



Performance Audit of City of Sacramento's Animal Care Services Division

April 14, 2025

Report # 2024/25-14 | April 2025

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Transmittal Letter

Office of the City Auditor, City of Sacramento
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Historic City Hall, Floor 2
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear City Auditor Farishta Ahrary,

We are pleased to present the audit report for the "Performance Audit of City of Sacramento's Animal Care Services Division" conducted by GPP Analytics Inc. for the City of Sacramento.

Our audit was conducted in compliance with the Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS) of the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

The primary objective of our audit was to evaluate the City of Sacramento's Animal Care Services Division (Division) operations, focusing on best practices for standards of care in animal shelters, and compliance with pertinent laws, regulations, and policies. This included:

- Evaluate the standard of animal kennel care, encompassing cleanliness, hygiene, and overall well-being of the animals.
- Assess the quality, accessibility, and staffing models of veterinary care provided to animals under the care of the Animal Care Services Division.
- Evaluate the adequacy of shelter design and physical space in accommodating animals and supporting their well-being.
- Review euthanasia procedures and ensure compliance with established guidelines and best practices, including the Capacity for Care model.
- Analyze staffing levels, adequacy, and deployment strategies of Animal Care Services Division field operations to assess operational efficiency and effectiveness, such as response times.
- Review written policies and procedures for clarity, relevance, and compliance with laws, regulations, policies, and best practices, including the Capacity for Care model.
- Evaluate the administration of the foster care and rescue programs, assessing their effectiveness in enhancing animal care and outcomes for animals.
- Evaluate current industry insurance coverage for non-profit animal shelters and rescue organizations and how it impacts Animal Care Services.
- Evaluate animal intake and outcomes at Animal Care Services, including local and national trends.
- Evaluate the administration of the fundraising program to support the Animal Care Services Division's operations effectively.
- Review community outreach efforts and their impact on promoting the reclaiming of owned pets, adoption of shelter animals, access to veterinary care (including low-cost spay and neuter), and volunteer opportunities.

This comprehensive approach was intended to identify areas for improvement and ensure compliance across a wide range of operational and administrative functions.

The following is a summary of the audit findings in the report:

Finding 1: Strategic Space and Population Management Could Improve Shelter Capacity

Challenges. The Division's shelter operates at or beyond its intended capacity, leading to overcrowding and increased strain on resources. The City should explore long-term strategies like spay/neuter programs to address animal population growth while optimizing existing space and resources for improved shelter management.

Finding 2: Focus on Employee Engagement and Recruitment Strategies Could Improve Staffing Shortages and Turnover.

Chronic vacancies and high turnover in key roles hinder the Division's ability to meet operational needs effectively. The Division should work with Human Resources to review some positions' qualifications to attract more applicants, increase efforts to publicize job opportunities, and focus on enhancing employee engagement to improve retention and morale.

Finding 3: Finalizing Policies and Procedures Could Improve Efficiency. The Division lacks comprehensive, documented policies and procedures, which can lead to inconsistent practices and can create uncertainty among staff. Formalizing and implementing clear guidelines will improve consistency, accountability, and compliance.

Finding 4: More Oversight is an Opportunity to Prioritize Limited Resources in Animal Control.

The Animal Control unit currently operates without sufficient oversight and formal procedures, putting effective service delivery at risk. The Division should establish clear protocols, and call response criteria to improve efficiency, consistency, and public safety outcomes.

Finding 5: Accurate Reporting on Open Data Portal Could Increase Transparency and Public Trust.

The animal outcome data reported on the City's open data portal contains incomplete information that risks confusing the public. The Division should improve oversight of reporting and regularly validate reported data to maintain transparency and credibility.

Finding 6: Increasing Veterinary Capacity and Reducing Delays Can Lower Shelter Population.

The Division's limited veterinary capacity and scheduling challenges have created backlogs of up to six months for spay/neuter procedures, prolonging animals' stays in shelter care or foster homes. If the City seeks to increase spay/neuter services, it should consider cost-effective solutions—such as a prefabricated clinic—that help expand capacity, reduce wait times, and improve animal outcomes without unduly straining the budget.

Finding 7: Focus on Licensing Compliance Would Increase Revenue and Bolster Public Safety.

Low compliance with animal licensing (14 percent of the City's dogs and 7 percent of cats are licensed) leads to funding gaps, shifts costs to all taxpayers, and undermines the Division's goals and legal requirements. Increasing outreach efforts, enforcing existing veterinarian reporting requirements, piloting additional licensing options, and reevaluating the fee schedule can help improve compliance, ensure fair cost recovery, and strengthen the Division's financial sustainability.

Finding 8: Transparency and Accountability Could be Improved by Agreement with Partner Nonprofit.

The informal relationship with Friends of Front Street poses risks around ethics and procurement. Formalizing the partnership through a contractual agreement, such as a

memorandum of understanding, and clarifying donation links on the City's website will enhance transparency and accountability.

Finding 9: Homeless Assistance Program Would Benefit From Staffing at its Authorized Level.


The Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP) currently operates with only one full-time staff, rather than the full team originally authorized, and as currently presented on the Division's organization chart. It also lacks defined performance measures. By accurately reflecting staff assignments and developing meaningful performance indicators, the program can improve transparency, ensure effective resource use, and better assess whether it is achieving its goals.

Finding 10: Increasing Use of Volunteer Performance Metrics Would Enhance Program Effectiveness. Volunteers play a crucial role but lack formal performance metrics. Developing key metrics like retention rates and participation frequency in volunteer events will help improve volunteer engagement and support operational goals.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance provided by the staff of the City of Sacramento throughout this audit. Their support was instrumental in the successful completion of this project.

We believe this report will provide valuable insights and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Animal Care Services Division's operations and role within the City of Sacramento. Should you require any further information or wish to discuss the findings in more detail, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



Julian Metcalf, CEO

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Introduction

This audit report presents the findings of the “Performance Audit of City of Sacramento’s Animal Care Services Division” conducted for the City of Sacramento by GPP Analytics Inc.

Standards of Audit

This audit was conducted in accordance with the U.S. Government Accountability Office’s (GAO) Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS).¹ Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient and appropriate evidence for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Objectives of a Performance Audit

According to the U.S. GAO, the objective of performance audits “include assessments of program effectiveness, economy, and efficiency; internal control; compliance; and prospective analyses.” The standards emphasize the importance of an informed assessment to improve program performance and operations, reduce costs, facilitate decision-making, and contribute to public accountability.

Audit Objectives and Methodology

As defined in our contract with the City and summarized here, the audit aims to evaluate the standards of animal kennel care and assess the quality and accessibility of veterinary care provided by the Animal Care Services Division. It also seeks to review the adequacy of shelter design, euthanasia, and compliance with guidelines, as well as analyze staffing levels and deployment strategies for operational efficiency. Additionally, the audit seeks to review policies and procedures and evaluate foster care and rescue programs. It will also examine animal intake and outcomes, fundraising program administration, and community outreach efforts to promote pet adoption and access to veterinary care.

Audit Timeline

Phase I Activities

GPP, the Animal Care Division, the Community Development Director, and the Office of the City Auditor held an entrance conference on May 30, 2024. Following the entrance conference, GPP began scheduling interviews with staff and requested documents and information. As of August 20, 2024, GPP interviewed seventeen staff from various Animal Care and supporting City functions, performed three days of onsite observations, and began interviews with peer jurisdictions.

GPP reviewed the following materials provided by Animal Care Services and other City staff:

- Procedures
- Email directives used as procedures
- Sample reports and forms
- Organizational charts and rosters
- Budget and financial reports
- Contracts and agreements used by the Division
- Marketing and fundraising materials

¹ United States Government Accountability Office’s Government Auditing Standards 2018 Revision.

- City ordinances
- Reports from Animal Care Services' information system, Chameleon, containing data on:
 - Intake
 - Medical
 - Adoptions
 - Calls
 - Transactions
 - Citations
 - Euthanasia
 - Licensing
- Capital Improvement Plan and historic facility assessments
- Summary workers compensation claims (forthcoming still)
- Reports from the City's 311 Center

GPP also obtained and reviewed job descriptions, budgetary information, and performance metric data from peer organizations.

We concluded Phase I on September 11, 2024, with an initial risk assessment and planning memorandum that informed our testing and analysis emphasis in Phase II.

Phase II Activities

In Phase II we undertook the primary fieldwork to evaluate various operational aspects and ensure compliance with established guidelines and best practices. This included thorough reviews of Animal Control Officer operations, staffing analysis, citation effectiveness, operational efficiency, and customer service. The team analyzed staffing vacancies, response times, and operational oversight, while also examining effectiveness and outcomes of Division functions. Comparative assessments were conducted with peer jurisdictions to identify disparities in staffing levels. The audit also included a review of volunteer programs, 311 Center dispatch data, and shelter operations, focusing on live release and euthanasia rates over the past three years. In addition, the allocation of veterinary staff time and the City's procurement policies were reviewed to identify inefficiencies and recommend adjustments.

Furthermore, we conducted an in-depth analysis of the Division's adoption programs and foster care initiatives, particularly evaluating the cost-benefit of adoption fee waivers. The audit assessed the partnership with Friends of Front Street, analyzing funds raised and allocated to determine compliance and transparency. Budget and fee practices were scrutinized to evaluate the reliance on outside funding sources and subsidies, particularly from the Building Division, to identify long-term financial risks. Lastly, the condition and adequacy of the shelter facilities were evaluated through reviews of past assessments and capital improvement plans. This comprehensive fieldwork provided critical insights into the operational strengths and areas for improvement and guided the development of targeted recommendations to enhance overall effectiveness and efficiency.

During the fieldwork phase we also took the opportunity to speak with additional stakeholders in the community, such as nonprofit animal care providers and community advocates to understand their interactions with the Division and hear feedback about animal welfare and services in the community.

Phase III

Draft Report

On December 6, 2024, GPP Analytics provided the City Auditor, with a confidential copy of our Draft Report. On February 20, 2025, we provided the Division and the Department with a confidential copy of the Draft Report, which they reviewed for factual accuracy and any inadvertent inclusion of confidential information. For all feedback and requests for revisions the City was asked to provide sufficient supporting evidence and documentation. We received all additional information by April 3, 2025.

Revised Draft Report

Based on feedback from City staff, GPP Analytics amended the Draft Report and provided a Revised Draft Report to City staff on April 10, 2025, with a request for a written response to each of the report recommendations. We received the written responses from the City on April 11, 2025, and they are included as attachments to this report.

Final Report

The Final Report, which combines the Revised Draft and the City's written responses, was transmitted to the City on April 14, 2025.

Collaboration Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and appreciate the cooperation and assistance throughout this audit provided by the Animal Care Service Division, the Community Development Department, other City departments, the City Auditor's Office, as well as external stakeholders in the community.

Review Of Animal Welfare Policy Topics

There are many shelter management practices being discussed and debated in the animal welfare community. Three stand out as relevant to the scope of this audit and therefore warrant mentioning before we discuss the operations of the Front Street Shelter. The three issues are discussed below.

1. Feline Neuter and Release Practices

The trapping, neutering, and releasing (TNR) of feral cats is a long-accepted strategy for reducing the number of feral cats in a community. However, the practice of neutering and releasing felines that don't exhibit the classic characteristics of being 'feral' has been called into question.

The Pet Assistance Foundation and Paw Protectors seek to establish that there is a difference between traditional feral cat 'Trap/Neuter/Return' (TNR) programs and new programs that include any and all stray cats who are brought into the shelter, even if they are friendly, domesticated cats who would qualify for the adoption program.²

In February 2021, the Pet Assistance Foundation and Paw Protectors filed a lawsuit against the San Diego Humane Society, which runs the City of San Diego's shelter. The lawsuit alleges that the organization's practice of releasing friendly, adoptable stray cats back onto the streets constitutes illegal abandonment and that the shelter is therefore neglecting its duty to provide proper shelter and adoption services. The lawsuit is still in progress.

An alternative perspective, as published in a San Diego Union-Tribune opinion piece, is that:

"We don't need to remove cats who are not at risk and place them into kennels where they may face euthanasia. Unfortunately, California shelters already put tens of thousands of cats to death annually; we cannot guarantee a live outcome to cats in shelters as it stands. Our limited resources therefore must be preserved for the cats who will truly die without them. Scooping healthy cats off the street and bringing them to shelters that already hurt for space and adopters is surely not the way to maximize lifesaving."

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) shares this perspective. Its website states, "Community cats who end up in shelters make up a large percentage of cats euthanized throughout the country every year. The ASPCA supports Trap-Neuter-Return-Monitor (TNRM) as a humane and effective method to manage community cat populations." The webpage clarifies its use of the term "Community Cats" by stating the term is used to describe outdoor, unowned, free-roaming cats that can be friendly, feral, adults, kittens, healthy, sick, altered and/or unaltered.³

Similarly, the Animal Care Services Division has taken the position that it is not in the best interest of healthy cats to be sheltered. Per the Division, "If we took in every friendly healthy cat, the shelter would be inundated with cats, leading to higher cases of disease and euthanasia rates of both sick and healthy cats, or cats that came in healthy but due to the stress became sick in the shelter environment."

² <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/2024/07/24/opinion-san-diego-has-a-cat-problem-and-it-could-cost-felines-their-lives/>

³ <https://www.aspca.org/helping-people-pets/shelter-intake-and-surrender/closer-look-community-cats>

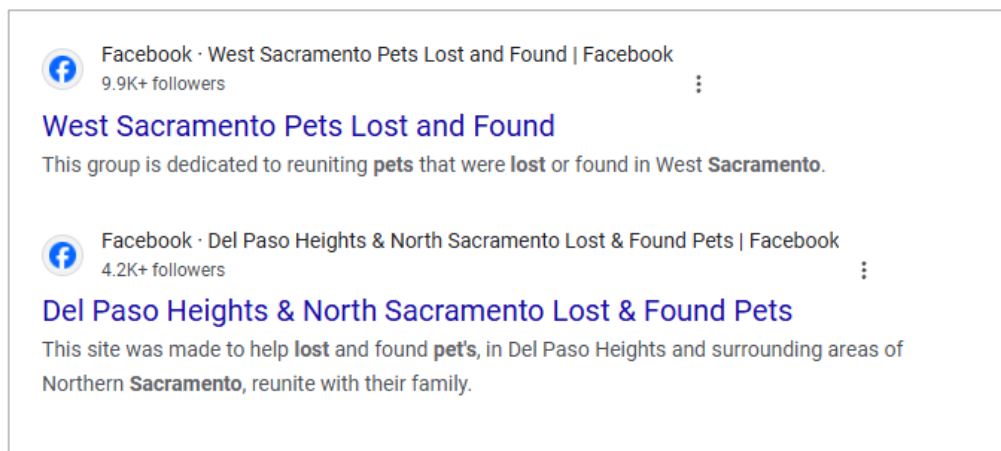
The outcome of the San Diego lawsuit could indicate the level of risk California cities with similar practices are exposed to.

2. Community Sheltering and Managed Intake Strategies

Many shelters are experiencing the overcrowding challenges that Sacramento faces. Community Sheltering and Managed Intake strategies seek to reduce the number of animals entering the shelter.

Community Sheltering refers to the practice by shelters of encouraging community members who find loose animals to temporarily keep the animal and try to locate its owner. Underlying this practice is the belief that most animals don't stray more than a mile from their home and that social media apps like Next Door and Facebook can be used to advertise that a loose dog has been located and/or retained. Examples of Facebook groups serving this purpose are provided below in Figure I.1.

Figure I.1: Examples of Facebook groups serving community sheltering practices



Source: Search of example pages November 2024

Managed Intake involves strategies to limit the intake of animals brought to a shelter by members of the community. Strategies range from having a policy that the shelter will not accept the voluntary surrender of an owned animal to using an appointment-based system for the intake of animals brought to a shelter.

Critics of Managed Intake express concern that these programs may result in unintended consequences. For example, an animal loose in the neighborhood may not be temporarily taken in by an individual who posts the animal's whereabouts on social media, and instead the animal may get hit by a car. Similarly, limited intake policies may result in an individual abandoning an animal. These strategies could also run counter to California state laws that require cities to enforce rabies and other health and safety controls.

The Animal Care Services Division reports that "many of these animals that are found by members of the community and posted are also reunited with their owners, without ever having to enter the already crowded shelter."

3. Vetting Prospective Adoptive and Foster Homes or a No Barrier Approach

Vetting is a process intended to ensure that foster animals are placed appropriately. The No Barrier approach seeks to remove any obstacle that prevents or discourages individuals from fostering animals. As with all public policy issues, both approaches have their risks and their rewards.

Proponents of vetting want to ensure that a prospective foster is legally entitled to have an animal in their home (i.e., no lease or condominium association prohibitions) and that the animal will not be left alone for unsuitable amounts of time.

Proponents of the No Barriers approach want to remove obstacles to fostering. These obstacles can range from the time and effort involved in a lengthy application and/or interview process to having to schedule a home visit or having monetary limitations that may impact care or feeding.

Proponents of the No Barriers approach also point out the additional resources that are needed to conduct vetting, the possibility that vetting targets marginalized community groups, and that a person who is rejected by the vetting process may turn to backyard breeders or another source rather than obtaining a spay/neutered, microchipped, and licensed animal from a shelter.

Findings

Finding 1: Strategic Space and Population Management Could Improve Shelter Capacity Challenges

The Division's shelter operates at or beyond its intended capacity, leading to crowding and increased strain on resources. This condition affects animal welfare, increases euthanasia rates, and reduces operational efficiency. Sacramento City Code Chapter 9.44 requires the City to impound stray and at-risk animals, necessitating adequate capacity and resource management. The City should explore long-term strategies like increased spay/neuter programs to address animal population growth while optimizing existing space and resources for improved shelter management.

Background

The majority of the Front Street Animal Shelter was constructed in 1992, with some newer portions such as the Cattery constructed in 2007. When the shelter was first constructed in 1992, the City had a population of 402,000, whereas in 2023 it had a population of 526,000, a 30.8 percent increase, suggesting that the City's animal population has also grown in that time. As of 2024, the shelter appears insufficient to serve all animals within the City's jurisdiction. The City has adopted various strategies related to intake and foster programs to manage its limited capacity. These could pose some risks to the City and generally do not address the root causes for animals coming to the shelter. There are few realistic options for expanding the shelter in the near-term. However, we recommend considering increasing the City's efforts to spay and neuter animals as part of its long-term strategy to reduce stray and feral populations.

Definitions

Length of stay in a shelter is the period from an animal's intake to its outcome (e.g., adoption, return, etc.). Length of stay directly influences shelter population levels. In practice, longer stays mean more animals accumulate in the facility, which can strain capacity. Conversely, shortening length of stay helps keep the shelter population lower; shelters that efficiently move animals to outcomes see fewer animals crowded in at once, reducing disease risk and stress on the animals.

Crowding vs. Overcrowding: "Crowding" generally refers to housing a high volume of animals in the shelter. "Overcrowding" is used when that volume exceeds the shelter's capacity to care for the animals humanely. The UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program defines a shelter's capacity for care as its ability to meet the needs of every animal in the facility— when that capacity is exceeded, animals' needs (space, sanitation, medical/behavioral care, etc.) can no longer be fully met. Overcrowding is thus associated with unsafe or unhealthy conditions: it often leads to increased disease transmission, stress-related behavioral deterioration, and other welfare problems. Recognizing this, shelter standards (e.g., the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' guidelines and NACA recommendations) assert that operating beyond capacity for care is unacceptable, and they emphasize intake and outcome strategies to avoid overcrowding. In short, controlling length of stay and preventing overcrowding are critical to maintaining a healthy, humane shelter population.^{4,5,6}

⁴ Journal of Shelter Medicine and Community Animal Health, "[The Association of Shelter Veterinarians' Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#)", Second Edition - December 2022

⁵ National Animal Care and Control Association, "[NACA Guidelines](#)", 2019

⁶ University of California Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program, "[Shelter Operations/Capacity for Care Resources](#)", Library webpage

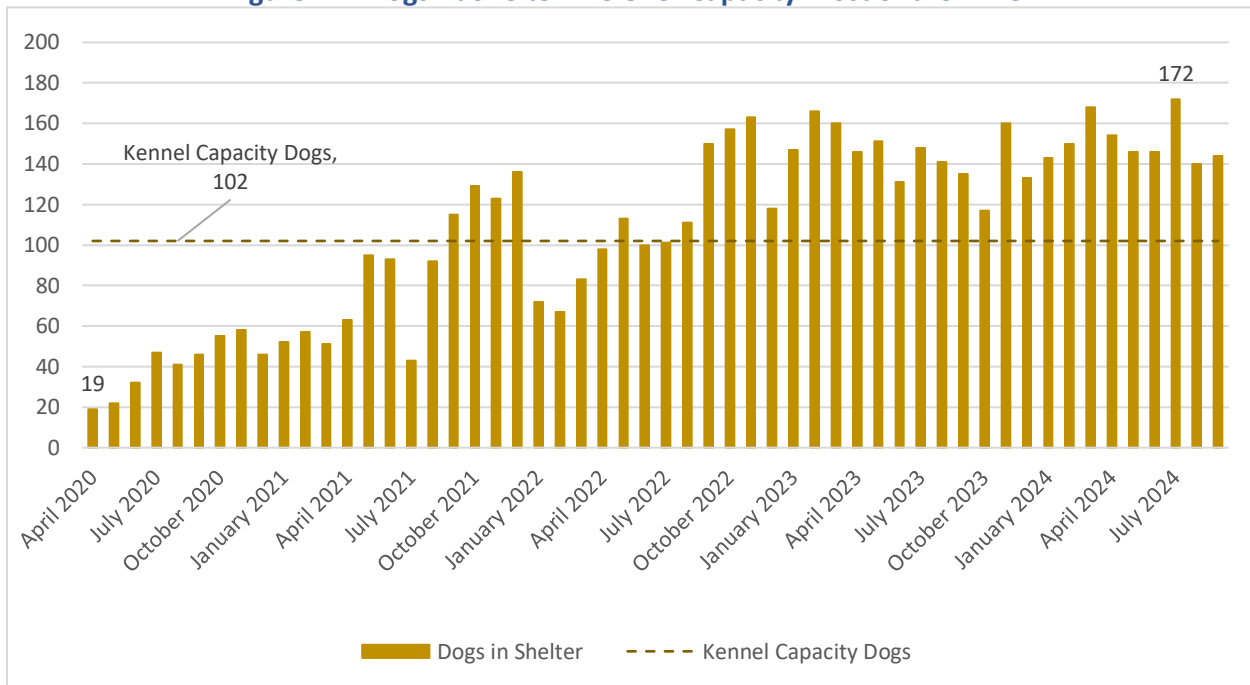
Shelter Is Often Crowded and Over Capacity Due to Resource Limitations

The current shelter has a capacity of 102 dog kennels and 109 cat kennels but often operates beyond its intended limits.⁷ As seen in Figure 1.1, the recent median population of dogs frequently exceeds the designed capacity annually, resulting in crowded conditions that increase animal stress. As seen in Figure 1.2, Cats experience seasonal population spikes, particularly during the summer known as “kitten season,” with a peak of 175 cats recorded in June 2023. Crowding and overcrowding strains shelter resources, affecting animal welfare and operational efficiency.

Crowding and overcrowding can have several detrimental effects on operational efficiency:

- **Resource Strain:** Increased demands on staff, supplies, and medical resources.
- **Increased Animal Stress:** Exacerbated stress among animals, leading to higher incidences of illness and behavioral issues. This, in turn, requires additional veterinary care and prolongs the time animals spend in the shelter, reducing turnover rates.
- **Operational Bottlenecks:** High animal intake without adequate capacity can lead to inefficiencies in shelter processes, including intake assessments, medical evaluations, and placement into foster or adoption programs.

