



December 2024 Riverside Commission Meeting Outcomes Consulting Briefing

PART 1: Outcomes Team Updates

The following experts will be working with [Outcomes for Pets](#) through the duration of the Riverside DAS contract:

- [Monica Dangler](#) - Executive leadership and change stewardship
- [Eliza Torrez](#) - Project management and coordination
- [Lindsay Cicconi](#) - Data analysis and reporting
- TBA - Strategic communications leadership
- [University of Florida Shelter Medicine Program](#) - Dr. Julie Levy and Cameron Moore
- [Gina Knepp](#) - Lost pet reunification - Michelson Found Animals
- [Cole Wakefield](#) - Program support for rural community and shelter efforts

Deliverables

- Established [monthly data and narrative reports](#) to increase transparency and awareness.
- Creating goals, objectives, and timelines for the Board ad hoc strategic plan.
- Updated five-year data analysis to evaluate trends over time.
- Set dates for ongoing bi-weekly staff and volunteer briefing and update meetings. Information about these meetings will be posted on the web page that is linked above.

PART 2: Managed Intake

The words ‘managed intake’ have taken on many meanings in animal welfare. Because there is some disagreement over the concept and how it should and shouldn’t be practiced, we’re going to dig into what we mean when we say managed intake and explain some dos and don’ts. For the purposes of this newsletter, I’ll use the terms



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'managed intake' and 'intake triage' interchangeably to refer to the practices and mechanisms of support that keep pets in their homes and communities whenever it's in the best interest of the pet and the person at the other end of the leash.

What managed intake IS:

1. Creating a pet help service to assist struggling pet owners in finding and accessing resources.
2. Being transparent with the public if the pet they're bringing in may be at risk of euthanasia.
3. Offering information and practical solutions to keep pets in their homes.
4. Working with overwhelmed caregivers to take in their animals in small groups, rather than all at once.
5. Providing spay/neuter and vaccination for owned pets and community cats.
6. Making free, temporary pet boarding available to pet owners experiencing a crisis.
7. Asking the public to participate in ['finder-to-foster' programs](#).
8. Scheduling appointments for non-emergency intake.
9. Inviting stray pet finders to file found reports and help get lost pets home.

What managed intake ISN'T:

1. Turning away animals in need or telling people to put animals back where they found them.
2. Allowing 'packs of dogs' to roam free and pose a potential threat to public safety.
3. Forcing people to keep pets they can't keep or don't want.
4. Allowing sick or injured animals to suffer without responding to cruelty, neglect, or emergency animal control calls.
5. Failing to address public safety concerns and dangerous dogs.

For large, government animal shelters, intake triage is a key lifesaving strategy because it allows shelters to time the flow of animals in to ensure every pet receives appropriate care and attention. The Los Angeles County Department of Animal Services explains [why they practice managed intake](#). They said, "With limited space at Los Angeles



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County animal care centers, it is our responsibility to identify any possible alternatives to impoundment, provide more robust resources, and increase positive outcomes for the animals that do have to be admitted into the care centers.”

In the days before managed intake, animals entered through a transactional process that involved the finder or owner of a pet either calling animal control to pick the animal up or dropping the animal off at the shelter. Little, if any, information was collected about the pets and most shelters followed a practice of ‘clearing kennels’ each morning to make room for incoming animals. This resulted in millions of healthy, friendly pets being needlessly euthanized.

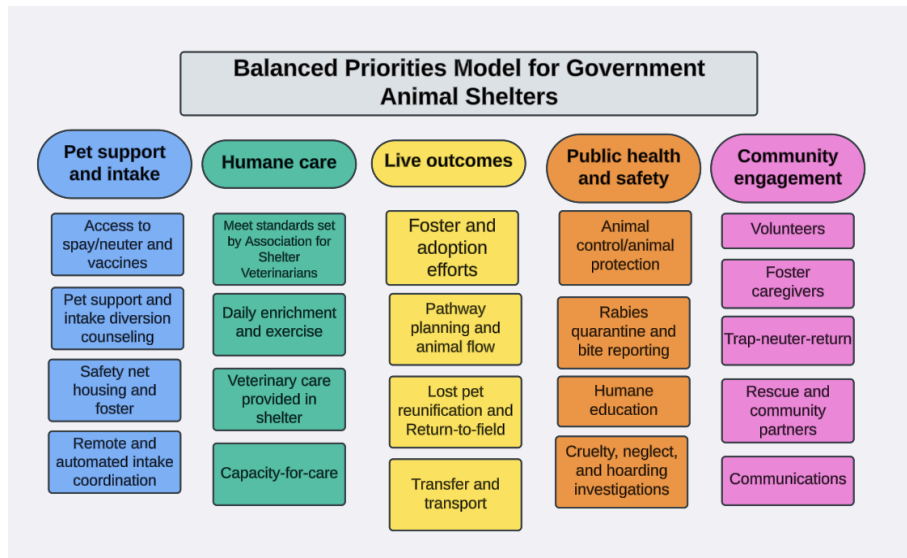
When shelters first started to provide intake diversion support, they learned that by the time people arrived to surrender a pet, it was often too late for the shelter to help. For this reason, shelters began scheduling intake appointments for pets whose owners wished to surrender them. By scheduling dedicated time for an intake counselor to meet with a pet owner or finder, animal shelters get better information about the pet and offer support to pet owners who want to keep their pets but face barriers to doing so.

