

Billings Police Department *Animal Shelter Volunteer* Program

Animal Shelter Needs Assessment

PURPOSE

To examine the current physical, human, and program resources of the BPD Animal Shelter, in order to better understand the needs of the Animal Shelter and how best to supplement the BPD Animal Shelter utilizing a dedicated and competent cadre of Shelter Volunteers. This utilization shall plan for both the current and future needs of the Animal Shelter. It should be understood, that all comments and observations contained within this assessment are to be interpreted in the context of how these items potentially impact the development and maintenance of a viable volunteer program.

EVALUATION TEAM

The *BPD Animal Shelter Volunteer Program* Development Team, henceforth referred to as “the team”, is comprised of four individuals. The team leader is the BPD Volunteer Coordinator; she is assisted by an intern with an academic background in marketing. The third member of the team has a business background in both computers and training. The final member of the team is a volunteer with a background in public safety management and training.

METHODOLOGY

The development team has researched all written materials made available to it regarding the BPD Animal Shelter as it exists today. The team has had the opportunity to interview the Director and two BPD Animal Control Officers, while performing their daily in-house routines. The team has made an onsite visit to the current Shelter facility to observe first hand the physical environment that comprises Shelter operations.

In addition, the team has made an on site visit to the Comm Center, which routinely picks up the Shelter’s after hours and overload phone traffic. A Comm Center representative was interviewed as to the impacts of this after hours and overload phone traffic upon Comm Center operations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The interviewed career staff of the Animal Shelter appears to be dedicated and sincere individuals who are doing their best to function under less than ideal circumstances. The BPD Animal Shelter appears to be understaffed when all FTEs are filled, and is currently critically understaffed with vacant FTEs. Additionally, the current physical resources are inadequate for the number of animals and activities. Hopefully, the physical constraints have been taken into account in the design and development of the new BPD Animal Shelter.

Animal Control Officers are forced to queue up non-critical incidents as they struggle to complete routine required Shelter maintenance. This chronic understaffing takes Animal Control Officers off the street as they strive to accomplish the necessary feeding and housing requirements within the Shelter itself.

During public hours, the office staff is routinely overwhelmed by the number of walk-ins and call-ins experienced during normal hours of operations. There is no time left in the day for proactive animal-related education that will eventually help in reducing the strain upon the Shelter, especially education in the need for spaying and neutering.

The current BPD Animal Shelter environment is ripe for the addition and assistance of more dedicated, well-trained, and competent volunteers. A well-designed volunteer program can have a great and immediate impact in the areas of office support, particularly in the areas of reception and activity processing. Volunteers can also reduce the negative impact upon Animal Control Officers by assisting in kennel maintenance and routine upkeep. Finally, volunteers can develop, run and maintain a proactive series of educational programs, which in the long run, may reduce the amount of animal volume experienced by the Shelter.

PHYSICAL RESOURCES FINDINGS

The current physical facility is clearly out of date and totally inadequate; it is sincerely hoped that many or all of these concerns have been addressed in the design for the new Animal Shelter. Some of the problems encountered were: There is no good flow to the routine and daily operations that are necessary in any Shelter environment. There is no system of “way finding” for the public who can easily get turned around and lost within the Shelter; perhaps a system of way finding stripes as often used in hospitals would be appropriate.

The HVAC system is wholly inadequate for the animals and staff. The reception area is too small, not sound proofed and not inviting. The same can be said for the public entrance which was littered with debris, donations, and a myriad of hand made signs posted on the door; the lawn also needed mowing. There needs to be sound proofing between the animal holding areas and all other Shelter areas particularly the reception and office areas.

A more adequate open outdoor area for walking dogs and observing potentially adopted dogs is needed, an area ideally set aside for this purpose and not for vehicle and equipment parking as well. The Shelter does possess a relatively high, state of the art Surgery Suite and it is hoped that this will be incorporated and expanded upon in the new facility. Again, it is assumed that most of these needs have been addressed by the staff and architects in the new facility.

HUMAN RESOURCES FINDINGS

The BPD Animal Shelter currently is authorized (8) FTEs; this breaks down as (1) Director, (4) Animal Control Officers, (1) Senior Officer Assistant, and (1) Kennel Assistant, (1) ½ Office – ½ Kennel Assistant. This appears to an inadequate amount of FTEs, leaving the Shelter chronically understaffed. Compounding the chronic understaffing is the fact that one ACO FTE is currently unfilled. The career staff is supplemented by (1) Youthmanpower Kennel Assistant, (1) Youthmanpower Office Assistant, and (5) volunteers.

During our site visit, one Animal Control Officer was cleaning the adoptable cat room, while another Animal Control Officer was cleaning out the adoptable dog area. This was the only staff on duty and although the Shelter was not currently open to the public, the ACOs were forced to queue up non-critical animal control dispatch calls in order to accomplish the required daily cleaning prior to the posted hours of public access.

Even if the necessary amount of cleaning was accomplished prior to the hours of public operation, one of the ACOs would have to remain at the Shelter in order to handle the public activity during the period of public access, there being no other career staff on duty to free the second ACO up for street duty.

Despite the best efforts of the career staff, the current staffing levels leaves the BPD animal enforcement personnel off of the street; this results in unacceptably long response times and a public perception of the same. This reflects poorly upon the BPD and its Animal Control Division.