Figure 1.1: Dogs At Shelter Are Over Capacity Most of the Time⁸

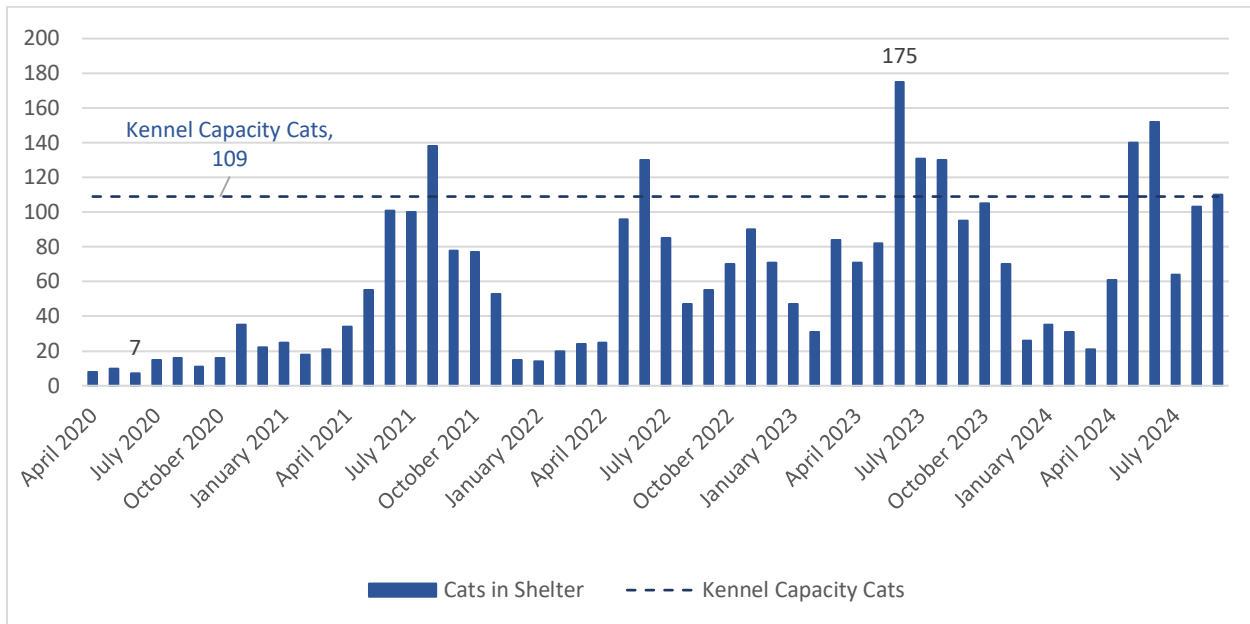


Source: Analysis of Division records (April 2020 to September 2024)

⁷ The capacity limits listed for the shelter may not be exact in all circumstance since littermates can more effectively share kennel space.

⁸ Figure 1.1 pertains only to animals housed at the Shelter. It does not include animals in foster care, which places additional impacts on Animal Care Service’s resources.

Figure 1.2: Cats Are Seasonally Over Capacity During “Kitten Season”⁹



Source: Analysis of Division records (April 2020 to September 2024)

There is a Legal Mandate for City Shelter and Programs

The mandated purpose of the animal shelter, as outlined in both the Sacramento City Code and State Code, serves multiple critical functions. Primarily, the shelter is essential for the enforcement of various animal-related ordinances and codes. For instance, Sacramento City Code Chapter 9.44 requires the Animal Care Services Division to impound animals found in violation of the chapter, ensuring compliance with local regulations.¹⁰ This enforcement role helps maintain public order and safety by addressing issues such as stray animals, animal cruelty, and public nuisances caused by animals.

Examples of violations that may require the impounding of animals according to Sacramento City Code:

- Unlicensed Dogs:** Animals found without valid licensing tags as required by ordinance.
- Unvaccinated Pets:** Pets that have not been vaccinated against rabies in accordance with local and state laws.
- Loose or Stray Animals:** Dogs or other animals found roaming at large without proper restraint or supervision by their owner.
- Dangerous or Aggressive Animals:** Animals posing a threat to public safety by exhibiting aggressive behavior or violating restrictions placed on dangerous animals.
- Exceeding Animal Limits:** Households keeping more animals than permitted under local codes.
- Animal Cruelty or Neglect:** Cases where animals are found in conditions of neglect or abuse that violate humane treatment standards.

⁹ Figure 1.2 pertains only to animals housed at the Shelter. It does not include animals in foster care, which places additional impacts on Animal Care Service’s resources.

¹⁰ Sacramento City Code chapter 9.44.070 Duty of animal care services manager.

The Sacramento City Code is further informed by state law. For example, the California Health and Safety Code (HSC) sec. 121690 mandates that cities and counties maintain an animal shelter system to support rabies control programs and provide vaccination clinics. These measures are part of preventing the spread of diseases from animals to humans and ensuring the well-being of both the animal and human populations.

Foster and Foster to Adopt Programs Help Ease Capacity In Shelter

The Division has implemented a volunteer foster and a foster-to-adopt program that leverages volunteers to temporarily house animals, helping to alleviate shelter overcrowding. As of 2024, a median of 1,116 animals were fostered at any one time, or about five times as many as held in the shelter at a given time. The practice of fostering animals enables the Division to manage its population more effectively. This program is particularly beneficial for animals needing temporary care due to medical or behavioral issues.¹¹

Facility Does Not Meet Current Needs of Shelter

The Front Street Animal Shelter spans 29,280 square feet but faces significant structural deficiencies. A 2018 Facility Condition Assessment identified deferred maintenance needs, and a 2024 Needs Assessment recommended a new facility to meet current and future demands. Estimated costs for a new shelter range from \$40 to \$60 million with a projected timeline of 3–5 years for design and construction.

Our audit team met with the City’s Facility Manager to discuss how the Division’s facility needs align with the broader City facility plans and budget. While some items are addressed in the City’s annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP) on an ad hoc basis, there is no comprehensive plan in place. Additionally, the Facility Manager noted that most departments have similar facility needs, but there is no coordinated approach to address them. It is our understanding that the City currently lacks a long-term capital financing plan for facility replacement, it has not identified alternative funding sources such as bond measures, and its near-term operating budget does not have the capacity to accommodate major shelter facility needs. This appears especially true in the near-term, as City staff report that departments are being asked to find ongoing budget savings for the upcoming 2025-26 Fiscal Year.

¹¹ The legality of the foster-to-adopt program hinges on adherence to state requirements for animal adoption and care. California law mandates minimum holding periods for impounded animals (Food & Agricultural Code §§ 31108, 31752) and requires spaying or neutering prior to adoption (§ 30503). Additionally, vaccination and health certification requirements (Health & Safety Code § 121690) and proper documentation for ownership transfer (Civil Code § 1834) must be followed. Ensuring compliance with these provisions is critical to mitigate potential legal risks associated with this program.

Staff Vacancies and Turnover Compound Problem

There are 19 budgeted positions that directly serve the Division’s shelter function. The group is led by a Program Specialist and also include two Senior Animal Care Technicians, and 16 Animal Care Technicians, though as of October 2024, four of the Animal Care Technician positions were vacant. Other functions within the Division that support the operations of the shelter, such as Veterinary Services, Customer Service, and Volunteer Coordination, also have staffing shortages, these are discussed in the Staffing Finding 2.

Live Release Rate Is Similar to Other Jurisdictions

In 2023, Sacramento reported an 88 percent live release rate for dogs and 79 percent for cats, which is high for dogs but lower for cats compared to peer jurisdictions. Both, however, are within the normal range generally for similar shelter systems in the state, see Figure 1.2 below. Overcrowding, especially during peak intake periods, contributes to increased euthanasia rates for cats due to untreated and/or untreatable medical conditions and for dogs due to behavioral deterioration. Research shows that prolonged stays in crowded kennels can exacerbate behavioral issues in dogs, reducing their adoptability and increasing euthanasia rates. For cats, overcrowding limits the effectiveness of shelter medicine, increasing vulnerability to infectious diseases.

Figure 1.2: Animal Intake and Live Release Rates 2023

Jurisdiction	Human Population	Est. Dog Population	Est. Cat Population	Dog Intakes	Cat Intakes	Dog Live Release	Cat Live Release
Sacramento (City)	526,384	127,969	90,951	5,240	4,128	88%	79%
Bakersfield	413,381	81,228	57,732	7,304	1,458	64%	27% ¹²
Stockton	319,543	63,146	44,880	3,773	2,884	89%	71%
Fresno (City)	545,716	115,748	82,266	7,513	3,514	<i>Not reporting at this time due to change in administration</i>	
Yolo County	220,544	54,496	38,732	1,842	1,736	87%	83%
Sacramento County	1,584,288	367,160	260,953	4,640	4,644	86%	76%
San Francisco City/County (FY 2022-23)	808,988	234,966	166,998	2,378	2,050	89%	93%
Los Angeles (City)	3,820,914	911,261	647,662	17,278	21,328	90%	80%

Source: Human Population, US Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey estimates, Dog and Cat Populations were calculated based on American Veterinary Medical Association methodology (44.6 percent of households own 1.46 dogs per household and that 26 percent of households own 1.78 cats) using household total estimates from the US Census Bureau, and intake and live release data collected from jurisdictions’ reports.

¹² As of April 2025, City of Bakersfield [Animal Care Center](#) only accepts cats that are sick or injured. This may explain the relatively low live release rate of cats compared to other jurisdictions.

Cats Often Euthanized For Untreatable Medical Conditions and Dogs for Behavior According to Records

The majority of animal deaths when they are in the care of the City are due to euthanasia, 1,312 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24. As seen Figure 1.3 below, most cats are euthanized for untreatable medical conditions, and most dogs for behavioral reasons.

For cats, overcrowding complicates medical care, as the City must balance high-demand shelter medicine with preventive practices like spaying and neutering. Research indicates that densely populated shelter environments can suppress cats' immune responses, making them more vulnerable to infectious diseases. This situation is especially challenging during "kitten season" when intake spikes. Without adequate resources to isolate and treat sick animals, overcrowded shelters may face increased euthanasia rates among cats with health complications.¹³

For dogs, research shows that overcrowded shelters can worsen behavioral problems in dogs, as limited space, high noise levels, and reduced mental stimulation increase anxiety and aggression. Numerous studies describe kennels as places that can cause dogs acute and continual stress, which can worsen behavioral problems or cause self-harm behaviors, diminishing their chances of adoption and raising the likelihood of euthanasia.¹⁴

Figure 1.3: Reason for Animal Euthanasia During FY2023-24

Euthanasia Reason	Number of Animals Euthanized In Year	Average of Days in Care
CATS		
Behavior	3	13.00
Biter	2	9.00
Medical/Contagious	32	5.38
Medical/Treatable	3	1.00
Medical/Untreatable	460	6.77
Owner Request	1	1.00
Physical Condition	94	2.96
Unweaned	5	2.20
CAT TOTAL	600	6.06

¹³ Dinnage JD, Scarlett JM, Richards JR. "[Descriptive epidemiology of feline upper respiratory tract disease in an animal shelter.](#)" Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, 2009

Wagner, D., Hurley, K.F., & Stavisky, J. "[Shelter housing for cats: Principles of design for health, welfare, and rehoming](#)". Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery, 2018

Patronek, G.J., Glickman, L.T., Beck, A.M., McCabe, G.P., & Ecker, C. "[Risk factors for relinquishment of cats to an animal shelter.](#)" Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, 1996

¹⁴ Suzanne Hetts, J. Derrell Clark, Janet P. Calpin, Cheryl E. Arnold, Jill M. Mateo, "[Influence of housing conditions on beagle behaviour](#)" Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 1992

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Euthanasia Reason	Number of Animals Euthanized In Year	Average of Days in Care
DOGS		
Behavior	373	20.52
Biter	53	17.21
Dangerous Dog	11	42.36
Kennel Stress	17	28.53
Medical/Contagious	11	5.09
Medical/Treatable	2	3.50
Medical/Untreatable	168	8.15
Owner Request	4	3.75
Potentially Dangerous Dog	5	11.20
Physical Condition	41	7.85
Space	3	16.33
Space/Behavior	21	27.95
Temperament	2	16.00
Unweaned	1	4.00
DOG TOTAL	712	16.88
Grand Total	1,312	11.93

Source: Analysis of Division records

Strategies of Other Jurisdictions

We spoke with and researched several other jurisdictions that have similar geographic and metropolitan characteristics to Sacramento. Some of these peer jurisdictions took different approaches to similar situations in which demand for kennel space exceeded kennel capacity.

Contract Sheltering to Share Resources

Municipalities that lack shelter space have established contracts by which their respective county shelters provide shelter services on behalf of these cities. For instance, the cities of Galt and Citrus Heights pay Sacramento County to provide shelter services. The cities pay a percentage of a fixed budget and additional per-unit costs for responding to calls and animal intakes. These costs are calculated based on intake percentages as a total. Additionally, dog license revenue is shared on a 1:1 basis with Citrus Heights. Similarly, the cities of Woodland, West Sacramento, and Winters have agreements with Yolo County, where the cities pay a fixed amount and additional per-unit costs for the County to respond to calls, animal intakes, housing, and medical care.

Contracting with either county on an overflow basis could offset some of the City of Sacramento's capacity challenges. Management from both counties could not estimate, at the time of our discussion, if they would have capacity to contract their space and services to the City of Sacramento without more information. Beyond the idea of overflow contracts, the City could further explore partnering with neighboring jurisdictions on a regional basis since stray animals in particular are a regional phenomenon without concern for jurisdictional boundaries.

Community Sheltering and Managed Intake Can Lower Intake but There are Legal and Policy Risks Associated

Community sheltering and managed intake are generic terms that apply to various strategies that are intended to reduce the percent of stray animals that get placed in a shelter.

Bakersfield

The City of Bakersfield has adopted an approach that draws from two strategies known as Community Sheltering and Managed Intake. These strategies focus on accepting only the most critical animals and encouraging the community to find homes for more adoptable animals. This approach is part of a strategy promoted by the National Animal Care & Control Association. Managed Intake in particular uses an appointment-based system for non-emergencies meant to deter unscheduled animal abandonment at the shelter and promote community involvement.

According to the Bakersfield SPCA, which operates the City of Bakersfield's shelter, the shelter has a live release rate of 64 percent for dogs and 27 percent for cats. These rates likely reflect the more dire population of animals they choose to intake, but also the higher ratio of intakes to its estimated total population, which is higher than other jurisdictions we surveyed.

Without more evidence, it is unclear whether Bakersfield's approach results in different overall public health and safety, public nuisance, or animal welfare outcomes across the city and among all animals in the community.

Managed intake and community sheltering could pose legal risks to a California city due to state laws requiring cities to control rabies and stray animals. Under California Food and Agricultural Code § 31105 and California Health and Safety Code § 121690, municipalities are mandated to ensure public safety by impounding stray animals and managing rabies exposure. Limiting shelter intake or relying heavily on decentralized community efforts may result in insufficient control of strays, potentially leading to violations of these statutes and exposing the city to liability for failure to fulfill its statutory obligations.

In February 2021, a lawsuit was filed by the Pet Assistance Foundation and Paw Protectors against the San Diego Humane Society, which runs the City of San Diego's shelter. The lawsuit alleged the organization's practice of releasing friendly, adoptable stray cats back onto the streets constitutes illegal abandonment and neglects their duty to provide proper shelter and adoption services. The eventual outcome of this lawsuit could indicate the level of risk California cities with similar practices are exposed to.

Lowering Stray Animal Population with Spay and Neuter Can Address Root Cause of Shelter Population

We discussed spay and neuter strategies with various jurisdictions. None of them named it as a central strategy, but all mentioned engaging in various levels of sterilization efforts. As discussed below, research shows that effective dog and cat population control through spay and neuter programs reduces the number of animals entering shelters.

For instance, a study by the University of Florida found that per capita euthanasia rates in U.S. animal shelters have decreased by more than 90 percent since the introduction of large-scale spay-neuter

clinics in the 1970s.¹⁵ The Humane Society of the United States reports that sterilization programs over time reduce shelter intake and euthanasia rates for dogs and cats.¹⁶ Finally, the American Veterinary Medical Association supports these programs as a key strategy in managing dog and cat populations, improving the health and welfare of the animals by reducing the risk of certain diseases and behaviors associated with unaltered pets.¹⁷ These findings underscore the effectiveness of spay and neuter initiatives in controlling pet populations and alleviating the burden on animal shelters.

City of Sacramento's Spay and Neuter Practices Are Limited and Result in Excessive Wait Times

Community Partnerships

The City of Sacramento has implemented initiatives to lower the stray animal population through spay and neuter programs, but the numbers are limited. The City collaborates with community groups such as the Community Spay and Neuter Clinic and the Sacramento SPCA to provide accessible and affordable spay and neuter services to the public. However, the number of animals treated through these programs are low, with the Community Spay and Neuter Clinic reporting they can only perform 10 surgeries for the City per month.

Six Month Wait in 2024 to Spay and Neuter Prior to Adoption

The City is required by California law to spay and neuter all animals it impounds prior to adoption. During our audit fieldwork in August 2024, the City had its spay and neuters scheduled as far out as February 2025. As of February 2025, they report that a similar six month wait time still exists. This adds months to the time animals are in legal custody of the City and held at the shelter or held in external foster households.

Part of the long wait times are due to the Division's veterinary services where staff perform shelter medicine and sterilizations. The combination of these functions is partly due to the staffing challenges as discussed in Finding 2, and the limited space discussed above and in the Veterinary Services as discussed in Finding 6.

New Spay/Neuter Clinics Could Alleviate Wait

As of February 2025, the Division reports that it is implementing a new program with partner organizations to offer multi-day spay and neuter clinics. The clinics and visiting partners are said to perform high-volume spay and neuters of animals at the shelter. The Divisions expects that the new program combined with increased veterinary staffing may reduce or eliminate the long wait times and eliminate the need for the Division's foster-to-adopt program by the end of March 2025. While we have not evaluated this new effort in our audit, it is aligned with our recommendation to reevaluate the Division's strategy on stray population control, including enhancing community-based spay/neuter programs and managed intake systems.

¹⁵ Julie Levy; Cynda Crawford; and Brenda Griffin, University of Florida, "[Integrating Veterinary Medicine with Shelter Systems, Module 4: The Case of the Spay-Neuter Skeptic](#)" 2019

¹⁶ Dr. Philip A. Bushby, DVM, MS, DACVS, Animal Sheltering Magazine, "[Deconstructing the spay/neuter debate](#)" 2020

¹⁷ American Veterinary Medical Association, "[Dog and cat population management](#)"

Strays are Most Common Intake Reason Driving Shelter Population

As seen in Figure 1.4 below, stray animals brought to the shelter and collected by Animal Control staff, have been the primary reason for animals being received at the shelter for the prior 10 fiscal years, FY 2013-14 to FY 2023-24. In the most recent fiscal year, FY 2023-24, strays represented 86.1 percent of all animals that year, and the other 13.9 percent from various other sources such as owner surrender.

Figure 1.4: Stray Animals Are Primary Reason for Animal Intakes

History of Animal Intake Reasons By Fiscal Year (All Animal Types)

	Adoption Return	Confiscate	Euthanasia Request	Owner Surrender	Protective Custody	Transfer In	Stray	TOTAL
2013-14	211	724	267	876		199	7,479	9,756
2014-15	296	459	265	484	1	58	9,479	11,042
2015-16	400	433	189	520	5	29	9,939	11,515
2016-17	437	383	68	458	1	150	9,515	11,012
2017-18	410	485	67	522	1	51	9,712	11,248
2018-19	323	548	62	637	2	80	8,922	10,574
2019-20	282	393	22	511	2	19	7,162	8,391
2020-21	83	321	2	336	1	22	5,188	5,953
2021-22	358	534	3	403		9	5,925	7,232
2022-23	411	590	6	664		21	7,461	9,153
2023-24	313	502	6	497	1	80	8,648	10,047

Source: analysis of data provided by Animal Care Services Division

Several research studies suggest that stray animals come from sources such as owner abandonment and uncontrolled breeding in stray populations.¹⁸ This means that a more concerted effort by the City to spay and neuter animals could help lower animal populations in the City and ease pressure on the shelter's limited capacity.

Conclusion

The shelter's limited capacity results in chronic overcrowding, resource strain, and increased animal stress. Overcrowding impacts operational efficiency, prolongs animal stays, and elevates euthanasia rates for animals with health or behavioral issues. Sacramento City Code Chapter 9.44 mandates that the shelter impound stray dogs and at-risk animals, emphasizing the need for adequate facilities and resources to fulfill these requirements. Addressing these challenges requires a balanced approach that prioritizes near-term strategies, such as managed intake and fostering programs, alongside long-term

¹⁸ "Stray animal overpopulation is a serious global problem with many negative impacts on the community, environment, and public health. Most stray animals do not depend on humans for food and shelter, leading to uncontrolled reproduction, increased chances of predation, road traffic accidents, and transmission of zoonotic diseases." - World Veterinary Journal, 11(3): 319-326, September 25, 2021.

"Stray animals are often a result of abandonment by their owners, uncontrolled breeding, and lack of spaying/neutering programs." - FOUR PAWS International, Responsible Pet Ownership Programme, August 2, 2023. four-paws.org

"The main causes of stray animals in cities are lost, abandoned, and disorderly breeding, as well as lack of regulations. Stray animals often live in poor conditions with many health problems and pose a serious threat to the development of cities." - SpringerLink, HCI International 2022 – Late Breaking Papers: HCI for Today's Community and Economy, October 22, 2022. springer.com

investments in spay/neuter initiatives and facility upgrades. By planning for incremental resource allocation and exploring cost-sharing opportunities with neighboring jurisdictions, the City can mitigate overcrowding and ensure compliance with legal obligations while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Recommendations

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 1.1 Reevaluate the Division's strategy on stray population control, including enhancing community-based spay/neuter programs and managed intake systems.
- 1.2 Explore cost-sharing agreements with neighboring jurisdictions to distribute intake and operational costs and increase its overall capacity.

Finding 2: Focus on Employee Engagement and Recruitment Strategies Could Improve Staffing Shortages and Turnover

Chronic vacancies and high turnover in key roles hinder the Division’s ability to meet operational needs effectively. Understaffing has led to service inefficiencies and low employee engagement. The Division’s obligations to ensure timely and effective animal care, as outlined in its various mandates, underscore the need for a stable workforce. The Division should work with Human Resources to review some positions’ qualifications to attract more applicants, increase efforts to publicize job opportunities, and focus on enhancing employee engagement to improve retention and morale.

Understaffing Is An Ongoing Issue That Dates Back To At Least 2021

Animal Care Services is budgeted with 63 Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 – 2024 but has had many unfilled positions during the year. As of October 1, 2024, the Division had 48 employees, which is consistent with employee counts at different times of the year. Figure 2.1 below provides the budgeted and filled staffing numbers at select times during FY 2023-24.

Figure 2.1: 2024 Animal Care Services Staffing Levels

	FY 23-24 Budgeted FTE	Filled FTE on Jan 1, 2024	Filled FTE on July 1, 2024	Filled FTE on Oct 1, 2024
Number of FTE	63	45	48	48

Source: Data Provided by Community Development Department

Vacancies at the time this report was drafted in October 2024 included the following:

- The Chief Animal Control Officer (ACO) position, which was vacated in June 2023.
- One of the three veterinarian positions. Two had been vacant until a recent hiring occurred.
- Seven of the 12 Animal Control Officer positions
- Four of the 18 Animal Care Technician positions
- Three of the seven Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT) positions

This condition is not a recent development. This has been an ongoing challenge since at least 2021, if not earlier. As shown below, the number of employees has not increased even though the number of budgeted positions has. Although budgeted positions increased by eight since 2021, the Division actually had fewer filled positions on January 1, 2024, than on January 1, 2021.

Figure 2.2 below presents budgeted and actual staffing levels on January 1, 2024, and January 1 of each of the prior three years.

Figure 2.2: Number of Budgeted and Filled Position 2021 - 2024

	Budgeted	Filled on January 1	Filled as Percent of Budgeted
FY 2023 - 2024	63	45	71%
FY 2022 - 2023	61	51	84%
FY 2021 - 2022	61	47	77%
FY 2020 - 2021	55	50	91%

Source: Data Provided by Community Development Department

A Competitive Hiring Environment, Limited Recruitment Efforts, Difficult Jobs, and Turnover All Contribute to Understaffing.

Low unemployment rates, jobs that offer the flexibility of working remotely, and even California’s \$20 an hour minimum wage for fast food workers are all conditions making it hard for employers to attract potential employees and retain staff. In this environment, Animal Care Services is not unique in this struggle. However, as discussed below, there are some areas where Animal Care Services can take actions that may improve recruitment efforts and may reduce turnover.

