MULTNOMAH COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES
ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH REPORT

July 2023
Prepared by Lara Media Services, LLC

Multnomah
County
Animal Services

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INTRODUCTION

Animals can be amazing companions to humans. They often offer unconditional love in a world where it can be hard to find. Due to the domestication of animals and current standards of civilization, society needs a system that supports healthy human and pet interactions.

Multnomah County Animal Services (MCAS) is the county's sole public animal shelter and control agency. The mission of MCAS is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of people and pets throughout Multnomah County. MCAS cares for the community's lost, homeless, stray, sick, neglected, and abandoned animals.

After a series of complaints and reports from the media, staff, and volunteers about problems within the agency, including animal neglect, Multnomah County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson ordered a detailed review of the issue and began work to address years of longstanding structural and management challenges, in partnership with the community.

The multi-stage review will comb through unfinished work recommended by previous audits and reports from 2016 to present on MCAS, solicit widespread community feedback, and bring the Board of Commissioners recommendations and a detailed work plan.

The second phase of the multi-stage review is intended to give the Animal Services Division the opportunity to connect with the community and key stakeholders to solicit input on their experiences working with the agency. Lara Media Services was brought into this phase of the review process to collect public opinion through community engagement tactics and research. This focused primarily on one-on-one and small-group conversations to solicit feedback and recommendations from partner agencies, long-term shelter volunteers, foster households, past and present MCAS employees, and a selection of previous adopters. In addition, an online form was made available for members of the public to submit comments and feedback throughout this phase of the review. The results from this study are included in this report.

"In bringing the community into this process, I am determined to uncover the root of the issues we've faced at Animal Services and address them productively and proactively. I appreciate the deep investment of the animal care community in helping us move our work forward in coming weeks and look forward to providing more information following this review about medium- to long-term changes we'll put in motion."

- Jessica Vega Pederson, Multnomah County Chair

LMS is a certified MBE, WBE, DBE, ESB firm (Certification #7923), and B-Corp.

The LMS engagement strategy begins with recognizing that no project can succeed without listening to and learning from the communities Multnomah County Animal Services would like to serve. It is crucial to place "people in the center" when creating authentic engagement tactics and strategies for community members who stand to benefit from them, with the principle that those closest to the problem are closest to the solutions as well. Lara Media Services (LMS) is honored to be a part of this critical project to provide the necessary recommendations for Multnomah County Animal Services to engage their community stakeholders in an inclusive and sustainable way.

METHODOLOGY

LMS gathered qualitative and quantitative data by coordinating and conducting community engagement and research with the general community and specific identified groups. This included virtual small groups conversations, one-on-one virtual interviews, and an online survey.

The research focused on connecting with members of Multnomah County belonging to animal Welfare organizations that work with MCAS, Selected long-term shelter volunteers, past and current MCAS staff, foster households, previous adopters, and the general public. The interviews and small groups conversations aimed to gather feedback to better understand the participants' lived experiences, observations, and ideas about MCAS. LMS encouraged the participants to be fully engaged and empowered them to let their voices be heard. Trust was built throughout the session, as each person's opinion was a vital contribution to this study.

The research took place between June 16th and July 7th, 2023. Participants were compensated for their time. A total of 27 people participated in the three small groups conversations, 20 had individual interviews, and 305 completed the online survey.

The following report synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative results from the survey and the virtual small groups conversations.

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE _____

Small groups conversations
- Animal Welfare organizations that work with MCAS (referred as partner agencies in this study)
- Selection of local municipal shelters
- Selected long-term shelter volunteers and foster households
- Past and Current MCAS staff

One-on-one interviews (referred as interviews in this study)
- Animal Welfare organizations that work with MCAS
- Previous adopters

Online survey
- General public

_____

FINDINGS _____

Themes are organized by questions - To see the questions, please view **Appendix 1**.

