

INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

# Austin Animal Center Engagement Strategies

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

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The City of Austin Animal Center (AAC) is seeking to engage with three distinct and diverse areas of Travis County to develop neighborhood specific outreach programming. This project targets three zip codes within Austin and unincorporated Travis County: 78617, 78702, and 78724. These zip codes were chosen due to the disproportionately high number of animals who are brought in to the center from the areas as well as the low number of successful return to owner rates that occur within them. The International City/County Managers Association was contracted by the City to develop community engagement strategies and recommendations for the targeted zip codes as well as recommended performance measures to quantify outcomes.

Through research of best practices, staff and stakeholder interviews, review of the AAC's community analysis, and a ride-along in the targeted neighborhoods, the ICMA team identified a number of challenges to engagement, including specific barriers to trust; a transient population and gentrification that may impact neighborhood cohesion; and diverse cultural norms around pet ownership and care.

ICMA has provided specific recommendations to leverage existing city resources and forge new community partners to share information and make connections with neighbors in the targeted zip codes. The Austin Police Department, Communications and Public Information Office, Austin Transportation, and Austin Energy have established programs and outreach initiatives that have built credibility in the focus communities. AAC engagement staff can build internal relationships with staff in these areas to capitalize on existing efforts. Although the AAC has already established partnerships with a number of nonprofits in the city, there is opportunity to expand these efforts where the missions of community organizations and the AAC overlap. ICMA has identified potential partnership opportunities with specific groups as well as general principles and tactics for engaging nonprofit partners.

The team has also provided a number of recommendations for internal AAC programs, including creating a strategic marketing campaign that targets specific neighborhoods through social media; deploying a mobile pet resource center; leveraging animal protection officers as engagement resources; and providing all staff with cultural and language resources to more effectively connect with community members.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

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The City of Austin Animal Center (AAC) is seeking to engage with three distinct and diverse areas of Travis County to develop neighborhood specific outreach programming. Outcomes will support the city's no-kill mission, which is to maintain a save rate of at least 95% of dogs and cats entering the center. This project targets three zip codes within Austin and unincorporated Travis County: 78617, 78702, and 78724. These zip codes were chosen due to the disproportionately

high number of animals who are brought in to the center from the areas as well as the low number of successful return to owner rates that occur within them.

The International City/County Managers Association was contracted by the City to develop community engagement strategies and recommendations in order to support efforts to increase community engagement for the targeted zip codes as well as recommended performance measures to quantify outcomes. Specific methodology used by the ICMA team is identified in Appendix A.

## **DEFINITIONS: THE VALUE OF CONSISTENT USE OF TERMS IN COMMUNICATIONS**

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Public participation, often referred to as community engagement across the United States, should be a very deliberate and strategic effort to involve people who live or work in a specific geographic area, or who are otherwise impacted by a decision or process/project, in the creation of goals and plans. The terms “community engagement” and “outreach” are often used interchangeably, but have distinct meaning. It is important when developing an engagement program to have a consistent definition of these terms.

One AAC staff member defined the two terms in the following way:

***Community Engagement:*** Building relationships and having conversations with residents.

***Outreach:*** Providing services in the community.

According to the AAC organizational chart, it appears that those responsible for “engagement” and “outreach” are clearly separated and are viewed as having mutually exclusive roles within the department. A more desirable approach may be to structure the organization in a way that these efforts overlap and work together as the AAC moves forward. It is the finding of this team that there is some confusion between staff, the public, and elected officials regarding these terms. Therefore, we offer the following definitions from Wikipedia, which given that this project is about communicating with community, seemed the most suitable place to turn for clarity in the use of terminology, since it culls knowledge from the public to produce definitions rather than a field of practitioners or academia.

“Community engagement”: the process by which community benefit organizations (nonprofits) and individuals build ongoing, permanent relationships for applying a collective vision for the benefit of a community.

“Outreach”: an activity of providing services to any populations who might not otherwise have access to those services.

In the AAC budget, outreach and services are grouped together which makes the line item, on the surface, appear elevated. Clarity around the definition of outreach for this purpose may be beneficial. Separation of actual outreach (sharing information) and off-site services may help people better understand the multitude of efforts that are being performed in each of the city's zip codes. Due to the on-site clinics (outreach) in these zip codes, information is being shared but actual services are also being delivered.

The immediate goals of AAC appear focused on informing the public about process, educating the public about programs, and providing services in the community. Using appropriate language and defining what information is being provided to the community, through what means and for what purpose, may create better communication pathways between city departments and to elected officials, which will also translate more clearly back to those officials' constituents.

Whether AAC chooses to utilize the definitions provided or prefers more regionally or discipline-specific terms, it may prove useful to further define the roles of community engagement, outreach, and education as it relates to the work plan of the department. For this report, the definitions stated above will be utilized for associated terminology.