More Can Be Done To Advertise Job Openings

The Division’s recruitment efforts are generally passive. The one exception to the passive approach has been the hiring of a recruitment firm to assist in efforts to recruit for the Chief ACO position.

Generally, job openings are posted on the City’s Human Resource website and through one or two industry, online job boards. Additionally, the Division Manager posts about openings on his LinkedIn account. The Division posted about its openings on its Facebook page only twice in 2024.

The Division does not advertise openings at its adoption, spay and neuter clinics, or other public events.

A Slow Hiring Process and Restrictive Minimum Qualifications May Limit the Number of Applicants

Slow hiring processes may be a factor contributing to hiring challenges. At the start of the audit, Animal Care Services had been receiving the applications of qualified applicants on a monthly basis from the Human Resources (HR) Department. The longer an employer waits to contact a job applicant, the greater the risk the applicant will have found a different employment opportunity. After discussing this with Animal Care Services and with the HR Department, Animal Care Services reports that it will now be receiving the applications of qualified applicants from HR every two weeks instead of monthly.

The Division’s minimum qualifications may be overly restrictive. A comparison of the minimum qualifications for each position to that of other shelters in the region identified that in some instances Animal Care Services has more restrictive qualifications than that of its peers. For example, to be qualified for the Division’s Animal Care Technician (ACT) position, an applicant must have one year of paid or two years of volunteer experience. By comparison, Stockton does not require any experience for this position and Sacramento County only requires six months of paid or volunteer experience. Moreover, volunteers perform many of the same tasks that ACTs do, and volunteers are not required to have experience.

The minimum qualifications associated with the Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT) position may similarly limit the applicant pool. The Division requires that applicants for the RVT position have one year of experience assisting a veterinarian. Sacramento County requires six months.

Retention Issues Contribute to the Understaffing, Though the Division’s Turnover Rate is Typical for the Industry

The Division’s 2023 turnover rate was 33 percent, which matched the national industry average. Annual surveys by the Association for Animal Welfare Advancement determined that the national median turnover rate for animal shelters was 33 percent in 2023, which was down from 38 percent in 2022. Figure 2.3 below presents the Division’s annual turnover rate and the number of employees who left each year.¹⁹

Figure 2.3: Animal Care Services Calendar Year 2020 – 2023 Turnover

Calendar Year	Number Who Left	Turnover Rate
2023	16	33%
2022	11	22%
2021	12	25%

Source: Data Provided by Community Development Department

The small number of line staff who have been with the Division for lengthy periods of employment illustrates the extent of turnover within the Division. Only four ACTs, three ACOs, and two RVTs who were employed by the Division in 2021 were still employed by the Division as of December 2, 2024. In contrast, the Division has seven Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) employees and five of them began their employment prior to 2022 with the other two beginning their employment in 2022 or later.

The Emotional and Physical Toll of Animal Care Services Positions May Contribute to Turnover

Working with shelter animals on a daily basis can take an emotional and physical toll on employees. Incidents reported in conjunction with the City’s Workers’ Compensation Program give an indication of the extent of the physical toll. As shown in the Figure 2.4 below, the Animal Care employees had a higher rate of reported workers’ compensation incidents than the Police, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), the Fire Departments, and other job classifications HR identified as higher risk.

Incidents refer to all reported work-related injuries or illnesses that do not require medical compensation from the City. Claims, on the other hand, are incidents that progress to a formal workers’ compensation request for benefits, typically involving medical treatment beyond first aid. In the figure below, Incidents and Claims are reported distinctly.

¹⁹ Turnover is calculated by dividing the number of employees who left an organization in a year by the average number of individuals employed by the organization. For example, in calendar year 2023 the Division averaged having 48 filled positions. During the year, 16 individuals left. $16 / 48 = 33\%$.

Figure 2.4: Animal Care Employees Experience High Rates of Workers' Compensation Incidents and Moderate Level of Claims

Select Divisions/Occupations Provided By Human Resources Department

FY 2019-20 to 2023-24

Avg # of Injuries / Avg FTE x 100

Divisions/Occupations	Incident	Claim²⁰
Animal Care Employees	39.35	20.97
Animal Care Volunteers	17.00	4.33
All Police Officers	30.25	24.07
Police Recruits / CSOs	8.46	21.92
Fire Suppression	31.86	34.85
EMS	26.57	21.79
Drainage Operations	9.90	9.90
Water Distribution	6.59	9.51
Wastewater Collection	23.87	20.97
Drainage Collection	23.72	12.65
All DOU Maintenance	4.49	9.39
Parking Enforcement	3.24	10.81
In-Source Concrete	8.45	16.90
Urban Forestry	12.42	9.80
Residential Garbage Collection	3.53	16.47
Residential Recycling	6.62	16.91
Seasonal & Appointment Collection	0.75	18.05
Containerized Organics	6.55	14.29
All PW Maintenance	9.21	13.48
Park Operations	2.50	18.59

Legend	0.00 - 9.99	10.00 - 19.99	20.00 - 29.99	30.00 & up
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Source: City's Department of Human Resources

²⁰ Claims are not reported as subset of Incidents. Incidents are defined as reported events that do not result in medical compensation payments. Claims are events that result in a Workers' Compensation claim for benefits.

Animal Care employees had an elevated rate of claims, but one comparable to other functions identified as high-risk. The rate of incidents and claims combined may contribute to staff’s perception of risk, which we heard reported frequently by staff throughout the audit. This trend is consistent with broader industry patterns, as animal care and service workers face significant occupational hazards, including an elevated risk of work-related injuries. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics highlights that these workers are employed in settings, where physically demanding tasks and close interactions with animals increase the likelihood of injuries:

“Animal caretakers have one of the highest rates of injuries and illnesses of all occupations. Animal care and service workers may be bitten, scratched, or kicked when working with scared or aggressive animals. Injuries may also happen while the caretaker is holding, cleaning, or restraining an animal.”²¹

Bites and scratches from dogs and cats accounted for the majority of reported Animal Care incidents. Being punctured by needles, strains from lifting and moving animals, falls/slips/trips, and other miscellaneous types of incidents also contributed to the total number of incidents. The number of incidents by Animal Care Services positions for FY 2019-20 to 2023-24 is provided in Figure 2.5 below. The increase of incidents in more recent years appears correlated with the increasing animal population following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2.5: Animal Care Services Workers’ Compensation Incidents by Position
Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20 to 2023-24

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-34	Total
Animal Care Officers I, II, and Seniors	2	6	6	5	6	25
Animal Care Technicians	14	5	6	13	19	57
Registered Vet Techs	3	6	1	2	3	15
Volunteers	2	1	3	17	18	41
All Other Positions	2	3	5	6	8	24
Total	23	21	21	43	54	162

Source: City’s Department of Human Resources

The Division’s Pay Rates are Comparable to Peer Shelters and National Averages

There is a general tendency among most organizations to blame recruitment and retention challenges on low pay. However, the Division’s pay rates are comparable to that of peer shelters operating in the region. In some cases, the Division had a lower minimum pay rate but then a higher maximum rate than its peers, and vice versa.

²¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Occupational Outlook Handbook: Animal Care and Service Workers](#)

A person considering Animal Care Technician (ACT) positions at both the City and the County of Sacramento would find that the County has a higher starting pay rate than the City but that the City has a higher maximum pay rate than the County. Similarly, the entry level Registered Veterinary Technician pay was lower than that of all peers, but the maximum was higher than that of all peers.

The Veterinarian position was the one exception. The Division pays its veterinarians less than its peers at both the entry and maximum pay rates. However, neither Bakersfield nor Stockton have staff veterinarians, making this a smaller comparison group. Data is presented in Figure 2.6 below.

Figure 2.6: Division Has Similar Base Pay Ranges for Line Staff Positions at Peer Shelters

Position	City of Sacramento	City of Bakersfield	City of Fresno	City of Stockton	County of Sacramento	County of Yolo
Animal Care Technician	\$45,011 - \$63,335	N/A – Outsourced Function	\$39,516 - \$48,036	\$43,591 - \$55,959	\$49,047 - \$59,592	\$35,963 - \$43,701
Animal Care Officer I	\$52,175 - \$73,415	\$48,237 - \$58,682	\$43,392 - \$51,984	\$53,210 - \$68,311	\$54,894 - \$66,712	\$51,854 - \$63,024
Registered Vet Tech	\$57,838 - \$81,384	Not available	\$58,032 - \$70,548	Not available	\$62,724 - \$76,254	\$64,646 - \$78,582
Veterinarian	\$94,846 - \$133,458	Not available	\$143,496 - \$226,536	Not available	\$126,679 - \$153,969	\$123,739 - \$150,405

Source: Analysis of base pay information posted by various jurisdictions

The Division’s pay rates are also comparable to local, state, national, and government sector averages published by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The Division’s entry level pay for ACTs is higher than the state and national average salaries for animal caretakers, though the animal caretaker category is not limited to shelter workers. For ACTs, the midpoint of the Division’s pay scale is \$54,173 which is higher than the California, national, and government sector averages. The Federal/State/Local government average wage was about a \$1,000 higher than the City’s entry pay rate for RVTs. However, the City’s RVT entry pay rate is higher than the BLS national, California, and Sacramento area averages for technicians, but the BLS category may include positions that do not require the RVT designation.

With the exception of the BLS government sector average, the Division’s veterinarian pay is lower than BLS averages. Data are presented in Figure 2.7 below.

Figure 2.7 Division’s Salaries Are Above National Government Sector Averages According to Bureau of Labor Statistics Averages

BLS Category	City of Sacramento Pay Range	Sacramento Metro Area (All Sectors)	California (All Sectors)	National (All Sectors)	National (Government Sector ²² Only)
Animal Caretakers ²³	\$45,011 - \$63,335	Not Listed ²⁴	\$39,710	\$33,530	\$48,980
Animal Care Officer	\$52,175 - \$73,415	\$65,230	\$62,670	\$48,150	\$48,400
Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	\$57,838 - \$81,384	\$55,600	\$55,740	\$43,730	\$58,770
Veterinarian	\$94,846 - \$133,458	\$163,360	\$158,610	\$136,300	\$106,290

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Low Levels of Employee Engagement May Be Contributing to Turnover

Employee engagement correlates with retention. The term ‘employee engagement’ refers to how committed an employee is to their organization, their role, their manager, and their co-workers. According to the Gallup Organization, their research on this topic shows that more highly engaged employees give more discretionary effort at work, are more productive, and have less turnover and safety incidents than less engaged employees.

The Animal Care Services Division has a low level of employee engagement as compared to other organizations, according to Gallup survey results. Gallup, Inc. has developed a 12-question survey that measures employee engagement and compares results to those of other organizations. The results reported to us by Gallup state that 90 percent of organizations in the Gallup database scored higher than Animal Care Services. The Gallup database consists of over 100,000 teams or work units. However, it should be recognized that the 100,000 teams include organizations in different industries, sectors, and countries, and these differences may influence workers’ survey responses.

Of the Division’s employees, newer employees had higher engagement scores than employees with longer tenures. Gallup tabulates scores on the organizational level and therefore we were not provided with information to determine if it is typical that an organization’s newer employees are more engaged than more tenured employees.

In conjunction with the 12 engagement questions, the Gallup survey also asked respondents to rate how satisfied they are with the organization as a place to work. As a whole, the Division scored in the 7th percentile. As with the engagement results, the score for newer employees was higher than the score for more tenured employees.

Thirty-two Division employees completed the anonymous, online survey. Employees who have been employed by the Division for less than 30 days were not offered the opportunity to participate. Figure

²² This sector excludes schools and hospitals

²³ This BLS job classification may include more than just shelter technicians

²⁴ The BLS lists the top 10 paying metro areas. The Sacramento metro area did not make the list for this position.

2.8 below provides summary results categorized by self-reported length of employment for both the 12-question engagement survey and the question of how satisfied they are with the organization as a place to work.

Figure 2.8: Gallup Q12 Survey Results Show Engagement Worsening With Tenure

Length of Employment	Number of Respondents	Overall Satisfaction with Org as Place to Work (1 – 5 scale)	Overall Satisfaction Percentile Ranking ²⁵	Q12 Ave Score (1 – 5 scale)	Q12 Percentile Ranking
Less than 1 Year	9	3.67	22nd	3.78	27th
1 to 5 Years	12	3.08	4th	3.52	14th
5 or More Years	11	3.00	3 rd	3.00	2nd

Source: Results from survey administered by audit team

The survey results are discussed in detail in Appendix A.

Current Engagement Initiatives

The Division reports that it has a current practice of celebrating employee birthdays and holidays, having an employee engagement fund whereby employees contribute \$5.00 a month to fund these celebrations, and having an employee of the month program. While these are positive activities, we recommend that the Division consider a focus on employee engagement beyond these initiatives. Our recommendation is not only driven by the survey results suggesting engagement is low, but the recognition that the work environment of animal care is challenging and risky as discussed previously in this finding. We have included strategies for increasing engagement in Appendix A that we recommend the Division consider and apply to different work groups and roles as appropriate.

Conclusion

Persistent vacancies and high turnover undermine the Division’s ability to meet operational demands. Staffing gaps in critical roles, compounded by restrictive qualifications, slow hiring processes, and limited recruitment efforts, exacerbate inefficiencies across shelter operations. Despite competitive base pay rates for most job classifications, the Division experiences challenges in attracting and retaining employees. To address this, the City should focus on revising qualifications to widen the applicant pool, enhancing recruitment outreach, and implementing strategies to improve employee engagement and retention. By addressing these systemic issues, the Division can strengthen its workforce and improve overall effectiveness.

²⁵ The Percentile Ranking compares the Division to all organizations that have completed the Gallup survey. For example, a ranking of 22nd percentile means that 78 percent of organizations scored higher.

Recommendations

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 2.1 Work with the Human Resources Department to review the minimum qualifications and pay range of each position for the purpose of determining whether qualifications can be reduced in order to attract more applicants and for determining the appropriateness of pay ranges.
- 2.2 Work with the Human Resources Department to review the appropriateness of the pay range for veterinarians.
- 2.3 Increase its efforts to publicize job opportunities, such as using online job portals, and animal care, veterinary medicine, shelter industry specific websites, forums, and organizations, and at adoption and other in-person events.
- 2.4 Focus on increasing employee engagement. Strategies for increasing engagement are discussed in Appendix A, which provides a detailed discussion of the employee engagement survey results.

Finding 3: Finalizing Policies and Procedures Could Improve Efficiency

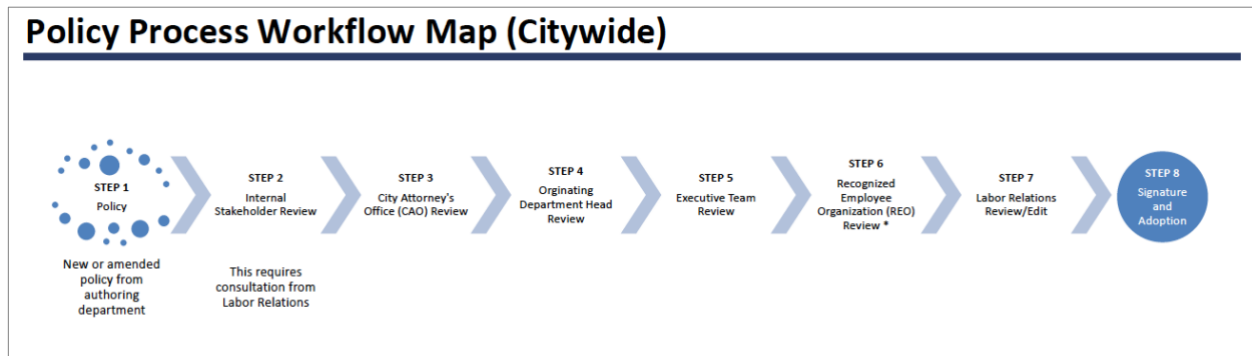
The Division lacks comprehensive, documented policies and procedures, which can lead to inconsistent practices and create uncertainty among staff. The City’s Policy Process Workflow requires departments to develop formalized guidelines, yet the Division has not completed this process. Formalizing and implementing clear guidelines will improve consistency, accountability, and compliance.

Developing And Documenting Policies and Procedures is an Expected Norm and is Required By City Policy

Policies and procedures provide a roadmap for the daily operations of any type of organization. They serve many purposes such as establishing roles and responsibilities, instructing staff how certain functions are to be performed, guiding the decision-making process at various levels of the organization, and generally ensuring that operations are designed in a manner that will result in compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Sacramento has designed a citywide Policy Process Workflow that established a requirement that departments and divisions establish policies. The Workflow states, “Departments and divisions are responsible for creating or updating administrative policies.” Additionally, the Workflow establishes the following process as the steps that need to occur when developing or amending a policy, see Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Excerpt from City Policy Process Workflow Document



Source: Human Resources Department

Animal Care Services Work Units Are at Various Stages of Policy and Procedure Development

The Animal Care Services Division has four primary work units plus two specialized work units. The four major work units are Animal Control, Animal Care (shelter operations), Customer Service, and Veterinary Care. The additional, specialized functions include the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP) and the Volunteer Coordination unit. The extent to which each work unit has developed policies is discussed below.

To date, the Division’s management reports that it has been unable to prioritize developing policies and procedures due to limited time and resources. However, without policies and procedures, the Division

lacks clear operating standards, it reduces their ability to hold staff accountable and may contribute to poor morale as discussed in Finding 2 of this report.

Animal Care Has a Draft-In-Progress Standard Operating Guidelines & Training Manual

Emails have been used to provide guidance, directives, and/or reminders to Animal Care Technician (ACT) staff. A series of 19 emails were sent to staff in calendar years 2023 and 2024. The emails appear to be sent reactively, as warranted by events and situations that occur. The emails are intended to both explain what occurred and document expectations as to what should be done in the future.

Additionally, work has begun on a document titled “Standard Operating Guidelines & Training Manual.” The document dated “in progress 4/12/24,” is 34 pages long. However, many of the pages contain basic administrative information and much work is needed to incorporate operating guidelines into the document.

Animal Control Has Tasked Its Senior Animal Control Officers With Drafting Policies

As discussed in Finding 4 regarding the Animal Control Unit, the Division has been without a Chief Animal Control Officer since June 2023. No policy and procedural manual is in place. The two Senior Animal Control Officers were tasked with drafting a policy and procedure manual as time allows. However, given the Division’s minimal number of filled ACO positions, time has not allowed them to make much progress.

Veterinary Care Has Some Operating Procedures, But They Are Marked “Pending”

The work unit has a series of approximately 20 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Most were dated in 2022 with the word “Pending” in the approval date field. Topics pertained to specific medical conditions, related topics, and included titles such as: Anesthesia Protocol, Canine Heartworm, Controlled Drugs, and Feline Ringworm.

Additionally, the work unit had a document titled Final Vaccine Clinic 2024 Protocols FSAS, which was developed by the Shelter PALS at the San Francisco SPCA. The title page included the following statement: Available for personalization by shelters in the state of California.

Customer Service Is An Exception and Has Documents Procedures

The Customer Service unit is an exception to the others as they have documents that explain various procedures. The documents provide detailed instructions and include screen shots as appropriate. However, the unit would benefit from their procedure’s consideration with Division-wide policies to ensure their work integrates with and supports the work of other units.

Common Organizational Challenges Explain The Lack Of Formalized Policies

Like any organization, the Animal Care Services Division has the challenge of balancing immediate needs such as the care and health of the animals in its custody and the need for Animal Control to respond to calls for service with the long-term need to formalized policies. As is typical, time and attention is based on the short-term needs. COVID created its own challenges and needs. Staff shortages and turnover have exacerbated conditions at the Division.

The Lack Of Final, Approved Policies in an Organized Manner Limits the Utility of the Existing Documents

One purpose of having approved policies and procedures is that it then allows staff to be held accountable for performing their duties and responsibilities in conformance to policy. The Division's policies have not gone through the steps outlined in the City's Policy Process Workflow, which was described above. Accordingly, it would seem that holding staff formally accountable would be made difficult.

Many staff did not seem aware of the policy documents described above. On multiple occasions we were told there were no documented policies. Their lack of knowledge regarding these draft policies may be contributing to their sense that they do not know what is expected of them.

The results of the employee engagement survey indicated that staff lack awareness of workplace expectations. As described in detail in Appendix A, the Division ranked in the 17th percentile for the survey item "I know what is expected of me at work." Moreover, scores were lower for employees who have been employed by the Division for less than a year than the scores of employees who have been there for more than a year. Employees with less than one year at the Division gave the Division scores that placed it in the seventh percentile of all organizations that have participated in the Gallup engagement survey. By comparison, the scores of employees with between one and five years ranked the Division in the 22nd percentile.

Conclusion

The absence of comprehensive policies and procedures across the Division's units creates inconsistencies, reduces accountability, and limits operational efficiency. Sacramento's Policy Process Workflow requires departments to establish clear administrative guidelines, yet the Division has not finalized or implemented these critical documents. Formalizing policies and procedures will align operations with City standards, enhance staff accountability, and ensure consistent service delivery. By completing this process, the Division will support compliance and foster a more efficient and transparent work environment.

Recommendations:

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 3.1 Complete and submit drafts of their various policies and procedures to the City Human Resources Department for review and approval.

Finding 4: More Oversight is an Opportunity to Prioritize Limited Resources in Animal Control

The Animal Control unit currently operates without sufficient oversight and formal procedures, putting effective service delivery at risk. Sacramento City Code Chapter 9.44 establishes clear responsibilities for animal control enforcement, but the lack of defined protocols and adequate staffing undermines these efforts. The Division recently filled its long-vacant Chief Animal Control Officer position and should now establish clear protocols and call response criteria to improve efficiency, consistency, and public safety outcomes.

City Ordinances Prohibit Animals From Roaming Free and Tasks Division With Enforcement

Sacramento City Code Chapter 9.44 Animals authorizes the Animal Care Services Division to issue citations and impound animals found to be in violation of prohibitions established by Chapter 9.44. The Chapter also establishes that the City may impose criminal and administrative penalties upon individuals found to be in violation of the Code.

The ordinance prohibits animal owners, except for domestic cat owners, from allowing their animals to roam at large, trespass on private or restricted public property, create public nuisances, or attack or harm others. It also requires owners to provide proper food, water, shelter, care, and veterinary attention to their animals. All of which are enforced by the Division’s Animal Control staff.

Staffing Has Been Below Budgeted Level

Animal Control is budgeted with 13 FTE which consists of the following:

- One Chief Animal Control Officer – This position is responsible for overseeing the unit's activities and developing the unit’s programs and policies. The position reports directly to the Animal Care Services Manager.
- Two Senior Animal Control Officers
- Ten Animal Control Officers (ACOs).

Obtaining and maintaining its staffing at the budgeted level has been a challenge for Animal Care Services. The Chief ACO position became unfilled in June 2023 and remained unfilled until January 27, 2025. Additionally, there were several vacant ACO positions during the time period this audit was conducted. Figure 4.1 below provides budgeted and filled staffing numbers at select times during FY 2023-24.

Figure 4.1: Animal Control Staffing Below Budgeted Levels

Position	Budgeted FTE	Filled FTE Jan 1, 2024	Filled FTE July 1, 2024	Filled FTE Oct 1, 2024
Chief ACO	1	0	0	0
Sr. ACO	2	2	2	2
ACO I & II	10	4	4	3
Total Number of Staff	13	6	6	5

Source: Data Provided by Animal Care Services Division

Vacancies and the filling of vacant positions have been a challenge for the Animal Care Services Division as a whole and is not specific to Field Services. Therefore, Chapter 2 is specifically devoted to discussing staffing challenges.

Staff Schedules Are Aligned With Call Volume

Generally, ACO’s work four ten-hour shifts that begin at 8:00 AM and end at 6:30 PM. Each ACO is assigned to work either Sunday through Wednesday or Wednesday through Saturday. Additionally, one ACO works a 3:00 PM – 1:30 AM schedule to alleviate the need to have an ACO on standby status for when emergency calls require an after-hours response.

The two Senior ACOs work 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM schedules. One works Monday to Friday and the other works Wednesday to Sunday. Their schedules were designed to maximize the number of hours they are available to provide support to the more junior ACOs.