Each section starts with an overview that includes all data, then focuses on specific in person findings, followed by specific survey findings through graphics.
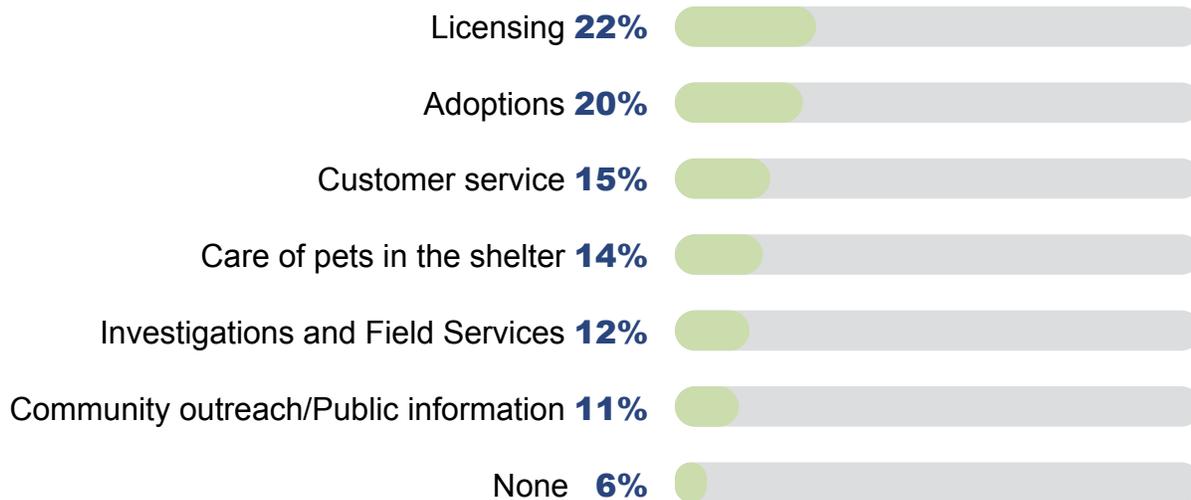
MCAS Perceived Strengths

When asked about specific procedures for which MCAS has strengths, participants elected licensing as the most significant strength. Although, when given the same question with an open-ended format, participants highlighted the **hardworking and caring staff, the pool of volunteers and the environment provided to them, the services offered to other animals** besides common pets like cats and dogs, and **the foster program** with its support for foster parents and good communication between the parties involved.

Below is a list of specific findings from some of the participant's groups:

- **Partner Agencies**
  - The freedom given to staff, allowing them to work in an environment free of micromanagement.

- **Volunteers**
  - Licensing, specifically due to their ability to collect the associated fees

- **MCAS past and current staff**
  - MCAS provides a counterbalance compared to privatized shelters; it works at a different level than public service shelters by being dedicated to demographics and animals that are struggling as opposed to animals and people who have means.
  - MCAS is well known by the community; for many, it is their first stop when looking for lost animals.

- **Interviews**
  - MCAS's customer service and communication with potential adopters are big strengths Staff and volunteers seem knowledgeable about their work and the animals they care for, leading to most people walking away with positive experiences, and feeling that the adoption process and other procedures run smoothly.

Survey data

Licensing (22%), adoptions (20%) and customer service (15%) amounted to more than half of the total responses from the survey (57%).

Licensing **22%**

Adoptions **20%**

Customer service **15%**

Care of pets in the shelter **14%**

Investigations and Field Services **12%**

Community outreach/Public information **11%**

None **6%**

"I really think that there's a lot of heart in the staff and they'll withstand amazing pressure to keep things going"
- Participant from small groups

Areas of Improvement

Of the options provided, almost half of the respondents chose the **care of pets in the shelter** as the area that needed the most improvement. In addition, other commonly mentioned areas in needs improvement category were the **effectiveness and consistency of the spay and neuter program, quality of veterinary care mostly due to the lack of supplies, transparency and accountability on every level, training for the current staff, recruiting more staff and volunteers** to deal with the understaffing situation,

