

ACCT Philly
Public Session
August 21, 2017
6:00PM-8:30PM
Location: Philadelphia Free Library, Central Branch

Board and Staff Attendees

Robin Ackerman
Dayna Villa
Adam Corbett
Lori McCutcheon
Vincent Medley
Audra Houghton
Darcy Oordt
Dr. Hillary Herendeen

Overview and Updates

Robin reviewed the new format prior to the start of the question and answer session. Participants signed up in advance to speak. They had 4 minutes to state comments and questions, with a one minute reply from the staff/board, then another minute to the participant for final comments.

Vincent gave an update about the Community Cat Program.

- History of the Best Friends Animal Society (BFAS) TNR grant
 - ACCT now taking that over
 - Hired a Community Cat Coordinator
 - City of Philadelphia is funding a second Coordinator position
- Obtained a grant from PetSmart Charities to fund the program
 - BFAS allowing ACCT Philly to keep all equipment including vans
 - Official start date in October 1, 2017

Participant Questions & Responses

1. Participant One

Issue: Concerned with the conditions of the Community Cat Room at ACCT Philly, stating there are three basic needs which are not being met: 1) paper in the trap & paper and plastic under the traps; 2) wet food; 3) a cover. She asked who is responsible for the room, who is checking the room and asked why some volunteers, like her, were banned from the room recently. She also said there are issues with the paperwork being accurate.

Immediate Response

- Dr. Hillary responded that there are standards for the room and training has been done with staff and that she was unaware of people being banned as a policy. She went on to say that volunteers are essential and they want more volunteers.
- Darcy responded that newer staff that aren't fully trained yet could be contributing to the issue and recognized that overall, ACCT Philly is understaffed so many things prove difficult to do properly.

- Robin indicated this would be looked into further.

Post-Meeting Responses:

Question: Who is responsible for care of cats in the TNR "Barn"?

ACCT Responded: Care of these cats depends on which organization is directly managing their care. For example, Best Friends keeps some cats in the cat "barn", and ACCT keeps some TNR cats as well as bite quarantine cats in the room. The ACCT cats are cared for by ACCT kennel attendants.

Question: What can be done about poor conditions in the Community Cat Room at ACCT Philly, stating there are three basic needs that are not being met: 1) paper in the trap & paper and plastic under the traps; 2) wet food; 3) a cover.

ACCT Responded:

- Training
 - Multiple staff trainings have been completed with Best Friends staff and Mandy Small, though some of the newest staff have not been formally trained yet and currently only trained on the job with kennel leads.
 - Another training is currently scheduled, with the most recent date (August 15th: General Cat Care) and the next training for trap cat care and set up. Animal Care will work closely with Amanda, and the new ACCT Philly Community Cat Coordinator when hired, to assure staff are receiving training and refreshers as indicated when non-compliance is observed on walk throughs or reported to Animal Care management.
- Reporting
 - Current reporting system for improperly set up cats is as follows:
 - Volunteers can email Kelsey if they can't find or are not comfortable with reporting to a manger or asking kennel staff on site,
 - Best Friends (BF) reports issues to Carolyn, Mandy Small and Audra. There have historically been several things reported by BF that have been followed up internally with corrective actions including retraining and up to the level of firing staff with recurring issues in this area.
 - There have been no reported complaints in the last 6-8 weeks.
- Number of daily walk throughs
 - Initial care is provided by Kennel Staff. There are two or three walk throughs in addition to the scheduled cleaning which is once in the morning, and a spot check in the evening.
 - Additionally, there is a basic medical assessment/review for possible vet check animals by vet nurses around 8-9 am.
 - Walk throughs performed by Managers include two per day (once for population, once for assigned task completion/care review) and the Veterinarian walks through once per day.

Question: Why were some volunteers banned from the room recently?

ACCT Responded: We ask that volunteers be in the room with an either an ACCT or Best Friends staff member to ensure the safety of the volunteers and the animals. If a volunteer is told they have been banned by a staff member, they should reach out to the community cat coordinator or volunteer coordinator. Volunteers may be banned from the room if they are in violation of the volunteer handbook and, if this is the case, the volunteer is notified in writing.

Question: Why are there issues with the paperwork being accurate?

Note: ACCT Staff followed up with Melyssa to gather more information about what was inaccurate. The items listed below, that are in bold, are clarifications from Melyssa.

There are a lot of mistakes in the surgery notes, for example, the notes will mention "puppy" when it's a cat. It appears these notes are copied and pasted.

