

From “Dog Pound” to Pet Resource Center: Baltimore Animal Rescue & Care Shelter is Leading the Way

Baltimore city, Maryland

#Extensive Internal Collaboration

Population: 611,648

Innovation

Criteria:

- Initiative fundamentally changed a process, product or service (fundamental)
- OR
- Initiative builds upon existing knowledge to improve a product, process or service (incremental)
 - The initiative substantially stretched the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.

Describe Your Innovation

(When and how did this innovation get started? Do also detail how the program or policy innovative, how it has changed previous processes, products, or services, and how it has substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.)

As recently as the 1980s, an estimated 17 million dogs and cats were being euthanized annually; today, that figure is about 1.5 million, thanks largely to the “no-kill movement.” It isn’t exactly news that we are a nation of animal lovers. After all, 68 percent of U.S. households own at least one pet and it’s estimated that Americans will spend more than \$72 billion on our pets this year alone. Still, the best reflection of our deep affection for these companion animals is seen not in commercial transactions but in the profound transformation of U.S. animal sheltering that’s taken place over the past 50 years—and Baltimore is at the forefront of the movement.

As recently as 2004, only 2 percent of animals entering Baltimore’s municipal shelter made it out alive. Today, though, the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS), the nonprofit that contracts with the city for its animal sheltering services, boasts a “save rate” of 91 percent. This is even more impressive when one considers BARCS’ intake numbers (10,475 dogs and cats in 2017 alone) and many challenges faced by its community (e.g., more than 23 percent of Baltimore’s residents are living in poverty, nearly twice the national figure).

Critical to BARCS’ success was the organization’s innovative approach to animal sheltering. Recognizing that the traditional “dog pound” model was inadequate to serve the animals in their care or the residents of Baltimore, BARCS turned this outdated model on its head, striving instead to become a resource center for people and their pets. Not surprisingly, this radical shift attracted others committed to lifesaving: partnerships with government agencies and animal welfare nonprofits, for example, as well as support from residents interested in volunteering. As a result, BARCS has become model for the rest of the country.

Collaboration

Criteria:

- Initiative demonstrated engaging stakeholders both internal and external.
- Initiative demonstrated high performance teaming, breaking down internal silos.
- Strategic partnerships and or community networks were developed as a result of the initiative

In less than 200 words, what individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming? What strategic partnerships and/or community networks, if any, were developed?

Community networks and strategic partnerships are part of BARCS' organizational DNA; indeed, the nonprofit was formed as a result of concerned citizens demanding change from their local government—and then rolling up their sleeves to become part of that change. Among them was Jennifer Brause, who's served as executive director since 2006. Brause knew from the beginning that the radical transformation she had in mind was going to require considerable support from a range of stakeholders, from government agencies and national animal welfare organizations to local business owners and "foster families."

BARCS has teamed up with the Maryland SPCA and the Baltimore Humane Society to create the Baltimore Animal Welfare Alliance, collaborating for adoption events, spay/neuter programs, and other lifesaving efforts. And BARCS was among the first shelters in the country to be awarded grant funding from Best Friends Animal Society and PetSmart Charities, Inc. for a "community cat program," whereby "stray" cats are sterilized, vaccinated, and returned to their neighborhoods rather than being euthanized. More recently, BARCS teamed up with Show Your Soft Side (<https://showyoursoftside.org/>), a public service campaign aimed at young people with a message that treating animals with compassion is a sign of strength, not weakness.

If a private consultant was used please describe in detail their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. Maintain a 100 word maximum.

Various national organizations have provided consultations.

Significance

Criteria:

- Initiative addresses an area of concern for the majority of local government organizations.
- Initiative can serve as a model and replicated in other jurisdictions.

Please describe the extent to which you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please also provide verification of the replication.

In 2014, Best Friends Animal Society, one of the largest national animal welfare organizations and a leader in the no-kill movement, featured BARCS in its 2014 No-Kill Community Playbook series highlighting organizations that have "taken [their] communities to lifesaving levels once believed to be unreachable."

In 1994, San Francisco became the first U.S. city to achieve “no-kill” status, saving the lives of more than 90 percent of the animals entering its shelter system. This success was easily dismissed by the naysayers, though; after all, San Francisco is wealthier than most cities, and more liberal, too. The same was said when, in 2010, Austin became the largest no-kill city in the country: “That’s great—but that’s Austin.” But when Baltimore flirts with that same 90 percent threshold—thanks largely to the remarkable strides made by the BARCS team—other communities sit up and take notice. Among those paying attention are Baltimore County and neighboring Anne Arundel County, who are modeling BARCS’ community cat programming and “open adoption” policies (designed to remove barriers to adoption).

Effectiveness

Criteria:

- Initiative addresses a community or organization need.
- Initiative has achieved tangible results.
- Initiative improved the organizational culture or the traditional approach to problem solving.
- Initiative has received recognition for its achievements, i.e. independent evaluation, national recognition, local press, etc.

Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain?

Easily the most significant obstacle to saving even more of Baltimore’s companion animals has been BARCS’ lack of funding and resulting staffing limitations. Although their current budget has increased 10-fold since 2005, BARCS’ contract with the City of Baltimore covers only about 29% of the \$4.5M budget. To bridge these persisting gaps in staffing, BARCS reached out to the community—and the response from Baltimore residents has been overwhelming.