The quickest and easiest way for volunteers to supplement the career staff would be in the staffing of the front desk and telephones during the public hours of operation. This would allow for the handling of multiple processes and the reduction in counter wait time for Shelter customers. In addition, these volunteers could guarantee the timely answering of phones thereby improving the public image of the BPD Animal Shelter and reducing the adverse ring down phone load that is currently experienced by the Comm Center. The Comm Center is currently forced to take on the additional phone load when the Shelter phones go unanswered during and after business hours.

The second activity in which volunteers could significantly assist the career staff is in the area of kennel maintenance. While you probably wouldn't find many volunteers exclusively interested in participating solely as kennel maintenance personnel, this could be a task incorporated into other Shelter positions and would take place immediately

upon arrival, and prior to the public hours of operation. This could be based on a similar hierarchy of responsibilities as is practiced daily in the Cop Shops.

As time and volunteer resources increase, additional positions could be created and filled to further the mission and goals of the BPD Animal Shelter. These subsequent positions could be as diverse as:

Adoption Follow up	Custodian	Volunteer Lands Keeper
Foster Owner	Graphic Artist	Grant Writer/ Marketing/Fund Raiser
Dog Walker	Dog Trainer	Medical Care Assistant
Groomer	License Assistant	Special Projects Assistant
Public Educator	Pet Request Processor	Lost & Found Assistant
Public Relations	Media Assistant	Animal Socializer

PROGRAM RESOURCES FINDINGS

The BPD Animal Shelter has demonstrated the desire to implement programs that it has currently designed, and to develop more. The Director has expressed the desire to implement such already designed programs as *9 Lives* and *Matchmakers*. While these are excellent programs, they appear to exist on paper only. The Shelter simply does not have the staffing to permit the implementation of these very worthwhile programs.

In addition to the above named programs, there are a variety of additional programs which could and probably should be developed and implemented. A Foster Care program for special needs, yet still adoptable pets, should be a program goal of the Animal Shelter. Off site Adoption Fairs is another program which could be handled by volunteers and would help to alleviate the resources strain on the Shelter. Other programs of note could be Public Dog Walks, Therapy Animals, Anti-Animal Cruelty Education, Spay/Neuter Education, Responsible Pet Ownership Education (adult and child), Dog Obedience Training, BPD Animal Shelter Information and Education (physically and through use of a vibrant and current web site), and education regarding the *BPD Animal Shelter Volunteer Program*.

It must be understood by all concerned that this is an ambitious list of programs and all programs cannot and should not be attempted in the beginning. Each and every program must be designed with the intent and purpose to further the mission and goals of the BPD Animal Shelter and to make it a more efficient and effective operation.

In order to make these programs additive and not subtractive, they should be phased in utilizing a modular approach. Program development and implementation should be done in a manner which takes into account priority, accomplishability, and practicality. In other words, accomplish the easiest programs, with the “biggest bang for the buck,” first.

It is the recommendation of this team that the priority order of programs, based on the above outlined criteria, begin as follows:

Module 1

Office Support/Reception Volunteers to help staff the front counter and phones.

Shelter Usher Volunteers to assist the public in finding their way around the Shelter as well as assisting with removing and replacing animals for interaction with prospective adopters.

Kennel Maintenance Volunteers to assist in the cleaning and maintenance of the dog & cat kennel areas. (May also be incorporated into the initial duties of the above positions.)

Computer Support Volunteers to maintain a current and viable website for prospective adopters to view adoptable animals online.

Module 2

Dog Walking Volunteers to exercise the dogs and socialize them.

Dog Training Volunteers to work with the dogs in obedience training to make the animal more adoptable.

Grooming Volunteers to make the animals as presentable as possible in order to enhance their chance of adoption.

Lost & Found Volunteers to attempt to match up “lost & found” pets and quickly return these animals to their rightful owners.

Module 3

Lands Keeping Volunteers to maintain a neat and clean exterior appearance in order to enhance the public’s initial impression of the Shelter.

Medical Care Assistant Volunteers to assist in the administration of medications and treatment when a veterinarian is not required or available.

Special Projects Volunteers to handle unique and unusual program needs.

Module 4

Public Education Volunteers to deliver the animal oriented education programs to the public.

Public Relations/Media Relations Volunteers to foster and perpetuate the desired image of the BPD Animal Shelter, its programs and its people.

Grant Writing/ Marketing/Fund Raising Volunteers to assist the Shelter and its programs by identifying and obtaining a variety and breadth of funding mechanisms.

Module 5

Foster Parent to assist in bringing along those animals who are suffering from Shelter Shock or a non critical illness and who are otherwise adoptable.

Graphic Artist Volunteers to assist in the visual design of unique and appealing graphics to enhance the message and mission of the Shelter.

CONCLUSION

A properly designed and administered volunteer program can assist the BPD Animal Shelter in a variety of ways; just the simple act of establishing a large enough corps of trained, competent, and dedicated volunteers, as well as establishing a schedule of their work hours, would make an immediate and significant positive impact upon Shelter operations. A series of modular program steps would best serve the Shelter needs, beginning with Office Support and soon followed by Shelter and Kennel Maintenance. It is the goal of the *BPD Animal Shelter Volunteer Program* development team, to time the initial steps of our recommendations to coincide with the opening of the new Shelter facility.