Austin ASPCA Partnership

Participating Organizations

- Austin Humane Society, Austin, TX
- Town Lake Animal Center, Austin, TX
- EmanciPET, Austin, TX
- Animal Trustees of Austin, Austin, TX

Please note that all data below was derived from the collaboration's nomination for the Collaboration Prize. None of the submitted data were independently verified for accuracy.

Formation

**Type of Collaboration:** An alliance or similar collaborative structure through which members retain structural autonomy and have defined roles and responsibilities to achieve specific social goals or purposes

**Geographic Scope:** City

**Collaboration Focus Area:** Animal Protection and Welfare

**Population Served:**
- Economically Disadvantaged
- Other

**Year Collaboration was Established:** 2007

**Goals Sought Through Collaboration:**
- Expand reach and/or range of services / programs
- Improve programmatic outcomes
- Address unmet and/or escalating community need

**Reasons Prompting Collaboration:**
- Advancement of a shared goal
- Response to a community need
- Competition for funding, donors and/or clientele

**Who Initiated Collaboration:**
- Other senior management staff
- Executive Director(s) / CEO(s) / President(s)

**Number of Participating Organizations:** 5-7

**Were Partners Added or Dropped?** No
ASPCA Partnership is a national initiative to end unnecessary homeless pet euthanasia through effective and sustainable collaboration amongst animal welfare groups in selected communities. It stems from our President & CEO’s collaborative work when at SF/SPCA and our work in NYC. The goal is to maximize the % of pets leaving shelters alive vs. entering – what we term Live Release Rate (LRR).

In 2007, the ASPCA chose Austin as a pilot community at the recommendation of Senior Director Karen Medicus. Having been Austin Humane Society’s E.D. for 10 years, she knew the city’s interest and efforts in collaboration. She felt Austin was poised to do great things for pets and that ASPCA Partnership’s structure and guidance would enable them to do so. The increase in Austin’s LRR from 46% ('07) to 69% ('09) proves she was correct.

Key to forming the collaboration was involving all players with the capacity to significantly impact the city’s homeless pet population: Town Lake Animal Center (TLAC), Austin Humane Society (AHS), Animal Trustees of Austin (ATA), and EmanciPET. Equally important is each partner’s willingness to accept shared responsibility for all of Austin’s animals and not just the animals in its care. Inviting other animal groups to Partnership trainings and events fosters community support.

The ASPCA’s driving this collaboration aided its formation and success. We approached Austin as a well-established, respected and neutral party seeking to build the city’s effectiveness and capacity to save animals’ lives. We offered them our expertise, knowledge, resources and experience. These factors made the partners comfortable accepting our leadership and joining the Partnership.

Management

Management Structure: Jointly managed by the Executive Directors of the partner organizations

The ASPCA’s desire to form a productive collaboration that will ultimately be sustained without us drove the management structure. The management team includes each partner’s E.D, as they have the knowledge and status to effect change. We provide a highly-experienced animal welfare professional to be their mentor, facilitator and liaison. We require them to attend monthly meetings and annual strategic planning sessions and invite other staff as needed. True to the plan, this year the partners took more control of the collaboration and its meetings, with our acting as an advisor.

Holding positive, productive meetings from the start helped the groups feel good about the collaboration and each other. Trust grew, and the leaders became a peer support group who now talk weekly and in some cases daily. They no longer compete for resources, but share them to help Austin’s animals. Veterinary staff from one group will fill in at another. TLAC and AHS share volunteers. The E.D.’s even attend each other’s fundraisers – a rare show of unity that has inspired major donors to support multiple partners simultaneously.

Key to the Partnership’s success is ASPCA Dashboard, a management tool that sorts shelter data into a series of key indicators. It acts as the basis for identifying at-risk animal populations, researching the causes, developing strategies and programs to address the risks, and evaluating whether those programs are working as intended. This tool drives the partners’ annual strategic planning, targeting resources where they are needed most.

In 2007, the Dashboard pinpointed kittens as a main source of spikes in shelter intake and euthanasia and a drop in LRR. In response, AHS took the lead on feral cat spay/neuter as it has big and at that time underutilized surgical space. Instead of euthanizing feral cats, TLAC began transferring >90% to AHS for spay/neuter and release or adoption. AHS hired a Foster Care Coordinator to arrange kitten care, and a Feral Cat Coordinator to facilitate spay/neuter. AHS worked with local businesses to fix feral cats in their area. From ‘07-’09, the partners did 43,431 cat spay/neuters including 13,866 feral. They reduced kitten intake 32% and kitten euthanasia 72%, and raised LRR from 46% to 69%.

