
**A REVIEW OF THE ANIMAL SERVICES UNIT
OF THE MIAMI-DADE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT DIVISION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the request of the County Manager, the Office of Strategic Business Management, Performance Improvement Division (OSBM/PI) conducted a review of the Animal Services Unit of the Miami-Dade Police Department. This review identified best practices and offers recommendations across four broad categories related to animal care and control: organizational placement, management, and funding; service priorities; facilities; and community relations and partnerships. Below is a summary of key findings and recommendations for each category.

Organizational Placement, Management, and Funding

In Florida and around the country, animal control agencies in large cities and counties typically are independent and autonomous. Exceptions tend to be placed in departments having complimentary functions, such as neighborhood services, public health, or public safety departments. Although outsourcing may provide public relations benefits to a jurisdiction by deflecting negative public sentiment, this practice is increasingly rare and not recommended by animal care experts. OSBM/PI recommends that the Animal Services Unit be transitioned out of the Miami-Dade Police Department and established either as a standalone department or combined with complimentary neighborhood-oriented services in a new department.

All best practice jurisdictions studied are managed by a veterinarian or other seasoned animal care specialist. These professionals bring with them specialized knowledge and experience in animal care and control, including an understanding of the health and behavioral issues that are central to the animal services function. Miami-Dade County should conduct a national recruitment to identify an animal care and control professional to lead the Animal Services Unit; the Humane Society of the United States can provide assistance in this effort.

Budgeted funding for all but one of the best practice jurisdictions studied is above the minimum of \$4 per capita recommended by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). While all jurisdictions studied are supported by both ad valorem and service-related funding, the ratios of these sources vary widely from agency to agency. Relative to these jurisdictions, Miami-Dade County lies near the bottom both in terms of per capita spending and general fund support. Over the course of several years, the Animal Services Unit's budget should be brought more into line with those of its high-performing peers and with HSUS/ICMA-recommended funding levels.

Service Priorities

Animal care and control agencies regarded as successful were found to have reconciled their often-competing "care" and "control" functions, balancing traditional public health and safety roles (focusing on rabies vaccination and stray animal pick-up) with a new emphasis on fostering humane population control and facilitating animal adoption. Increasingly, best practice jurisdictions work cooperatively with private sector animal welfare organizations, establishing complimentary programs and planning strategically for the future. The Animal Services Unit has made progress toward such an orientation since its transition to the Miami-Dade Police Department. A newly selected director should be tasked with continue strategically in this direction.

Facilities

State of the art animal shelters, according to the International City/County Management Association, “must have the disease prevention components of a hospital, the functional capabilities of a police station, and the user-friendly appeal of a library.” Despite these requisites, many jurisdictions’ shelters, including that of Miami-Dade, are aged and ill-designed for their purpose. A dilapidated facility can harm not only public perception but the health and well-being of potentially adoptable animals. With this in mind, OSBM/PI recommends that the County develop a multi-year capital funding strategy for the Animal Services Unit to secure substantial shelter improvements.

Furthermore, most jurisdictions with state-of-the-art shelter facilities (whether newly constructed or renovated) reported strong cooperative partnerships providing considerable benefits to the capital improvement process. These partnerships vary in nature and scope, from “friends-of” organizations helping to raise funds and secure corporate sponsorships, to public/private joint ventures in pursuit of shared new sheltering and adoption center facilities. OSBM/PI will work with the Animal Services Unit in investigating and pursuing such cooperative opportunities.

Community Relations and Partnerships

Well-regarded animal care and control agencies are notable for their solid community relations and strong partnerships. This study revealed no single formula among best practice jurisdictions for successful community relations; however, each jurisdiction demonstrates strength in at least one of the following areas: community engagement through advisory boards, volunteer programs, and not-for-profit “friends of” organizations; community education; and community collaboration through regional coalitions and alliances. The first of these, community engagement, is an essential starting point for the Animal Services Unit. Provided appropriate channels for contributing their time and talents, members of the public can then assist the Animal Services Unit not only with animal care but with long-range planning, fundraising, community education, and development of broader alliances and strategic partnerships throughout the animal welfare community. OSBM/PI will work with a newly appointed director to help establish a productive model for leveraging community support through volunteer programs, advisory and planning assistance, and fund raising.

SCOPE

In January of this year, the County Manager requested that the Office of Strategic Business Management, Performance Improvement Division conduct a best practices review of the Animal Services Unit (ASU) of the Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) in response to concerns raised by County Commissioners, members of the public, and the media. In addition to this internal review, the County Manager's Office and the Office of the Inspector General jointly contracted with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) in March to perform a peer review and assessment of the ASU through that organization's Animal Services Consultation Program. An HSUS final report is slated for release in mid-September.