Below is a list of specific findings from some of the participant groups:

- **Partner agencies**
  - Better parameters and documentation need to be consistently followed for key procedures, like accepting strays and owner surrenders, future adopters screening, safety procedures to ensure the wellbeing of the staff, and euthanasia decisions, especially when the cause can be unclear.
  - The work environment needs improvement, highlighting communication, leadership, accountability, and relationships between coworkers, including management, staff, and volunteers.
  - There is no community engagement (proactive social media posts for educational purposes, pet safety, kid and dog safety, bite prevention, etc.) or community events like training classes, adoption pop-ups, etc.
  - The availability of services lacks flexibility, shown in the short hold time given to stray dogs without an ID or chip (even if holiday/closed), the difficulty for people to go to the shelter on the current work hours.
  - There is tardiness in both internal and external communication, especially when related to questions from the public.

- **Volunteers**
  - Most of the people working with animals (volunteers, med techs, low-level staff) have no say in what happens to them.
  - There are no resources or training to help prevent or reduce anxiety and behavioral issues in animals.
  - The euthanizing process is problematic. Lots of animals get put down for preventable incidents and there are no investigations into incidents or attempts to fix the issue.
  - MCAS's crisis management skills need to be improved. A lot of damage was done to the donor community after the Oregonian1 published the article referring to the more than $2 million dollars that <CAS failed to spend over the last five years that were supposed to cover spay and neuter surgeries, veterinary expenses and outreach to increase pet adoptions.
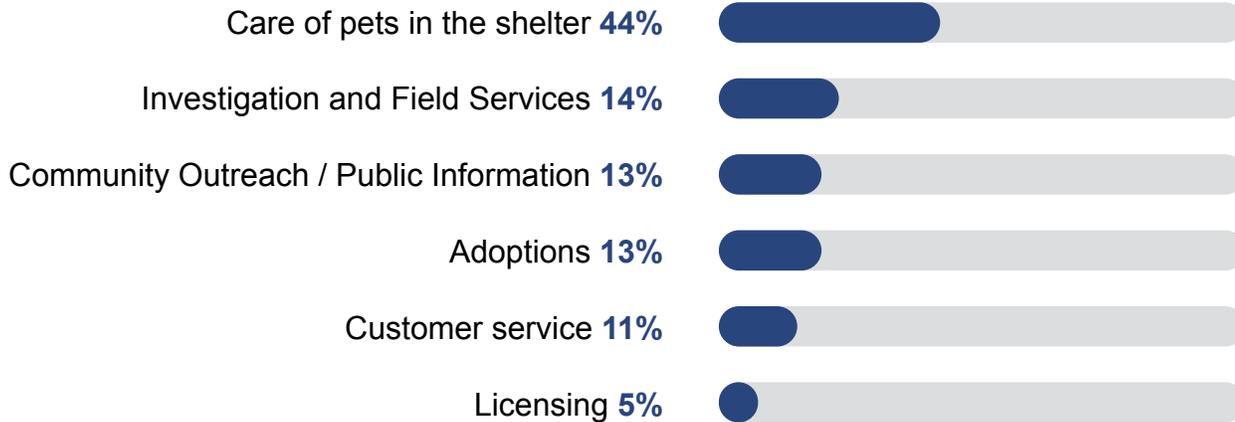
- **MCAS past and current staff**
  - A better facility for both the animals and the people; staff and the public included. The current facilities cause a variety of issues, like the lack of proper housing in almost every area, and staff being on top of each other in areas where they don't have room to work.
  - The work environment needs a thorough assessment; the lack of communication between departments leads to a feeling of isolation; managers vie against each other to get resources for their departments, there is bullying between departments, people are not free to have great ideas and run with them because they end up clashing against other workers. Good people are not supported in a sustainable way, worsening the impact of being understaffed and overworked.
  - There is no trust or belonging from upper management to trust their team members to know what they're doing. And then there's also no trust in the upper leadership's managers, who may have experience in animal welfare.