Call volume data indicates that the staffing schedule aligns with the workload, see Figure 4.2 below. Specifically:

- 73 percent of priority 1 calls were received between 8:00 AM — 6:30 PM.
- It was less busy from 7:00 AM to 8:00 AM than from 8:00 – 9:00 AM. Similarly, call volume dropped off after 6:30 PM.
- Late night activity suggests the current swing shift is appropriate. About once every six days, a call was received between midnight and 1:00 AM. Although not all calls require immediate action, 30 of the 60 calls received during this one-hour time period did result in an impound, which indicates at least half the calls required on-site action.

Figure 4.2: Standard ACO Shift Aligns With FY 2023-24 Activity and Call Volume

Hours (CALL TIME)	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Grand Total
12 AM	13	10	17	12	16	13	9	90
1 AM	17	11	6	14	9	11	7	75
2 AM	9	12	2	12	8	5	6	54
3 AM	6	6	6	3	10	9	7	47
4 AM	13	5	5	7	8	12	5	55
5 AM	8	12	22	9	7	12	15	85
6 AM	11	55	64	25	36	46	24	261
7 AM	46	93	78	67	78	83	56	501
8 AM	72	105	93	108	99	120	74	671
9 AM	101	128	111	134	146	150	92	862
10 AM	104	111	141	134	122	108	97	817
11 AM	100	110	116	111	103	98	109	747
12 PM	113	126	135	128	103	106	114	825
1 PM	92	127	126	111	119	107	95	777
2 PM	94	86	120	96	108	95	100	699
3 PM	75	104	92	95	107	81	97	651
4 PM	92	115	91	111	103	75	96	683
5 PM	93	107	88	101	115	85	94	683
6 PM	73	96	107	95	92	82	72	617
7 PM	57	97	83	76	77	87	61	538
8 PM	68	62	63	48	43	56	61	401
9 PM	35	54	46	45	40	45	38	303
10 PM	32	33	39	27	43	38	30	242
11 PM	17	28	27	33	17	23	26	171
Grand Total	1,341	1,693	1,678	1,602	1,609	1,547	1,385	10,855

Source: Analysis of FY 2023-24 Activity Report Provided by Animal Care Services Division from their Chameleon database

Staff Duties Are Reactive to Calls for Service

ACOs are primarily tasked with responding to calls for service. They have the authority to impound animals and may be asked to assist law enforcement as needed. ACO responsibilities also include removing dead animals from public spaces and responding to calls regarding wildlife.

Given its current staffing level, Animal Control does not perform any proactive activities such as inspecting pet stores or breeding facilities.

311 Service Center Is Primary Dispatch of Animal Control Officers

The City's 311 Customer Service Center receives all Animal Control requests for service as well as receiving other inquiries relating to the Animal Care Division. When receiving a request for service, the 311 Center classifies the request using a four-level priority classification system and then uploads the information to the Chameleon database system, which is used by Animal Care Services. The four levels range from Priority 1, the most urgent matters, to Priority 4, the least urgent matters.

Chapter 11 provides more information regarding 311 and the type and volume of requests for services and other calls received.

Animal Control Officers (ACO) Respond to Highest Priority Calls Quickly, Others Have Slower Response Due to Limited Staff

When the 311 Center determines that a call requires an action by Animal Control, the information gets transferred from the 311 Center database (Salesforce) to the Animal Care Services database (Chameleon). ACO's engaged in approximately 10,855 unique activities during FY 2023-24 (excluding follow-up activities), per the data entered into Chameleon. Please note that in some instances the unique activity may be limited to reviewing the call information and determining that no action is needed or that the information provided was not sufficiently detailed to allow for a response.

Activity was highest on Mondays and Tuesdays and lowest on the weekends, as shown in Figure 4.3 below.

Figure 4.3: ACO Activity in Response to Calls for Service by Day of Week FY 23-24

Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
ACO Activity in Response to Calls for Service	1,693	1,678	1,602	1,609	1,547	1,385	1,341

Source: Division's Chameleon database

The monthly Animal Control activity steadily dropped during the fiscal year.²⁶ The July 2023 total of 1,170 activities decreased to 723 in June 2024, a reduction of over 60 percent, as shown in Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4: Activity Level by Month in FY 2023-24

Month	Number of ACO Activities (all priority levels)	Average Daily Number
July 2023	1,170	38
August 2023	1,116	36
September 2023	1,017	34
October 2023	1,093	35
November 2023	891	30
December 2023	877	28
January 2024	853	28
February 2024	808	28
March 2024	762	25
April 2024	773	26
May 2024	772	25
June 2024	723	24
TOTAL	10,855	

Source: Division's Chameleon database

Majority of "Priority 1" Calls Responded Within One Hour and Almost All Within the Day

Calls to the 311 Center are given a ranking of Priority 1 through Priority 4, with Priority 1 designating the most serious matters and Priority 4 the least serious.²⁷

The 'Priority 1' designation is used for service requests deemed to involve an emergency situation such as a bite in progress or a loose dog having bitten someone, an aggressive stray, cruelty in progress such as a dog left in a hot car, and requests by fire and police for assistance.

Animal Control generally responds to Priority 1 calls within 24 hours of receiving the service request. Data was available to analyze 4,144 of the 4,684 Priority 1 calls received in FY 2023-2024. For the other 540 calls, Animal Care Services explained that an ACO may determine that no physical response was necessary or that the call did not contain enough valid and pertinent information to warrant a response. For example, according to Animal Control staff, a call in which no location is provided, no description of the animal at issue is provided, and no contact information is included, would result in the call being classified as not warranting a physical response.

²⁶ This does not include calls to 311 Center regarding animals already at the Shelter or other calls not specific to Animal Control.

²⁷ Chapter 12 discusses the 311 Center's dispatch activity in more detail and includes a detailed description of the priority ranking system.

Of the 4,144 calls with response time data, ACOs responded within 24 hours to 4,104 (99 percent) of the calls. Of these, 58 percent of the time the response came within one hour and cumulatively 95 percent of calls were responded to within four hours. Figure 4.5 below provides additional details.

Figure 4.5: Same Day Response Times for Priority 1 Calls in FY 2023-24

Timeframe	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Cumulative Percent of Responses
Within 1 Hour	2,385	58%	58%
Between 1 and 2 Hours	886	22%	80%
Between 2 and 3 Hours	373	9%	89%
Between 3 and 4 Hours	180	4%	93%
Between 4 and 5 Hours	89	2%	95%

Source: Division's Chameleon database

Only 40 Priority 1 calls were not responded to within 24 hours. Of these calls, 15 were responded to within 48 hours.

Almost Half of "Priority 2" Calls Responded to In Two Days

The 'Priority 2' designation is used for service requests regarding abandoned animals, bites no longer in progress, and calls regarding animal welfare concerns. The City's expectation is that responses to these calls will occur as quickly as time and staffing allow.

There were 2,544 Priority 2 calls in FY 2023-24, which accounted for 23 percent of all calls. Responses were made to 2,070 of the Priority 2 calls. For the other 474 calls, Animal Service explained that an ACO may determine that no physical response was necessary or that the call did not contain enough valid and pertinent information to warrant a response. Figure 4.6 below presents the count and percentage of Priority 2 calls responded to within 24 hours and within longer periods of time.

Figure 4.6: Priority 2 Response Times in FY 2023-24

Timeframe	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Cumulative Percent of Responses
Within 24 Hours	802	39%	39%
Between 24 and 48 Hours	202	10%	49%
Between 48 and 72 Hours	118	6%	55%
Between 72 and 96 Hours	49	2%	57%
More than 96 Hours	899	43%	100%

Source: Division's Chameleon database

There Are Opportunities to Increase the Animal Control Program's Efficiency and Effectiveness.

As discussed below, several conditions hinder the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the Animal Control Program.

There Has Been Minimal Oversight of Animal Control Officers

As discussed above, the Chief ACO position was vacant from June 2023 until January 27, 2025, which included the time period during which this audit was performed. During this time, ACO staff generally operated with complete discretion as to which service requests they respond to. There was a lack of oversight and controls to ensure consistency from one staff person to another in determining which calls to respond to or in the way staff performed their duties. Similarly, during evenings and weekends when shelter veterinary staff were not on duty, ACO staff had discretion in determining whether an animal's condition warrants taking it to the contracted veterinary hospital. Increased oversight of staff by the newly hired Chief ACO will help ensure activities are aligned with the Division's priorities.

The program has two Senior ACO positions which, per the position description, "... performs the full, first-line supervisory duties such as plan, evaluate, and assign the work of subordinates." However, given the staffing shortages, the two Senior ACO's time is generally spent on routine ACO duties and not on supervising the ACO I and ACO II employees.

Animal Control Policies and Procedures are Lacking

Animal Control has not developed and implemented official policies and procedures to instruct and govern ACOs in performing their duties. In conjunction with the lack of a program manager, the lack of documented policies and procedures increases the risk of operational inefficiencies and misaligned performance. At the time this audit was conducted, the two Sr. ACOs had been tasked with developing policies and procedures, in addition to their other duties and responsibilities. Policies and procedures are discussed more completely in Finding 3 of this report.

Standardized Data Entry Practices Are Needed To Improve The Usefulness Of Activity Data

The Chameleon database was designed with drop-down menus that categorize the nature of the call (subtype) and the results of ACO activities. The system was designed with multiple result fields so that an ACO can record more than one response to an activity. For example, a call alleging cruelty to an animal had the result of "No One Home" and a second result of "Written Warning Issued."

There are 39 separate result codes. Moreover, in some instances more than one result code can be appropriate for a given situation. For example, one result code is "Gone on Arrival", and another code is "Unable to Locate." There is no written direction to guide ACOs in determining which code to use based on the individual circumstances of the activity. Moreover, one code is "Completed Call," which does not sufficiently explain what resulted from the ACO's activity.

Standardization of how responses are coded would make it easier for the Division to use the data for analytical purposes.

Over Ten Percent of ACO Activity is in Response to Calls Informing the City of Dead Animals, and More Often Than Not the Animal Cannot Be Located

Animal Care Services is responsible for picking up dead animals from public spaces. In FY 23-24, ACOs responded to 1,322 calls regarding dead animals. This total consisted of 1,252 calls regarding dead

animals in public spaces and another 70 regarding dead animals on private property. In total, these 1,322 responses equated to 12 percent of all ACO responses during the fiscal year.

More than half of these responses to calls involving a dead animal did not result in the ACO removing a dead animal. On 630 occasions, the ACOs coded the response “Unable to Locate an Animal.” Additionally, in another 215 responses the ACO used the code “Gone on Arrival” to record the result. Together, these codes account for 845 of the 1,322 (64 percent) responses to calls regarding dead animals.

It is safe to estimate that at a minimum over 400 hours of ACO staff time was spent looking for dead animals that they could not locate. Data limitations do not allow for a calculation of the total time spent responding to these calls.²⁸ However, an estimate that it takes on average at least half an hour to respond seems reasonable based upon the data that was available for analysis. If at least half an hour was spent on each of the 845 calls coded to “Unable to Locate” and “Gone on Arrival,” then at least 422 hours were spent on these calls.

Given the hours spent looking for dead animals that do not pose an urgent public safety threat, the Division should explore other options for staffing this task. For example, the work could be done by Animal Control Technicians, volunteers, or interns that have a lower hourly cost, lower minimum qualifications, and would thereby free up ACO resources for more urgent calls.

When Responding to Calls, Often the Result Was That the ACO Could Not Locate an Animal

About 20 percent of responses to all calls, including the aforementioned calls pertaining to dead animals, did not result in an action because either the animal was gone on arrival (GOA), the ACO was unable to locate the animal (UTL), or there was no one home (NOH) when the ACO arrived at the reported location. These results occurred in 2,159 of the 10,855 calls to which ACOs responded, see Figure 4.7 below. The exhibit below provides details on the five types of calls most likely to result in an animal not being located. These five types of call jointly accounted for 1,777 (82 percent) of the 2,159 responses in which the ACO could not locate an animal.

Figure 4.7: Most Common Types of Calls in Which ACO Could not Locate Animal in FY 2023-24

Call Subtype	Gone on Arrival	No One Home	Unable to Locate Animal	COMBINED all not located
Aggressive Dog	101	7	101	209
Dead St	204	0	616	820
Injured	112	17	112	241
Tethered	125	12	49	186
Welfare	148	62	111	321
All other not located call types	184	27	171	382
TOTAL	874	125	1160	2,159

Source: Division’s Chameleon database

²⁸ The database records when 311 Center receives a call and when the ACO completes an action, but the database does not capture the time an ACO initiates a response.

Less Than 10 Percent of Calls About Aggressive Dogs Resulted in an Impound, Raising Questions About Alignment with Public Safety Goals

There were 865 reports of aggressive dogs in FY 2023-24. Of these 865 reports, 82 resulted in an impound, with another 67 resulting in a written or verbal warning. The resulting actions are presented in Figure 4.8 below.

Figure 4.8: Most Common Call Actions (Outcomes) for Calls About Aggressive Dogs in FY 2023-24

Result	Count
Make a Phone Call	157
Send a Letter	113
Unable to Locate	101
Gone on Arrival	101
Information Received from Public	98
Impounds	82
Warnings	45
Verbal Warnings	22
All Other Results Combined	146
TOTAL	865

Source: Division’s Chameleon database

A key purpose of Animal Control is to promote public safety by addressing potentially dangerous dogs. However, with only 82 impounds stemming from 865 aggressive-dog reports, the current practices may not provide sufficient clarity or authority for Animal Control staff to take effective enforcement actions in borderline or ambiguous situations. As a result, potentially dangerous dogs may remain in the community, indicating a possible misalignment between the program’s costs and its intended public safety objectives. Clarifying Animal Control’s policies and procedures could help ensure that Animal Control has the necessary tools to address aggressive dogs more decisively.

Data Reporting Limitations Impedes the Ability to Determine the Effectiveness in Responding to Animal Safety and Welfare Concerns

Jointly, three categories of call subtypes - “hot car,” “tethered,” and “welfare” - accounted for 2,429 ACO activities. This equated to 22 percent of the 10,855 activities performed by ACOs.

An impound was the resulting activity in 191 instances. In many other instances, due to the ACOs choice of result category, the result cannot be determined. In 278 instances, the ACO selected the response choice “Call Completed.” Similarly, “Welfare Check” was selected by the ACO in 296 instances. Twenty-two of the welfare checks did have a secondary result indicating the ACO educated the public, but many calls did not have a recorded secondary result.²⁹ Figure 4.9 below presents the most common outcomes.

²⁹ The database structure allows for up to six results to be reported, but typically only the ‘Result 1’ field was used. Only 7 ‘Call Completed’ results had a second result reported.

Figure 4.9: Five Most Common Results Regarding Reported Animal Welfare Concerns

Result	Hot Car	Tethered	Welfare	Total
Phone Call Made	3	45	318	366
Info Received from Public	10	78	288	376
Welfare Check	5	90	201	296
Gone on Arrival	15	125	148	288
Completed Call	16	26	236	278
Impounded an Animal	1	42	148	191
Unable to Locate	1	49	111	161
All Other Results Combined	10	112	351	473
TOTAL	61	567	1801	2,429

Source: Division’s Chameleon database

170 Unique Addresses Were the Subject Of At Least Three Complaints In FY 2023-24

It is worth noting that a total of 681 responses were to 170 addresses that were each the subject of at least three complaints during the fiscal year.³⁰ This adds context to the nature of the call data, since a small subset of call relate to apparent repeated complaints. Typically, the complaints had to do with barking, loose, or aggressive dogs; feces; a residence having too many animals; or poultry.

Efficiency and Effectiveness are Limited by Inadequate Oversight, Unclear Policies and Procedures, and a Lack of Standardized Coding Practices.

Collectively, the examples above illustrate that the Animal Control Program’s efficiency and effectiveness are limited by inadequate oversight, unclear policies and procedures, and a lack of standardized coding practices. These gaps in consistency and documentation not only hinder the Division’s ability to accurately assess its performance but also undermine its core public safety mission—particularly when responding to potentially dangerous or neglected animals.

Conclusion

The Animal Control unit struggled with insufficient staffing, a lack of formal policies, and minimal oversight, which hinder its ability to enforce City ordinances effectively and respond consistently to service requests. The Sacramento City Code Chapter 9.44 establishes the Division’s enforcement responsibilities, highlighting the need for clear protocols and adequate oversight to align field activities with public safety objectives. The Chief Animal Control Officer position was filled on January 27, 2025. By tasking that individual with establishing formal policies, standardizing practices, and implementing process improvements, the Animal Control unit can better meet the community needs.

³⁰ It is likely that the number is higher than 170. Variations in the way addresses are entered into the database and other data entry inconsistencies may have resulted in an undercounting of addresses with multiple complaints.

Recommendations:

The Animal Service Division should:

- 4.1 Direct the newly hired Chief to set and monitor clear call response criteria and priorities, regularly conduct analysis of Animal Control Officer performance, and provide feedback to continually align call responses to priorities.
- 4.2 Explore staffing options for tasks related to removing dead animals from public property. These options could include volunteers, interns, or employees in positions that don't require the experience and skill set of Animal Control Officers.
- 4.3 Work with the 311 Customer Service Center to improve the collection of information in order to reduce the number of animals that cannot be located.
- 4.4 Evaluate its practices regarding households that are the subject of multiple complaints in order to determine if other approaches may more effectively reduce the number of repeat complaints.
- 4.5 Develop comprehensive written policies for the Animal Control Unit.
- 4.6 Develop standardized data-entry protocols to ensure consistent call responses, clear result codes, and accurate record-keeping. At a minimum, include a data dictionary for Chameleon, periodic quality checks, and staff training to promote data accuracy and reliability.

Finding 5: Accurate Reporting on Open Data Portal Could Increase Transparency and Public Trust

The animal outcome data reported on the City’s open data portal contains incomplete information that risks confusing the public. This condition conflicts with the Sacramento Code of Ethics (Chapter 4.02), which emphasizes transparency and accountability. The Division should improve oversight of reporting and regularly validate reported data to maintain transparency and credibility.

Missing Outcome Data Due to Unmonitored Reporting System

The City maintains an open data portal, <https://data.cityofsacramento.org/>, that provides datasets available to the public. The Division reports several datasets to the portal including “Animal Intakes and Outcomes for the Last 3 Years”. As of November 2024, the dataset reported inconclusive³¹ outcomes for 41.3 percent of all animals in the three-year period of November 2021 to November 2024.

Upon review, the technology staff within the Division were not familiar with how the open data portal is administered or how it sources the data from the Division’s databases. However, they suggested that the data erroneously includes various types of non-intake/non-outcomes:

- Animals that were found by the public and held onto by the public who did not turn the animals into the Division.
- Animals that were reported lost by their owners.
- Animal brought to the shelter for medical treatment but not held at the shelter.

Figure 5.1: Screenshot of Open Data Portal With Blank Outcome Fields

Number	Intake_Type	Picked_up_Location	Intake_Date	Outcome_Type	Outcome_Date	Animal_Age	Animal_Color
	STRAY	JEFFERSON BLVD & LINDEN...	1/1/2022, 12:00 AM		2/1/2022, 12:00 AM		BLON
	STRAY	41ST ST & 8TH AVE	5/9/2024, 12:00 AM		5/9/2024, 12:00 AM	12Y	BROV
	STRAY	MEADOWGATE DR & MAND...	6/22/2022, 12:00 AM		8/22/2022, 12:00 AM	15Y	TRIC
	STRAY	EL CAMINO AVE & HOWE AVE	2/9/2024, 12:00 AM		6/9/2024, 12:00 AM	15Y	BRN T
	STRAY	S ST & 13TH ST	5/23/2022, 12:00 AM		8/23/2022, 12:00 AM	9Y	WHIT
	STRAY	42ND ST & 12TH AVE	2/22/2024, 12:00 AM		2/22/2024, 12:00 AM	9Y	TAN
	STRAY	TAFT ST & GLENROSE AVE	10/19/2022, 12:00 AM		10/20/2022, 12:00 AM	11Y	GRAY
4	CONFISCATE	EICHLER ST & HOLSTEIN WAY	8/30/2024, 5:00 PM			8Y	BR BR
	STRAY	RIO NORTE WAY & RIO LOM...	2/26/2022, 12:00 AM		2/26/2022, 12:00 AM	9Y	BLAC
	STRAY	10TH ST & D ST	6/20/2024, 12:00 AM		7/20/2024, 12:00 AM	9Y	BLAC
	STRAY	CARSTAIRS CT & OAK AVEN...	9/13/2023, 12:00 AM		10/15/2023, 12:00 AM	7Y	GRAY
	STRAY	FRANKLIN BLVD & ERHARDT...	1/26/2023, 12:00 AM		2/2/2023, 12:00 AM	7Y	BR BR
	STRAY	FRANKLIN BLVD & ERHARDT...	1/26/2023, 12:00 AM		2/2/2023, 12:00 AM	7Y	YELL
	STRAY	MCGREGOR DR & COLOMA...	11/3/2024, 4:00 PM			10Y	TAN
	STRAY	BELLEAU WOOD LN & 43RD...	8/30/2022, 12:00 AM		8/31/2022, 12:00 AM	8Y	WHIT
	STRAY	WESTACRE RD & W CAPITO...	2/2/2022, 12:00 AM		4/6/2022, 12:00 AM	6Y	WHIT
	STRAY	AUDUBON CIR & WARBLER ...	1/16/2024, 12:00 AM		4/17/2024, 12:00 AM	7Y	BLAC
	STRAY	SLOBE AVE AT COMMERCE ...	2/1/2022, 12:00 AM		4/1/2022, 12:00 AM	8Y	WHIT
	STRAY	JERAE CT & WALBROOK CT	7/11/2023, 12:00 AM		10/11/2023, 12:00 AM	8Y	GRAY
	STRAY	POCKET RD & CHICORY BE...	5/3/2022, 12:00 AM		5/10/2022, 12:00 AM	7Y	BROV
	OWNER CLUB		11/22/2024, 4:00 PM			7Y	BRON

Source: [website](#) viewed on December 3, 2024

³¹ This includes Animal’s whose outcome field was blank, and animals whose outcome field was listed as foster even though other outcomes had been realized and logged in the Division’s database system.

Sacramento City Code and Best Practices Suggest Data Should Be Accurate

The Sacramento Code of Ethics (Chapter 4.02) requires City employees to "treat their office or position as a public trust," emphasizing their responsibility to act transparently and with integrity in all professional duties. This obligation extends to the accuracy and reliability of data published on the City's open data portal. Ensuring that data is accurate, complete, and consistently reviewed aligns with this ethical mandate, reinforcing public confidence in City operations. Furthermore, the National League of Cities' Guide on Open Data³² highlights the critical role of data quality in fostering trust and enabling informed decision-making by the public.

Staff Should Regularly Monitor All Reported Data

The Division separately maintains a [data dashboard run on Microsoft Power BI on the Division's website](#). While the dashboard is not as detailed and granular as that on the open data portal, it does appear to be complete and more consistent. The dashboard is managed by the Division and updated automatically every two hours.

As long as both data sets continue to be published, Division staff should monitor both for accuracy and consistency.

Missing and Inaccurate Data Could Erode Public Trust

The current outcome data as reported on the City's open data portal, risks undermining the Division's existing work toward transparency and accountability of its operations and could weaken the public's trust in the Division.

Conclusion

Incomplete and inconsistent data on the City's open data portal undermines transparency and risks eroding public trust. The Sacramento Code of Ethics (Chapter 4.02) emphasizes that employees must treat their roles as a public trust, necessitating accurate and reliable reporting. Ensuring data validity aligns with this mandate and supports the National League of Cities' best practices for transparency. By implementing monitoring protocols, the Division can enhance transparency and improve public trust.

Recommendation(s):

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 5.1 Determine how data is reported to the City's open data portal and correct the erroneous data currently reported to the site.
- 5.2 Develop a policy to periodically monitor all published data for completeness and consistency.

³² National League of Cities, *Open Data: Smart Cities Solutions for Transparent and High-Performing Government*, Available at: <https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CSAR-Open-Data-Report-FINAL.pdf>.

Finding 6: Increasing Veterinary Capacity and Reducing Delays Can Lower Shelter Population

The Division's limited veterinary capacity and scheduling challenges have created backlogs of up to six months for spay/neuter procedures, prolonging animals' stays in shelter care or foster homes. California Health and Safety Code Section 121690 underscores the Division's responsibility to provide timely veterinary services to safeguard public health and animal welfare. If the City seeks to increase spay/neuter services, as discussed in Finding 1, it should consider cost-effective solutions—such as a prefabricated clinic—that help expand capacity, reduce wait times, and improve animal outcomes without unduly straining the budget.