- ACCT Responded: We will review this with staff and ask them to do a quick proof read on their notes before they save them in. We also can run reports from Pet Point to review notes on animals, so it may be something that we will need management to follow up on to ensure accuracy.

Sometimes the paperwork for the ACCT cats isn't clipped to the cages, it's just laid on top. Aren't we concerned this could cause a mix up and lead to the cat getting released in the wrong location?

- ACCT Responded: This is a concern. It has now been forwarded to Dr. Hillary to follow up with staff for reminders to make sure the appropriate paperwork stays with the correct animal.

Sometimes when I bring cats in for TNR the intaking staff member puts my address instead of the found address where I trapped them, so there's no information in the system about where the cat came from.

- ACCT Responded: This is improper entry of data and we will remind our Client Services Representatives of the importance of collecting the found address. If this happens in the future, please bring it to the attention of a member of management so that it can be addressed immediately.

2. Participant Two

Issue:

- She said the staff are incompetent and lazy, only a handful of them care and that their jobs aren't that difficult.
- She said she isn't called when cats are ready for pick up and that one cat was euthanized and she wasn't called.

Immediate Response: Dr. Hillary apologized immediately and Sharla expressed her appreciation for the sincere apology.

Issue: Sharla is concerned that strays are being TNR'd because people lie and say a cat is a stray when it's actually their owned cat. She also expressed that she is not happy with rescues not being allowed to

pull directly from the community cat room. She said this is all being implemented to get a higher live release rate and that ACCT Philly needs more caring people and more training for them is needed.

Immediate Response:

- Dr. Hillary apologized again, and said changes have been made immediately to avoid the issue of the cat being euthanized and her not being notified about it happening. She also said the staff care quite a bit about the animals. She also said they are trying to hire more staff.
- Darcy went on to say that releasing the cats gives them a better chance at a live outcome and to possibly be reunited with a possible owner.

Issue: She still wants an answer on why cats in the community room are not available for rescue if there is a rescue willing. It was briefly explained that ACCT wants the other urgent animals pulled. A more detailed explanation is needed, perhaps with a link to studies done by large organizations on SNR.

Issue: There is clarification requested on the “stray cat policies for returning to field and rescue pulls”

Post-Meeting Response:

Question: Why aren't cats in the community room available for rescue if there is a rescue willing to pull them? Please clarify the policies for returning cats to the field and rescue pulls.

ACCT Responded:

- Generally, when we have a live exit option for an animal we take the first available option. That means if a rescue tags a healthy, adoptable animal, we will allow that animal to go to the transfer partner instead of being placed on the adoption floor. The same is true with TNR/SNR cats. Once a cat has been determined to be a candidate, that option remains the preferred option for that cat. Additionally, as our community is quite flooded with animals needing homes, when there is a cat that is identified as a TNR or a return to field cat we believe that putting that cat in rescue placement takes that available spot for a cat who *cannot* be returned to the neighborhood where it came from.
- Most the cats that are brought to us as strays are healthy, well fed cats. This is evidence that someone is providing basic food and water for that animal, and likely several people in the neighborhood are caring for that cat. Because cats are legally allowed to be outdoors and roaming, there's also a strong possibility in some cases that the cat is owned by a person and is an indoor/outdoor cat, especially if the cat's behavior suggests that it is a good candidate for adoption. In those cases, it is our policy to return those animals to the location where they were picked up to give them the best chance at returning to the home or community where they are stable, comfortable, and cared for, leaving the adoption opportunities for cats who were known to be indoor cats, are declawed, or have other indicators that they are not candidates for return to field. This also reduces the risk of contributing to the 'vacuum effect', in which removing an established cat from a territory creates space for another to come in, furthering the negative cycle of trapping and removing.
- The sad reality is that healthy, adoptable cats are not pulled from the shelter on a regular basis and become candidates for euthanasia, so to increase the chances that there is a transfer partner with space to pull those animals, return to field is utilized to save the lives of the returned cat, but also the cat in the shelter that does not have an interested rescue.