- **Interviews**
  - Accountability for workers is needed to improve the care of the animals and the veterinary operations.
  - More funding could help improve the adoption processes, and also provide low-cost resources for adopters.

Survey data

The areas that need more improvement are:

Care of pets in the shelter **44%**

Investigation and Field Services **14%**

Community Outreach / Public Information **13%**

Adoptions **13%**

Customer service **11%**

Licensing **5%**

"Managers were essentially vying against each other to get stuff for their silo. And there was bullying between silos and I think, that really handicaps the organization because people are not free to have great ideas and run with them because you buck up against another silo..., and has carried through to the point where good people just get so beat up."
-Participant from a small group

MCAS Culture

Opinions about MCAS' work culture are polarized. Although one third of the survey participants rated MCAS' work culture as **positive**, the majority of in person responses tended towards **negative** criticism, with many participants commenting on the need for **more training, structure, support for staff, and changes in MCAS' management policies.**

Below is a list of specific findings from some of the participant groups:

- **Partner agencies**
    - Even though there have been improvements, there is still a perception that MCAS holds a toxic and abusive environment, heavily correlated to the lack of empathy from the management, who doesn't understand or support the emotional impact of euthanizing pets.

- **Volunteers**
    - There are a wide variety of personal experiences, from positive to negative, among volunteers. Some feel very valued and appreciated, while others feel as if their opinions and work are unvalued. There's a perception that volunteers and low-level staff advocating for animals or changes are often ignored and have no opportunities to partake in decision making processes. This lack of communication and inclusion leads to tension, stress, and desperation for staff and volunteers, and high turnover for employees and volunteers.
    - Volunteers dislike the drift towards corporate management. They feel that MCAS is prioritizing numbers over excellence in animal welfare. This amounts to the belief that current MCAS management does not have the experience to manage animals.
    - There is no clear chain of command. With MCAS's constantly shifting management staff, volunteers and staff do not know who is responsible for making decisions. They do not see who is taking responsibility or accountability. Many feel that current management is unqualified for the positions they hold and does not uphold the mission of MCAS.

- **MCAS past and current staff**
    - "The people running MCAS seem to lack the connection to the values and heart of the purpose of MCAS, instead they seem to focus on numbers vs impact to the animals." The desire and the attempt to do the right thing are not always in line with what is coming from higher up.
    - Staff do not have time to check emails due to low staffing or being busy with animals. There is much confusion and disorder. Higher ups do not understand what the job requires in the shelter. There's a complete lack of taking into consideration the knowledge that other people have and their experience. The shelter used to "run smoother … when MCAS partnered more with other agencies… like OHS [Oregon Humane Society]." OHS took simple and easy pets from the shelter and put them up for

adoption, while MCAS has focused on the more difficult animals.
- Participants shared that there can't be an improvement in the work culture without improving the facility (shelter). There is a need to increase the number of rooms, to be made available or expanded since there isn't enough space for more staff, let alone animals, who are being put in closets or places they shouldn't be.

- **Interviews**
  - Staff should be evaluated for job qualifications and experience. Training should be made available to staff and volunteers to help them improve their work and deal with challenges. Despite their commitment and dedication, volunteers and staff are busy and overworked, which only hinders their performance. Staff need better pay for the work they do.
  - A toxic environment with no communication is perceived. There is a need for greater structure, supported by a shift in management and policies. MCAS needs to gather feedback from employees and volunteers on how to best support them, whilst allowing the staff to be part of decision-making processes.
  - The newer generation of staff and volunteers hear about the other better shelters and move there. All the best staff at MCAS end up moving because of poor management.

Survey data

There's a clear division on the work culture perception, 33% of participants see it as being positive, 30% perceive it as being negative, 21% of participants had no opinions on the matter, and 16% thought it was fair.