Historic Staff Shortages and Small Space Prioritizes Shelter Medicine But Leads to Six Month Delays for Spay and Neuters

The Veterinary Services Unit provides medical care and is responsible for the sterilization of animals in the Division's care, which are statutory responsibilities. These functions are critical for both public health and compliance with California law.³³ However, operational constraints, including staffing shortages and limited space, hinder the unit's ability to meet growing demands effectively.

Like Other Units, Veterinarians Have Been Historically Understaffed

Until late 2024, the Veterinary Services Unit operated with longstanding vacancies, including one Veterinarian and two Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVTs). The unit is budgeted for two Veterinarians, one Administrative Analyst, and five RVTs but often operates understaffed, relying on external contract services through Friends of Front Street to address gaps. The risks related to the Division's relationship with Friends of Front Street is discussed further in Finding 9 of the report. The Division's overall staffing challenges are discussed further in Finding 2 of the report.

Small Medical Facility Used For Shelter Medicine and Sterilization Procedures

The unit manages both shelter medicine and sterilization procedures within a 2,133-square-foot medical facility. These dual responsibilities strain resources, limiting the ability to simultaneously provide urgent medical care and conduct sterilizations.

Space and Staffing Limits Result In Sterilization Delays of Up to Six Months

As discussed in Finding 1, as of February 2025, animals in foster-to-adopt programs faced up to a six-month wait for spay and neuter surgeries. These delays extend the City's legal custody of animals, increase shelter overcrowding, and risk contributing to the stray animal population when animals in foster care escape before sterilization.

³³ California Penal Code Section 597.1: Requires adequate medical care for animals in City custody.

California Food and Agricultural Code Section 30503: Mandates spay and neuter procedures for adopted animals. Best Practices: Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) and American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) guidelines emphasize timely spay/neuter and shelter medicine practices to enhance animal welfare and reduce shelter populations. Sources: [ASV Guidelines](#), [AVMA Spaying/Neutering](#).

The shared use of a single facility for both shelter medicine and sterilization strains resources, forcing the unit into a reactive mode that prioritizes urgent medical cases but delays non-urgent procedures. This dual demand impacts animal welfare, shelter capacity, and the Division's ability to comply with statutory requirements.

Finding 1 of the audit also includes a discussion regarding a series of clinics and partnerships that have the potential to alleviate the spay and neuter backlog. If the initiative has the impact that the Division intends, it could free more time for existing veterinary staff to provide shelter medicine services to animals in its custody.

Data Shows Shelter Medicine Appears Responsive to Urgent Cases, But More Data Is Needed

In the face of operational constraints, the Veterinary Services Unit has demonstrated general responsiveness in providing medical care. Despite splitting its time between sterilization and shelter medicine, the Veterinary Unit reported performing 5,251 medical examinations in FY 2023-24. We classified these examinations into broad categories and calculated the number of days from when an examination was requested by shelter staff and when the Veterinary Unit was able to perform the examination, see Figure 6.1 on the following page. For dogs and cats, the most common animal types at the shelter, it took on average two days for an examination to occur.

Figure 6.1: Days Elapsed from Request to Medical Examinations in FY 2023-24

	Number of Examinations	Average Days Elapsed
BIRD	5	1.40
Behavioral/Anxiety	1	1.00
Infectious Diseases	1	4.00
Injury/Wound	2	Same day
Skin/Fur Issues	1	2.00
CAT	1,854	2.36
Behavioral/Anxiety	28	0.78
Dental Issues	44	1.20
Digestive	103	1.03
Eye/Ear Issues	557	3.05
Infectious Diseases	245	3.44
Injury/Wound	87	1.27
Mobility Issues	37	0.70
Neurological Issues	14	0.64
Other	606	2.04
Reproductive Issues	88	2.22
Skin/Fur Issues	45	1.51
DOG	3,375	2.23
Behavioral/Anxiety	175	1.64
Dental Issues	87	4.86
Digestive	74	2.31
Eye/Ear Issues	635	2.00
Infectious Diseases	360	1.69
Injury/Wound	190	2.47
Mobility Issues	112	3.94
Neurological Issues	27	0.92
Other	1,474	2.18
Reproductive Issues	117	2.26
Skin/Fur Issues	124	3.05
OTHER	17	0.94
Behavioral/Anxiety	1	2.00
Dental Issues	1	2.00
Eye/Ear Issues	4	1.00
Infectious Diseases	1	Same day
Injury/Wound	1	1.00
Other	3	0.67
Reproductive Issues	5	0.60
Skin/Fur Issues	1	2.00
Grand Total	5,251	2.27

Source: Analysis of Division records

By prioritizing emergency surgery and routine shelter medicine, the unit has generally addressed urgent medical cases and overall animal welfare. However, without a more dedicated strategy to support sterilization, shelter medicine is mostly reactive in the face of the overall growing animal population.

We then analyzed the records for any mention of the word “urgent” which according to staff is used to note more critical need for exams. However, this is only a partial view of truly urgent cases. It is likely that in some urgent instances shelter staff verbally communicate the need to veterinary staff who may have immediately prioritized the examination. With that in mind, the results shown below in Figure 6.2 could be missing some data on other urgent cases. The calculations show that on average the 94 urgent requests recorded in FY 2023-24 took 1.07 days to receive a medical exam.³⁴ This is driven by the fact that 42 of the urgent requests were seen within the same day, 28 within one day, and another 28 within two to eight days.

Figure 6.2: Days Elapsed from Request to Examinations in FY 2023-24 for cases marked “Urgent”

	Number of Examinations	Average Days Elapsed
BIRD	1	-
Injury/Wound	1	Same day
CAT	46	1.09
Behavioral/Anxiety	3	0.67
Dental Issues	3	0.67
Digestive	5	0.40
Eye/Ear Issues	6	1.17
Infectious Diseases	7	0.57
Injury/Wound	7	2.14
Mobility Issues	1	Same day
Other	10	1.10
Reproductive Issues	2	0.50
Skin/Fur Issues	2	3.00
DOG	47	1.09
Digestive	3	1.00
Eye/Ear Issues	12	1.33
Infectious Diseases	15	0.47
Injury/Wound	8	1.88
Neurological Issues	2	2.50
Other	5	0.60
Reproductive Issues	1	Same day
Skin/Fur Issues	1	2.00
Grand Total	94	1.07

Source: Analysis of Division records

³⁴ We excluded one case marked “urgent” for an animal that was housed in foster care at the time. The outlier case had a 72-day delay. The description stated, “Urgent vet check, QAR vomiting, diarrhea, Neg for parvo coming from foster care.” While the animal was still in the legal custody of the City, while in foster care it is housed with a volunteer. The volunteer may have subsequently contacted the Division with updated information and the Division determined not to bring the animal in for an examination until a later time.

Without more information about the severity of each case, and more complete records about the actual urgency needed for an exam, the best we can do is assume that the veterinary staff has used its professional judgement to prioritize examination and treatment of animals.

However, as the veterinary unit fills its vacancies, improved tracking of its operations using standardized fields in their database and records system would allow for greater monitoring, accountability, and reporting on the veterinary units' operations overall. This will help the management to assess the adequacy of resources it has for the Division.

Expansion of Spay and Neuter Operations Would Require Additional Space and Staff

If the Division seeks a long-term strategy to reduce shelter overcrowding by reducing the stray animal population through expanded spay and neuter programs, it will likely need additional resources. However, the current medical facility, built in 1992, includes only two operating spaces, limiting the unit's ability to scale its sterilization efforts. Adding a third Veterinarian, which would help meet the increased demand, would necessitate an additional operating space to ensure efficiency and prevent further bottlenecks.

One solution could be to purchase a prefabricated medical facility that could provide the necessary space to accommodate both additional staff and increased sterilization procedures. Yolo County recently built a "Clinic In A Can" for an estimated \$337,000. The prefabricated clinic is built around a standard shipping container and comes pre-assembled with veterinary medical and surgical equipment, see Figure 6.3 below.

Figure 6.3: Example of a Prefabricated Veterinary Spay/Neuter Clinic



Source: Clinic In A Can

Sacramento could consider a similar approach to address its space constraints, enhance its capacity to provide medical care for shelter animals, and increase its ability to perform sterilization procedures.

Conclusion

Staffing shortages and space constraints in the Veterinary Services Unit create delays in spay/neuter procedures, extending animal stays and contributing to shelter overcrowding. California Health and Safety Code Section 121690 mandates that municipalities maintain animal care services, underscoring the Division's responsibility to address these operational constraints. Enhancing veterinary staffing, improving operational tracking, and investing in prefabricated medical facilities would increase capacity, reduce wait times, and align with statutory obligations to safeguard animal welfare and public health.

Recommendations

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 6.1 Consider adding additional veterinary staff to provide timelier spay and neuter procedures of animals in the City's legal custody and to animals in the community to reduce stray animal populations.
- 6.2 If veterinary staff are budgeted and hired, consider installing a temporary prefabricated medical building as a medium-term solution to provide sufficient space for separate shelter medicine and sterilization functions.
- 6.3 Implement standardized fields related to categories and assigned urgency to examination records to allow management to better monitor and report on the Veterinary Unit's operations.

Finding 7: Focus on Licensing Compliance Would Increase Revenue and Bolster Public Safety

Low compliance with animal licensing, at 14 percent of the City’s estimated number of dogs and seven percent of cats being licensed, leads to funding gaps, shifts costs to taxpayers, and undermines the Division’s goals and legal requirements. Sacramento City Code Chapter requires all dogs, cats, and swine (pigs), over the age of four months that reside within the City to be licensed and requires veterinary providers to report rabies vaccinations, but enforcement and outreach has lapsed since 2008. Increasing outreach efforts, enforcing existing veterinarian reporting requirements, piloting additional licensing options, and reevaluating the fee schedule can help improve compliance, ensure fair cost recovery, and strengthen the Division’s financial sustainability.

Animal Licensing Is Key Public Health Tool

Animal licensing is one of the City’s tools for promoting public health and safety, ensuring responsible pet ownership, and providing critical funding for the Animal Care Services Division. Licensing helps in:

- **Identifying Lost Pets:** Licensed animals are more likely to be reunited with their owners.
- **Disease Control:** Licensing requires proof of rabies vaccination, reducing the risk of rabies transmission.
- **Funding Animal Care Services:** Revenue from licensing supports shelters, adoption programs, and public education.

In the City, all dogs, cats, and swine over four months old are required by Municipal Code to be licensed, and state laws require dog licenses and rabies vaccinations.³⁵ The licensing program is intended to reduce the number of unvaccinated animals that put the public and other animals at risk. Despite these mandates, the City has experienced low compliance rates, affecting both public safety and the financial sustainability of the Animal Care Services Division.

There Is a Public Cost of Animal Ownership that Licensing Fees Can Help Offset

Animal owners benefit from City services such as shelter services, and public safety programs that address strays and return pets to their homes. Licensing serves as a means for pet owners to contribute their fair share toward the public resources used to support animals. However, the costs associated with these services are not equitably distributed since so few animals are licensed, as discussed below. As a result of low rates of compliance with licensing requirements, the burden of funding these services shifts from animal owners to taxpayers at large.

City’s Animal Licensing Rates Below Industry Levels for Dogs

In October 2024, the Division reported about 14 percent of the estimated number of dogs in Sacramento are licensed, as compared to an average of 23 percent for 70 other jurisdictions that

³⁵ Chapter 9 of the City’s City Code requires all dogs, cats, and swine (pigs), over the age of four months that reside within the City to be licensed. The sections require the animals to be sterilized (unless an unaltered license is sought) and provide proof of rabies vaccination at the time of issuance. Licenses are allowed to range between one and three years. In addition, State law requires licensing and rabies vaccinations for dogs, California Health and Safety Code Section 121690.

participated in a 2018 survey conducted by DocuPet. The City’s cat compliance rate was 7 percent, which was the same rate as survey participants.³⁶

Revenue from Licensing Fees Provide Some Support for Division Functions but Not Much

License revenue accounted for 6.5 percent of the Division’s budgeted revenue in FY 2023-24. The Division received about \$500,000 in license fees and related charges such as late fees in FY 2023-24. License fees average about \$20 a year for dogs and \$15 for cats though actual annual costs vary based on the length of the license, whether the animal was spayed or neutered, and whether the owner is a senior citizen.

Other Fees and Revenues Sources Routinely Waived to Align with Policy Goals and Strategic Needs

Fees are intended to offset the cost of operating the Shelter, but many fees are routinely waived, which increases the importance of collecting license fees. The Division has 56 approved fees listed in the City’s Master Fees Schedule (e.g., adoption fees, impoundment fees, vaccination fees, and fees for various medical treatments). However, Division management reports that many of these fees, aside from licensing fees, are routinely waived. For example, adoption fees are frequently waived when the shelter is at or near capacity to reduce overcrowding at the shelter. Similarly, impound fees may be waived if the inability to pay is the only hinderance to an owner reclaiming a lost pet.

Figure 7.1 below shows the budget to actual results of all of these fee revenues across multiple fiscal years. The figure also shows how animal license fees have been under collected compared to the budgeted amount.

Figure 7.1: Fee Revenues Under Budget in Most Years (\$)
Fiscal Years 2018-19 to 2022-23

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Budget					
Animal Licenses	472,950	472,950	520,000	520,000	520,000
All Other Fees	811,703	542,441	326,169	475,334	544,290
Actual					
Animal Licenses	589,302	493,859	346,789	370,582	406,869
All Other Fees	850,957	509,156	471,038	390,388	266,431
Difference					
Animal Licenses	116,352	20,909	(173,211)	(149,418)	(113,131)
All Other Fees	39,254	(33,285)	144,869	(84,946)	(277,859)

Source: Analysis of Community Development records

³⁶These estimates are based on 17,991 active dog licenses, and 6,352 active cat licenses reported by the Division in October 2024, compared with the 196,524 estimated households in the City (US Census) equating to 218,920 estimated dogs and cats in City using the American Veterinary Medical Association’s estimate methodology, and the total active licenses report from the City’s license management vendor DocuPet.

Increasing Licensing Fees and Compliance Could Provide Better Financial Support to Division

If the Division continues with this strategy of waiving several fees, it should revisit its fee schedule holistically and propose a change to the City Council that better reflects the cost recovery of its services and eliminates fees that undermine the Division’s strategy. In conjunction, by increasing license compliance rates, license fees could be repositioned as the main fee to pay for the burden of animal ownership by the public.

We recommend several approaches below that could increase enforcement and collection of fee license revenue with limited cost to the Division.

Division Could Do More to Increase Compliance

Covid, staffing challenges as discussed in Finding 2, and other priorities may have diminished the Division’s ability to focus on increasing license compliance. However, going forward there are several activities that could help to increase compliance with City and State laws. Further, City Staff report that for the coming FY 2025-26 budget year every department in the City has been directed to identify 15 percent budget reductions due to \$77 million budget shortfall. Increasing compliance with the Division’s existing license revenues could contribute to closing the Division and Department’s required reduction.

City Code Already Requires Reporting by Veterinarians but No Efforts since 2008 to Enforce

Section 9.44.640 of the Sacramento City Code requires that veterinarians report to the City behalf all vaccinations of animals “that [are] required to be licensed by the city.” The Code provides escalating financial penalties for each offense. The Division does not seem to be actively enforcing this requirement or seeking the required financial penalties for the veterinary practices who have failed to report vaccinations to the City. The last time the Division reached out to veterinary clinics to encourage reporting was in 2008.

In 2008 the Division worked with local veterinary practices to set up reporting relationships (as noted above) and to provide the veterinarians with City signage that informed animal owners of the legal requirement to license animals. However, no similar efforts have occurred since 2008. If the Division renewed its engagement with these practices and provided refreshed signage or considered pilots such as registration kiosks it could likely increase licensing compliance.

Records from the Division indicate that 28 veterinary practices and vaccination providers have been reporting rabies vaccinations to the Division as of 2024, 16 of those practices are within the City boundaries. However, we identified 106 practices within the geographic region and 24 within the City boundaries, see Figure 7.2 below. While some of the 78 that are not reporting may be too far geographically from the City to have an impact, there are eight within the City boundaries and several others nearby that could help improve licensing compliance.

Figure 7.2: Veterinary Practices and Vaccination Providers In Geographic Area

	No Reporting	Currently Reporting to City	Total
Antelope (Sacramento County)	2		2
Carmichael (Sacramento County)	2		2
Citrus Heights (Sacramento County)	2	2	4

City of Davis (Yolo County)	6		6
City of Dixon (Solano County)	2		2
City of Elk Grove (Sacramento County)	6	2	8
City of Folsom (Sacramento County)	5		5
City of Rancho Cordova (Sacramento County)	1		1
City of Roseville (Placer County)	8		8
City of Sacramento	8	16	24
City of Woodland (Yolo County)	4		4
Fair Oaks (Sacramento County)	5		5
Orangevale (Sacramento County)	2		2
Placer County	3		3
Rancho Cordova (Sacramento County)	2		2
Sacramento County - unincorporated	18	5	23
San Joaquin County		1	1
West Sacramento (Yolo County)	1	1	2
Yolo County	1	1	2
TOTAL	78	28	106

Source: Analysis of Division records compared to business listings

According to Division management, obtaining vaccine information from veterinarians is one of the easiest ways to get current information on animal ownership. This information can then be used to encourage and enforce licensing.

The Division Does Not Engage in Any Social Media Messaging Related to Licensing or Advertising

The Division maintains an active web and social media presence with a Facebook account with 207,000 followers, an Instagram account with 52,000 followers, and YouTube account with 2,900. Even with this large audience, the Division reports that it has no messaging or campaigns informing residents of their legal requirement to license animals or other messaging related to increasing compliance. The most recent post with terms such as “license”, “register”, or “tag” was from December 2018.

The Division Does Not Engage in Traditional or Other Media Campaigns to Promote Licensing

The Division does not use any paid advertising, mailers, or other media campaigns to promote awareness of, and compliance with, the licensing requirement. Other jurisdictions use utility bills, parks and recreation brochures, and other municipal communications to increase awareness and compliance.

No Door-to-Door Enforcement or Canvassing

The City does not have a door-to-door or canvassing program to provide education or enforcement. While this strategy would take an investment in staff or volunteer time it could be effective. According to DocuPet’s 2018 report, “[...] door-to-door sales and/or education campaigns. In our experience, door-

to-door campaigns are a cost-effective means of raising program awareness, although other methods may make more sense in certain jurisdictions. For instance, one alternative approach is including educational material on pet licensing in monthly utility bills.”

Conclusion

Low compliance with animal licensing requirements—14 percent for dogs and seven percent for cats—undermines public health and safety goals while creating funding gaps. The Sacramento City Code requires all dogs, cats, and swine (pigs), over the age of four months that reside within the City to be licensed and requires veterinary providers to report rabies vaccinations, but enforcement and outreach has lapsed since 2008. Renewing engagement with veterinary clinics, leveraging outreach methods, and piloting innovative licensing strategies will improve compliance, ensure fair cost recovery, and strengthen the Division’s financial sustainability.

Recommendations

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 7.1 Consider annually engaging every veterinary practice and animal vaccination provider in the City and metro area to remind them to report all rabies vaccines to the City.
- 7.2 Consult the City Attorney’s Office about the possibility of fining veterinarians in known violation of the Sacramento City Code’s requirements to report vaccinations.
- 7.3 Consider include licensing information in social media outreach and consider paid advertising to educate City residents about their legal obligation and the benefits of licensing their animals.
- 7.4 Consider piloting the use of a City-run kiosk onsite at veterinary clinics to provide on-site licensing for their customers. A pilot program would help determine whether this is a cost-effective strategy for increasing licensing compliance.
- 7.5 Consider piloting assigning staff to attend vaccination clinics in the City and immediate metro area to provide on-site licensing to the participants and advise City residents on their legal requirements. A pilot program would help determine whether this is a cost-effective strategy for increasing licensing compliance.
- 7.6 Consider piloting a canvassing program to have staff systematically identify residents without licensed animals. A pilot program would help determine whether this is a cost-effective strategy for increasing licensing compliance.
- 7.7 Review the Division’s fee schedule, and consider eliminating fees that are not strategically appropriate, and increasing licensing fees to better align revenues with service costs and strategic goals.

Finding 8: Transparency and Accountability Could be Improved by Agreement with Partner Nonprofit

The informal relationship with Friends of Front Street, a non-profit organization formed to assist the operation of the Front Street Animal Shelter, poses risks around ethics and procurement. Although all parties express a positive working relationship, the relationship should be more formalized to ensure activities do not violate ethics, procurement, or other requirements. California Government Code Section 8314 prohibits the use of public resources for non-City purposes, highlighting the need for a formal agreement to ensure accountability and compliance. Formalizing the partnership through a contractual agreement, such as a memorandum of understanding, and clarifying donation links on the City's website will enhance transparency and accountability.

Friends Of Front Street Is An Independent Organization That Supports Animal Care Services

Friends of Front Street Shelter (Friends) is a non-profit organization that was initially incorporated in 2001 as the Friends of Sac City Shelter Animals, Inc. In 2015 the organization renamed itself Friends of Front Street Shelter. Friends is governed by a nine-member board of directors, and it currently employs an executive director and administrative assistant.

In 2021 the organization amended its 2015 purpose statement. It now reads:

“The specific purpose of this corporation is to support and financially assist the City of Sacramento’s Front Street Shelter and Animal Care Services in their mission to save and improve the lives of animals and people, and to strive for improvements in animal welfare without geographical limitation.”³⁷

The Relationship between Friends and the Shelter Has Not Been Formalized

There is no formal, agreed-upon legally enforceable contract, for example a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), between the City and the Friends of Front Street. Reportedly, for reasons that are unclear, past attempts to establish a MOU were never finalized. As such, roles, responsibilities, and similar matters are not contractually defined or established by either party. This puts the Division at risk of violating ethics, procurement, or other requirements discussed further below. It leaves the City exposed to potential liabilities such as during fundraising events hosted in coordination with Friends. Further, the City has no guarantees that the resources, staff time and online promotion, it commits to fundraising for Friends will fully benefit the City.

This informality has resulted in challenges, including City staff dedicating time to support Friends' fundraising activities without clear guidelines, which could be perceived as an improper use of public resources. Additionally, Friends' direct purchases of equipment for the Division bypass City procurement processes, raising concerns about transparency and accountability. The lack of contractual boundaries has allowed these practices to persist without adequate safeguards, increasing the risk of ethical and legal violations. Over time, this situation has eroded trust with community stakeholders we heard from during the audit and made it more difficult to ensure that Friends' activities consistently align with City objectives and comply with relevant policies.

³⁷ Friends of Front Street Shelter Certificate of Amendment of Articles of Incorporation filed 7/29/21.

Animal Care Services is the Primary Financial Beneficiary, But Not Friend's Sole Financial Beneficiary

Friend's fundraising activities produced just over \$700,000 of revenue in calendar year 2023. Between 2019 and 2022, it reported between \$530,000 and \$725,000 in annual fundraising and grant revenue. Fundraising activities include the Front Street Brewfest, which raised over \$120,000 in 2024, and the Tails at Twilight Gala.

Friends gave donations to other animal-related organizations in the Sacramento area, according to its 2023 tax filings. The largest of these donations was \$144,707 which it provided to the Community Spay Neuter Clinic, located within the County of Sacramento. Eight other animal related organizations received a combined total of \$87,150. In total, Friends provided \$231,857 to the Community Spay Neuter Clinic and the other eight recipients.

Though these donations were not made directly to Animal Care Services, the donations did, at least in part, benefit animals under the Front Street Shelter's care as well as animals that would otherwise be under the Shelter's care. Several of the donations were micro-grants made to regional rescue partners to whom some Front Street Shelter animals have been transferred. Additionally, Community Spay Neuter Clinic, which received the largest donation, is used by Animal Care Services. Similarly, one donation was to the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine and had the description "Foster dog tail amputation," though it is unclear whether the dog was being cared for by the Front Street Shelter or another shelter that provides fostering services.