The scope of this review is limited and intended not to overlap with that of the HSUS review, which will provide more specific procedural and policy recommendations related to the day-to-day operation and management of the ASU. This review focuses on *best practices* and provides high-level recommendations related to organizational placement, management, and funding; service priorities; facilities; and community relations and partnerships. OSBM/PI has coordinated with HSUS to minimize duplication of effort.

BACKGROUND

The ASU is responsible for the enforcement of State law and County code related to the control and care of animals, principally Chapter 828 of the Florida Statutes and Chapter 5 of the Miami-Dade County Code. Key responsibilities under these rules are licensing of dogs; enforcing vaccination requirements for dogs and cats; protecting the public from stray and dangerous dogs; and investigating animal cruelty cases.

In addition to these enforcement functions, the ASU operates an animal shelter and clinic seven days a week, providing vaccination and spay/neuter services. This shelter is the only public animal shelter in the county; importantly, it is also the only *open-admittance* animal shelter. A satellite office and clinic located in South Dade offers licensing, vaccination, and spay/neuter services. ASU operates a Mobile Animal Care vehicle (MAC) that provides off-site spay/neuter and adoption services several days each week.

The ASU took in approximately 32,000 animals in calendar year 2003. Of those, 66% were euthanized, 14% were adopted, and 3% were redeemed by their owners. Of those animals euthanized, 86% were considered potentially adoptable. Also in calendar year 2003, the ASU responded to nearly 30,000 calls for service, performed 9,342 spay/neuter operations, removed 5,338 dead animals from public rights-of-way, and investigated 1,458 animal cruelty cases resulting in 560 warnings and issuance of 457 civil citations.

The ASU budget for fiscal year 2003-04 is \$5.575 million. The majority of this budget comes from proprietary operations, with only \$900,000 coming from the Countywide General Fund. In addition to these budgeted amounts, MDPD provides approximately \$1.5 million in unbudgeted personnel. This additional personnel consists of one civilian and 10 sworn officers, several of whom are on light duty or are relieved of duty, and supplements a staff of 81 full-time equivalents. Although the ASU is ostensibly fully proprietary, it requires consistent general fund

support. The unit's principal revenue sources are license tag sales, shelter fees, and code violation fines; additional revenue is generated through a variety of means, including lien research fees, breeders permit fees, and sales associated with the MAC. Special purpose trust funds that had combined balances of more than \$1.5 million in 2001 have been substantially depleted; these funds now total less than \$70,000.

The ASU was transferred to the Miami-Dade Police Department in October 2001 from the Miami-Dade County Public Works Department, where, under the name Animal Care and Control, it had been housed since 1982. Customer service deficiencies were cited as the reason for the transfer. MDPD appeared well-placed to assume the responsibility, with its investigative capacity (including frequent participation with Animal Care and Control in animal-related cases), established community education role, and animal care experience. Furthermore, the unit's animal control officers already were members of the Police Benevolent Association.

Following this transition, two key policy modifications were implemented, significantly reorienting the mission of the ASU. First, healthy animals at the shelter would no longer be euthanized immediately following the state-mandated holding period, but instead would remain available for adoption as long as they remained in good health. In support of this policy, all animals received health assessments and vaccinations immediately upon arrival at the shelter. The ASU sought to build partnerships with rescue groups to increase the likelihood of adoption and began advertising adoptable animals on the ASU website. Second, with the intent of tackling the county's serious animal overpopulation situation, the ASU instituted a free spay and neuter program for cats and dogs below the weight of 50 pounds; it is perhaps the nation's only fully subsidized spay/neuter program. Partnerships with local veterinarians and purchase of the Mobile Animal Care vehicle supported this ambitious program. While the revamped unit was initially hailed as a success, in recent months public support has waned while complaints against the ASU have mounted.

METHODOLOGY

OSBM/PI sought first to understand the legal and cultural context of animal care and control in the United States and Florida, including traditions, trends, and emergent issues of consensus and contention. Subject matter experts assisted in identifying leading jurisdictions in the animal care and control field; ten jurisdictions (including six best practice and four peer jurisdictions) were surveyed on a broad array of topics. Nine more jurisdictions provided information concerning specific topics of interest, such as regional partnerships and advisory board structure. OSBM also conducted a site visit to the ASU shelter, interviewed current and former ASU staff, and consulted with additional County personnel on a variety of subjects. Attachments A-C provide a listing of research contacts and jurisdictions, references, and best practices by category.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review identifies best practices and offers recommendations in four broad categories related to animal care and control: organizational placement, management, and funding; service priorities; facilities; and community relations and partnerships. In summary, OSBM/PI recommends that the ASU should be separated from the Miami-Dade Police Department,

managed by a nationally recruited animal care professional, and funded at an enhanced level. Current service priorities appear to align with best practices, but need to be implemented in a more effective and sustainable manner. The unit's facilities are in need of improvement; OSBM/PI recommends a multi-year capital funding plan that takes into account potential shelter-related partnerships. All of the above should be pursued in the context of improved community relations and partnerships, built on the foundation of community input in the form of an advisory board and community involvement in the form of a well-ordered volunteer program.