Rating	Percentage
Excellent	7%
Good	26%
Fair	16%
Poor	13%
Very poor	17%
Not applicable/I have no idea	21%

"It's easier for upper management to just ignore what's happening rather than actually deal with something that they don't know how to handle." - Participant from a small group

Facilities and Amenities

While many participants had a more **positive** image of MCAS facilities, most discussion centered around issues with shelter facilities and how to improve them. About 40% of participants classify the MCAS shelter facilities as **poor and run down, difficult to access, and lacking necessary maintenance**. Participants' biggest concern, however, was the **lack of space available**. **The opinion was that the building was not built to be an animal shelter**, this has directly contributed to **difficult working conditions**, **dysfunctional workspaces, and a loud, stressful environment for shelter animals**. Overarching sentiments were that MCAS shelter facilities are fairly clean, but inadequate, and the best course of action would be to rebuild or find another location.

Below is a list of specific findings from some of the participant groups:

- **Partner agencies**
  - There is no natural light within the facility or separate kennels for animals that suffer from stress, thus contributing to a more stressful and unhealthy environment.

- **Volunteers**
  - Recent changes have been mainly aesthetic and have not addressed many structural issues.

- **MCAS past and current staff**
  - MCAS facilities have a lot of safety concerns. There are no outside lights, making it difficult and dangerous to do things outside with animals when it's dark, latches and doors are broken, electrical hazards, etc.
  - While MCAS has looked into building better facilities before, progress is slow. This is discouraging and seems to stem from little support from the county to find funding.

- **Interviews**
  - MCAS facilities lack animal infrastructure, such as healthy spaces for animals, green areas, and adequate medical facilities.
  - The environment of the shelter is not welcoming or child friendly and it seems unclean and bare. Indoor waiting rooms are needed for potential adopters, along with organized signage, building security, and private areas for adopters to meet with the animals.

The impressions of the MCAS shelter facility were viewed positively (67%). While their counterparts view the shelter as more to improve (33%).

Excellent **10%**
Good **27%**
Fair **30%**
Poor **19%**
Very poor **14%**
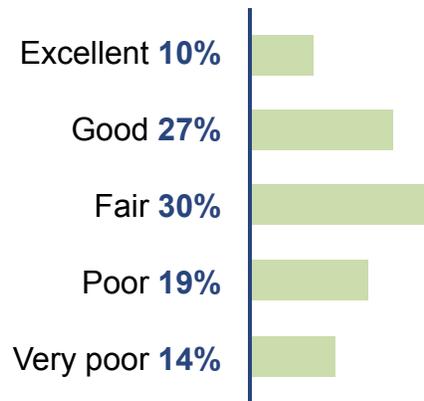
"Safety concerns were just kind of pushed aside because it's just what the building is. We can't do anything about that. We can't fix that. It's just what the building is… Not only is it, like, not appropriate for staff, not appropriate for animals, but… for safety in itself." **- Participant from a small group**

Interaction with MCAS

When asked about their experiences with MCAS in the last five years, participants' perception was overall more positive than the previous sections. The main areas that participants noted issues were that t**here didn't seem to be much care for the animal's welfare and procedures related to their care, and a general lack of information about animals being taken in and put up for adoption**. Several participants commented that it seemed that the organization was **prioritizing a quick animal turnover (adoption rate) ahead of ensuring that the animals were sent to the right home and in good healthy conditions.**

Below is a list of specific findings from some of the participant groups:

- **Partner agencies**
  - In the past five years it was split, some participants felt their opinions were being heard. Others had very frustrating and disappointing experiences.
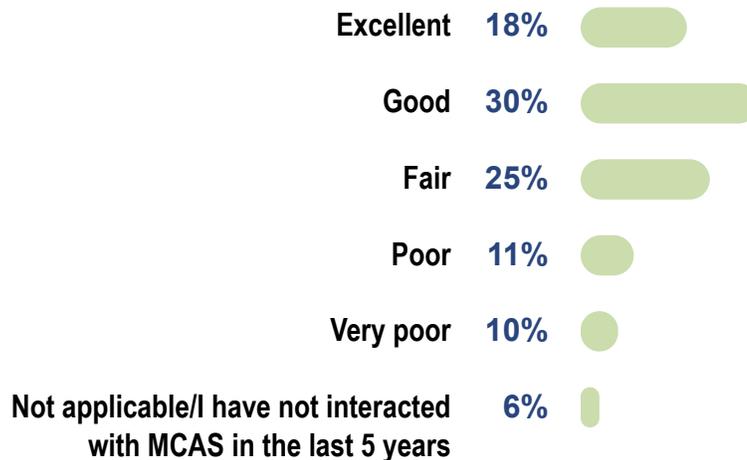
- **MCAS past and current staff**
  - There are many missed opportunities for gathering more information that could help avoid adoption returns and get animals into the correct home. There is often a lack of description from staff when animals are being taken into the shelter or information on the website about animal behavior and whether the animals are adoptable or not.
  - Language (other than English) is a barrier in the adoption process that has not been taken into account by management.

- **Interviews.**
  - MCAS has improved over time, especially since COVID.
  - In some instances, interactions with management have been negative, and there are constant frustrations in communications.
  - The lack of accountability for staff creates a tense atmosphere and causes staff to waste time instead of being productive.

Survey data

A good portion of participants rated their interactions with MCAS as positive (48%). While only a few described it as fair or negative.

Rating	Percentage
Excellent	18%
Good	30%
Fair	25%
Poor	11%
Very poor	10%
Not applicable/I have not interacted with MCAS in the last 5 years	6%

"This next generation as far as staffing and volunteers… you need [them]... to make those policies and procedures and your training plans and your events. But they come to MCAS and it's a bummer and they don't feel good and they don't wanna come back… they're so overworked and so they're gonna go to somewhere like OHS [Oregon Humane Society]."
- Participant from a small group

Access to Information

When asked about how easy it was to access information from MCAS, participant's responses signaled a clear necessity to **improve communication on every platform**. While some participants had positive experiences, many in the small groups emphasized **how difficult it was to navigate the website; citing a non-intuitive layout and a lack of necessary information; access information over the phone, or access medical information** for animals they were adopting or fostering. Consistent comments were also made about MCAS's **internal access to information**, with many participants in the past and current MCAS staff group and the volunteers group highlighting how difficult it was to find or access information due to a lack of **standardization** and communication.

Below is a list of specific findings from some of the participant groups:

- **Partner agencies**
    - Information is for the most part available, and the staff is very responsive, especially via email. Some of the teams that participants specifically highlighted include the medical team, foster coordinators, and staff responsible for adoptions.
    - Social Media isn't monitored for feedback.

- **Volunteers**
    - Resources provided to fosters are incomplete and out of date, which limits their ability to care for animals.
    - The website does not have a lot of images or specific information about individual animals. This hinders stable adoptions by limiting potential adopters' ability to make informed decisions.

- **MCAS past and current staff**
    - Shelter management does not have a clear method of communication with staff. Various platforms are being used, causing confusion and frustrating experiences.
    - There is no communication with, or assistance available for, people who have urgent issues over the weekend, such as losing pets. Phone calls do not get answered and there is no way to get real-time assistance over MCAS's website.

- **Interviews**
    - Multiple participants found information easy to access on overall platforms, with many commenting on obtaining information from the MCAS's website after they learned how
    - to navigate it. Some also highlighted emails and newsletters as easy to access and helpful.
    - Experiences gathering Information over social media and word of mouth were mainly negative, as many felt that information was non-existent or incomplete across both means of communication.

On a scale from 1 to 5, the lower the score, the easier it is to attain information from that method.

As seen below, there was no clear and easy way to access information, but social media and phones ranked slightly worse than the website and in person.