However, it is important to highlight that accepting money from donors for the use of Front Street Animal Shelter could raise legal concerns if those funds are then used to support different agencies. This practice could potentially violate ethical standards and procurement regulations, thereby putting the City at risk of legal repercussions. It is crucial to ensure that all funds raised for a specific purpose are allocated and used strictly as intended by the donors, to maintain transparency and accountability.

There Are Complexities to the Relationship between Animal Care Services and the Friends

The relationship between Animal Care Services and Friends is multi-layered and involves more than just the donation of money by Friends to Animal Care Services. The Friends provide contracted veterinarian services to Animal Care Services, the employees of Animal Care Services assist with Friends fundraising events, and individuals associated with the Friends volunteer at the Shelter. The complexities of this relationship are discussed below.

Animal Care Services Pays Friends to Provide On-Site Veterinarian Coverage at the Front Street Shelter

Per a contractual relationship that began in 2022 and was established for a five-year period, Friends provide veterinarians to Animal Care Services at an hourly rate of between \$125 - \$225 an hour. The contract amount has been revised upward on two occasions through supplemental contract agreements. The initial not-to-exceed amount of \$249,999 is now \$1,049,999.³⁸ Per the contract, services are to be provided when the Shelter lacks veterinary staff due to vacancies, vacations, sick days, or leaves of absence.

The veterinarians are subcontractors of the Friends organization. They provide treatment to animals that are housed both in the Front Street Shelter and in associated foster homes. Treatment includes

³⁸ City of Sacramento Contract PRC002049 Supplemental Contract No. 2 dated 2/1/2024.

herd health of shelter animals (i.e., vaccines and treatments to prevent the spread of communicable disease), spay/neuter surgeries, and case specific treatment of individual animals (specialty services).

Their provision of contractual services to the Division is not a problem in and of itself, but it is important context to consider when understanding how it interacts with other conditions of their relationship discussed below.

Animal Care Services Employees Have Historically Assisted the Friends Organizations on ‘City Time.’

Animal Care Services management reports that City staff have contributed hundreds of hours supporting Friends’ fundraising events such as Brewfest. Brewfest is Friend’s main annual fundraiser recently hosted at the California Automobile Museum across from the Front Street Shelter, and partially in the shelter when providing tours to the guests of the event. The event features “unlimited tastings of beer and wine” according to the City of Sacramento’s blog the Sacramento City Express.

Division management estimated that City staff have contributed at least a hundred hours annually. Examples of staff activities include editing videos and promoting the event on social media, attending planning meetings, helping to staff fundraising events by providing tours to event attendees and working at the events. However, Friends recently hired paid administrative staff that may be able to perform these tasks in the future.

California Government Code 8314 defines state-compensated time as a “public resource.” The Code further defines “use” to mean use of a public resource that is substantial enough to result in a “loss to the state or any local agency for which a monetary value may be estimated.”³⁹ A monetary value could be placed upon the value of staff time spent on tasks relating to the Friends’ fundraising activities. The funds raised through the Friend’s fundraising activities are not contractually or otherwise limited to directly benefiting the Animal Service Division. Therefore, the current, informal arrangement could be viewed as non-compliant with the requirements established by this prohibition.

“Unlimited” Alcohol Tastings at Public Events Highlights Risks to City

The Brewfest event described above is advertised as offering “unlimited” alcohol tastings to public attendees. While the event is hosted on private property across the street from the shelter, City employees reportedly offer attendees tours of the shelter, and animals are shown at the event to encourage adoption. The mix of alcohol, members of the public, City property, City staff, and animals in the legal custody of the City could increase the risk of liability. While the event may be effective at fundraising and finding animals homes, without any agreement between the City and Friends defining who is responsible for this liability for this or other events, the City is at higher risk.

Members of Friends Board of Directors Also Volunteer at the Shelter

Some Friends board members also volunteer at the Front Street Shelter. Volunteerism can increase the risk that conversations between board members and Shelter employees, who technically meet the definition of being “City officials,” can be interpreted as lobbying or advocacy activities.

Jointly, five board members volunteered at least 1,800 hours of service at the Shelter in FY 2023-24. These five included all three board officers. In addition to the five, two other board members have also volunteered at the Shelter prior to FY 2023-2024, though it was unclear whether they still actively volunteer at or on behalf of the Shelter.

³⁹ [California Government Code Section 8314](#)

There is nothing wrong with a board member volunteering at the Shelter and the Friends organization reports that it does have a practice of prohibiting lobbying or advocacy with City officials. However, the natural interactions that may occur through volunteer involvement does increase opportunities for discussion between board members and Animal Care Services Division staff and leadership to occur and then to be interpreted as lobbying and advocacy efforts. Accordingly, appropriate safeguards are needed, which we recommend could be defined and agreed upon in a formal agreement.

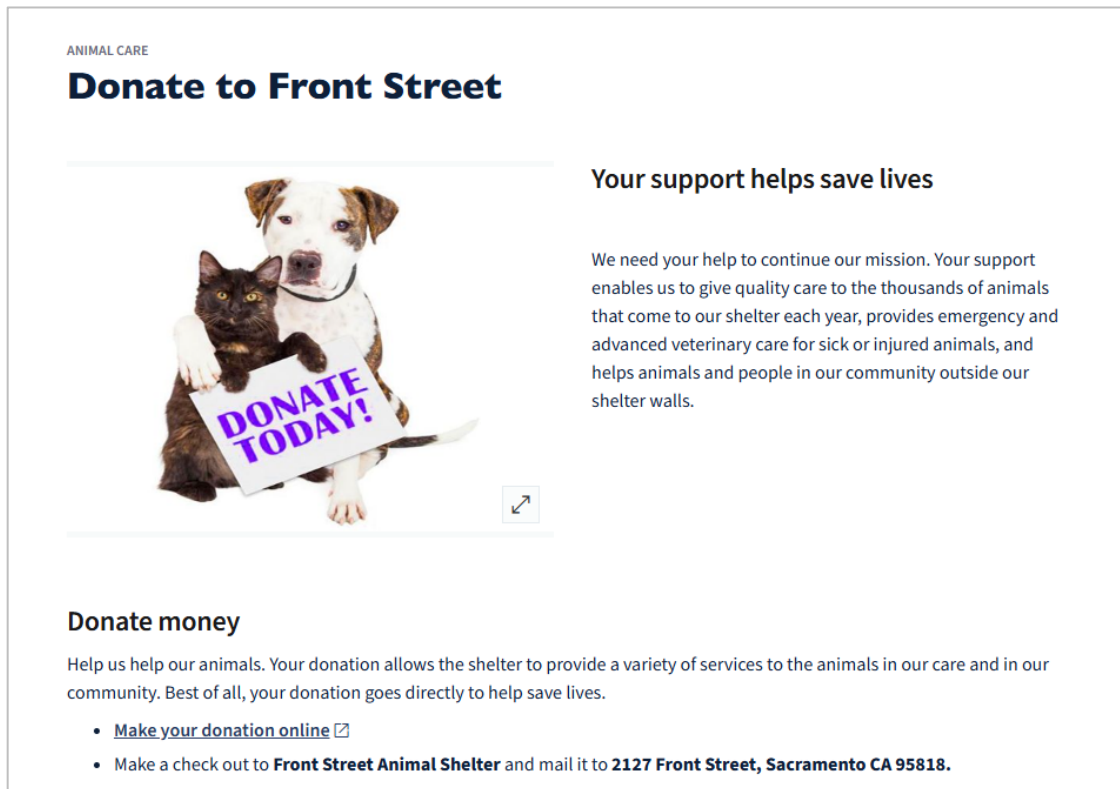
The members of the Friends’ board of directors do not appear to meet the definition of a lobbyist, as established by section 2.15.050 of the Sacramento City Code. Nonetheless, they do interact with Division leadership and the Friends organization is also a contractor that receives payment from the Shelter for veterinarians the Friends provides to the Shelter. This multi-layered relationship can influence perceptions regarding the independence and inter-relationships of the two organizations.

The Shelter’s Online Donation Request Form Blurs the Distinction between the Two Organizations

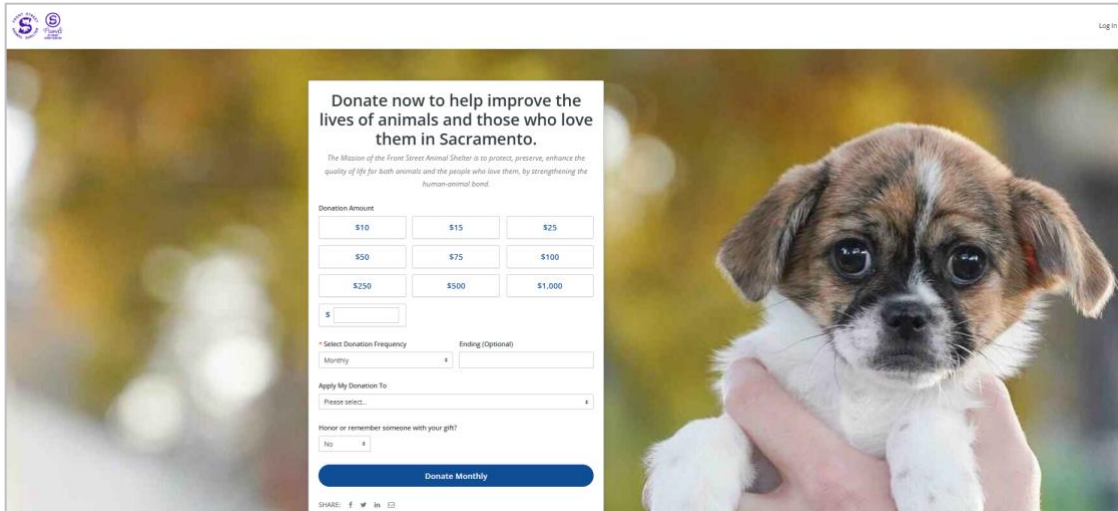
The Animal Care Services web pages contain donation links. The links give the appearance that a viewer would be donating directly to the Front Street Shelter. However, the donations actually go to the Friends organization. Figure 8.1 below shows how Division’s webpage directs visitors to “Make your donations online” but links to the Friends organization with no disclaimer on the City’s webpage that they are being directed to donate to an external organization that is not part of the City.

Figure 8.1: City’s Animal Care Services Division Donate Page Links to Friend’s Page

A viewer of the City’s Animal Care Services web pages will see the following:



Clicking on the “Make your donation online” link brings the viewer to this:



Source: <https://www.cityofsacramento.gov/community-development/animal-care> and <https://friendsoffrontstreet.networkforgood.com/projects/168966-city-of-sacramento-front-street-animal-shelter>

While it may appear that the donation is being made to the Front Street Shelter, it would actually be made to the Friends organization. The donation form shown above is from the website: friendsoffrontstreet.networkforgood.com. Other than the address, the only indication of the Friends involvement is that in the top left-hand corner both the Front Street Shelter and the Friends' logos appear.

To prevent confusion among potential donors, we recommend that Animal Care Services update its webpage with clearer disclosure or instead direct potential donors to a City-owned donation fund.

The Friends Organization Has Purchased Some Division Equipment

Both the Division and the Friends organization report that Friends' funds have been used to make purchases expediently. Had the Division made these purchases, the Division would have needed to abide by the competitive bidding procedures established by City Policy AP-4001 Procurement of Supplies.

The primary example both organizations cite was the purchase of a commercial washer and dryer by the Friends to replace a Shelter washer/dryer that broke and needed to be replaced quickly to ensure the Shelter had an adequate supply of clean bedding. Friends reported that the purchase of the washer/dryer directly enabled the Division to obtain washer/dryer without having to undergo a competitive procurement process, which is typically a time-consuming process. However, the City's procurement policies include a provision for Emergency Contracts. These are defined as "a contract initiated when the public interest and necessity demand immediate procurement of supplies to safeguard life, health, or property, to permit the continued conduct of City operations or services, or to mitigate further damage."⁴⁰ This suggests that while the donated funds may have been critical to help Animal Care Services make this or other similar purchases, there was and is an existing expedited

⁴⁰ City Policy AP-4001 Procurement of Supplies, City Policy AP-4101 Non-Professional Services, and City Policy (not numbered) Professional Services

emergency purchasing option in City policy that could be used instead of relying on Friends to make the purchase outside of City procurement rules.

The City's Procurement Policy was enacted, in part, to ensure fairness, open competition, and competitive pricing in the procurement process. The associated procedures required that a City purchaser use a competitive bidding process for purchases of over \$5,000⁴¹ and that the purchaser solicits at least three prospective bidders unless the purchaser documents that the supplies are not reasonably available from at least three bidders. Use of the Friends' organization to pay for and facilitate the purchase of the washer/dryer may be seen as an attempt to bypass those requirements.

Individually, the Events Described Above May Seem Inconsequential. Jointly, They Can Be Viewed Suspiciously By Some, Leading to the Erosion of Trust and Confidence In the City.

The City established the "Sacramento Code of Ethics" as part of Sacramento City Code Chapter Four Ethics and Open Government. Chapter 4.02 of the Code states that "City employees shall treat their office or position as a public trust." The inclusion of the chapter in the Code, and the specific reference in 4.02 to "public trust," are illustrative of the importance of public trust to the City.

A person with a dis-favorable view of government may view the above-mentioned activities suspiciously. Donations and staff time were used to benefit the Friends of Front Street without absolute assurance that the City would benefit, leaders of the Friends organization are involved in day-to-day activities of the Shelter, and a commercial washer/dryer was reportedly purchased for the benefit of the Shelter without adhering to City safeguards intended to ensure fair and competitive bidding.

Conclusion

The informal relationship between the Division and Friends of Front Street creates risks related to transparency, compliance, and public trust. California Government Code Section 8314 prohibits the use of public resources for non-City purposes, emphasizing the need for clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. Establishing a legally enforceable agreement, clarifying donation practices, and ensuring compliance with City procurement policies will formalize the partnership, mitigate risks, and enhance public confidence in the Division's operations.

⁴¹ The amount was reported as recently increased from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Recommendations

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 8.1 Enter into a legally enforceable contract, for example a Memorandum of Understanding, with Friends of Front Street that defines the relationship between the two organizations, identifies ownership of different liabilities related to City property, defines financial reporting requirements, limits or defines the City's fundraising role, and addresses any other compliance, financial, or statutory risks identified by the City's legal representatives.
- 8.2 Add language to the City's website to indicate to the public that the donation button is directed to an external organization OR have the donation button go directly to a City-managed donation fund.

The City's Procurement Services Division should:

- 8.3 Provide guidance, in consultation with the City Attorney's Office, to ensure that any future equipment purchases made by the Friends on behalf of the Shelter are made in accordance with City requirements.

Finding 9: Homeless Assistance Program Would Benefit from Staffing at its Authorized Level

The Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP) Program currently operates with only one full-time staff member, rather than the full team originally authorized, and as currently presented on the Division's organization chart. It also lacks defined performance measures, which limits the ability to assess whether the program achieves its goals of reducing barriers to housing and supporting homeless pet owners. By accurately reflecting staff assignments and developing meaningful performance indicators, the program can improve transparency, ensure effective resource use, and better assess whether it's achieving its goals.

Program Authorized By City Council for a Staff of Six Positions

The origin of the program began in 2021 when the designation "Owner Experiencing Homelessness" (OEH) was created as a category type for calls to Animal Control. The OEH designation was intended to recognize the unique needs of calls involving unhoused owners and animals.

Also in 2021, the City received federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. The Community Development Department recommended that a portion of this funding be used to establish a Homeless Outreach and Assistance (HOAP) Program. The City Council approved formation of the program and established that six positions would be funded through the ARPA Reinvestment Fund (Fund 1003) for the first three fiscal years and after which costs would transition to the General Fund (Fund 1001) and the Measure U Fund (Fund 2401).

In recommending establishment of the program, the Community Development Department (CDD) provided the City Council with the following information:

"The six-person ASHR [Animal Care Services for the Homeless Response] Team will support the homeless animals within the homeless population housed at City's facilities. Two new Animal Control Officers would be assigned to assist in implementation of the Comprehensive Siting Plan and the Department of Community Response, assistance will be available to community members who own pets that are housed in the Siting Plan's facilities. These Animal Control Officers would handle reports of stray dogs or dangerous dogs, including injuries involving both people and other pets. Equally important, these officers will be able to offer resources such as the proper way to safely contain an animal when housed near other people and pets, free pet food, directions to low-cost or no-cost spay/neuter services, and free pet supplies (e.g., pet food, leashes, collars, crates)."

The Department further explained that:

"Animal Care Services struggles to provide community outreach services to our community, specifically our community members who are experiencing homelessness or are in transitional housing. An additional Animal Care Services Coordinator position would assist the shelter sites and the Department of Community Response by coordinating between the Animal Care Services staff, other City staff, and various partner organizations."

The Department also explained that:

"Animal Care Services continues to struggle to provide veterinary care to the average 11,000 animals that enter the Front Street Animal Shelter each year. A new Veterinarian position and the support of two additional Registered Veterinary Technicians would

allow for routine and emergency care to pets owned by our community members experiencing homelessness.”⁴²

The HOAP Program also receives funding from Friends of the Shelter. Friends will fund veterinary services for up to 50 animals per quarter in amounts not to exceed \$2,500 per pet over the pet’s lifespan. The funding is intended to prevent owners from having to euthanize or surrender pets due to the financial burden of emergent vet care needs.

The Program Has Not Received Its Intended Staffing Levels Due to Vacancies In Other Areas of the Animal Care Services Division.

The City Council authorized the following six positions as HOAP Program staff:

- One Program Coordinator
- One veterinarian
- Two Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVTs)
- Two Animal Control Officers

The Division’s organization chart gives the appearance some of these positions have been filled and are part of the Program’s operating staff. However, the chart is misleading. As discussed in the chapters on Animal Control and Staffing, the Department has been operating below its number of authorized positions.

A Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT) and an Animal Control Officer (ACO) assist with HOAP Program outreach events and activities as time and the Division’s competing needs allow, but they are not assigned full time to the Program because of the competing needs for staff in other areas.

The only full-time position currently serving the program is the Program Coordinator, as depicted in Figure 9.1 below.

Figure 9.1: Org Chart of the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP) Shows Vacant and Filled Positions, but only One Staff Functionally Works in the Program

Veterinarian	Registered Vet Tech	Registered Vet Tech	Animal Services Coordinator	Animal Control Officer I	Animal Control Officer I
•Vacant	•Filled but not working within HOAP	•Filled but not working within HOAP	•Only staff budgeted to HOAP and serving program fulltime	•Filled but not working within HOAP	•Vacant

Source: Recreation of Community Development Department’s “Functional Organization Chart” Updated: April 4, 2024

Though the Animal Care Services Coordinator is the only position that works exclusively as intended per the Program’s design, the RVT and ACO positions perform duties that benefit both those that are housed and those that are unhoused. For example, the City’s 311 Department received more than 2,000

⁴² City Council Report File ID: 2021-01338 December 7, 2021, Consent Item 05

Animal Control calls relating to people experiencing homelessness. These 2,168 calls accounted for about five percent of the Animal Control-related calls. Additionally, another 6,000 calls were about stray animals, and a percentage of these calls can be assumed to pertain to the pets of people experiencing homelessness. Further, the Division reported in the FY 2024-25 budget that the HOAP Program “provided vaccinations, veterinary care, and spay/neuter services to 1,466 animals owned by 260 owners.” This data suggests that while the Program Coordinator is the only person directly working on HOAP full-time, other staff throughout the Division lend support to people experiencing homelessness through their everyday work activities. By using staff that the City Council approved for the HOAP program for other purposes, the program has never had the intended staff to fulfill its goals.

Lack of Performance Measures Prevent Determination as to Whether the Program is Achieving its Goals.

Program literature indicates the program operates with two primary goals. One goal is to remove barriers to housing. Requirements that animals be vaccinated and/or spayed/neutered, and have the records to prove it, can be a barrier to housing. The second goal is to assist homeless pet owners provide for their pets’ wellbeing. The program offers preventative care, spay/neuter services, minor medical care referrals, pet resources (leashes, collars, etc.), and emergency veterinary funding assistance.

No performance measures have been developed for the program. As a result, we could not determine whether the program is meeting the City’s and the public’s expectations. Given the staff reassignments discussed above, we suspect that its overall impact has been smaller than intended when the City Council approved the program.

The Program does track the services it provides. As stated above, the Program provided vaccinations, veterinary care, and spay/neuter services to 1,466 animals owned by 260 owners in FY 2023-24. Additionally, the Program reports that in calendar year 2023, it aided 1,438 pets and accomplished the following:

- 725 pets microchipped
- 208 pets spayed/neutered
- 140 pets returned to owners
- 3,528 treatments administered
- \$181,000 in off-site veterinary funding assistance

Conclusion

The Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP) is not operating as intended due to staffing gaps and a lack of defined performance metrics inhibits the ability for management to evaluate the program’s efficiency and effectiveness. The program’s goals, as outlined during its establishment, include removing barriers to housing and supporting homeless pet owners, but the absence of metrics limits the ability to assess success. Accurately reflecting staff assignments, addressing staffing needs, and developing meaningful performance metrics will improve transparency, align operations with stated goals, and ensure the program meets community expectations.

Recommendations

In addition to the detailed recommendation below, if the Division also addresses the recommendations made in the Staffing Finding 2, it will reduce the staffing shortage and allow the Division to use its budget allocation as intended by the City Council to support the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program.

The Community Development Department should:

- 9.1 Update its Functional Organizational Chart to accurately reflect staff assignments to represent program staffing more transparently. For example, the Functional Organization Chart should specify employees assigned to the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP).

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 9.2 Develop performance measures that will allow it to evaluate whether the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP) is achieving its expected results.

Finding 10: Increasing Use of Volunteer Performance Metrics Would Enhance Program Effectiveness

Volunteers play a crucial role in the Division's operations but lack formal performance metrics to monitor efficiency and effectiveness. Government Finance Officers Association best practices emphasize the value of performance measures in improving operational accountability. Developing performance metrics like retention rates and participation frequency in volunteer events will help improve volunteer engagement and support operational goals.

Volunteer Program Provides Significant Contribution to Shelter Operations

The volunteer/foster programs contribute a significant number of hours and housing to the Animal Care Services Division. However, Animal Care Services does not have specific goals or performance metrics for the foster program. Lack of defined program performance metrics and benchmark data make it difficult to monitor the program's performance and identify areas of operational concern.

The Front Street Shelter employs two full-time staff in the capacity of Volunteer Coordinators to oversee the Shelter's volunteer program, which includes its foster program. In FY 2023-24, the Volunteer Coordinators managed the recruitment and training of 861 active volunteers who jointly provided over 93,000 hours of service.

At the broadest level, volunteer activities include:

- Fostering – Individuals who participate in the Shelter's foster program are counted as volunteers. For purposes of tracking volunteer hours, one day of fostering one or two felines equates to one hour of volunteer activity. A foster volunteer with three or more felines is credited with three hours per day. Fostering an adult dog for a day equates to 1.5 hours, fostering one or two puppies equates to two hours, and three or more puppies (with or without the mother) equates to three hours.
- Onsite activities such as helping in the office, feeding, and walking dogs, cleaning kennels and bedding, assisting in the medical building, and many other activities.
- Outreach activities such as assisting with vaccine clinics, the pet food pantry, and at other community events.

Fostering Greatly Reduces the Need for Kennel Space

More animals are housed through the foster program than at the shelter. Foster homes account for the placement of about 70 percent of dogs and 84 percent of cats. On average, 367 dogs and 397 cats are in foster care each month. These numbers include animals in the sub-category "Foster to Adopt" (explained below). In comparison, the shelter houses a monthly average of 145 dogs and 83 cats.

Animals in foster care consist of two subtypes. One subtype is the traditional foster role in which the provider intends to provide housing on a temporary basis. The 2nd subtype is referred to as "foster to adopt." Foster to adopt involves prospective adopters who foster an animal until such time as the animal can be spayed or neutered. The City cannot legally release an animal for adoption unless the animal has been spayed or neutered.

During kitten season, foster care placements increase. The number of cats in foster care was 167 in March 2024 and then increased to 418 in April, 590 in May, and then 695 in June 2024.

Over 800 Individuals Volunteered In Recent Year

An active volunteer is defined as a person who logs more than five hours of volunteer activity on behalf of the shelter in a calendar year. Volunteers that satisfied this criterion in FY 2023-2024 totaled 861 individuals. Together, they provided 93,710 hours of service. Almost 100 of these volunteers individually each provided over 250 hours of service, which equates to more than six weeks of full-time work. Figure 10.1 below provides a breakdown of volunteers by number of hours of service.

