrichment programs, including a better sense of humane housing for pets with a longer stay in the shelter. This includes playgroups, enrichment exercises, and stimulation activities. The need to streamline the home quarantine process was also a reported concern. Additionally, Leadership wishes to find ways to manage medical capacity more effectively and to find ways to take some responsibility off the Clinic team member where possible. Some individuals feel that there is a lack of resources to find placement for harder-to-place pets. Lastly, Leadership expressed a lack of technological tools, which hinders ACS's productivity. Some areas of opportunity include the ACS website, the ability to make online payments, the DEX system, download new applications onto mobile devices, and access to tools such as Grammarly.

Community Relations

Regarding community outreach and issues/concerns within the community, Leadership reported a need for a physical presence in the community, specifically by the CASA team. There is also a need to help keep animals in their homes and increase the community and rescue's role in placement rate. Leadership feels ACS should commit to always looking for new ways to redefine how ACS engages with the public. This may include reaching out to those outside of our network and finding the target market to educate.

Overall, Leadership hopes to bridge the gap from ACS having a negative image to being seen as a helpful resource. This could start by eliminating the phrase "no-kill" and replacing it with something else. There should also be a coordinated plan to address negative media and misinformation. Leadership feels that greater advocacy by our partners would engage the public



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO **ANIMAL CARE SERVICES**

and advocate on behalf of the overall mission. Lastly, Leadership reports the need for a re-commitment to providing exceptional customer service across the entire department.

Conclusion

Many of the Leadership interviews touched on themes that will be relevant when developing a strategic plan. The long-term, big picture themes to come out of the Leadership interviews include:

- Making spay/neuter and low-cost veterinary services more accessible
- Providing resources to keep pets in their homes
- Encouraging the professional growth and development of ACS staff
- Identifying a unified goal and mission for the department
- Increasing shelter pets' chances for placement through advanced sheltering methods and enrichment and behavior programs
- Redefining ACS's role in and relationship with the community

These strategic themes will be used to shape conversations in Phase II of the strategic plan development, where ACS staff will bring together various stakeholders to inform the goals that will ultimately make up the new strategic plan.