■ Website
■ In person
■ Social Media
■ Phone

5
4
3
2
1

2.49   2.67   2.81   2.92
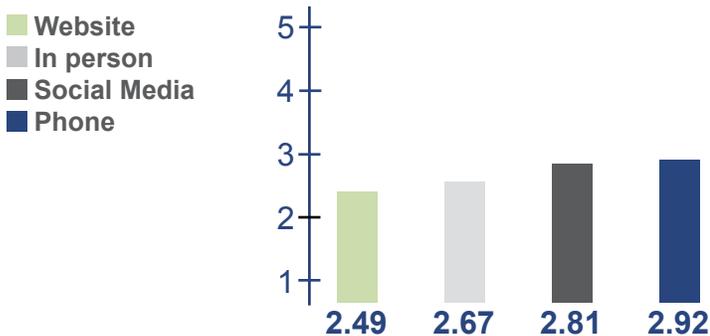
"People not being able to reach staff [is] an issue. And simple information that could be handled over the phone but is now being, having to be requested through public records is an issue. And there's no transparency in that and there's no good customer service skills in that."
- Participant from a small group

Adoption Process

Opinions were divided when discussing this topic. While some participants expressed having a positive impression of the adoption process, others expressed concerns and pointed out existing problems, including **inconsistency of the adoption process**, especially when it comes to **screening of possible adopters and concealing information** on the animals available for adoption, resulting not just in problems at home but in animals being returned to the shelter, thus creating or adding to an unsustainable existing cycle.
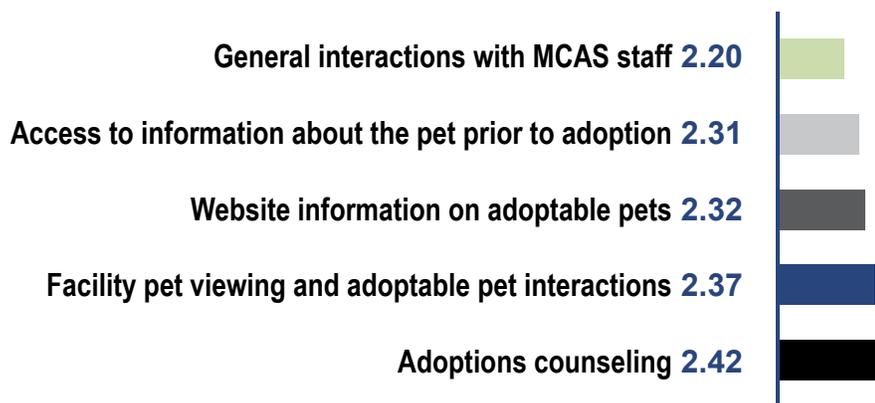
Below is a list of specific findings from some of the participant's groups:

- **Partner agencies**
  - Participants noted the lack of preparation and training from both staff and volunteers, lack of responsiveness, and missing information on the website.

- **Volunteers**
  - There is no access to the 'Do not adopt list', meaning anyone can adopt an animal, which could be dangerous for the animals.
  - Staff do not take into account volunteers notes on animal behavior or opinions about troubling adoptions and do not say no to adopters. This, along with a lack of animal meetings or showings, increases the chances of animal returns, unstable adoptions, and preventable incidents like dog fights and biting.

- There are no specific counselors for adoption counseling, making the process inconsistent. Counselors do not give enough information about the dogs or their needs during adoption counseling, including full and accurate medical histories, before allowing adoptions.
- Dogs during intake are not always cared for properly. They need more stimulation and a clean environment. There are some animals who have been there for a long time, and in other places, they get no human contact at all.
- Returns are very hard on the animals and often increase/cause anxiety or behavioral issues.

- **MCAS past and current staff**
  - The biggest obstacle is that people cannot bring their dogs to meet other dogs.
  - **Most participants shared the importance of having animals under spaying and neutering services because of animal aftercare when they are not spayed or neutered.** (This conversation came up as well with the selected long-term shelter volunteers and foster households group)

- **Interviews**
  - The current spay and neuter voucher program is not accessible; the $200 deposit is a barrier for many families. Additionally, when compared to the rate that unneutered animals get put out for adoption, only a small fraction of vouchers are redeemed each year, creating an unethical system.