## **COMMUNITY ANALYSIS:**

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### **Involving Community in Problem-Solving:**

Hans, Annemarie, and Jennifer Bleiker began working in the 1960's to develop research and recommendations related to what they now call the Standard Development of Informed Consent. Over the last five decades, the group has delivered training to thousands of cities and counties and tens of thousands of individual attendees. The basis of their training and of the various problem-solving techniques they teach across disciplines is that to move toward solution, much less public support of that solution, an entity must first start with a clear identification of the problem. The identified problem in this case is in many ways a symptom of underlying issues and opportunities in the targeted zip codes, including social justice challenges; tensions between groups based on racial and socio-economic challenges; employment and transportation issues; and gentrification. What may be needed, however, is a strategic dialogue about what this means for service delivery from AAC within these zip codes. Obviously, AAC is not able to address all social issues, single-handedly institute neighborhood structures, or engineer large-scale social justice initiatives. Such efforts would be far outside of scope. AAC can, however, become more aware of those larger efforts and work with other departments and partner agencies, even outside of animal services, to play its small role in that overall effort.

**ZIP CODE: 78702**

<b>COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS</b>		
	<b>78702 Zip Code</b>	<b>City of Austin</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	55.6% Hispanic/Latino 27.2% White 14.1% Black or African American 1.1% Asian	35.1% Hispanic/Latino 48.7% White 8.1% Black or African American 6.3% Asian
<b>Rental Housing</b>	54.1%	51.2%
<b>Percent Below Poverty Line</b>	31.2%	18.0%

**ZIP CODE: 78617**

<b>COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS</b>		
	<b>78617 Zip Code</b>	<b>City of Austin</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	65.2% Hispanic/Latino 19.8% White 10.5% Black or African American 2.1% Asian	35.1% Hispanic/Latino 48.7% White 8.1% Black or African American 6.3% Asian
<b>Rental Housing</b>	22.2%	51.2%
<b>Percent Below Poverty Line</b>	21.1%	18.0%

**ZIP CODE: 78724**

<b>COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS</b>		
	<b>78624 Zip Code</b>	<b>City of Austin</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	63.3% Hispanic/Latino 8.3% White 26.7% Black or African American 0.5% Asian	35.1% Hispanic/Latino 48.7% White 8.1% Black or African American 6.3% Asian
<b>Rental Housing</b>	43.5%	51.2%
<b>Percent Below Poverty Line</b>	32.4%	18.0%

## Challenges Identified:

*Lack of Trust:* There is a perception of a lack of trust in government among residents in the targeted zip codes. According to interviewed staff and council members, this distrust stems from inequity in access to city services and infrastructure and a negative view of law enforcement, including uniformed animal protection officers (APO). Staff indicated that, especially in the 78724 zip code, the city has failed to deliver on promises to neighborhoods, including an important thoroughfare connection that would connect neighborhoods and allow for more efficient bus service and a significantly delayed recreation center. Interviewed staff noted a general distrust among residents of uniformed officers, and district council members shared that constituents avoid a uniformed APO because they feel the city is not there as a resource but to take something from them – either through removal of their pet or issuance of a citation. In one neighborhood in 78724, APOs interviewed expressed a concern for their safety in responding to calls in the area because of a past incident where a resident threatened an officer with a firearm during an attempt to return a loose dog.

The lack of trust between the city and the residents in these zip codes adversely impacts animal control efforts, especially engagement initiatives. Although this lack of trust is much broader than just animal services and can impact many other services that are offered by the City of Austin, overcoming this issue is essential to lowering the intake from these zip codes.

*Transient Population:* The high proportion of renter-occupied housing in neighborhoods was identified by staff as an impediment to animal services in the zip codes, especially in 78702, where the percentage of rental housing is greater than in the city as a whole. There is a perception that renters are less likely to be connected with their neighbors, and therefore less likely to have the resources to return loose dogs to their owners. Renters may also be less likely to have connections with established community resources that staff can leverage for engagement programs.

*Gentrification:* Gentrification was often noted as a challenge in each of the target zip codes, but is especially prevalent in 78702, one of the city's oldest established Hispanic neighborhoods which is experiencing rapid redevelopment. As new residents move into established neighborhoods, cultural and language differences can create barriers to connecting residents to the AAC and to each other.

*Cultural Norms:* District council members noted that their constituents may have different views and values of pet ownership and care than members of the animal advocacy community, particularly in terms of sterilization and keeping pets in a fenced enclosure. Council members also shared that residents would be reluctant to pay a fee to reclaim a pet at the AAC because they can easily replace the pet at no cost through friends and neighbors who breed at home.

## AUSTIN ANIMAL CENTER: CURRENT EFFORTS

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While the AAC seeks to improve its outreach efforts in the identified zip codes, it is important to note that Center staff, as well as other community partners, have had some outreach success that can be leveraged as they move forward. These existing engagement strategies occur both formally and informally and are identified below. Suggested strategies for expanding and strengthening these efforts are detailed in the recommendation section of this report.

**Spay/Neuter Efforts:** In support of the city's no-kill mission, the City of Austin and Travis County invest in the spaying and neutering of animals within their jurisdictions. According to the AAC website, in 2015 the City and County budgeted \$543,000 for community spay and neuter clinics and estimated that, in that same year, 40,000 owned and sheltered pets were sterilized.

*Free Spay/Neuter Clinics:* In cooperation with EmanciPet, the City of Austin and Travis County offer free spay/neuter clinics to residents where they live. The EmanciPet Mobile Clinic travels to different neighborhoods in Travis County where residents can bring their animals to be sterilized. Included with the surgery, pets also receive vaccinations for rabies and DHRP or FVRCP, microchip, and medications for post-surgical care.