- <http://millioncatchallenge.org/resources/return-to-field>
- <http://www.pethealthnetwork.com/news-blogs/a-vets-life/dr-hurley-and-dr-levy-aim-save-one-million-cats>

3. Participant Three

Issue: She complained that the lot had a lot of white city vehicles in it for CTS, taking up parking for customers. She said the parking lot has major pot holes and that she submitted a complaint to the Streets Department about it. The TNR clinic ran wonderfully under Aine Doley and she was heartbroken to hear she was “banned”

Immediate Response:

- Audra thanked her for contacting the streets department on behalf of ACCT Philly. Vincent said that the cars do not belong to ACCT and that overall, sharing the space with another group causes issues to grow programs and have events like CTS. Vincent said he had a conversation with the city that day about the lot. He meets with them weekly and we have a city official on the board. The public then asked that Councilman Henon to respond to this.
- Robin said it’s not appropriate to comment about personnel issues and Vincent directed her to speak to Best Friends Animal Society, as Aine is their employee, not an employee of ACCT Philly.

4. Participant Four

Issue:

- She wanted to know why ACCT Philly did not participate at a mega adoption event held in Center City, when those same days they euthanized animals for space reasons. She also wanted to know if held again, will ACCT participate?
- She questioned the budget in regards to staffing, stating that if the budget wasn’t cut, why are there less veterinarians and less clinic hours?
- She asked about current annual reports on the website (for 2015 & 2016) and why they aren’t uploaded.
- She stated the laundry room is disgusting, slippery and the machines are never cleaned.

Immediate Response:

- Vincent said the budget hasn’t decreased but it hasn’t increased either, but expenses have gone up, giving ACCT less resources. Specifically, health care costs and liability insurance costs have increased substantially.
- Dr. Hillary said having fewer veterinarians has been “painful” and the increased funds promised to ACCT Philly from the City of Philadelphia of \$300,000 has not been given to the organization yet.

- Darcy said the data issues at ACCT have been “enormous” so they made the annual report less of a priority since the numbers are on the website, just not in that format.
- Vincent said they would work to get the report up on the website within the next 30 days.
- Robin said ACCT now has 1 full time vet and 3-part time vets and said it’s extremely difficult to find veterinarians willing to work full time in an animal shelter. ACCT is honored to have the first shelter medicine intern in the City of Philadelphia which is sponsored through Maddie’s fund.
- Staff said the laundry machines are serviced regularly and that the facility cannot support better, industrial machines because of the electrical.
- Again, Councilman Bobby Henon was asked to help with this by members of the public.
- ACCT will follow up with the city to see if industrial machines are an option but it is unlikely since the current electric system is having a hard time keeping up with the new HVAC

Post-Meeting Response:

Question: She wanted to know why ACCT Philly did not participate at a mega adoption event held in Center City, when those same days they euthanized animals for space reasons. She also wanted to know if held again, will ACCT participate?

ACCT Responded: Our participation in events is determined by several factors from staff availability, availability of adoptable animals to other events planned in the same time frame. Prior mega adoption events have conflicted with other adoption events that ACCT was previously committed to participate.

Item: ACCT will follow up with the city to see if industrial machines are an option but it is unlikely since the current electric system is having a hard time keeping up with the new HVAC

ACCT Responded: Public properties is sending their electrical team out to evaluate the laundry room capacity as of 8/29/17.

5. Participant Five

Comment: He stated that every year CTS is better organized!

Issue: He asked why more isn’t done to fundraise and cited examples of shelters in San Diego, Baltimore and Washington DC that raise over \$1 million. He recognized the board of directors and how it’s set up poses a fundraising conflict of interest. He suggested different people are approached to join the board that can raise money.

Immediate Response:

- Staff responded that ACCT is given \$4 million from the city and that they raise \$1 million through grants and donations. Vincent stated that the entire community needs more resources, including ACCT Philly.

- Robin stated that during the recent strategic planning sessions that a committee will be formed to help recruit people for fundraising.

6. Participant Six

Issue: She asked why ACCT has no signs stating that abandoning an animal on the property is illegal?

Immediate Response: Audra responded that technically it isn't illegal and Dayna reiterated that no judge will charge someone for abandonment if they leave the pet at the shelter.

Issue: Katie asked if there's been an increase of abandoned pets because of the surrender appointment requirement.

Immediate Response: Audra responded that no they haven't and if there's mitigating circumstances they take the animal without an appointment and that they are working with the CSR's on active listening skills to get more of the truth behind the reason for the surrender to see if they can help resolve it.

Issue: Katie asked if checks of cages are done and if there's individual accountability for this.

