Chapter Two

Know Your Community–Community Assessment

Staff Training That Meets the Needs
At the Massachusetts SPCA (MSPCA), the Living With Wildlife (LWW) steering committee conducted an internal assessment to prepare for the launch of their public advocacy campaign. They gathered data to custom-design resources and staff training in preparation for responding to public inquiries. LWW wanted to know: (1) who gets called upon to deal with wildlife issues, (2) what information would help staff, and (3) how best to teach staff and provide them with that information. The three-month assessment included developing a survey, interviewing 64 MSPCA staff (10% of total staff, including representatives from every department), and analyzing the themes from responses. Questions ranged from “How frequently do you get wildlife related questions?” to “Imagine that you could attend a wildlife-related workshop tailored to your needs. What would the topics be?”

As a result of the assessment, LWW learned that the most frequent wildlife issues MSPCA staff handle include: animals in garbage cans, squirrels in attics, orphaned animals and birds, neighbors feeding wild animals, and bear or coyote sightings. MSPCA staff wanted simple tools—such as FAQ’s answer sheets, fact sheets on common species, and resource/referral lists. Assessment data also suggested topics, methods, and timeframes for training. The resulting training, designed with staff skills and needs in mind, earned high marks for being interesting, relevant and beneficial. Additionally, LWW discovered that the assessment process was a great way to further interdepartmental relationships and communications, paving the way for future successful work among departments.

If you have come to help me, you can go home again. But if you see my struggle as part of your own, perhaps we can work together.

—Australian Aboriginal Saying
A community assessment describes a community’s successes and limitations in dealing with a specific problem. The best community assessments combine facts, data and information that you gather with interpretations, opinions and hypotheses that you formulate.

A community assessment gives you a broader and deeper understanding of issues—within the context of your community—that will help you formulate effective solutions. The assessment process is the first step of engaging the community in solutions.

- at the beginning of strategic planning
- before creating a new program or service
- before embarking on a major new initiative—such as a new building
- as a check to see how effectively your organization has been meeting the community’s needs

1. Identify the scope of your study.
2. Learn more about the context.
3. Define your audience.
4. Ask your community.
5. Summarize your findings.
Step 1. Identify the scope of your study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you are...</th>
<th>study...</th>
<th>For example...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conducting strategic planning,</td>
<td>the overall needs and capacities of the community related to animals and the human-animal bond.</td>
<td>homed and homeless animals, cared for and neglected animals, availability and gaps in behavior and training services, available and needed animal and guardian recreation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creating a new program, service or campaign,</td>
<td>the specific capacities you could mobilize and the needs you hope your program will address.</td>
<td>one or more of the issues from above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considering a new building or a major renovation,</td>
<td>both the community needs and the organizational needs that a new or improved building will address.</td>
<td>community needs: accessibility to training classes, more/better opportunities for community service, etc.; organizational needs: air circulation, space for customers to visit with animals, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conducting an organizational assessment,</td>
<td>the overall needs of the community related to animals and the human-animal bond.</td>
<td>homed and homeless animals, cared for and neglected animals, availability and gaps in behavior and training services, available and needed animal and guardian recreation, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 2. Learn more about the context.

Your goal is to develop new insight about what’s needed for animals and what works. One way to do so inexpensively is to let others do the work for you. Many organizations have already collected research that you can use. Data collected by others is called external secondary research.

☐ Review journal articles, trade magazines, and animal protection websites (see the list in the appendix). What are the prevalent or recurrent trends and issues over the past two years?

☐ Contact national groups serving shelters and humane organizations. What do they see as the key strengths of organizations like yours, and conversely, the leading problems and best ways to address them?

☐ Consult your colleagues in your state or regional federation. What are they seeing as the emerging trends and issues? What are they doing with their planning and services as a result?

---

### Resources for Data on Animal Protection Trends and Issues

- **The Foundation For Interdisciplinary Research And Education Promoting Animal Welfare**—click on “working papers” for information on spay/neuter, relinquishment, adoption and more at [www.firepaw.org/research.html](http://www.firepaw.org/research.html).
- **Society & Animals**—articles on a variety of animal protection issues (many with data) at [www.psyeta.org/sa/index.html](http://www.psyeta.org/sa/index.html).

---

### Making Good Use of External Secondary Research (Existing Data)

To determine where to target spay/neuter efforts, No More Homeless Pets of Hillsborough County, Florida, combined Hillsborough County Animal Services records on phone calls, impounds and euthanasia with census data and with veterinary practice locations, in order to track the needs for services by zip code. Here’s a sample of what they learned:

**In the five lowest median income zip code areas...**

- one is among the highest ranking for impounds or euthanasias,
- one is among the highest ranking for requests for services, and
- 100% have above average occurrences of service requests, impoundments and euthanasias.