*Rabies Clinics:* As Austin is home to the largest urban bat colony in North America, rabies outreach is an important program. AAC works with Emancipet to provide two rabies clinics annually. Pets brought to these clinics receive free vaccines and a microchip, and visits may include spay/neuter surgery.

*Spay/Neuter Outreach:* Austin Animal Center staff participate in an outreach strategy to transport pets from high-intake neighborhoods to EmanciPet for sterilization and vaccinations. Pets are then returned to their homes by AAC staff.

*Community Cats Program:* The Community Cats program offers spay/neuter vouchers to individuals who bring in cats they have found in the community that are over six weeks old. The AAC also works with Austin Humane Society to sterilize cats in the Austin area. Cats are spayed or neutered and then returned to the location where they are found. AAC credits this program for saving approximately 1,200 cats annually.

**Return to Owner Efforts:** The Austin Animal Center makes every effort to support pet owners' efforts to keep pets in their yards or return pets to their owners. As part of their outreach initiative they provide fencing materials to low income pet owners, microchip pets, and provide identification tags. Austin Animal Center data showed that in 2016, 3,388 cats and dogs were returned to their owner which is an increase from 2007 of 207 pets returned.

*Microchip Clinics* – Austin Animal Center offers free microchips and ID tags to pet owners at their facility. The AAC has also offered free microchip clinics in the field. Animal Protection Officers (APOs) go door to door inviting neighbors to get their pets'



microchipped. These events serve pet owners but also allow APOs to engage residents in a non-threatening way.

*Fencing Program* – The AAC provides fencing to low-income pet owners in order to support pet owners’ compliance with laws requiring dogs to be kept on their property in an adequate space. Pet owners are encouraged to apply for the program by APOs. APOs then drop off fencing materials and fences must be constructed by the pet owner within 14 days or donated materials may be reclaimed by AAC staff.

**Education:** In support of their mission “To provide animal services to the public in order to educate and prevent animal homelessness and promote humane, compassionate treatment of animals and responsible pet ownership” the Center seeks opportunities to offer education to the public about Center services and how residents might play a part in caring for animals in their community.

*Community Events* – The Center currently maintains a list of 57 “information partners” who receive information that they can post for public view. These partners include city departments, non-profits and schools.

The Austin Animal Center is actively working to educate the community about the importance of rabies vaccination, bite prevention, responsible pet ownership, and adoption opportunities. The Center offers classes, shelter tours, and table displays at any school or community event to which they are invited.

**Relationship Building Efforts:** As part of the Center’s informal engagement and outreach strategies, staff is encouraged to build relationships with the community they serve. Interviewed staff recognized the apprehension in some neighborhoods to work with AAC staff because those they are most familiar with are uniformed APOs who are considered to be law enforcement. APOs and public outreach educators work particularly hard in high intake neighborhoods to build trust.

Public Outreach Educator Luis Herrera spoke to the importance of starting the process of relationship building in non-threatening ways that do not ask the homeowner to participate in any activity. He identified success in neighborhoods where he introduced the AAC to residents by first giving out leashes and collars. Other interviewed staff agreed that the best way to build trust in the field is to have friendly, casual interactions with neighbors. Herrera then built on his initial encounters by identifying neighborhood leaders, or cultural brokers, that understand and support the mission of the Austin Animal Center. Cultural brokers then serve to strengthen the relationship between the residents and the city department by spreading awareness about the Center’s work.

Field Services Program Manager Mark Sloat has also found value in educating a neighborhood leader on the rules of pet ownership so that they might share the information with their

community. Sloat worked with landlords to help educate residents about the need to fence dogs and has since seen a drop in loose dogs in those areas.

**Moving Forward:** The Austin Animal Center has recently begun implementation of significant internal changes that will put a stronger emphasis on community engagement in a way that positions the Center to be viewed as a resource for support and information.

*Engagement Staffing* – The Austin Animal Center has recently re-organized some of its staffing to create an Engagement Manager position. This position will be responsible for neighborhood level programming and volunteer services.

*Pet Resource Center*- The Pet Resource Center was formerly known as the “intake” where people would go to surrender their pets. The AAC is doing away with terms such as “surrender” and “intake” in favor of providing positive alternatives to pet owners. These alternatives may include re-homing, meeting with the Center’s behavioral team, finding pet-friendly housing, etc.

*Adoption Process* – The Center is dedicated to streamlining their adoption process in an effort to encourage people to adopt shelter animals and become familiar with the Center’s services. Currently potential adopters are asked to fill out a lengthy form even if they have not fully committed to adopt. Staff is working on a shorter form that will obtain required contact information but will not discourage potential adopters who are still exploring the idea.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: CITY RESOURCES

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### **Austin Police Department:**

*Contact Identified:* Community Liaison Office

APO officers expressed a positive working relationship with the Austin Police Department (APD) and identified several current examples of collaboration, including participation in the National Night Out program. The Engagement Manager should build a relationship with the APD Community Liaison Office, in coordination with their Public Information Officer, to facilitate increased participation in police-sponsored events and neighborhood education throughout the year. The police have built a strong network of community partners to complete their work more effectively and to share information; the AAC can take advantage of this and share information through the same channels. For example, APD hosts commander meetings regularly in each district. Residents that are invested in preventing neighborhood crime might also share concerns related to animal services and safety. Messaging to attendees might be about brainstorming ways to effectively reconnect stray animals and owners without leaving the neighborhood.

