Community Spay/Neuter Needs Assessment

Accessible Spay/Neuter Toolkit

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Community Spay/Neuter Needs Assessment:
Tips and Recommendations

Before undertaking to set up any accessible spay/neuter services in your area, assess your community to identify the population, the demographics of animal shelter intake and outcomes, existing resources, including spay/neuter services, potential partners with whom to collaborate, and the overall climate of support.

Taking the time to conduct an assessment will allow you to create a strategy and thereby focus your effort, time, and resources to set up an initiative that will have the best likelihood of success in improving spay/neuter rates and reducing overpopulation in your area.

The process of conducting a community assessment can facilitate working collaboratively, strengthening relationships with other organizations that share a common goal, in order to meet the needs of the entire community and develop a program all partners are comfortable with.

A number of excellent tools and guidance documents exist for conducting an assessment of the spay/neuter solutions your community needs, including:

www.animalsheltering.org/how-we-help/work-for-change/pets-for-life/pets-for-life-toolkit.html

www.humanealliance.org/images/elearning/admin/Community_Assessment_How-To.pdf

www.foundanimals.org/docs/pdfs/bf-nmhp-spay-and-neuter-one-size-does-not-fit-all.pdf

www.aspcapro.org/webinar/2011-11-02-000000/truly-targeted-spayneuter

The tips and recommendations presented here have been compiled from the above guidance, along with the advice of others who have successfully implemented accessible spay/neuter options in their communities. The "Community Assessment Spreadsheet" will help you get started in organizing the information you collect.

Community Assessment spreadsheet

1. Get to know your community

- ▶ Compile a directory of community resources.
    - • Identify all resources, including shelters, animal control services, spay/neuter clinics, veterinary practices, social welfare organizations, community groups, faith groups, schools, daycare providers, community police, recreation services, pet supply retailers, pet service providers, and other companion animal related businesses.
    - • Identify community leaders.

- ▶ Compile a directory of collaborative contacts, documenting their contact information, mission statements, and your specific relationship.

- ▶ When collecting information about community resources, don't limit yourself to aspects related only to spay/neuter, but include broader information that could be relevant for future initiatives.

► Compile a directory of media contacts, including television, radio, internet, and print media outlets – include their contact information, as well as the format, target audience, and impact of the media.

2. Build relationships

► Engage in conversations with potential partners and consider how they could contribute, for instance in promoting the initiative, in organizing transportation, or in providing animals for surgery (e.g. from a shelter or feral colony).

► Work with the veterinary community. You will want to promote ongoing veterinary care for the welfare of animals and to build relationships with community veterinarians.

► Cultivate media and community leaders.

► Engage as much of the community – veterinarians, shelters, rescues, TNRs, local government and interested citizens – as possible to discuss the situation and develop solutions.

► Identify regulations and policies that apply locally, including for the veterinary community, and discuss how they can be met.

3. Understand how the companion animal issues present themselves in different parts of your community

► Determine the main sources of homeless animals and the challenges specific to the community.
  • Working with your community's animal control services and shelters, examine the information collected for animals admitted to shelters such as their species, age, source of intake, spay/neuter status, accurate location where the animal lived or was found.
  • Identify the geographic areas where animal control services are frequently dispatched and which are the source of high proportion of animals taken in to shelter.
  • For initiatives such as Trap-Neuter-Return, identify the locations where cats were trapped. It is important that the information be accurate to identify the geographic areas the animals actually inhabit; information about the address of the trapper or the organization is not relevant.
  • Organize the locations you've identified above by postal code; you may even wish to map them out.
  • If you have the resources and are already collecting relevant, accurate data on intake of animals to shelters, you may be ready for more thorough mapping, using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). ASPCA's X Maps Spot GIS program can help get you started with GIS mapping www.aspcapro.org/gis

► Identify any spay/neuter services that exist by geographic area.
  • What model of accessible spay/neuter services are offered and what volume of surgeries on an annual or monthly basis is handled. What are the limitations of the programs (e.g. not enough surgery capacity or underuse of existing offerings).
  • Determine what private veterinary spay/neuter services exist. Identify the average

fees charged for dog and cat spay and neuter. Make note of other associated or required fees for examinations, vaccines, etc.
- • Note: some spay/neuter services are compiled in a North America-wide directory maintained by ASPCA and PetSmart Charities www.aspca.org/pet-care/spayneuter

▶ Determine which segments of animal guardians in your community do not use or have difficulty accessing existing services and why.

4. Design a strategy to increase the number of animals benefiting from accessible spay/neuter initiatives, starting with goals that are more easily achievable

▶ Target spay/neuter services to the animal populations most in need. In general, populations to target are:
- • shelter animals
- • free-roaming cats
- • prepubescent animals
- • animals whose guardians have low incomes
- • animals from geographic areas over-represented in shelter intake and dispatch of animal control services.

Consider your community's particular situation and what you have learned about segments who have difficulty accessing services.

▶ Consider what accessible spay/neuter service models will work for the different segments. The ASPCA Professional website provides a useful comparison of the different models. Policies or standards exist in some provinces that could limit the use of mobile and MASH-style clinic models. Confirm what models would meet the standards in your area. www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/program_models.pdf

▶ Given the need, determine whether to use and expand existing program(s) or whether a new program is needed.

▶ If targeting a new geographic area, concentrate on a single neighbourhood until goals are met in that area before moving to the next closest neighbourhood.

▶ Eventually, devise a tailored, multifaceted approach that meets the needs of different segments of animal guardians. Create specific strategies to address neighbourhoods or regions with the highest incidence of animal welfare issues, and include initiatives to engage those who are not actively seeking to spay-neuter their companion animals. Strive for fees that will attract clients, using tiered subsidy levels, including a fully-subsidized program for low-income clients, if possible.

▶ Conduct periodic re-evaluations to assess the impact of new initiatives.