Immediate Response: Dr. Hillary responded there is team accountability for this and the vet nurses do evening medications and check animals then. Katie asked her to consider individual accountability and Dr. Hillary said under current staffing levels that isn't a realistic expectation. She acknowledged that yes, they should be able to do better with this but it just isn't realistic now.

7. Participant Seven

Comment: Acknowledged there is a lot of great work being done!

Issue: She said she's had issues getting in contact with anyone at the facility, that the email designated to contact the board of directors wasn't working and that when emailing Vincent, she's received no response.

Immediate Response: Darcy & Robin responded that the email issue for the board email address should be resolved now.

Issue: Michelle asked if there is overall management follow up to things that go on at ACCT.

Immediate Response: Vincent replied that he walks through the entire facility every day.

Vincent Response: In checking emails, over the last 6 months, he has no emails from Michelle

Issue: Michelle asked why people would be turned away at impromptu adoption events

Immediate Response: Robin replied that being its last minute, that leaves little time for proper preparation. Michelle asked about the signs being posted turning adopters away and Robin acknowledged the sign was poorly worded and it's been changed. Audra explained that the public turn out is amazing and that they give vouchers to anyone that needs to come back another day to process their adoption due to a lack of time for ACCT to do so that day.

8. Participant Eight

Issue:

- She wanted to talk about Dog Meet videos, evaluations for rescues and using volunteers in the operations.
- She indicated she lead a meeting with a team of volunteers to addresses these issues and came up with solutions...and that group has failed to coordinate a second meeting due to a lack of response from ACCT Philly.
- She brought a transfer partner application that had not been responded to, which was submitted 6 months ago.

Immediate Response:

- Robin announced that Audra would be holding monthly volunteer meetings starting in September. Audra reported they are filling the Director of Community Services position, who the Volunteer Coordinator reports to, to help improve volunteer involvement. They want to simplify the barriers to volunteering.

Post-Meeting Response:

- An offer was made to a Dir. of Community Services candidate on 8/28/17. He has accepted, and pending his background screening will start at the beginning of October.
- Currently, any blue lanyard volunteer can help with handling dogs for meets and any green lanyard can help with photos or videos.

Issue: Megan asked if any of the \$300K additional funding is going towards hiring a behaviorist.

Immediate Response: Vincent was going to follow up with Megan to see where the breakdown was with the second meeting and Audra was going to look into the transfer partner application. ACCT will need to formulate a response re: dog meet videos, evaluations, and whether any of the additional budget can go towards a behaviorist.

Post-Meeting Response:

- Due to increases in salaries required by the union contract and staffing needs for veterinary staff this money will not be used towards a behaviorist/evaluator.
- The second meeting had to be postponed due to Vincent being out of the office and the volume of work occurring during this time of year. The first monthly meeting with volunteers has been scheduled with Audra for 9/23/17 and was announced in this week's volunteer blast and will be posted to volunteer social media pages.
- ACCT Philly's Lifesaving Department is small, with only 3.5 front-line employees when fully staffed, and handles an overwhelming workload. In order to save as many lives as possible, we must first allocate our limited time to accommodating active rescues and processing applications from rescues that can take pets at highest risk for euthanasia.

Given the amount of work this requires, we are currently not in a position to prioritize approval of Transfer Applications for rescues that only wish to pull specific, highly sought after dog breeds such as Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. In our experience, these breeds are so in demand that

even when ill or injured, we see immense interest. Due to a lack of urgent need, approving the rescue in question was on our “to-do” list, but not a top priority.

This being said, we deeply appreciate all rescues that want to work with us to save lives. There is no excuse for a six month lag in communication, and we apologize for the oversight. We should have been in contact with the rescue to let them know that the application was received, but may take a few months to process due to the vast number of pressing matters requiring our immediate attention.

We are also working to improve the transfer partner application process to increase efficiency and decrease future communication breakdowns.

9. Participant Nine

Issue:

- Concerned about the board participation, that the last meetings he has attended most of board doesn't come.
- He asked why he's never been solicited to donate to ACCT and why there is no fundraising program.
- He said that people feel unwelcomed and unappreciated
- He suggested ACCT do pop-up adoption events in center city
- He thanked Vincent for not getting defensive

Immediate Response:

Robin explained we are a working board of directors but we acknowledge the need for fundraising so we are starting committees. And that the board is undergoing changes to get more clarity of roles. Vincent will solicit Michael for a donation 😊

Post-Meeting Response:

- ACCT Philly has an active fundraising program that includes direct mail, point-of-service donation campaigns, a growing medical fund (the Stella Fund), yearly participation in #GivingTuesday, and an online donation platform (<https://acctphilly.networkforgood.com/>). Continued growth of the program will require board involvement and more resources.