### **Communications and Public Information Office:**

*Contact Identified:* Marion Sanchez and Larry Schneider; Community Engagement Consultants

In May 2016, the City of Austin’s Task Force on Community Engagement issued a report of findings and recommendations for the city’s engagement program. One of the Task Force’s key recommendations was to invest in creating capacity and trust with underrepresented communities (Recommendation 4A). The engagement manager should connect with the efforts underway to implement this recommendation, assuring that resources are used wisely and that information and education strategies deployed by AAC will be complementary and strategic to the overall effort to improve participation, understanding, and connectedness within the targeted zip codes. This larger effort provides opportunity to work with outside entities such as the University of Texas Division of Diversity and Community Engagement.

A theme of the Task Force’s report is to “make it easier for people to give input in ways that are convenient, accessible and appropriate to them.” The AAC is already working toward this goal by partnering with other agencies for greater access and coordination. The report suggests partnering with council members to participate in town hall meetings and identifying “go to” spaces in areas as additional strategies. The Public Information Office has created an email group for employees engaged in this work. The AAC engagement team should participate in that group.

### **Spirit of East Austin:**

*Contact Identified:* Lara Foss, Corporate Communications Marketing Consultant

The Spirit of East Austin is a community engagement project focused on improving economic development opportunities in a specified section of the city. The ideas and discussion facilitated by the project shows that some residents do believe that education is a promising, though time-intensive path toward bridging gaps between races and social classes in the area. Ninety projects identified through the Spirit of East Austin project were completed by the City of Austin in 2016. While all projects do not necessarily involve outreach opportunities, some of these likely do target the same neighborhoods and people with whom AAC would like to reach with both messaging (information) and education as well as service delivery. As the city continues to make steps toward realizing the suggestions and ideas that have been provided, there may be opportunities to include education about animal services. Increased connection to Planning and other city departments already engaged in this work may produce beneficial outcomes for the AAC.

### **Austin Public Transportation**

*Contact Identified:* Jackie Nirenberg, Community Involvement

The City of Austin public transportation system, specifically buses provided through Capital Metro, could be accessed for messaging to riders. Residents of the identified zip codes as well as other Austin residents using the bus service could be targeted through this venue. Capital Metro has a Community Involvement office that might be contacted for this purpose.

## **Austin Energy**

*Contact Identified:* Austin Energy Outreach

As Austin's publicly owned electric utility, this department was identified multiple times as having great access to residents and a good reputation. Austin Energy houses a Community Outreach division that puts on and/or participates in several community events annually. The AAC could partner with Austin Energy to share ideas, provide messaging and participate in outreach opportunities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS: EXTERNAL EXAMPLES**

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As no-kill strategies become more common in the United States, Austin is well-positioned to create communication pathways and strategy-sharing opportunities among the cities and counties who embrace them. While Austin has been a leader, it can continue to learn from, and reinforce its strategies, through those that follow.

### **Pima County, Arizona:**

Pima County, Arizona is working toward similar animal service goals and may provide a useful resource of ideas and peer support. The International City/County Management Association shared a case study completed by the Alliance for Innovation on Pima County, Arizona, in its May 2017 issue of Public Management magazine; highlighting Pima County's successes and challenges in saving the lives of more than 90% of its animals. While the focus of the innovation is on mechanisms to promote private donations for the cause, Pima County touts a positive media relationship through which employees have shared information and created an understanding of the problem and the need to save animals both from a pet lovers and a public health vantage point as critical to its effort.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

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AAC staff has completed a community assessment for each zip code, which identifies potential community partners and resources. These resources can be leveraged to effectively connect with targeted populations to increase participation in services and behaviors that ultimately impact intake and return to owner rates.

**Neighborhood Liaisons:** Creation of some mechanism for greater involvement from interested community members from the neighborhoods identified may provide an opportunity for deliberative dialogue to create new strategies. A task force or other representative committee would serve this purpose as would a partnership with Austin Interfaith or Conversation Corps to host conversations about the underlying issues and purpose of laws enforced by AAC. This may also provide a mechanism to increase understanding about culture and behaviors among

differing ethnic and socio-economic groups—all of whom may believe they are doing exactly what they should be doing regarding pet management and lack the understanding necessary to properly interpret actions of other groups. Council members supported the concept of dialogue and conversation among their constituencies and AAC. Cultivating these opportunities through the representatives may allow for a unified and supported approach with the strategy for AAC to provide more listening than instruction during these sessions.

**Faith-based organizations:** Places of worship, where the community gathers to practice their faith, are generally places where their members feel safe, have a level of trust, and share information. Engagement staff can connect with residents in partnership with faith-based organizations by:

- Reaching out to the leadership at each faith-based organizations to gauge their interest in sharing information and initiating a conversation with their membership about animal resources needed in the community.
- Identifying individual members of faith-based organizations who are interested in animals and working with the AAC as liaisons with their organizations and communities. This role could include providing resources to help people find their lost pets, or helping people return found pets to their home.
- Participating in community events that are hosted by the faith-based organizations and partnering to market AAC-specific events, such as microchip and spay/neuter clinics.
- Provide information about any events that AAC is hosting or even coordinate and have the faith based organizations host Animal Services events in their communities, such as microchipping.