Today, volunteers walk and play with dogs and cats, transport animals, clean dog kennels and cat cages, train dogs and cats, staff off-site adoption events, provide mobile adoptions, work as adoption counselors, help reunite lost pets with their people, provide low cost services for public pets and outdoor cats, do fundraising and outreach, including managing social media, educate the community about the shelter’s services and pet care, and provide customer service at BARCS’ low-cost vaccination clinics. And a network of devoted foster families provide care for animals recovering from medical problems, dogs who need a little extra training, as well as newborn kittens and puppies. Several hundred animals are in foster homes at any given time, thereby expanding BARCS’s lifesaving capacity.

What outcomes did this program or policy have? Could you share one or two objective measures that demonstrate these outcomes? Ultimately, how did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment?

BARCS’ most important measure of success is its “save rate,” the ratio of positive, live outcomes to the total number of animals entering the shelter. In 2004, the year before BARCS was established to take over animal sheltering services for Baltimore, only 2 percent of animals entering the city’s municipal shelter made it out alive. In 2017, BARCS achieved an 89 percent save rate—on the cusp of the 90 percent threshold necessary to be awarded no-kill status. Through August of 2018, BARCS save rate is at an all-time high of 91%.

Other key metrics include adoptions (from 90 in 2004 to 4,000–5,000 annually today), shelter intake (decreased significantly in recent years due to a range of community-level interventions) and volunteer hours (there were no volunteers in 2004; in 2017, BARCS volunteers logged almost 36,000 hours). Somewhat more difficult to measure in quantitative terms—but equally important—is the outpouring of support from the community. This is perhaps best exemplified by the success of BARCS’ annual Pawject Runway event, which, as they like to say, “ain’t your mama’s fashion show!” For the past five years, BARCS has partnered with the Show Your Soft Side anti-animal abuse campaign (<https://showyoursoftside.org/>), pairing some of the biggest names in professional sports with the shelter’s adoptable animals together on the runway. In 2017, Pawject Runway attracted more than 1,200 attendees and raised more than \$130,000 to save the lives of Baltimore’s homeless and abused animals.

BARCS is committed to transparency, posting the shelter’s annual statistics on its website for all to see (<https://barcs.org/about-reports/>), and participates in the Shelter Animals Count project (<https://shelteranimalscount.org/>), a collaborative initiative to publicly share key statistics from animal shelters across the U.S.

Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage.

2015 “Baltimore” magazine article covering the history of BARCS and the shelter’s remarkable turnaround
<http://www.baltimoremagazine.net/2015/9/2/barcs-celebrates-10-years-of-animal-rescue>

2016 “People” magazine article describing BARCS’ dramatic lifesaving success.

<http://pets.people.com/pets/2016/06/02/article/dog-tired-thriving-how-one-woman-dramatically-reduced-baltimore-shelters-98>

Presentation

Criteria:

- Presentation will be delivered by a team.
- Presentation will be highly interactive and engaging.

Example Social Media Post

By implementing one innovative lifesaving program after another, Baltimore’s saving 91% of its shelter pets—becoming a model for communities across the country!

Please write an abstract or short description for your innovation that would make conference attendees say “Well, I need to attend this session!”

As anyone who has ever attended a public meeting with an “animal issue” on the agenda will attest, there are few issues that attract such passionate participation from residents. It’s no wonder, then, that as communities across the country strive for greater “livability,” policymakers are increasingly turning their attention to issues of animal welfare. After all, how can a community be considered livable while thousands of cats and dogs are dying in its municipal shelter?

Among the communities leading the way toward a “no-kill nation” is Baltimore, MD, where the Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS) has transformed animal sheltering, turning the outdated “dog pound” model on its head, striving instead to be a resource center for people and their pets. Not long ago, more than half the animals entering the shelter didn’t make it out alive; today, BARCS is saving more than 91 percent of the animals in their care.

This interactive session offers attendees an opportunity to assess their own community’s performance on key shelter metrics—and set a course for improvement using the BARCS playbook.

How will you make the session creative and unique?- How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?- Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.- What will attendees be able to have as an actionable "takeaway" from the session?

In late 2018, Best Friends Animal Society will unveil its interactive “No-Kill Communities Map.” For the first time ever, anyone with Internet access will be able to assess their community’s performance on key shelter metrics. Most critically: how many of the animals coming into the shelter are making it out alive. This tool promises to be a legitimate game-changer—and will be put to good use at TLG, with attendees revealing (for all to see) their community’s “save rate.”

For generations, the public has had limited access to such information (despite the fact that so much animal sheltering is funded by tax dollars). Those days are over. Armed with this new information, residents are much more likely to take action—supporting high-performing shelters and demanding change from poor-performing agencies. For this case study presentation, we will not only “diagnose” the situation in participants’ community—we’ll also provide a “prescription” for improvement (if necessary). Shelter overflowing with cats and kittens? Have you tried a targeted sterilization program? Large dogs taking too long to be adopted? What about a transport program to get them to shelters where these dogs are in demand? Workshop participants will be going home with answers!

Anything else you would like to add?