Challenges

Challenges to Making the Collaboration Work:

- Lack of trust among partners
- Retaining staff or staff departures
As a mission-focused, neutral, national leader, the ASPCA moves the partners past their philosophical differences by focusing them on larger community goals. Maintaining this focal point also makes it easier to face challenges together and not get sidetracked or deterred by them. When TLAC needed volunteers, AHS (who had a successful volunteer program) helped them build one. TLAC and AHS now hold joint volunteer training, share volunteers, and have more volunteers than ever.

Austin’s Dashboard and resulting strategic plans help the partners effectively identify and address challenges and be proactive vs. reactive. The partners created a “safety net” of affordable veterinary services vital to reducing pet relinquishment; health is a key reason pets are given up. By transferring more low-cost public spay/neuter and wellness care services to EmanciPET and feral cat spay/neuter to AHS, and entrusting TLAC and AHS to provide most pet adoptions, ATA redirected resources towards other community needs including low-cost heartworm treatment, parvo vaccines, and life-saving surgery and free services to pets of the homeless.

**Impact**

**Internal Efficiencies and Effectiveness:**

- Human resources - Increased use / leveraging of volunteer efforts
- Greater ability to allocate resources to areas of need - Greater ability for each partner to focus on core competency
- Greater ability for each partner to focus on core competency - Greater ability to allocate resources to areas of need

**Community Impact:**

- Improved programmatic outcomes
- Previously unmet community need now being addressed

ASPCA Dashboard is a highly-effective tool for measuring impact. The partners enter their monthly data online, and we analyze and report on what it shows, mainly in relation to strategic plan outcomes. The strategic plan itself identifies indicators for monitoring each outcome. Monthly data review means ongoing evaluation and the chance to identify and alter strategies that are not working before too many resources are wasted. It also documents what works and is worthy of replication and expansion.

The partners have learned how successful data driven planning and outcome measurement can be when done wisely and consistently, and that what data you collect is very important. It is also vital that the partners be honest and transparent about their data. The way to make them comfortable doing so is to never use data as a means to single out, judge, or blame a particular group or manager. By focusing on collective community data (and making only this data public), we reinforce the Partnership as a community effort where the partners have equal responsibility.

**Model**

This Partnership already serves as a model. A V.P. from Purina flew two of the group’s leaders to St. Louis to help the city start a similar program, which they have. Outside groups have asked to use the Dashboard because they’ve seen its power to drive highly effective change; the ASPCA posts all data and outcomes online. TLAC’s animal transfer program is a model highlighted on ASPCApro.org. Austin initiated use of the logic model for strategic planning, and due to its success, all Partnership communities use it.

This collaboration exemplifies how a national group like the ASPCA can direct its resources and experience to effect lasting communitywide progress. Undoubtedly, the Austin partners are living proof of how much more can be accomplished through supportive collaboration.

**Efficiencies Achieved**
Working collaboratively, the partners have achieved operating efficiencies in that now they collectively provide a broader range of services to a larger number of at-risk pets with more expediency than ever before. They have done so by each focusing on their strengths and filling a particular niche for Austin’s pets, be it AHS’s feral cat and adoption programs, EmanciPET’s public spay/neuter, or ATA’s life-saving veterinary services. While some of their services are the same, they view all of their efforts as complementary to one another and an important part of a larger safety net needed to save the lives of Austin’s at-risk pets, both homeless and owned.

Through joint strategic planning and regular communication, they effectively identify at-risk pets and determine which organizations are best equipped to help these animals. Pets move between the partners as necessary to bring the fastest and best results for them. For example, as a result of ATA’s focusing its resources on affordable veterinary care, more homeless pets at TLAC that are suffering from an injury or illness can receive life-saving treatment than was possible when private veterinary clinics were used. This can range from orthopedic surgery to heartworm treatment. ATA gives renewed hope to the staff and volunteers at TLAC (the city shelter) who see a brighter future for the pets in their care.