The faith-based organizations in each zip code that Animal Services can potentially work with include:

#### 78724

- Decker United Methodist Church -- 8304 Decker Lane, Austin, TX 78724
- Austin Hindu Temple and Community Center -- 9801 Decker Lake Rd, Austin, TX 78724

#### 78617

- Haynie Chapel -- 16309 Greenwood Dr, Garfield, TX 78617
- Del Valle Missionary Baptist Church -- 3320 Highway 71 E, Del Valle, TX 78617-3200
- The Edge Community Church -- 5612 Malarkey Rd, Del Valle, TX 78617
- Austin Buddhist Center -- 5816 Ross Rd, Del Valle, Texas 78617
- Wat Buddhnanachat -- 8105 Linden Rd, Del Valle, Texas 78617
- The LORD's Vineyard Christian Church -- 5326 Hwy 71 E, Austin TX 78617

## 78702

- New Hope Baptist Church -- 2405 E 16th St, Austin, TX 78702
- Mt. Zion Baptist Church -- 2938 East 13th St, Austin, TX 78702
- Our Lady of Guadalupe -- 1206 E 9th St, Austin, TX 78702
- Ebenezer Baptist Church -- 1010 E. 10th St, Austin, TX 78702

**Nonprofits:** Each zip code has social or community service nonprofit organizations based within the area or offering services to area residents. Although each nonprofit has a specific purpose or services, there are opportunities to collaborate where missions or issues overlap. For example, Meals On Wheels Central Texas, an organization that provides prepared meal delivery service to seniors and adults with disabilities, also provides delivery of pet food and supplies and transport to vet and grooming services through their PALS (Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors) program. The AAC engagement staff can partner with Meals on Wheels to provide transportation to AAC services and can encourage PALS volunteers to refer clients for AAC programs, such as the fencing program. Other recommendations for coordinating with nonprofits include:

- Establish relationships with nonprofit staff and leadership to better understand their mission and services in the targeted neighborhoods. Collaborative efforts with non-profit organizations will vary widely and should be based the organizations' value proposition and shared goals. For example, Habitat for Humanity is a leader in addressing poor housing conditions and leverages volunteers to make improvements. AAC engagement staff might pursue a partnership with Habitat to leverage skilled volunteers to build or repair fences in targeted zip codes, which can impact the number of loose dogs in the area and help residents keep their pets at home.
- Propose partnership opportunities that are mutually beneficial. Non-profits are often limited in resources and may be wary of entering into a one-sided partnership. Organizations will be more willing to collaborate in an effort that advances their stated goals and mission.
- Collect information on nonprofit services that may be relevant and create a resource kit for APOs in the field. Individual APOs sometimes make referrals for services that can help a resident keep a pet in their home. Creating a kit and training APOs in the resources available will expand and standardize this practice.
- Provide information about any events that AAC is hosting or coordinate with the nonprofit to host Animal Services events in their communities, such as microchipping.
- Where practical, be present at non-profit facilities to talk to people directly and, at minimum, have information about AAC available at nonprofit facilities.

The team recommends pursuing partnerships with following nonprofits, as they offer direct services in the community to residents of the target zip codes and have a connection to the AAC

engagement goals. A large number of nonprofit organizations have been identified within the targeted zip code, but beginning with a few strategic partnerships will help the AAC create a framework for collaboration and evaluate its effectiveness.

*Meals on Wheels:* Existing collaborative efforts with Meals on Wheels were mentioned in staff interviews. Meals on Wheels offers a unique chance to be in the zip codes directly interacting with people who receive their services and may have a pet or know others who do. Staff from Meals on Wheels will also know which of their clients have pets and may need services. Though home delivery of meals is the primary service they offer, other programs include Hand in Home Care and Veteran Services which again work directly with people in their homes. Of particular interest could also be the PALS (Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors) program through Meals on Wheels, which provides food for animals that are companions for seniors, as well as transportation to veterinary care services.

*Emancipet:* As with Meals on Wheels, the AAC has already built a collaborative relationship with Emancipet, which can serve as a foundation for an expanded partnership focusing on engagement. The mission of Emancipet, which is to provide low cost spay and neuter services and veterinary care, aligns perfectly with the goals of the AAC in targeted zip codes. Leveraging contacts each organization already has in the zip codes, as well partnering in the community with other resources could reach more pet owners for services, such as spay/neuter.

*Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation:* The GNDC works in the community by rehabilitating and developing low cost housing for low to moderate income families. In interviews, housing challenges were mentioned repeatedly, renters may have to give up their pets if they cannot find affordable pet-friendly housing. The AAC could use the GNDC as a resource to help low to moderate income pet owners find housing where they could keep and care for their pets rather than give them up.

