JVR STRATEGIES

Executive Summary: City of Dallas Loose Dog Community Project Report

Prepared for Friends of Dallas Animal Services
by JVR Strategies

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Introduction

Project Background

Dallas Animal Services (DAS) strives to lead the nation in compassionate animal care while addressing community needs through innovative shelter operations and engagement. In line with their Dallas90 Initiative which launched in 2018, DAS has been working toward a 90% live release rate for adoptable pets. However, increasing intakes prompted a deeper examination of loose dog issues in the city, with an aim to better align their work with community needs.

In late 2023, DAS engaged JVR Strategies (JVR) to assist with assessing the scope of the ongoing loose dog issue and explore potential directions for a multi-year project to reduce stray and loose dogs in Dallas.

Objectives and Goals

The primary objectives of this project are to:

Scope the loose-dog concerns from key stakeholders in the community to examine what potential approaches could be taken to make an impact on loose dog numbers

Obtain a general sense of the barriers and incentives to impacting this population of animals

Determine the key parameters to be retained in a future multi-year project to combat this problem

By achieving these objectives, the project aims to create a solid foundation for DAS to pursue a broader project leading to the implementation of long-term solutions that are community-driven, culturally sensitive, and effective in managing the loose-dog population.

Methodology

Data Collection

To scope the loose dog issue in Dallas, the JVR Strategies team employed a multifaceted approach to data collection. This approach involved gathering both qualitative and quantitative data from varied sources to explore the problem's scale, underlying causes, and community impact. We analyzed city demographic data along with service request records from DAS, engaged in community conversations through stakeholder and resident interviews, observed field operations during ride-alongs with DAS field officers and code enforcement, and conducted community surveys. Nearly 900 individuals participated in a survey to gather feedback on loose dog perspectives. Integrating these data sources allowed us to validate findings across different perspectives, identify key patterns, and develop an evidence-based view of the loose dog issue in Dallas. This combination of data provided insights into both statistical trends and the lived experiences of residents, forming the foundation for our recommendations.

This executive summary provides a high-level overview of the scope of the concern and some recommendations for ideas to be retained in an RFP for future projects. The quantitative and qualitative data collected through the surveying may be viewed in the full report. .

RFP Considerations

This section provides recommendations to be considered for inclusion in a forthcoming Request for Proposal (RFP) to address the complex issue of loose dogs in Dallas. These concepts are designed to inform the next steps for Dallas Animal Services (DAS) in addressing the loose dog issue with community-driven, culturally sensitive, and sustainable approaches. Developed from insights gained through community engagement, field observations, and data analysis, these ideas are intended to be practical and responsive to the unique needs of the Dallas community.

It is important to note that these initial recommendations, while developed using a combination of community feedback, field observations, and data analysis, are not exhaustive. Other approaches and strategies, beyond what is included here, may also be effective and should be considered as part of a comprehensive response. These recommendations serve as a starting point for further exploration of potential pathways for addressing the issue. They do not imply an obligation for implementation. Additionally, while each recommendation is supported by collected data, their success will depend on factors such as execution, community participation, and the evolving nature of the challenges faced.

Integrated Community Strategy

The Integrated Community Strategy pulls together potential recommendations for a future multi-year project to address loose dog concerns in Dallas. The **Foundational Components** are strategies that may be viewed from a **Community-Centered Framework**.

The Foundational Components present potential strategies and resources to help mitigate the loose dog problem and related challenges, as presented in conversations and survey responses. The Community-Centered Framework emphasizes collaboration with neighborhoods with the goal of aligning solutions to reflect local values and needs. Together, these two parts offer a view to consider as the city develops a plan to address immediate concerns while building a foundation for community-driven, and community-supported outcomes.

Integrated Community Strategy

A comprehensive approach that combines targeted actions with community-driven collaboration to address the loose dog issue sustainably.

Community-Centered Framework

A collaborative approach that prioritizes community engagement, values local input, and aligns solutions with neighborhood needs.