**In those zip code areas which have below average median income levels (23 total)...**

- 12 (52%) have one or no veterinary clinic,
- four (17%) are among the highest ranking for impoundments or euthanasias,
- 13 (56%) have above average occurrences of impoundments or euthanasias, and
- 12 (52%) are in rural areas and small cities outside Tampa.

---

**Watch for sample relevance.** When using research from other sources, be careful to consider the population base studied and how your community may differ. If analysis was done for the whole U.S. or for a specific region, you may want to duplicate the research locally to validate the findings for your area.
Step 3. Define your audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you are...</th>
<th>your audience will be...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conducting strategic planning,</td>
<td>your entire community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creating a new program, service or campaign,</td>
<td>specific people and animals affected by the initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considering a new building or major renovation,</td>
<td>your entire community and the specific people and animals affected by the new or improved facility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conducting an organizational assessment,</td>
<td>your entire community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the Target Audience Profile on pages 28-29 to describe your audience. Identify current local conditions. What’s most important to your audience? What are the relevant trends and issues for your community and your identified audience? What will be the most pressing issues and trends over the next two to five years? For the answers, consult local experts on population, social and economic issues—such as news editors, politicians, government personnel, Chamber of Commerce officials, and university professors.

Resources for Data on Community Demographics (age, income, ethnicity, marital status, etc.)

- U.S. Census—quick, free reports by town, county, state and U.S. at www.factfinder.census.gov.
- EASI—offers data based on radius around a specific address, useful for analyzing neighborhoods. Data for 2000 is free with free site registration at www.easidemographics.com. Note that the company will follow up with an email and phone call on their services if you register.
- You can also find demographic statistics by asking your local librarian, planning commission, economic development board, tourism council or board of realtors.

Think positive! You may find that asking questions about trends and issues yields answers about only negative trends. Work to get the complete picture by asking specific questions that tease out positives. For example: “What do you see as the three most encouraging trends in our community?”

For examples of community interview projects in other fields, visit Business As Agent of World Benefit at http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu/bawb.cfm, and the Peace Corps at www.peacecorps.gov/wws/service/lessons/lesson4/lesson4.html; for an innovative model of community assessment and capacity building, visit the Asset Based Community Development Institute at www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd/cfw.
Step 4. Ask your community: Interviews, Focus Groups & Surveys

Talking to people begins the process of engaging them in solving problems—laying the foundation for future development (fundraising) and possible collaboration.

Community Interviews

Ask people in your community for their input on the issues you are studying. Begin by explaining the scope of your study (see Step 1). For example, “We’re studying homed and homeless animals in our community to understand why, how and when some animals have permanent homes and others become homeless.” Then ask a few open-ended questions to elicit their knowledge, attitudes and ideas about the issue. Here’s a general set of questions you could use:

- What do you see as the needs of the community around this issue?
- How is the community meeting those needs now?
- What about this solution is working well? What about this solution isn’t working well?
- What are some ideas or possible models for improving the community’s ability to meet the needs?
- What other thoughts do you have about this issue?

Opinion leaders to interview:

- veterinarians
- leaders of area animal service organizations
- community leaders and politicians
- professional educators or school administrators
- business leaders
- law enforcement professionals
- human service (public and private) executives
- active volunteers and animal advocates
- newspaper editors
- representatives of your target audience
Focus Groups
A focus group is a carefully facilitated meeting designed to solicit a lot of feedback in a short amount of time from a representative group of people. The interactive, conversational nature of a focus group helps participants to collaboratively generate detailed answers beyond what they would typically provide in a one-to-one conversation. Additionally, because participants have the flexibility to express feelings and opinions in their own words, focus groups often surface novel ideas.

To host a successful focus group:
- Use a professional facilitator. Your facilitator must be neutral on the topic, set a safe and respectful tone, facilitate equal participation from all group members, manage the time, and keep the group on track while allowing for deep exploration into topics of great interest.
- Select your group wisely. Participants should be familiar with (but not have overly positive or negative feelings about) your organization or the issues you are studying. Participants should be able to communicate in a group setting. Finally, make sure the group is representative of your target audience. For example, if you are interested in researching the potential effectiveness of spay/neuter vouchers, you will want to talk with individuals for whom cost may be a barrier.
- Set clear goals for the group, and don’t try to cover too much ground.
- Test your questions ahead of time. Questions should be simple, brief, consistent with your goals, and invite thoughtful participation.
- Set the stage with an invitation that establishes your goals, your expectations, and your plans for utilizing the results.
- Select a private, comfortable setting, and provide beverages and simple (not messy) snacks.