*Austin Revitalization Authority:* The ARA does community, economic and cultural development in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street revitalization area. The ARA targets services and outreach to the 78702 zip code, and may offer an established network for and community events that could offer opportunities for animal services outreach. A partnership with the ARA could help AAC engagement staff in establishing relationships with community members in 78702 to act as neighborhood liaisons.

*YMCA:* There are three YMCA facilities in the target zip codes. Though the YMCAs are based around their physical facilities and the programs that are offered there, they are also key community gathering places for neighbors. The AAC can partner with the YMCA on events and information sharing, and may be able to use the YMCA to gain credibility and trust with community members.

**Government Facilities:** The City of Austin and/or Travis County have a physical presence in each of the targeted zip codes. These facilities can provide opportunities to post information or to host meetings with residents. Recommendations for leveraging government facilities include:

*Schools:* Educating families through their children is a common tool for changing behaviors over time. For example, students learn from a very early age principles of water conservation, recycling, and fire prevention. They go home to their parents encourage behavioral changes in the home. There is an opportunity for AAC to partner with the school district to provide animal care education to students, including the importance of spay/neuter, microchipping, proper fencing or enclosures, and behavioral training. Over time, these efforts could have an impact on intake rates. Engagement staff should reach out to elementary school principals or counselors in the targeted zip codes to see if they can schedule lessons on animal care.

*Libraries and Recreation Centers:* All City of Austin residents have access to libraries or recreation centers, even if there is not a center in their zip code. AAC should contact library staff to explore opportunities to post information or host classes about animal care and other animal services events. These include both Austin Public Libraries as well as the East Travis Gateway Library district (Travis County). Each facility offers various programming, which may also offer opportunities to “piggyback” on the existing programs for distributing information or potentially offering classes related to animal services. Mobile units could locate in their parking lots on weekends to provide services. At minimum, information from Animal Services should be present at library facilities adjacent to the zip codes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS: AUSTIN ANIMAL CENTER STRATEGIES**

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**Marketing and Educational Materials:** The Austin Animal Center should develop and execute a strategic educational campaign targeting the specific behaviors that can help reduce intake and increase reclamation in the targeted zip codes including but not limited to the following efforts:

- Spay/neuter programs
- Microchip programs
- Lost pet reclamation
- Fencing and enclosure resources

Marketing materials should be compelling, and messaging for the campaign should focus on the benefit to the animal and the resident in engaging in the desired behaviors. For example, instead of a flyer listing only the date, time, and cost for a microchip clinic, the materials should focus on why the microchip will help a lost pet get home. The campaign could include the following elements: posters and flyers posted at city facilities, corner stores, parks, and other



community centers; door hangers for door-to-door outreach efforts; informational brochures distributed at tabling events and through the Pet Resource Center; and a Pet Resource Center webpage. Educational materials should be developed in both Spanish and English. Examples of these materials are included in Appendix B.

**Social Media:** Social media is a powerful tool for two-way communication with residents. A deliberative social media strategic can be a low-cost option for disseminating marketing information in an authentic way that resonates with community members. The following are specific recommendations for the use of social media channels:

*Facebook:* The engagement team should develop a Facebook strategy that includes two components: marketing/education and community resources for lost pets. The marketing/education campaign should align with the efforts mentioned in the previous section, and should include sponsored posts targeted to users in the three zip codes. Facebook provides inexpensive tools for location targeting with analytics to measure reach of the campaign and opportunities to boost or sponsor posts to reach a larger audience than is available with organic posts. More information on Facebook marketing tools can be found at [www.facebook.com/business](http://www.facebook.com/business).

Facebook can also be used to monitor animal issues in neighborhoods or as resources to return pets to owners. There are several existing neighborhood-based Facebook groups in the three target zip codes that staff can leverage to share information. Staff should contact the administrators of these groups to seek permission to post educational and event information. APOs and the Pet Resource Center should keep an inventory of active groups to assist in returning pets to homes. The following neighborhood-specific Facebook groups have been identified in the targeted zip codes:

*78702:* Hermanos de East Austin; East Austin: Nuestro Barrio; East Cesar Chaves Neighborhood; Chestnut Commons HOA; Govalle Neighborhood Association

*78617:* Del Valle Community; Del Valle Pets; Del Valle Community Coalition; Del Valle Times; Del Valle-South Austin; Austin Colony Homeowners 78725; Hornsby Glen; Berdoll Farms and Meadows at Berdoll @ Del Valle Texas; Berdoll Farms & Meadows at Berdoll

*78724:* Hornsby Bend Neighborhood; Colony Park & Lakeside Neighborhood Association

*Nextdoor:* Nextdoor is a private social network designed to connect neighbors and communicate about neighborhood-specific issues. Nextdoor users must verify their address before their account is activated. The City of Austin already uses Nextdoor, and the AAC can use Nextdoor in the same manner as Facebook: to target marketing and education materials to a more specific audience. Nextdoor is also an important tool in returning pets to owners. Cities have a tendency to use Nextdoor like other social media

platforms to blast information to a mass audience, but engagement staff should keep in mind that the true value of this platform is to target a message to a very specific geographic area and that users may be more likely to consume information that is targeted and relevant.