Recognizing that spay/neuter, veterinary care and other pet care resources help tackle pet homelessness, the partners collaborate to provide these services to residents with limited resources. For example, through P.A.L.S. (Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors), TLAC, EmanciPET and Blue Dog Rescue have joined with Meals on Wheels and More for the past two years to provide free vet services to pets of the homebound during Annual Pet Wellness Fairs. The most recent fair reached 119 pets with spaying/neutering and/or vaccinations and wellness exams. The partners also offer similar wellness events in different Austin communities.

Undoubtedly, due to the Partnership, Austin’s at-risk pets have more resources than ever before. As a result, more pets’ lives are being saved. A key way to track this impact is the ASPCA Dashboard, described in Section F. For example, looking at the year-to-date analysis of key indicators for Q3 2010 vs. Q3 year-to-date figures for 2006 (the year prior to the launch of the Partnership), the partners can document successes such as a 42% increase in adoptions, a 150% increase in targeted spay/neuter, and a 15% increase in Live Release Rate. The individual partners also keep track of their own services and outputs not directly listed on the Dashboard, for example ATA reports 400 dogs receiving heartworm treatment annually; however, their efforts all aim towards achieving a reduction in the number of homeless pets.

The complementary, cooperative and collaborative nature of the Partnership and the benefits they have achieved for Austin’s pets have fostered greater public awareness and support for animal welfare issues. This is demonstrated in several key areas: volunteers, fundraising, and government funding.

First, the partners have seen tremendous growth in both the number of volunteers and the number of volunteer hours. For example, AHS went from 250 active volunteers tallying 46,000 hours in 2006 to 750 active volunteers in 2010 tallying over 80,000 hours just through October. TLAC, which as you recall from Section F shares volunteers with AHS, saw an impressive 37,000 volunteer hours over the past year. The foster care program at AHS went from 760 pets in foster homes in 2006 to 1,336 in 2010 just through October. This past year, TLAC hired a foster care coordinator who works closely with the foster care coordinator at AHS. This position has helped place 1,200 pets from TLAC in foster homes. Those practicing Trap-Neuter-Return on feral cats increased from 468 in 2007 to 1,276 this year through October.

Second, fundraising has increased as a result of the Partnership. The partners now proudly share many of the same donors, including several major donors who recognize the unique and important role each partner serves in the community. As mentioned in Section F, the partners no longer compete for donors, and this too bolsters donors’ comfort in supporting multiple agencies. The collaboration also helped secure major grants from PetSmart Charities including $300,000 to AHS for feral cat spay/neuter and $150,000 to EmanciPET for public spay/neuter. Additionally, with expertise and financial support from the ASPCA, AHS created a new website and developed an effective on-line fundraising strategy that resulted in a 165% increase in on-line donations from $55,000 (2006) to $146,000 (2009). They recently held two on-line campaigns for shelter pets in need of medical care and far surpassed their $3,000 goals in both by raising $16,000 in one and $13,000 in another.

Third, Austin’s citizens have applied greater pressure on the city to help pets. This has resulted in the approval of a new city shelter which is currently under construction and funding such as $50,000 given to treat parvovirus which saved 100 puppies’ lives this past year. Most recently, the council approved approximately $1 million in additional animal welfare funding for a variety of programs including: adoptions, spay/neuter, veterinary care for injured or sick shelter pets, emergency veterinary care funds for low-income pet owners, parvovirus prevention, behavioral evaluations and rehabilitation plans for shelter pets, foster care, public awareness campaigns, and outreach to at-risk populations.

Unquestionably, the lives of Austin’s pets have benefitted from the Partnership through more resources for their care and a growing commitment to animal welfare in the community overall.

Evolution
In addition to the aforementioned achievements of the Partnership, success can also be seen in the relationship amongst the partners’ Board of Directors. When the Partnership first formed, the board members from all the groups attended a joint meeting to learn about the collaboration. Over the years, they have toured and visited each other’s facilities in order to better understand the issues in the community and the niche each organization can fill. This year, the boards are having a joint holiday party. This further demonstrates how the Partnership has produced collaboration at all levels of the partner organizations.

Karen Medicus of the ASPCA, who facilitates the Partnership, notes how amazing it is to see the leaders of these groups in action - how whenever challenges or issues arrive, they come together to collectively face them, working through their differences to achieve the best outcomes for the animals. These partners are truly a model of collaboration and a beacon of inspiration and hope to those wishing to help others and improve their communities.