10. Participant Ten

Issue:

- She asked why foster and rescue partner applications are not followed up on
- She asked why some timestamps are only given 24 hours, and said that's not enough time to network them properly to find them a live exit.
- She said a lot of bios have inaccuracies and marketable features are missed
- She finds it unacceptable that staff don't know what animals are timestamped and asked that before an animal is time stamped, if it's been there for a few days, to re-evaluate it.

Immediate response: Someone started to explain that the write-ups include the worst behavior observed by staff and that the bios might not be accurate if the animal has been in the shelter for a

while and that animals respond differently to different people. ACCT will respond with a clearer explanation to these questions.

Post-Meeting Response:

1. Why aren't foster and rescue partner applications followed up on?

ACCT Response: Foster applications are current. There is a delay on transfer partner applications now due to staffing.

2. Why are some timestamps only given 24 hours? That's not enough time to network them properly to find them a live exit.

ACCT Response: Timestamps vary from 6 hours to 11 days, dependent on each individual animal's circumstances. Timestamps indicate the staff's desire and efforts to place that animal. Shorter time stamps are generally used for animals that have urgent medical needs or behavioral needs that are beyond our capacity to care for/resolve. Longer time stamps are used when there is a legal hold on an animal that prevents us from transferring the animal out (such as a bite quarantine hold or court hold) and/or when the pet is not exhibiting signs of declining in the shelter environment.

3. Why do a lot of bios have inaccuracies and marketable features that are missed?

ACCT Response: Our lifesaving staff is too heavily burdened to verify and correct all this information. To remedy this, we are revamping admissions and adding an animal handling position like a vet nurse to assist in proper age, gender, breed, and color identification in addition to microchip scans and vaccines on intake. This position will be created by shifting existing positions from another department that have become obsolete, so no additional funding is necessary. This will help ensure that the correct information is collected on intake and is available as early as possible.

4. She finds it unacceptable that staff don't know what animals are timestamped and asked that before an animal is time stamped, if it's been there for a few days, to re-evaluate it.

ACCT Response: Most staff are not going to be well versed on which animals are timestamped either due to their position and access to that information or simply due to the sheer volume of animals in their care. We can run reports to determine what animals are on what types of holds or timestamps, but unless the staff member is specifically familiar with an animal, they may not know the details of an animal's admission or stay at the shelter without looking it up in the system. Our current staffing levels will not allow us to re-evaluate animals.

5. Someone started to explain that the write-ups include the worst behavior observed by staff and that the bios might not be accurate if the animal has been in the shelter for a while and that animals respond differently to different people. ACCT will respond with a clearer explanation to these questions.

ACCT Response: This piece presents some misunderstandings about dog's behavior and our reaction to it. Our observations of an animal's behavior are an indicator we use to determine what our resources and availability are to address or manage that behavior. Even if a dog evaluates "better" after 2-3 days, if we observed aggressive behavior prior, we have a liability risk and an obligation to address that behavior within our resources. That may mean that a dog is not a fit for our adoption program but would be available for transfer, or it may mean that the dog has exhibited behaviors that we believe put people at risk. While we acknowledge that dog behavior can change and is largely circumstantial, and that it can be modified and managed, we do not have the resources to modify or manage that behavior ourselves. We also recognize that the circumstances that elicited the behavior in the first place may do

so again, leading the dog to react poorly and potentially harm other pets or people. Animals do react differently towards different people; however, it is our obligation to record the "worst case scenario" for each pet based on what they have shown us because the probability exists that they will exhibit that behavior again at some point in their lives.

Continuing to house animals in a shelter setting that are already reacting poorly to it does not increase the chances that they will evaluate better for us. In fact, longer stay animals are at greater risk of increased anxiety, aggression, and a decline in behavior that begins to pose a threat for safe handling by staff. Best practice research states that a shelter where the pet has limited space and does not have access to humane housing allowing for natural movement, eating, sleeping and eliminating behaviors is detrimental to their overall wellbeing, and it certainly does not increase their chances of being adopted.

Q&A Time Ends

Adam ended the meeting by asking for feedback about the meeting format. Robin reminded the group about Vincent's open office hours and stated responses to questions will be posted on the website.

Dr. Resnick ended with a presentation on managed admissions.