**Pet Resource Center:** The AAC is in the process of creating a Pet Resource Center to provide resources to pet owners and others surrendering animals to the shelter. The intent of the resource center is to decrease the number of intakes and empower the community to resolve animal issues. We recommend that the engagement staff create a mobile resource center to share educational and resource information with community members in the targeted zip codes. The mobile resource center could set up alongside the microchip and spay/neuter services provided by Emancipet. Emancipet was praised by both staff and district council members as a trusted partner in the targeted zip codes. The City should capitalize on this goodwill and be visibly present at city-sponsored Emancipet clinics.

At these events, the mobile resource center should provide information on services and programs such as low-cost vet services, microchip and spay/neuter programs, the City's fence materials program, and other resources.

**Animal Protection Officers:** Animal Protection Officers are currently rotated out of their assigned districts every three months. This short period gives the officers very limited opportunity to build relationships and trust in their districts. We recommend that officers spend at least one year in their assigned district before rotating.

Several officers shared instances when they were able to identify resources for pet owners to address outstanding issues. In order to further leverage officers as a resource, the engagement team should provide officers with a pet resource kit with educational materials and all forms in English and Spanish and training on the resources available to pet owners.

**Engagement Staff:** The leader of the department's engagement division should consider becoming involved in other citywide engagement initiatives and seek greater understanding in neighborhood dynamics by asking questions of partners and then working to implement the new knowledge into the department's work plans.

**Fencing Volunteer Program:** The City provides fencing materials to eligible pet owners to help keep their pets on their property, but the recipient is required to complete the installation. Several staff members mentioned cases where the recipient did not have the skills or physical capability to install the fence. The engagement team should partner with community organizations in the targeted zip codes to organize a volunteer program to build fences. The program would enhance the effectiveness of the City's fence program and empower the community to help their neighbors in addressing animal issues.

**Fee Clarity:** The project team struggled to clearly identify the fee structures associated with reconnecting a lost pet and owner at the center, with the understanding that the fees are

sometimes waived to achieve this goal. The same lack of clarity exists among council members and may be impacting return rates in these zip codes. Providing materials that set out clear guidelines may help lower anxiety among residents and encourage pet pick-up at the center.

**Language interpretation and Cultural Sensitivity:** Proportional representation of African American and Hispanic residents is greater in the targeted zip codes than in the city as a whole. Cultural competency of engagement staff and APOs is critical in building and sustaining relationships with community members. Utilizing language interpretation and other culturally sensitive tools and resources could enhance the role of APOs and engagement staff that interact with residents. Bloomfire, [beyondlanguage.bloomfire.com](http://beyondlanguage.bloomfire.com), hosts many resources that the department may want to explore.

## **OUTCOMES: MEASURING PERFORMANCE**

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Outcome measures: These are the ultimate goal of the engagement program – a lower intake and higher return to owner rate for the targeted zip codes.

1. Stray intake per 100 residents (from Pet Resource Center)
2. APO intake per 100 residents (from APO in the field)
3. Number of APO return to owner in the field

Activity/Output measures: These measures track the activities of engagement staff. Logically, if staff is conducting these activities, community members will be more engaged and educated about animal services and resources.

1. Meetings with community partners
2. Partnerships initiated
3. Staff attendance at community events (tabling)

Marketing Effectiveness Measures: Engagement staff can track the immediate reach of marketing efforts. Evaluation of these measures will help direct resources to the marketing tools that are most effective.

1. Number of attendees at events, and source of information for attendees
2. Social media reach (measured per post or campaign)
3. Number of webpage hits

## Appendix A: Methodology

The Leadership ICMA Team was supplied with an Austin Community Assessment, AAC operational data, AAC organizational chart, and links to program videos and newscasts covering the “no kill” initiative. The visit to Austin was coordinated by Lee Ann Shenefiel, Deputy Chief Animal Services Officer, who arranged interviews and tour while on site. Interviews were scheduled with persons identified below while the team was on site. A tour of the zip codes under study was provided by Mark Sloat, AAC Enforcement Officer Supervisor. Members of the team concluded the visit to Austin with a debrief to Lee Ann. Follow up emails and calls were placed to: Doug Matthews, Chief Communications Director, who provided links and contacts related to: Marion Sanchez, Multilingual/Limited Access Outreach; Language Access Bloomfire; Community Engagement Bloomfire; Lara Foss, Spirit of East Austin; and Anna Sabana, Austin Police Department Community Liaison Program. The Austin City Manager’s Office coordinated travel, lodging and per diem for the trip.

Interviews: Staff

<b>Staff Member</b>	<b>Role</b>
Luis Herrera	Public outreach educator – spay/neuter outreach
Michelle Dossou	Public outreach educator – formerly spay/neuter outreach. Currently community cats
Mark Sloat	Field Services Program Manager – oversees Animal Protection and Outreach, former Animal Protection Supervisor
April Moore	Engagement Manager – responsible for pilot program management, former Animal Protection Supervisor
Holli Odom	Customer Service Supervisor – formerly supervisor intake functions
Evelina Perez	Pet Resource Center lead
Tawny Hammond	Chief Animal Services Officer
Amber Harvey	Animal Protection Officer specializing in tethering/neglect cases
Meagan Nehls	Former Animal Protection Officer specializing in tethering/neglect cases
Kimberly Hart	Public health educator
Rebekah Montie	Animal Protection Officer