Figure 10.1: Number of Volunteers by Hours of Service
FY 2023-24

Number of Hours	Volunteers
Between 5 and 10 hours	149
Between 10 – 99 hours	489
Between 100 – 250 hours	125
Between 250 – 499 hours	52
Between 500 – 999 hours	35
1,000 or more hours	11
Total Volunteers	861

Source: Data provided by Animal Care Services

Volunteers Contributed to Foster Care and Shelter Operations

Volunteers play an active role in many areas of shelter operations. They perform a variety of duties that would otherwise have to be performed by paid staff, such as cleaning kennels and bedding. They also perform many activities that increase the well-being of shelter animals, such as dog walking and socialization, that likely would not occur without volunteers. Additionally, volunteers also assist at adoption fairs and pet food pantries and in numerous other capacities. Figure 10.2 below provides an overview of the number of volunteer activities by activity category.

Figure 10.2: Total Volunteer Hours by Activity Category
FY 2023-24

Category	Hours
Foster Care (including support of foster activities). This category does not include participants in the Foster to Adopt Program.	58,591.80
In-Shelter Activities	14,335.74
Dog Handling Activities (Including adoption counseling)	7,677.79
Training	2,867.71
Veterinary Care (assisting in the medical building)	2,331.18
Vaccination Clinics	1,835.57
Special Projects (Includes Eagle Scout and “handyman” activities at the Shelter)	1,183.12
Special Events (Brewfest and Paws to Party)	1,087.08
Offsite Adoption Volunteer Activities	650.15
Smart Team (the Smart Team helps to re-unite lost dogs with their families by posting information on social media about dogs entering the Shelter)	555.33
Mentoring other volunteers	461.03
Outreach Activities	369.35
Transport	369.00
Spay/Neuter Clinic	337.00
All Others Combined	1,058.16
Total	93,710.01

Source: Data provided by Animal Care Services

Given the Value of the Volunteer Program, Division Could Better Track and Report Performance Metrics

Performance metrics, also referred to as performance measures and key performance indicators (KPI), can serve as a tool that increases management’s ability to monitor performance and identify any trends as they begin. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) issued a Best Practice recommending that “All government should identify, track, and communicate performance measures.” As described by the GFOA:

“Performance measures are used by governments to collect information about operational activities, achievement of goals, community conditions, or other environmental factors to better understand a situation and make informed decisions.”⁴³

For example, literature on volunteer management suggests the following metrics be used to monitor an organization’s volunteer retention performance:

- a. New Volunteer Conversion Rate – This refers to the percent of individuals who begin volunteering after initiating contact with an organization regarding volunteering.
- b. Annual Volunteer Retention Rate – This refers to the percent who are still active 12 months after beginning to volunteer with an organization.
- c. Annual Event Participation Rate – This refers to the percent who show up after signing up for a volunteer event or shift.
- d. Monthly Churn Rate – This refers to the percent who become inactive each month.

Conclusion

The Division’s Volunteer Program relies on substantial contributions from volunteers but lacks formal performance metrics to monitor program efficiency and effectiveness. Government Finance Officers Association best practices emphasize the importance of performance measures in enhancing operational accountability. Metrics such as retention rates, engagement, and participation frequency will strengthen volunteer engagement, support operational goals, and ensure the program’s sustainability.

Recommendations

The Animal Care Services Division should:

- 10.1 Develop a performance metric system or reporting method that would serve as a tool so that management can better monitor performance and ensure that a cadre of volunteers continue to provide their assistance.

⁴³ GFOA Best Practice “Performance Measures” dated 3/31/18

Recommendations List

Finding	Recommendation
<p>Finding 1</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>1.1 Reevaluate the Division’s strategy on stray population control, including enhancing community-based spay/neuter programs and managed intake systems.</p> <p>1.2 Explore cost-sharing agreements with neighboring jurisdictions to distribute intake and operational costs and increase its overall capacity.</p>
<p>Finding 2</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>2.1 Work with the Human Resources Department to review the minimum qualifications and pay range of each position for the purpose of determining whether qualifications can be reduced in order to attract more applicants and for determining the appropriateness of pay ranges.</p> <p>2.2 Work with the Human Resources Department to review the appropriateness of the pay range for veterinarians.</p> <p>2.3 Increase its efforts to publicize job opportunities, such as using online job portals, and animal care, veterinary medicine, shelter industry specific websites, forums, and organizations, and at adoption and other in-person events.</p> <p>2.4 Focus on increasing employee engagement. Strategies for increasing engagement are discussed in Appendix A, which provides a detailed discussion of the employee engagement survey results.</p>
<p>Finding 3</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>3.1 Complete and submit drafts of their various policies and procedures to the City Human Resources Department for review and approval.</p>
<p>Finding 4</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>4.1 Direct the newly hired Chief to set and monitor clear call response criteria and priorities, regularly conduct analysis of Animal Control Officer performance, and provide feedback to continually align call responses to priorities.</p> <p>4.2 Explore staffing options for tasks related to removing dead animals from public property. These options could include volunteers, interns, or employees in positions that don’t require the experience and skill set of Animal Control Officers.</p> <p>4.3 Work with the 311 Customer Service Center to improve the collection of information in order to reduce the number of animals that cannot be located.</p> <p>4.4 Evaluate its practices regarding households that are the subject of multiple complaints in order to determine if other approaches may more effectively reduce the number of repeat complaints.</p> <p>4.5 Develop comprehensive written policies for the Animal Control Unit.</p> <p>4.6 Develop standardized data-entry protocols to ensure consistent call responses, clear result codes, and accurate record-keeping. At a minimum, include a data dictionary for Chameleon, periodic quality checks, and staff training to promote data accuracy and reliability.</p>
<p>Finding 5</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>5.1 Determine how data is reported to the City’s open data portal and correct the erroneous data currently reported to the site.</p> <p>5.2 Develop a policy to periodically monitor all published data for completeness and consistency.</p>

Finding	Recommendation
<p>Finding 6</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>6.1 Consider adding additional veterinary staff to provide timelier spay and neuter procedures of animals in the City’s legal custody and to animals in the community to reduce stray animal populations.</p> <p>6.2 If veterinary staff are budgeted and hired, consider installing a temporary prefabricated medical building as a medium-term solution to provide sufficient space for separate shelter medicine and sterilization functions.</p> <p>6.3 Implement standardized fields related to categories and assigned urgency to examination records to allow management to better monitor and report on the Veterinary Unit’s operations.</p>
<p>Finding 7</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>7.1 Consider annually engaging every veterinary practice and animal vaccination provider in the City and metro area to remind them to report all rabies vaccines to the City.</p> <p>7.2 Consult the City Attorney’s Office about the possibility of fining veterinarians in known violation of the Sacramento City Code’s requirements to report vaccinations.</p> <p>7.3 Consider include licensing information in social media outreach and consider paid advertising to educate City residents about their legal obligation and the benefits of licensing their animals.</p> <p>7.4 Consider piloting the use of a City-run kiosk onsite at veterinary clinics to provide on-site licensing for their customers. A pilot program would help determine whether this is a cost-effective strategy for increasing licensing compliance.</p> <p>7.5 Consider piloting assigning staff to attend vaccination clinics in the City and immediate metro area to provide on-site licensing to the participants and advise City residents on their legal requirements. A pilot program would help determine whether this is a cost-effective strategy for increasing licensing compliance.</p> <p>7.6 Consider piloting a canvassing program to have staff systematically identify residents without licensed animals. A pilot program would help determine whether this is a cost-effective strategy for increasing licensing compliance.</p> <p>7.7 Review the Division’s fee schedule, and consider eliminating fees that are not strategically appropriate, and increasing licensing fees to better align revenues with service costs and strategic goals.</p>
<p>Finding 8</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>8.1 Enter into a legally enforceable contract, for example a Memorandum of Understanding, with Friends of Front Street that defines the relationship between the two organizations, identifies ownership of different liabilities related to City property, defines financial reporting requirements, limits or defines the City’s fundraising role, and addresses any other compliance, financial, or statutory risks identified by the City’s legal representatives.</p> <p>8.2 Add language to the City’s website to indicate to the public that the donation button is directed to an external organization OR have the donation button go directly to a City-managed donation fund.</p> <p>The City’s Procurement Services Division should:</p> <p>8.3 Provide guidance, in consultation with the City Attorney’s Office, to ensure that any future equipment purchases made by the Friends on behalf of the Shelter are made in accordance with City requirements.</p>

Finding	Recommendation
<p>Finding 9</p>	<p>The Community Development Department should:</p> <p>9.1 Update its Functional Organizational Chart to accurately reflect staff assignments to represent program staffing more transparently. For example, the Functional Organization Chart should specify employees assigned to the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP).</p> <p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>9.2 Develop performance measures that will allow it to evaluate whether the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP) is achieving its expected results.</p>
<p>Finding 10</p>	<p>The Animal Care Services Division should:</p> <p>10.1 Develop a performance metric system or reporting method that would serve as a tool so that management can better monitor performance and ensure that a cadre of volunteers continue to provide their assistance.</p>

Other Pertinent Information

Information: 311 Customer Service Center Dispatch

This section provides background information only. Our audit did not conclude any findings on this topic, but we have provided background information about the function for the audit report.

The Sacramento 311 Customer Service Center (311 Center) serves as a single point of contact by which residents and visitors can report an issue, request a service, or obtain information regarding City services, including Animal Care Services. Similarly, when other City departments such as Fire and Police want to request assistance from Animal Control, those requests are routed through the 311 Center.

311 Center Offers Multiple Ways to Contact

The 311 Center can be contacted telephonically, by e-mail, and through an online reporting system. In recent years, the volume of contacts regarding animal-related matters has ranged from 40,000 and 47,000 contacts annually, which includes both calls requesting service from Animal Control and more general calls involving the Shelter.

The volume has increased in the post-Covid era. The volume had not exceeded 43,000 prior to FY 2021-2022 and has not been below 43,000 for the three most recent three full fiscal years (FY 2021-2022 through FY 2023-2024).

Animal-related contacts encompass a wide variety of topics that range from informational requests to reports of specific issues. Figure 11.2 below provides the number of FY 2023-2024 animal-related contacts by category.

Figure 11.2: FY 23-24 Common Animal-Related Reasons for Contacting 311 Center

Reason for Contacting 311 Center	Number of Contacts
General	16,103
Customer Service	8,653
Stray Animal	6,067
Owned Animal Complaint	5,691
Dead Animal	2,562
Owner Experiencing Homelessness	2,168
Found Animals	1,163
Wildlife	836
Request by Fire, Police, or Other Agency for Assistance	584
Animal Cruelty and Abandoned Animals	455
Bites	373
Other	339
TOTAL	44,994 (after other is added)

Source: Source: Data provided by 311 Center

311 Center Staff Triage the Call First

Center staff are responsible for triaging the contact. A four-level classification system is used to assist in the prioritization of the contacts. For example, emergency situations are classified “Priority One.” When information about the contact is uploaded by 311 Center staff to Animal Control’s database, the assigned classification level informs Animal Control of the matter’s urgency.

The four priority classifications and the situations which determine the appropriate classification are:

- 1 Emergency (Priority One) - Used for events such as a bite in progress or a loose dog having bitten someone, an aggressive stray, cruelty in progress such as a dog left in a hot car, and requests by fire and police for assistance.
- 2 Very Important (Priority Two) - Used for contacts regarding abandoned animals, bites no longer in progress, and calls regarding animal welfare concerns. Responses to these calls occur as quickly as time and staffing allow.
- 3 Important (Priority Three) - Used to classify complaints regarding loose animals, feces, poultry, and similar matters. These calls result in the issuance of a letter to the property owner.

- 4 As Time Allows (Priority Four) - Used for contacts regarding dead or stray loose animals are classified Priority Four and are responded to as time allows.

Call Volume Related to Animal Service Varied Across Council District

For each contact, the 311 Center records the City District to which the contact pertains, as applicable and provided that address information allows for the district to be determined. However, 27 percent of the contacts (12,148 of the FY 2023-2024 contacts) were by individuals seeking adoption information, asking if their lost pet is in the shelter, or for other matters that resulted in the contact being assigned the category 'General' rather than be categorized to one of the City's eight districts.

The remaining 73 percent of contacts, (32,846 contacts) were categorized by district. Each District had at least 2,000 contacts in FY 2023-24. Figure 11.3 below provides a full breakdown of the number and priority levels of each district's contacts.

Figure 11.3: FY 2023-2024 Contact Volume by District and Priority Level

District	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	Other Contacts (Customer Service and General Info)	Total Contacts	Percent of Total Contact
One	373	185	242	309	915	2,024	4%
Two	1,939	647	619	1,293	3,072	7,570	17%
Three	656	288	308	549	1,337	3,138	7%
Four	1,277	272	243	679	2,141	4,612	10%
Five	741	433	498	740	2,347	4,759	11%
Six	927	313	391	783	1,863	4,277	10%
Seven	459	189	287	523	1,300	2,758	6%
Eight	877	338	410	696	1,387	3,708	8%
General	22	1	2	37	12,086	12,148	27%
TOTAL	7,271	2,666	3,000	5,609	26,448	44,994	100%

Source: Source: Data provided by 311 Center

Figure 11.4 below provides a snapshot as to the nature of contacts received on a randomly selected afternoon in FY 2023-24. On Wednesday, May 8, 2024, the 311 Center received 15 contacts between 12:00 PM and 6:00 PM. Nine contacts were received telephonically and the remaining six through the Center’s app.

Figure 11.4: Nature of Contacts of All Calls on Randomly Selected Afternoon

Reason for Contact	Number
General information request about adoption process, licensing process, and similar	4
Requesting information, such as availability status, of specific animals listed on the Shelter’s website listing of animals available for adoption	4
Caller attempting to locate their animal, which caller believes is or may be at the Shelter	4
Request for Animal Control service at a specific location provided by the caller	1
Issuer pertaining to caller’s animals’ license	1
Caller would like an update on her animal, which is at the Shelter	1

Source: Source: Data provided by 311 Center

The data above indicates that most contacts are requests for information, not for Animal Control to provide services. However, because of the volume of contacts – over 43,000 contacts annually – many do relate to requests for service or other issues relevant to Animal Control services. Details regarding the nature and outcomes of these calls are discussed in Finding 3 regarding Animal Control.

Information: Customer Service

This section provides background information only. Our audit did not conclude any findings on this topic, but we have provided background information about the function for the audit report.

As its name implies, Customer Service is the public facing unit of the Front Street Shelter. The unit answers phone calls, staffs the front counter at the shelter, and performs similar and other duties as described below.

Most Customer Service Positions Filled

The unit is budgeted with eight FTE, which consists of one supervisor and seven Customer Service Representatives (CSRs). Five of the CSR positions perform customer-facing duties and the other two perform other administrative duties.

As of August 23, 2024, two of the eight budgeted positions were unfilled. One open position was the supervisory position for which a candidate had been selected and accepted the position with an upcoming September start date. The other unfilled position was one of the two administrative CSR positions. As of March 25, 2025, the two previously unfilled positions had been filled.

Staff Schedules Vary to Provide Access to Shelter and Customer Service Seven Days a Week

All CSRs work a 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM schedule. Because the Shelter is open seven days a week, the five customer-facing CSRs do not all work on the same days. The number of customer-facing CSRs scheduled for each day is shown in the exhibit below.

Figure 12.1: Number of Customer-facing CSRs Scheduled by Day

Friday – Monday	3
Tuesday	5
Wednesday – Thursday	4

Source: Animal Care Services Division

Staff Duties and Daily Schedule of Activities Vary Throughout the Day to Reflect Shelter Hours

From 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM, the five customer-facing CSRs perform the following duties:

- Responding to phone calls and emails that the 311 Center had received from members of the public but that didn't require assignment to an Animal Control Officer (ACO), such as general informational inquiries.
- Preparing letters in response to 311 Center contacts that did not necessitate involvement of an ACO. For example, contacting an address about which the 311 Center had received a complaint of feces, loose animals, or a similar issue.

- Viewing social media in an attempt to locate owners of animals that the shelter had taken in the previous day.
- Performing other miscellaneous data entry and other administrative tasks.

From 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM staff take lunch.

At 12:00 the Shelter opens to the public. From noon to 5:00 the staff performs front counter duties which include processing adoptions, issuing licenses and renewals, and the intake of animals.

From 5:00 PM to 6:00 PM the staff completes unfinished adoptions, responds to messages from earlier customer contact, and performs other, similar administrative tasks.

The sixth CSR position is responsible for managing the Shelter's data and software. This CSR prepares database reports, manages the Shelter's website, and closes out the electronic files of animals upon adoption.

The duties of the 7th CSR position is in the process of being re-determined, according to Division management. The position had been responsible for many functions involving the coordination with the Division's partner non-profit, Friends of Front Street. However, Friends of Front street now has an Executive Director, and that person now performs these functions. The relationship between the Division and Friends of Front Street is discussed further in the Friends of Front Street finding. The Division reports that when the 7th CSR is fully trained, one CSR position will be transitioned to support Field Services.

Appendix A Gallup Survey Results

Why the Gallup Survey was conducted as part of this performance audit

As discussed in Finding 2 Staffing, the Animal Care Services Division has had retention challenges and staff turnover has contributed to the Division's inability to achieve its budgeted staffing level. At the time this report was drafted, the Division was budgeted to have 63 employees but only 47 positions were filled. As of March 25, 2025, the Division had eight vacancies which consisted of: one shelter operations manager, one Registered Veterinarian Technician, two ACOs, and four ACTs.

Gallup's research on the topic of employee engagement has found that teams with low engagement levels typically have turnover rates that are 18 percent to 43 percent higher than highly engaged teams. Additionally, the research has found that there is a well-established connection between employee engagement and the following eleven performance outcomes:

- Customer loyalty/engagement
- Profitability
- Productivity
- Turnover
- Safety Incidents
- Shrinkage (theft)
- Absenteeism
- Patient Safety Incidents
- Quality (defects)
- Wellbeing (net thriving employees)
- Organizational citizenship (participation)

Gallup's research conclusions are based on a meta-analysis of the Q12 survey that used 456 research studies across 276 organizations in 54 industries and 96 countries. The research studies included 112,312 work units and 2.7 million employees.⁴⁴

What is employee engagement

Many similar definitions of employee engagement abound in organizational theory literature. Gallup's defines employee engagement as:

*"The involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace"*⁴⁵

Engagement is related to job satisfaction but there are distinct differences between the two concepts. The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) offers this distinction, "Job satisfaction has more to do with whether the employee is personally happy than with whether the employee is actively involved in advancing the organizational goals."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ [The Benefits of Employee Engagement](#)

⁴⁵ [How to Improve Employee Engagement in the Workplace - Gallup](#)

⁴⁶ [How to Develop and Sustain Employee Engagement](#)

What Drives Employee Engagement

Leadership style, the nature of the relationship between managers and their direct reports, and organizational communication are critical activities that influence the extent to which an employee feels engaged in their work and workplace.

The research firm Quantum Workplace identifies the following six drivers as having the greatest impact on employee engagement:

1. The leaders of their organization are committed to making it a great place to work.
2. Trust in the leaders of the organization to set the right course.
3. Belief that the organization will be successful in the future.
4. Understanding of how I fit into the organization's future plans.
5. The leaders of the organization value people as their most important resource.
6. The organization makes investments to make employees more successful.⁴⁷

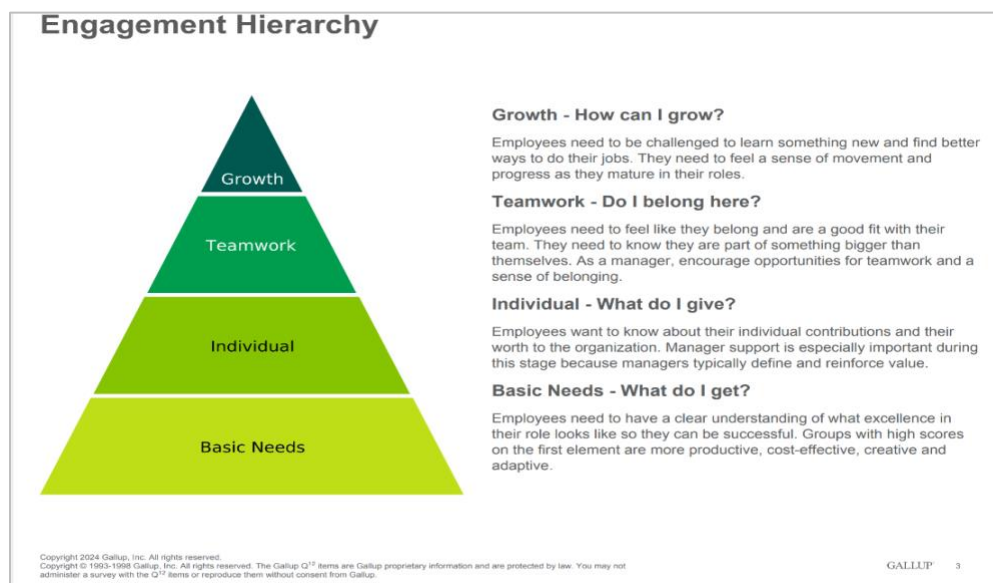
Similarly, Gallup's research indicates the five key drivers of employee engagement are: Purpose, Development, A Caring Manager, Ongoing Conversations, and A Focus on Strengths.

Quantum Workplace and Gallup's research indicates that employee engagement is within the ability of management to influence.

Design of the Gallup Q12 Survey

The survey asked 12 questions designed to measure levels of engagement using a hierarchical construct of engagement that includes four levels. The questions begin by determining if basic needs are being met and then progress along the scale to questions that determine if employees are presented with professional growth needs opportunities. The graphic below explains the construct more fully.

Figure A.1: Gallup's Engagement Hierarchy



Source: Gallup

⁴⁷ [How to Develop and Sustain Employee Engagement](#)

In addition to the 12 survey items pertaining to engagement, employees were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the organization as a place to work on a five-point scale.

How the survey was administered

The survey was administered using an anonymous, online process. All Animal Service employees who had been employed by the Division for at least 30 days were provided with a link to the survey. The only demographic information that was collected was categorized length of employment. Employees indicated whether they had been employed by the Division for less than one year, for one to five years, or for five or more years.

Employees were first notified of the survey by an email sent to them by the Division Manager. The employees then received the link directly from GPP Analytics, Inc. Employees were given two weeks to take the survey and two reminder emails were sent by GPP during that time.

A total of 46 employees received the survey and 32 employees (70 percent) completed the survey. This included nine employees who had been with the Division for less than one year, 12 who reported being employed for one to five years, and 11 who reported five or more years of employment in the Division. The results consist of the perceptions of these 32 employees. No evidence indicates whether these results can be generalized to the Division's other 14 employees.

Interpreting and Using the Survey Results

The twelve-item employee engagement survey (Q12) survey is designed using a standard five-point scale with response options ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The percentile ranking compares an organization's score to other organizations in the Gallup database.

The Q12 survey has been administered to more than 35 million employees in 195 different cultures and in 70 languages.⁴⁸ Gallup's database of results is updated annually to allow for benchmarking and comparison of an organization's employee engagement level to the most recent data.⁴⁹

The database includes for profit, not-for-profit, and governmental organizations; small, medium, and large organizations; and organizations from multiple countries. These differences will naturally create different environments that will influence scores. However, because of the large size of the database, the percentile ranking does give a general indication of how a workplace compares to other workplaces.

The survey results provide insights into where there are opportunities to increase employee engagement. This information can then be used to prioritize areas upon which to focus and can be used to develop strategies for increasing engagement.

Percentiles Show Results In Relative Position to Others

Percentile scores compare one organization's results to all other organizations in Gallup's database, so even small changes in an organization's average score can cause larger jumps (up or down) in percentile rank. This is because the database of Gallup's responses is very large—spanning a wide range of organizations, industries, and cultures—and the percentile calculation focuses on where a score sits

⁴⁸ Gallup Access Q12 Survey Implementation Guide

⁴⁹ Gallup Access Q12 Survey Implementation Guide

relative to everyone else. Consequently, a slight movement in the overall raw score can lead to a bigger shift in percentile ranking than one might expect.⁵⁰

Survey Results

In addition to the 12 survey items, participants were also asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the organization as a place to work. The results placed the organization in the seventh percentile.