At Pima Animal Care Center, we started a special [safety net foster program](#) so those pets could live in homes with foster caregivers while their struggling owners got back on their feet. This highly successful program is now practiced in cities, towns, and counties throughout the U.S.

PART 3: The Balanced Priorities Model of Animal Sheltering



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Animal shelters are increasingly facing an impossible set of expectations – to take in every animal, provide gold-standard care for each one, and ensure all pets are adopted



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into approved homes. In addition, these same animal welfare organizations are increasingly feeling public pressure to provide comprehensive community pet support programs including spay/neuter, microchips, vaccines, food support, and other veterinary care.

With the exception of a select number of well-funded, nonprofit shelters, the vast majority of U.S. animal shelter systems simply do not have the resources, expertise, or staff to meet this growing set of expectations. While most animal shelters also have self-imposed challenges (lack of robust volunteer and foster programs, barriers to outcomes, and fair to poor customer service), the ever-expanding set of community expectations are making it tough or impossible for even the best animal shelters to combat the criticism that they need to ‘do more.’

How do we fix the problem?

First, we need to create and implement a ‘balanced priorities model’ in animal services. This means we always look at the entire system, rather than just one of its components. The five priorities of the balanced model of animal sheltering are explained in this graphic.

When shelters face external pressures to address *just one* of these areas, without considering the impacts on the others, the system as a whole will suffer. None of this is necessarily new, but the animal welfare movement has historically struggled to effectively explain this complex series of priorities.

As we build strategic plans for the future, we can turn to the balanced model as a foundation for creating positive change. We can also see through this lens to better understand our funding and staffing gaps. When I look at staff org charts, I often notice that intake, animal control, and animal care have a significantly higher percentage of the overall funding and staff positions.

By balancing the amount and type of resources dedicated to each area, we can measurably improve the overall system, reduce the length of stay, improve safety and humane care, and save more lives.

Tough Choices and Limited Resources



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There is another way that a balanced approach can benefit animal shelters. Since the pandemic, animal shelters across the country have been at or even above-capacity because intakes are outpacing outcomes, year-over-year. In other words, there are more animals coming in than animals leaving. This is partially due to how each animal shelter prioritizes the competing functions of intake, animal care, and live outcomes. Some shelters focus so heavily on reducing intake, that they may not be acting in the best interest of animals that truly need to receive care at the shelter. Others take in every animal and achieve a high live release rate, but fail to meet basic humane care standards. Finally, some shelters take in every animal and meet humane care standards, but euthanize highly adoptable animals to maintain an ideal capacity.

So how do we begin? At intake, we can ask people who find lost pets to file found reports and help get those pets home without them having to be impounded. We can provide resources and support to struggling pet owners to help them keep their pet if they're able and willing. We can create consent-based systems of intake diversion, inviting but never forcing people to care for animals in the community.

While animals are in our care, we can expand volunteer and foster programs to provide extra care and exercise to a higher number of animals that are in our shelters for longer periods of time. We can invite the public to help and make it easy for them to do so. We can meet basic standards of animal care even when we don't have the time or resources to do the extra stuff. We can reduce the time animals spend in our care by making them available for pre-adoption as soon as they enter the shelter.

To decrease unnecessary euthanasia, we can [communicate transparently with the public and let them help at-risk animals](#). We can work with rescue groups and advocates by giving them as much time as possible to get at-risk animals to safety. We can be honest with the public when we are euthanizing due to lack of space in our shelters.

When we embrace a balanced approach, we commit to honest communication, piloting positive changes, measuring how programs and policies impact the whole system, and transparently reporting on the outcomes of our operational and strategic decisions. Importantly, we need to do more to include our communities in planning and implementing positive changes. Consider bringing real-life challenges to volunteers and



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community partners and invite them to be part of problem-solving using data and financial information.

Intake triage, grounded in ethics of community engagement and pet support services, can be a key, lifesaving strategy by reducing the overall population at a shelter and therefore reducing illness, behavioral decline due to kennel stress, and unnecessary euthanasia. Need help? Check out my [lost dog intake management best practice document](#) and my [dog owner surrender intake survey](#). Want to assess your current intake practices? Take [this self-assessment](#).

A successful approach always begins with explaining the 'why' to your community. When people can better understand how they can be part of the solution, the majority of them will want to help. Our job is to offer support, invite help, and make it easy for everyone to participate in caring for the animals in our communities.