Ana Almaguel	Animal Protection Officer
Christina Snow	Animal Protection Officer
Doug Matthews	Chief Communications Director
Larry Schooler	Communications, Public Engagement Consultant

Interviews: Council Members

Ora Houston	District 1 Council Member
Sabino "Pio" Renteria	District 3 Council Member
Staff Representative for Delia Garza	District 1 Council Member

Interviews: Community Partners/No Kill Advocates

Ellen Jefferson	Executive Director of Lifesaving Operations for Austin Pets Alive!
Palmer Neuhaus	City of Austin Animal Advisory Commission member
Patty Lepley-Alexander	Austin Pets Alive – Positive Alternatives to Shelter Surrender (PASS)
David Lundstedt	Animal Services Advisory Commission Chair

## Appendix B: Marketing Material Samples

**woulda, coulda, shoulda...**

**...but I didn't know she could get pregnant so young!**

**spay & neuter early.**

Puppies and kittens can safely and easily be fixed by 4 months to prevent accidental litters.

Learn more and find a veterinarian near you.

WhenToSpay.org

**Scared of losing the one you love?**

**7 in 10 vets** couldn't reunite lost dogs with owners because they didn't have an identifier or microchip

**Don't risk losing your dog – get it microchipped**

For more information visit [www.bva.co.uk/microchipping](http://www.bva.co.uk/microchipping)

Dog designed by Freepik

**BVA**  
British Veterinary Association

**WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU COULD HAVE 18 CHILDREN A YEAR?**

**EXACTLY!**  
[ Please Spay or Neuter Your Pets ]

In Louisiana, 92,000 homeless pets are put down each year due to overpopulation, thousands more suffer in our streets.

Louisiana shelters can't save and support the huge number of accidental litters, strays and family pets brought to the shelter door everyday.

Call your vet or local spay/neuter organization. Affordable assistance is available.

**861-0101**  
Save this number to your cell

[www.robinsonrescue.org](http://www.robinsonrescue.org)

**COULD YOUR PET FIND ITS WAY HOME?**

By **April 2016**, in England, it will be **compulsory** to have your dog **microchipped** and your contact details **kept up to date.**

Check your contact details are up to date now at [www.petlog.org.uk](http://www.petlog.org.uk) or speak to your local vet

**WHY SPAY & NEUTER?**

- REDUCE AGGRESSION
- LOWER RISK OF CANCER
- REDUCE ROAMING
- DECREASE OVER-POPULATION
- INCREASE LIFE SPAN 3-5 YEARS

## Appendix C: Summary of Partners and Strategies

City Resources Identified	
Resource	Contact
<b>Austin Police Department</b>	Community Liaison Office
<b>Communications and Public Information Office</b>	Marion Sanchez, Community Engagement Consultants Larry Schneider, Community Engagement Consultants
<b>Spirit of East Austin</b>	Lara Foss, Corporate Communications Marketing Consultant
<b>Austin Public Transportation</b>	Jackie Nirenberg, Community Involvement
<b>Austin Energy</b>	Austin Energy Outreach

Non-Profit Partners Identified	
Resource	
<b>Meals on Wheels</b>	
<b>Emancipet</b>	
<b>Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation</b>	
<b>Austin Revitalization Authority</b>	
<b>YMCA</b>	

Strategies for Engaging with Community Partners	
Resource	Strategy
<b>Neighborhood Liaisons</b>	Work with identified neighborhood groups to identify interested representatives that can serve as liaisons between the AAC and residents.
<b>Faith-based Organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out to identified faith based groups to meet with and identify issues and share information.</li> <li>• Identify liaisons to faith based communities for information sharing.</li> <li>• Participate in community events hosted by faith based organizations.</li> <li>• Invite these organizations to AAC events and market services.</li> </ul>
<b>Nonprofits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish relationships with non-profits and identify mission overlap.</li> <li>• Propose mutually beneficial partnerships</li> <li>• Include relevant non-profit partners' messaging in pet resource materials.</li> <li>• Share information on events that might be attended.</li> </ul>

<b>Internal Strategies for Austin Animal Center</b>	
<b>Resource</b>	<b>Strategy</b>
<b>Marketing and Educational Materials</b>	Develop and execute a strategic educational campaign. See Appendix B.
<b>Social Media: Facebook</b>	Develop a Facebook strategy that includes marketing and education as well as community resources for lost pets
<b>Social Media: Next Door</b>	Use these neighborhood groups to distribute marketing materials and return lost pets.
<b>Animal Protection Officers</b>	Rotate schedule on a one year, rather than 3 month, basis to allow APO's to build relationships in neighborhoods.
<b>Engagement Staff</b>	Work with engagement staff in other departments to identify successes and failures with tested engagement strategies.
<b>Fencing Volunteer Program</b>	Partner with community organizations to organize volunteers to build fences for residents who receive free fencing materials through the existing grant program.
<b>Fee Clarity</b>	Develop materials that present a clear fee structure to lessen anxiety around the cost of retrieving lost pets.
<b>Language Interpretation and Cultural Sensitivity</b>	Utilize language interpretation and cultural sensitivity tools to better interact with residents who do not speak English.