Division Ranked 7th Percentile Overall Compared to All Global Respondents

The Division as a whole ranked in the 7th percentile. However, analysis at the length of employment subgroup level identified that opinions change over length of employment, and not favorably. The ranking by employees with less than one year of employment at Animal Care Services was substantially higher than the other two subgroups, as shown below.

Figure A.2: How satisfied are you with your organization as a place to work

Length of Employment	Ranking
Less than a year	22 nd Percentile
Between one to five years	4 th Percentile
Five or more years	3 rd Percentile

The Employee Engagement ranking, based on responses to the 12 survey items, placed Animal Care Services in the 10th percentile, which means that 90 percent of surveyed organizations scored higher than Animal Care Services. Employees who have been employed by the Division for less than one year had the highest level of engagement of the three length of employment subgroups.

Figure A.3: Employee Engagement Composite Score

Length of Employment	Ranking
Less than a year	27 th Percentile
Between one to five years	14 th Percentile
Five or more years	2 nd Percentile

⁵⁰ Gallup's Q12 Meta-Analysis, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/321725/gallup-q12-meta-analysis-report.aspx>

At the individual question level, the Division’s highest ranking was the 28th percentile. It ranked in this percentile for two of the 12 survey items. On the other end of the spectrum, it scored in the third percentile for one item and in the seventh percentile for two items. A snapshot of subgroup percentile rankings is provided below.

Figure A.4: Percentile Ranking by Subgroup

		Less Than a Year	1 - 5 Years	5 Plus Years	All Staff
0	Overall Satisfaction	22	4	3	7
Q1	I know what is expected of me at work	7	22	17	17
Q2	I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right	2	3	7	3
Q3	At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day	4	7	8	7
Q4	In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work	63	19	1	14
Q5	My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person	48	33	12	27
Q6	There is someone at work who encourages my development	71	36	7	28
Q7	At work, my opinion seems to count	54	11	3	12
Q8	The mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important	44	29	8	22
Q9	My coworkers are committed to doing quality work	27	6	2	7
Q10	I have a best friend at work.	25	44	13	28
Q11	In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress	25	17	6	13
Q12	This last year, I have had opportunities at work to grow and learn	46	24	3	16

Basic Needs

The first two survey items are included to determine if basic needs are being met. The survey asks participants to respond to the following two statements:

1. I know what is expected of me, and
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right

Knowing what is expected means understanding tasks at hand and situational knowledge. Effective managers define and discuss expectations and help employees see how their work contributes to overall success.

Animal Care Services Division employees scored in the 17th percentile for knowing what is expected. New employees, with less than a year of service, had the lowest scores, indicating a need for better communication of expectations during onboarding. Although quarterly evaluations are recommended, they are not routinely done in Animal Care Services, as discussed in the Staffing Chapter.

Interestingly, employees with five or more years of experience were less certain of their expectations than those with one to five years. This might reflect uncertainty in mid-level management roles.

The Division ranked in the 3rd percentile regarding having the materials and equipment needed. Employees often feel frustration and anger when lacking necessary tools, leading to disengagement from their work and the organization.

Subgroup scores for these two survey items are re-presented below.

Figure A.5: Basic Needs Survey Items

	Mean Score	Percentile Ranking
I know what is expected of me at work		
Less than 1 Year	3.78	7
1 – 5 Years	4.17	22
Five + Years	4.00	17
All Respondents	4.00	17
I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right		
Less than 1 Year	2.89	2
1 – 5 Years	3.00	3
Five + Years	3.27	7
All Respondents	3.06	3

Individual Contributions

After having basic needs met, the second level of engagement involves the ability to contribute to the organization in a manner that demonstrates their worth to the organization. Four survey items address this. They are:

1. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
2. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
3. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
4. There is someone at work who encourages my development.

Overall, the Division scored in the 17th percentile for this level, with significant variation by subgroup and survey item. Employees with less than one year at the Division gave more favorable scores for three of the four items.

The organization ranked in the 7th percentile for allowing employees to do what they do best. Newer employees were least likely to feel they had this opportunity, while the most tenured felt the opposite.

In the 14th percentile for recognizing good work, results show newer employees feel more recognized than others. Those with five or more years rated recognition the lowest, at the first percentile with a mean score of 1.73.

The trend of decreasing scores with employment length continued with supervisor care perceptions, which is concerning given the turnover rate.

Encouragement for professional development also declined with tenure, with scores halving from employees under a year to those between one and five years, and even lower for those with at least five years.

Subgroup scores for these four survey items are re-presented below.

Figure A.6: Individual Contributions Survey Items

	Mean Score	Percentile Ranking
I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day		
Less than 1 Year	3.11	4
1 – 5 Years	3.25	7
Five + Years	3.36	8
All Respondents	3.25	7
In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work		
	Mean Score	Percentile Ranking
Less than 1 Year	4.00	63
1 – 5 Years	3.08	19
Five + Years	1.73	1
All Respondents	2.88	14
My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person		
	Mean Score	Percentile Ranking
Less than 1 Year	4.33	48
1 – 5 Years	4.08	33
Five + Years	3.55	12
All Respondents	3.97	27
There is someone at work who encourages my development		
	Mean Score	Percentile Ranking
Less than 1 Year	4.44	71
1 – 5 Years	3.83	36
Five + Years	3.00	7
All Respondents	3.72	28

Teamwork

The Teamwork level of the engagement hierarchy pertains to the extent to which employees achieve a sense of belonging and feel that they are a part of something bigger than themselves. The four questions used to determine the extent that employees feel like they belong are:

1. At work, my opinion seems to count.
2. The mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important.
3. My coworkers are committed to doing quality work.
4. I have a best friend at work.

Overall, the Division ranked in the 32nd percentile. However, scores decreased with longevity. The decline in scores was significant, decreasing from the 36th percentile for the newest employees to the 5th percentile for employees with at least five years of employment experience. Subgroup scores for the four Teamwork survey items are re-presented below.

Figure A.7: Teamwork Survey Items

	Mean Score	Percentile Ranking
At work, my opinion seems to count		
Less than 1 Year	4.00	54
1 – 5 Years	3.08	11
Five + Years	2.55	3
All Respondents	3.16	12
The mission or purpose of my organization makes me feel my job is important		
Less than 1 Year	4.11	44
1 – 5 Years	3.83	29
Five + Years	3.27	8
All Respondents	3.72	22
My coworkers are committed to doing quality work		
Less than 1 Year	3.89	27
1 – 5 Years	3.27	6
Five + Years	2.91	2
All Respondents	3.32	7
I have a best friend at work		
Less than 1 Year	3.17	25
1 – 5 Years	3.58	44
Five + Years	2.78	13
All Respondents	3.22	28

Growth

The two questions used to measure whether growth needs are being met are:

1. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
2. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to grow and learn.

As with the other categories, scores declined with tenure at the Division. Both questions saw a significant decline from respondents with longer tenure. For the question about someone talking to them about their progress scores declined from the 25th percentile to the sixth percentile, as shown below. Similarly, for the question about having had an opportunity to grow and learn, scores declined from 46th to the third percentile for those with more than five years at the Animal Care Services Division.

Figure A.7: Growth Survey Items

	Mean Score	Percentile Ranking
In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress		
Less than 1 Year	3.50	25
1 – 5 Years	3.25	17
Five + Years	2.73	6
All Respondents	3.10	13
This last year, I have had opportunities at work to grow and learn		
Less than 1 Year	4.14	46
1 – 5 Years	3.75	24
Five + Years	2.82	3
All Respondents	3.50	16

Strategies for Improving Engagement

The survey results, combined with the literature on employee engagement, suggest that there are several strategies and actions that can be taken by organizations to improve engagement.

To better meet the basic needs of employees, the Division can do the following:

1. During the onboarding time period, the Animal Care Services Division could focus more time and attention on ensuring that new employees gain an understanding of what is expected of them.
2. Perform the required quarterly evaluations during employees' first year of employment and use the opportunity presented by these evaluations to ensure that expectations are communicated and understood. Management could survey employees to determine what materials and equipment are needed and then use this information to develop a purchasing plan and/or adjust performance expectations based on what materials and equipment are available.

To create opportunities for teamwork and to promote a sense of belonging, Management could:

1. Create time and safe spaces for members of the organization to share their concerns and ideas with management. For example, some organizations provide the opportunity for employees to

anonymously submit ideas and concerns that management then addresses these topics at organization-wide meetings.

2. Continue to, and increase, its communications of success stories.
3. Use “employee of the month” or similar recognition events to communicate the importance of staff accomplishments.
4. While management can’t be responsible for ensuring everyone has a “best friend,” it can try to create opportunities that will strengthen ties between employees.

To meet the Growth needs of employees, management could:

1. Meet with employees individually to discuss the employee’s career aspirations and then look to help the employees gain the needed experience and knowledge to achieve those aspirations.

Attachments: Division/Department Response Letter

DATE: April 11, 2025

TO: Office of the City Auditor

FROM: Phillip Zimmerman, Animal Care Services Manger

RE: Response to Performance Audit of Sacramento's Animal Care Services Division

RESPONSES TO REVIEW OF ANIMAL WELFARE POLICY TOPICS

1. Feline Neuter and Release Practices

RESPONSE: The Animal Care Services Division (ACS) recognizes that there are various perspectives on which cats should be eligible for Trap Neuter Return (TNR). If the division were to take in every healthy and friendly cat, the shelter would exceed its capacity to provide humane care. Bringing in all healthy cats to a stressful shelter environment is not beneficial for the cats, and it would place additional burdens on staff and volunteers. This scenario could lead to an increase in illnesses among healthy cats, higher costs for their treatment, and an uptick in euthanasia rates for cats that were previously healthy. Additionally, if cats are healthy and thriving in their community, it's likely they have owners. Taking them into the shelter might result in rehoming to another family, even though they were already being cared for.

2. Community Sheltering and Managed Intake Strategies

RESPONSE: The Animal Care Services Division (ACS) acknowledges that there are various viewpoints regarding Managed Intake procedures in animal shelters. Community members are eager to assist animals, and many are locating the owners of found pets prior to reaching out to the division. This is reflected in the numerous lost and found groups on social media platforms like Facebook and Nextdoor, where finders are successfully reuniting pets with their owners. Although we cannot quantify the exact number of these reunifications, it is clear that when an animal shelter is already at capacity, every animal that can be reunited without entering the shelter helps free up space and resources for those animals that truly need to be impounded.

3. Vetting Prospective Adoptive and Foster Homes or a No Barrier Approach

RESPONSE: The Animal Care Services Division (ACS) recognizes that there are various perspectives on best practices for adoptions. The division advocates for low barrier adoptions for several reasons. By removing obstacles such as lengthy applications and restrictive requirements, shelters can create a quicker and more accessible adoption process, resulting in higher adoption rates. This approach emphasizes matching pets with families based on compatibility rather than rigid assessments, thereby fostering stronger human-animal bonds. Additionally, encouraging more families to adopt can help lower the number of animals at risk of euthanasia due to overcrowding.

Low barrier adoptions also allow for a more diverse group of potential adopters, including those who may have previously felt deterred for various reasons, such as being renters or having limited income. This practice can effectively engage the community, motivating more people to consider adoption as a practical option and promoting a culture of pet ownership. While barriers are minimized, shelters also continue to provide resources and education for new pet owners, ensuring they are adequately prepared for the responsibilities of pet care and wellbeing. By simplifying the adoption process, families are more likely to make long-term commitments to their pets, leading to stable and loving homes. Furthermore, no barrier policies can encourage the adoption of pets with special needs or those who might be less likely to be chosen under stricter criteria, underscoring the importance of giving every animal a chance for a loving home.

RESPONSES TO FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDING 1: Strategic Space and Population Management Could Improve Shelter Capacity Challenges

RECOMMENDATION 1.1: Reevaluate the Division's strategy on stray population control, including enhancing community-based spay/neuter programs and managed intake systems.

RESPONSE: Agree. While we agree that strong spay and neuter programs are essential for reducing stray intake, they are not the sole solution. Addressing population management within the shelter involves multiple components. Some of these include housing shelter pets in foster care, transferring animals to other shelters and rescues, and reducing or waiving owner redemption fees and adoption fees. Furthermore, with our Field Services section now almost fully staffed, they have the capacity to take a more proactive approach in reuniting pets in the field before resorting to impoundment at the shelter.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: Explore cost-sharing agreements with neighboring jurisdictions to distribute intake and operational costs and increase its overall capacity.

RESPONSE: Agree. We will reach out to local shelters to see if there are any potential possibilities to cost-share for sheltering and to increase shelter capacity. However, due to the City's current budget deficit funding will be an issue.

FINDING 2: Focus on Employee Engagement and Recruitment Strategies Could Improve Staffing Shortages and Turnover

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: Work with the Human Resources Department to review the minimum qualifications of each position for the purpose of determining whether qualifications can be reduced in order to attract more applicants.

RESPONSE: Agree. We support the idea of reducing barriers to employment. Lowering minimum qualifications would not only expand our applicant pool but also enable us to hire candidates from a wider range of diverse backgrounds. We will continue collaborating with the Human Resources Department on the ongoing classification and compensation study.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2: Work with the Human Resources Department to review the appropriateness of the pay range for veterinarians.

RESPONSE: Agree. If we do not address the total compensation package for the veterinarian classification, we will continue to struggle to recruit and retain qualified shelter veterinarians.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: Increase its efforts to publicize job opportunities, such as using online job portals, and animal care, veterinary medicine, and shelter industry specific websites, forums, and organizations.

RESPONSE: Agree. The more channels we use to advertise our open positions, the greater the number of applicants we can attract. As vacancies arise, we will ensure to promote them through various platforms.

RECOMMENDATION 2.4: Focus on increasing employee engagement. Strategies for increasing engagement are discussed in Appendix A, which provides a detailed discussion of the employee engagement survey results.

RESPONSE: Agree. There is always room for improvement in employee engagement. Currently, we celebrate monthly birthdays and hold staff parties for major holidays, as well as recognize special appreciation weeks for our industry, such as National Animal Control Officer Appreciation Week, National Shelter Employees Week, and Registered Veterinary Technician Week. Our department also facilitates an Employee of the Month program, with many Animal Care Services staff being honored over time. Additionally, last year, one of our Animal Care Technicians was named Employee of the Year for our department.

FINDING 3: Finalizing Policies and Procedures Could Improve Efficiency

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: Complete and submit drafts of their various policies and procedures to the City Human Resources Department for review and approval.

RESPONSE: Agree. We recognize that having approved policies and procedures is essential for employee satisfaction and accountability. Now that we are nearing full staffing, we have started drafting these policies and procedures to submit to the Human Resources Department and will have them submitted by July of 2025.

FINDING 4: More Oversight is an Opportunity to Prioritize Limited Resources in Animal Control

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: Direct the newly hired Chief to set and monitor clear call response criteria and priorities, regularly conduct analysis of Animal Control Officer performance, and provide feedback to continually align call responses to priorities.

RESPONSE: Agree. The current Chief has already begun monitoring call responses. At one point, we had over 2,000 service calls pending. However, since hiring of the Chief and the onboarding of new officers, we have reduced that number of calls pending to under 500.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2: Explore staffing options for tasks related to removing dead animals from public property.

RESPONSE: Agree. We would support a lower-level classification to respond to these types of calls. However, due to the City's current fiscal deficit, this will not be an option at this time.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3: Work with the 311 Customer Service Center to improve the collection of information in order to reduce the number of animals that cannot be located.

RESPONSE: Agree. We have already started collaborating with the City's 3-1-1 center on a module that will ensure each operator asks the same questions of callers based on the call type. This will provide our officers with consistent information tailored to the specific nature of the call.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4: Evaluate its practices regarding households that are the subject of multiple complaints in order to determine if other approaches may more effectively reduce the number of repeat complaints.

RESPONSE: Agree. With the addition of a Chief and more Field Services staff, we can take a more proactive approach to addressing repeat calls for the same complaint. We will also be developing policies and procedures that outline how our officers should manage repeat complaints at the same address regarding similar issues. We will have these policies and procedures submitted by July 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 4.5: Develop comprehensive written policies for the Animal Control Unit.

RESPONSE: Agree. With the hiring of a Chief and additional Field Services staff, we will focus on identifying policies and procedures that will have the greatest impact on our employees, enabling them to perform their duties while also delivering quality and timely service to the community. We will have these policies and procedures submitted by July 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 4.6: Develop standardized data-entry protocols to ensure consistent call responses, clear result codes, and accurate record-keeping. At a minimum, include a data dictionary for Chameleon, periodic quality checks, and staff training to promote data accuracy and reliability.

RESPONSE: Agree. This will be included in the policies and procedures we develop, ensuring that staff are aware of the appropriate dispositions and record-keeping protocols to follow when handling service calls. We will have these policies and procedures submitted by July 2025.

FINDING 5: Accurate Reporting on Open Data Portal Could Increase Transparency and Public Trust

RECOMMENDATION 5.1: Determine how data is reported to the City's open data portal and correct the erroneous data currently reported to the site.

RESPONSE: Agree. We contacted the IT department responsible for managing the City's open data portals, and they have confirmed that our shelter management software is now accurately reporting data to the Animal Care Services' open data portals.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2: Develop a policy to periodically monitor all published data for completeness and consistency.

RESPONSE: Agree. We will create an internal policy that reminds staff to regularly monitor that the open data portals are receiving current and accurate data from our shelter software system.

FINDING 6: Increasing Veterinary Capacity and Reducing Delays Can Lower Shelter Population

RECOMMENDATION 6.1: Consider adding additional veterinary staff to provide timelier spay and neuter procedures of animals in the City’s legal custody and to animals in the community to reduce stray animal populations.

RESPONSE: Agree. However, this will not be possible due to the City’s current budget deficit.

RECOMMENDATION 6.2: If veterinary staff are budgeted and hired, consider installing a temporary prefabricated medical building as a medium-term solution to provide sufficient space for separate shelter medicine and sterilization functions.

RESPONSE: Agree. Additional staff will not be hired. However, looking into a potential off-site location to provide high-volume spay/neuter to shelter pets, while also potentially partnering with a non-profit to also provide high-volume for community pets may be a viable option. This would also relieve the space constraints when shelter staff and volunteers are performing spay and neuter surgeries, while also practicing shelter medicine.

RECOMMENDATION 6.3: Implement standardized fields related to categories and assigned urgency to examination records to allow management to better monitor and report on the Veterinary Unit’s operations.

RESPONSE: Agree. We currently have templates that our veterinary staff can utilize when entering medical records. However, policies and procedures directing staff on which templates should be used will create efficiencies and accuracies to allow the veterinarian team to better manage the shelter population. We will work on creating policies and procedures in this area submitted by July 2025.

FINDING 7: Focus on Licensing Compliance Would Increase Revenue and Bolster Public Safety

RECOMMENDATION 7.1: Consider annually engaging every veterinary practice and animal vaccination provider in the City and metro area to remind them to report all rabies vaccines to the City.

RESPONSE: Agree. In January of 2025 we sent out letters to fifty-one veterinarian clinics in the Sacramento area. Seventeen of the clinics have begun sending us updated rabies vaccination information. We will continue to send out these reminder letters every January.

RECOMMENDATION 7.2: Consult the City Attorney's Office about the possibility of fining veterinarians in known violation of the Sacramento City Code's requirements to report vaccinations.

RESPONSE: Agree. We will work with the City Attorney's Office on developing a process to fine veterinarian clinics who are refusing to provide rabies vaccination records.

RECOMMENDATION 7.3: Consider including licensing information in social media outreach and consider paid advertising to educate City residents about their legal obligation and the benefits of licensing their animals.

RESPONSE: Agree. We will post on our social media accounts and on NextDoor the importance and requirement of licensing their pet in the City of Sacramento.

RECOMMENDATION 7.4: Consider piloting the use of a City-run kiosk onsite at veterinary clinics to provide on-site licensing for their customers.

RESPONSE: Agree. We will have to look into the cost of this pilot program to determine if we can pay for a kiosk due to the city's financial deficit.

RECOMMENDATION 7.5: Consider piloting assigning staff to attend vaccination clinics in the City and immediate metro area to provide on-site licensing to the participants and advise City residents on their legal requirements.

RESPONSE: Agree. We do currently provide licensing information to City residents who attend our vaccination clinics; however, we don't offer to license them at the time. We will implement this by June of 2025 and determine if we generate enough revenue to justify paying staff to attend the vaccination clinics for this purpose.

RECOMMENDATION 7.6: Consider piloting a canvassing program to have staff systematically identify residents without licensed animals.

RESPONSE: Agree. Due to the city's financial deficit we do not believe this is feasible at this time.

RECOMMENDATION 7.7: Review the Division's fee schedule, and consider eliminating fees that are not strategically appropriate, and increasing licensing fees to better align revenues with service costs and strategic goals.

RESPONSE: Agree. We have proposed eliminating fees that we do not generally charge community members during the current fees and fines study for FY 25/26. We have also increased most of our licensing and other fees by at least 5% for FY 25/26.

FINDING 8: Transparency and Accountability Could be Improved by Agreement with Nonprofit Partner

RECOMMENDATION 8.1: Enter into a legally enforceable contract, for example a Memorandum of Understanding, with Friends of Front Street that defines the relationship between the two organizations, identifies ownership of different liabilities related to City property, defines financial reporting requirements, limits or defines the City's fundraising role, and addresses any other compliance, financial, or statutory risks identified by the City's legal representatives

RESPONSE: Agree. We believe that it is essential for there to be a legally enforceable Memorandum of Understanding between the City and Friends of the Front Street Shelter. We will begin negotiating with the Friends of the Front Street Shelter in May of 2025, and expect a signed MOU by the end of June 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 8.2: Add language to the City's website to indicate to the public that the donation button is directed to an external organization OR have the donation button go directly to a City-managed donation fund.

RESPONSE: Agree. We have already made this change. Our website now states that if you are making an online donation via the shelter's website, that it is going to our non-profit partner, Friends of Front Street.

RECOMMENDATION 8.3: Provide guidance, in consultation with the City Attorney's Office, to ensure that any future equipment purchases made by the Friends on behalf of the Shelter are made in accordance with City requirements

RESPONSE: Agree. Recently the City increased the ability to purchase items on a pCard from \$5,000 to \$10,000. With this increase it will allow Animal Care Services staff to purchase one-time items timelier, and without the need to have Friends of the Front Street Shelter purchase the items. We will also utilize the City's emergency procurement policy exemption for emergency purchases.

FINDING 9: Homeless Assistance Program Would Benefit from Staffing at its Authorized Level

RECOMMENDATION 9.1: Update its Functional Organizational Chart to accurately reflect staff assignments to represent program staffing more transparently. For example, the Functional Organization Chart should specify employees assigned to the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP).

RESPONSE: Agree. Due to staffing shortage over the last several years, we have had to utilize the staff assigned to the Homeless Outreach Assistance Program for shelter

services. Now that we are almost fully staff in all areas of the Animal Care Services division, the Homeless Outreach Assistance Program employees are working more directly in their roles under the Homeless Outreach Assistance Program.

RECOMMENDATION 9.2: Develop performance measures that will allow it to evaluate whether the Homeless Outreach and Assistance Program (HOAP) is achieving its expected results.

RESPONSE: Agree. Initially, we measured our success using the number of animals, pet owners, and services provided. However, we recognize the need to analyze the data more closely to understand the broader impacts of the program. For instance, we should consider the number of animals served by the Homeless Outreach Assistance Program and its effect on reducing shelter intake. Additionally, if animals do enter the shelter, we need to assess how quickly they are reunited with their owners, as this could influence their length of stay and our Return to Owner rates. We expect to have these new performance measures in place by the end of calendar year 2025.

FINDING 10: Increasing Use of Volunteer Performance Metrics Would Enhance Program Effectiveness

RECOMMENDATION 10.1: Develop a performance metric system that would serve as a tool so that management can better monitor performance and ensure that a cadre of volunteers continue to provide their assistance.

RESPONSE: Agree. Although we can track the number of volunteers and the hours they serve, our current volunteer management software does not provide retention data. We will investigate whether our existing software has a feature for this or if we will need to allocate staff time to manually gather the data.