Community Voices

Incorporate community input by co-creating solutions and maintaining a consistent, visible DAS presence.

Strengthened community trust, engagement, and alignment of DAS strategies with resident needs and values.

Hyper-Localized Approach

Conduct targeted outreach and engagement programs specific to the needs of individual neighborhoods, accounting for economic and demographic variability.

Adaptable, responsive solutions that are relevant to each community

Collaboration with Human Services

Partner with human services agencies to address the interconnected issues of animal welfare and human well-being.

Holistic support for both pets and their owners; improved overall community well-being and access to resources

Connection to Racial Equity Plan

Align animal welfare initiatives with the city's racial equity plan to ensure fair and just treatment of all communities.

Equitable distribution of resources and services.

Foundational Components

Targeted strategies and resources aimed at addressing the root causes of loose dog issues.

Community Engagement and Education

Develop initiatives to discuss responsible ownership with pet owners, containment, and community safety; engage trusted public figures and local influencers to resonate with the community.
Intended Outcomes: Greater public awareness and knowledge regarding responsible pet ownership; increase community ownership of solutions.

Enhanced and Equitable Resource Distribution

Provide accessible resources by collaborating with human services and supporting neighborhood-led programs to reach underserved areas efficiently.
Intended Outcomes: Reduce barriers to adequate pet care and containment in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

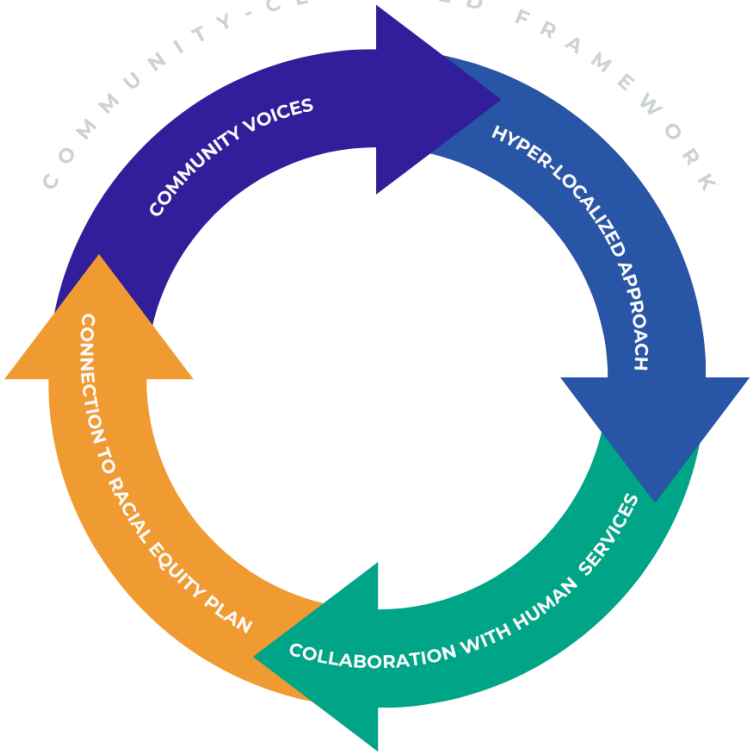
Strategic Field and Shelter Operations

Balance field and shelter roles, use data to guide loose dog responses, and build community trust through clear communication and relationship-focused operations.
Intended Outcomes: Improve response to loose dogs, balance intake, and strengthen community trust. Include responsive community-aligned enforcement suggestions.

Integrated Community Strategy in Detail

Community-Centered Framework

The Community-Centered Framework is a guiding approach that emphasizes collaboration and co-creation with Dallas neighborhoods. This framework focuses on listening to community voices, understanding local values, and involving residents in shaping solutions that reflect their unique experiences and needs. Prioritizing relationship-building can foster trust, support community engagement, and create a foundation for ongoing, community-driven efforts. The framework serves as a bridge, helping to align DAS's initiatives with the perspectives of residents and promoting a connected and culturally responsive approach to animal control.