Quality Plus Quantity
Interviews and focus groups are qualitative research tools. Qualitative research uncovers general impressions. The products of this research are words—transcripts, interview notes, or survey comments. You can interpret what’s been said, but you can’t make conclusions about what portion of your target audience would feel similarly. Qualitative approaches are especially helpful when you want input to define a problem, create new ideas, see what words your audience uses to talk about an issue, or learn how people react to your plans and programs.

Quantitative research yields statistical results such as “X% of your community supports spay/neuter.” For quantitative results to be meaningful, you must talk to a sufficient number of people (at least 30, preferably 100 or more) and you must ask questions that produce answers that can be counted—such as multiple choice, yes/no, or ratings.

Community Surveys
Interviews and focus groups uncover general issues, impressions, and ideas. But to gain a precise direction, you’ll need survey data. Survey topics are chosen based on the issues they address:

- **Planning or Assessment**
  What do community members believe to be the most important animal protection issues?
  How do they rate your organization in handling each?

- **Facility Expansion for Training Classes**
  How interested would people be in learning to resolve animal behavior problems?
  Which behaviors would concern them the most?
  What factors would draw them to your organization vs. an alternative provider?

- **Spay/Neuter**
  What percentage of animals in your community have been spayed or neutered?
  What are the key barriers for guardians who have not altered their animals?

Below are two examples of question sets you might ask for needs assessment on spay/neuter.

In addition to questions specific to your issue, your survey should include questions asking about gender, age, education and other demographic data. You can then check that the group you have surveyed represents the audience you are targeting, and see if there are any significant differences between responses from men and women, youth and seniors, or those with different levels of education.

The best surveys are designed to help you make better decisions. For every question you’re considering putting in a survey, ask yourself how you will use the data that you collect.

You can conduct your survey in person, on the telephone, or by mail. In general, you need at least 30 completed surveys (preferably 100 or more) to draw meaningful conclusions. If you want to look at subgroups you should have 30 in each subgroup. Therefore, if you want to compare responses for men vs. women, you will want to have at least 30 surveys from men and 30 from women.

---

**Please circle the number showing how important each reason below would be in your decision to spay or neuter your animal.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think it’s mean to “fix” an animal.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An animal should have one litter before being spayed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My animal may become lazy and fat if spayed or neutered.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s too expensive.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have a way to drive my animal to a clinic for the surgery.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hours to pick up and drop off my animal are not good for me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Please circle the number showing how important each reason below would be in your decision to spay or neuter your animal.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It will help reduce the number of unwanted animals killed each year.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My animal will be less likely to roam and less likely to get lost, injured or hit by a car.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My animal will not get mammary cancer [females] or testicular cancer [males].</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will be cheaper to license my animal.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 5. Summarize your findings.

Describe your community’s resources and needs in quantitative and qualitative terms.

- What is the issue or problem?
- How many are affected and who are they?
- What are the strengths and resources of this community?
- What are the underlying causes of the problem? ... contributing factors?
- Where, when, and how is the community rising to the challenges?
- Where, when, and how is the community struggling with this issue or problem?
- What solution(s) does your research indicate will most effectively activate the community’s resources and meet the challenges of this problem?

Document the process you used to gather data and your sources for information. Attach supporting documentation: copies of interview, focus group, and survey response summaries; journal articles; relevant demographics or statistics; and any other pertinent materials.

### TARGET AUDIENCE PROFILE

**Name and location of your organization’s total service area:**

__________________________

__________________________

**□ urban □ suburban □ rural**

**Size:**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Total Service Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Size:**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average household income:**

**Unemployment rate:**

**Education:**

**Name or description of the service area and target audience for this initiative:**

__________________________

__________________________

**Sex**

**Age**

**Ethnicity**

**Marital status, family or household composition:**

__________________________

**Types (and hours) of work:**

__________________________

**Major employers:**

__________________________

**Types of housing:**

__________________________

**Preferred modes of transportation:**

__________________________

**How do work, household composition, housing and transportation impact this audience’s relationship with animals?**

__________________________

**Where does this audience shop?**

__________________________

**Where and how does this audience get news?**

__________________________

---

*These calculations yield rough estimates and are based on The American Veterinary Medical Association U.S. Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook, available from the AVMA at 847-925-8070 or www.avma.org.*
What educational, social, religious and youth organizations does this audience frequent? ______________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
How much free time do members of this audience have? What kinds of recreation do they enjoy? Where? __________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
What are the predominant values and beliefs of this audience regarding family, animals and community? __________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
What government and private institutions serve the needs of this audience and how? ____________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
What animal-related services and retailers serve this audience? ____________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
What are this audience’s general strengths and resources? ________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
What are this audience’s needs related to animals? _____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
Other interesting facts and statistics about this audience: __________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
The above information was gathered from the following sources: ___________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________