Each of the following sections and subsections presents key findings and recommendations in brief, followed by supporting information, case studies, and/or relevant historical data.

Organizational Placement, Management, and Funding

OSBM/PI identified a number of factors contributing to the success of a public animal care and control agency; primary among these are organizational autonomy and flexibility, managerial expertise and experience in the animal welfare field, and budgetary strength and diversification. The ASU comes up short on each of these counts, limited operationally by MDPD policy and procedure, lacking in experienced professional leadership, and reliant on program-related revenue to perform an intensive task serving all county residents. To provide the ASU the flexibility and resources it requires, OSBM/PI recommends that the ASU be transitioned out of MDPD, that an animal care professional be recruited to lead the unit, and that the unit's budget gradually be restructured and enhanced to meet certain nationally recognized funding formulas.

Organizational Placement

In Florida and around the country, animal control agencies in large cities and counties typically are independent and autonomous. Exceptions tend to be placed in departments having complimentary functions, such as neighborhood services, public health, or broad, multidisciplinary public safety departments. Although outsourcing may provide public relations benefits to a jurisdiction by deflecting negative public sentiment, this practice is increasingly rare and not recommended by animal care experts. OSBM/PI recommends that the unit be transitioned out of the MDPD and established either as a standalone department or combined with complimentary neighborhood-oriented services in a new department. (See Attachment D: Best Practice Jurisdictions – Organizational Placement.)

Typically, according to subject matter experts, animal care and control agencies are located within police departments only in small to mid-size cities; few successful models of such arrangements are available. While certain benefits may presently accrue to the ASU as a result of its placement within MDPD – such as direct access to police officers for arrest purposes, additional staff rotations, and the support of a large, well-resourced department – these appear to be outweighed by a number of drawbacks.

In accordance with MDPD policy, managerial positions in the ASU must be staffed by sworn police officers. This contributes to elevated staffing costs, removes officers from direct police work, and restricts opportunities for positioning civilian animal care professionals at high levels within the organization. MDPD policy regarding training has further negatively impacted the

unit. Pursuant to Chapter 828 of the Florida Statutes, Animal Control Officers must complete 40 hours of Florida Animal Control Association-approved training prior to issuing citations; MDPD's unwillingness for its personnel to receive civilian training has resulted in a deficiency of certified Animal Control Officers at the ASU. Above all, experts in the field underscore the need for clear distinction between the missions of law enforcement and animal care and control (and the potential of law enforcement agencies to blur the two), as well as the critical importance of professional knowledge of animal care and shelter management, which often is lacking in law enforcement agencies.

OSBM/PI's recommendation to transition the unit out of MDPD would require significant adjustments to compensate for the loss of centralized services now provided to the ASU through various support bureaus. However, potential benefits of such a transition include greater flexibility in asserting the unique identity of the ASU, a more-equal footing with private animal welfare organizations, and a position of appropriate weight and significance from which to provide community leadership and to recruit key personnel.

In approaching a transition, special consideration must be given to staffing, not only to meet needs associated with realigning support functions, but to compensate for the loss of light-duty and relieved-of-duty officers now supplementing the ASU staff. Furthermore, particular attention would have to be given to ensuring that adjustments would not negatively impact the unit's already strained record-keeping systems, which have been a persistent source of public complaint. A staged, carefully planned transition would also be required to avoid potential supervisory issues relating to uniformed and civilian reporting.

OSBM/PI does not recommend outsourcing the animal services function at this time. Although outsourcing may provide public relations benefits to a jurisdiction by deflecting negative public sentiment, this practice is increasingly rare and not recommended by animal care experts. The public/private partnership it establishes shifts the burden of animal care and control without necessarily contributing to a sustainable improvement in services. At worst, such an arrangement could impede opportunities for building a broad network of partnerships toward a comprehensive countywide animal welfare strategy. Experts point out that jurisdictions often fail to reap the savings benefits anticipated from outsourcing while experiencing a decline in service levels and continued, and even increased, public complaint. In view of an unfortunate tradition of antagonism between private animal welfare organizations and public animal care and control agencies, successful partnerships have been particularly difficult to effect. Successful relationships are built primarily at the point of overlapping interests: humane population control and animal adoption.

Furthermore, no candidate organization with sufficient capacity or inclination has been identified at this time. The most likely candidate, Miami-Dade's largest private animal welfare organization, the Humane Society of Greater Miami (HSGM), revised its policies in 2002 to cease accepting stray animals and to become a limited-admittance shelter focused on adoptable animals. This policy is in conflict with the statutory animal care and control responsibilities assigned to ASU.