Community Voices

- **Listening and Co-Creating Solutions**: Consider a Community Voice Model[1] as one approach to align DAS's strategies with local residents' needs and values similar to the Virginia Community Voice model.
- **Building Trust Through Consistent Presence**: Establish a consistent presence to improve collaboration and trust, especially in areas with historical distrust of authorities. Trust-building improves DAS's ability to work with the community on animal control initiatives. Community feedback from interviews and ride-alongs underscored the importance of trust and relationship-building.

Hyper-Localized Approach

- **Create Neighborhood-Specific Response Plans**: Develop tailored response plans for individual neighborhoods by working with local residents. Co-creating these plans helps ensure they align with each neighborhood's unique needs.

[1] Virginia Community Voice. "Our Model." Accessed November 4, 2024. https://vacommunityvoice.org/.

- **Focus on Economic and Demographic Variability**: Prioritize neighborhoods experiencing economic hardship or high loose dog incidents with tailored interventions that reflect their challenges.

Collaboration with Human Services and City Departments

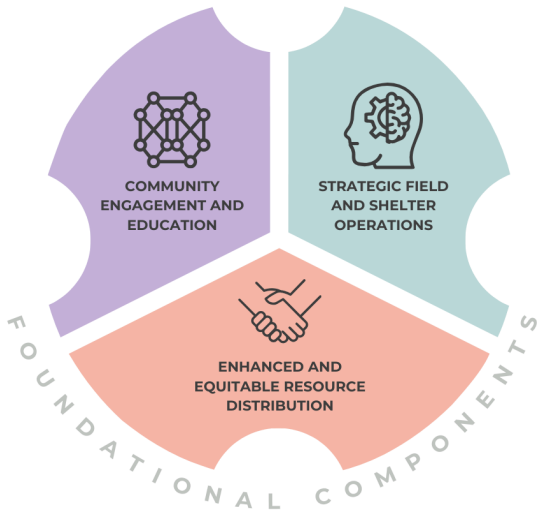
- **Interconnected Support Model**: Work alongside other city departments, such as Health, Housing, and Sanitation, to provide a coordinated response to the loose dog issue. This model promotes a supportive environment by addressing the intersecting human and animal welfare needs in neighborhoods facing economic and social challenges.

Connection to Racial Equity Plan

- **Equitable Access to Pet Resources**: Ensure that resources are distributed fairly across neighborhoods, prioritizing areas with historically limited access to veterinary and containment resources.
- **Inclusive Community Engagement**: Actively involve community members in the planning and implementation of solutions, particularly in neighborhoods with a history of skepticism toward animal control interventions, to increase buy-in and cooperation.
- **Alignment with Racial Equity Plan**: Regularly review and align interventions with the city's Racial Equity Plan, focusing on the impact of enforcement and resource distribution to prevent unintended consequences that could exacerbate existing inequities.

Foundational Components

The Foundational Components focus on three key areas: community engagement and education, equitable resource distribution, and strategic field & shelter operations. Each component includes potential recommended programs, initiatives, and resources aimed at reducing the loose dog population, improving community safety, and promoting responsible pet ownership. These foundational strategies are not exhaustive; other approaches may also be effective and should be considered as part of a broader response.



Community Engagement and Education

- **Public Figures and Local Influencers**: Leverage trusted public and community figures, such as former Dallas Cowboys players and local community leaders, to influence attitudes toward pet ownership. Utilizing familiar faces could amplify messages and strengthen public resonance.

- **Accessible Educational Resources**: Offer accessible educational resources like informational signage, workshops, and community events to support public understanding toward responsible pet ownership and humane animal treatment.

- **Community Advisory Boards and Volunteer Programs**: Establish community advisory boards and volunteer opportunities for residents to participate actively in shaping initiatives, strengthening local ties, and building collective responsibility.

- **Partnerships with Local Organizations and Stakeholders**: Collaborate with trusted local groups to expand reach, connect with residents effectively, and ensure that initiatives are rooted in the neighborhood's cultural context.

- **Localized Outreach and Community Connection Events**: Host events and localized outreach initiatives that bring together community members, DAS, and other city services to foster a sense of shared mission and responsibility.

- **Owner Education**: Raise awareness and understanding of responsible pet ownership, including containment practices, spay/neuter benefits, and pet identification options like microchipping.

Enhanced and Equitable Resource Distribution through Partnerships with Human Services

- **Resource-Based Support**: Increase access to a variety of resources that support pet ownership, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas. This includes pet food pantries, supply assistance (leashes, collars, bedding), mobile veterinary clinics, and pop-up care events providing low-cost or free preventive care. Offer pet identification kits and services like ID tags and microchipping vouchers to assist with lost pet recovery. Free or low-cost behavioral support and training programs, as well as fencing repair assistance.

- **Collaborative With Human Services**: Partner with human services such as Housing, Health, and Sanitation to provide a coordinated response to the interconnected needs of residents and their pets. This includes working with housing authorities and landlords to promote pet-friendly rental housing, reduce pet-related fees, and support tenants in accessing affordable, pet-inclusive housing options.

- **Spay/Neuter and Veterinary Services**: Expand access to spay/neuter services and basic veterinary care, particularly in areas with high stray populations. Address barriers

to accessible care such as cost, transportation, hours of operation, and language. Leverage community members to promote and help run events.

- **Neighborhood-Led Programs:** Establish neighborhood-led networks to support local pet owners through guidance, and connection to resources. These peer-led networks can also facilitate lost pet recovery and reunification efforts. Offer tools, training, and a locally administered registry or platform (Nextdoor, Facebook page, etc) for reporting sightings and coordinating reunifications.

Strategic Field and Shelter Operations

- **Response Capacity and Efficiency**: Increase DAS's field capacity to address loose dog complaints in a timely manner. This may include additional field officers, faster response times, and an increased community presence to mitigate risks associated with loose dogs.

- **Balanced Shelter Intake and Field Operations**: Implement sustainable strategies for shelter stray intake that do not overwhelm DAS's resources. This includes setting intake prioritization criteria, fostering clear communication between field officers and shelter staff, and supporting community members to help dogs return home.

- **Data-Driven Decision-Making**: Utilize data to identify patterns, assess needs, and refine response priorities. This includes mapping hotspots and analyzing fluctuations in call volumes to allocate resources effectively.

- **Clear Communication of DAS Roles and Resources**: Regularly update communities on DAS's role and available resources through community meetings and digital platforms. Transparent communication fosters community trust and aligns DAS's goals with residents' expectations.

- **Relationship-Focused Field Operations**: Encourage field officers to foster positive relationships with residents, emphasizing respect for local contexts. Providing non-punitive options, like educational warnings, can help improve compliance and goodwill.

- **Community-Recommended Enforcement and Policy Enhancements**: Expand capturing policy suggestions offered by residents to strengthen containment and owner responsibility.

Conclusion

Addressing the loose dog issue in Dallas is not merely an animal control challenge but a complex intersection of public safety, equity, and community welfare. By integrating a community-centered framework with targeted, data-driven solutions, Dallas Animal Services has the opportunity to lead with innovation and compassion, setting a national standard for tackling such multifaceted challenges.

This work matters because it extends beyond managing animal populations—it seeks to strengthen the human-animal bond while fostering trust and equity within Dallas's diverse communities. The recommendations presented here serve as an initial framework to create community-driven outcomes that address the root causes of the problem, promote public safety, and ensure that resources are distributed equitably. Aligning these efforts with the City's Racial Equity Plan ensures that the solutions offered will prioritize inclusivity and cultural responsiveness for City residents and their pets.

Through collaboration, education, and systemic change, the City of Dallas can transform its approach to loose dogs into a model of compassionate and equitable animal welfare. These efforts will not only enhance the lives of pets and their owners but will also contribute to the overall health, safety, and resilience of the City as a whole.