Survey data

On a scale from 1 to 5, the lower the score, the easier it is to attain information from that method. From someone who adopted a pet's perspective, these were the options that were shown as helpful.

General interactions with MCAS staff **2.20**

Access to information about the pet prior to adoption **2.31**

Website information on adoptable pets **2.32**

Facility pet viewing and adoptable pet interactions **2.37**

Adoptions counseling **2.42**

"The concentration is so much on [getting] the animal out as fast as possible, that we're missing the opportunities for gathering more information to not just get the animal out, but to get the animal out into the correct home to avoid the adoption returns. There's on any given week, at least three or four animals that are returned because they got them home and something happened because there wasn't enough information. So… by not rushing them out the door quite so quickly, we're missing the opportunity to find the right home, not just any home." - Participant from a small group

Follow-Up Communication from MCAS Post-Adoption

Participants' responses consistently mentioned a **lack of follow-up communication** from MCAS post-adoption, regardless of follow-up medium. However, despite these findings, when asked if the follow-up was helpful, most participants tended to report helpful and positive experiences, showing that post-adoption follow-ups are very well received by the community, but need to be done more consistently.

There were no qualitatively specific findings from the participant's groups to add.

Survey data

When participants were asked if they had received any follow-up from MCAS, the majority reported that they had not received any communication (70%). For those who had received follow-up, the majority described the communication as helpful (87%).

When asked if they received post adoption follow-up from MCAS, participants answered:

Yes **30%**

No **70%**

When asked if the follow-up was helpful, participants replied:

Yes **87%**

No **13%**

Values for Policies and Procedures

When asked which 5 values should be prioritized by MCAS when developing policies and procedures. **The top values** that were highlighted across the survey, small groups conversations and interviews were the following:
- Care of shelter and foster pets.
- Clear communication and transparency.
- Community centered.
- Staff integrity and wellbeing.
- Adequate use of resources.

Below are additional values from specific groups:

- **Partner agencies**
  - Better work environment, focused on ethics, safety, accountability, and integrity on every level, including employee retention, teamwork, and clear communication.
  - Transparency at every level.
  - Animal wellbeing (medical and social).
  - Empathy.
  - Center their efforts on building community trust, by providing clear and honest education to the public.

- **Volunteers**
  - Management and accountability for management and staff including clear policies, procedures, roles, and responsibilities, and better internal communication.
  - Exposure to community.
  - Animal welfare.
  - Successful adoption processes.
  - Allow for greater involvement and input from volunteers.
  - Better work environment and support for volunteers and staff.

- **MCAS past and current staff**
  - Must always prioritize safety for employees, volunteers, and the animals.
  - Integrity has a lot to do with trusting your teammates, incorporating their values, respecting their values, and understanding that we are all here for the animals.
  - Transparency. Participants mentioned that things shouldn't be happening behind closed doors. There are questions about why animals are being euthanized and they would like to understand what is behind those decisions.
  - Decision-making should be more collaborative. People who are doing the procedures should also have input.
  - Honesty with the community about decisions and the state of the agency, this will increase trust and support to the agency.

Survey data

The following are the top 5 values that participants picked as priorities:

Value	Percentage
Care of shelter and foster pets	18%
Reunification of pets and their humans	13%
Ethical	12%
Safety	11%
Clear communication	10%

*"We should be striving for quality care of the animals, not just providing what they need to survive and so they can be adopted [at] their time…. we should be striving for excellent care, quality care rather than just what we need to do to get by." **- Participant from a small group***

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to move forward with the best possible impact, LMS recommends that MCAS leverage their strengths toward the following solutions.

Program Improvements

- Existing programs should be reevaluated to measure their actual effectiveness and support for the community, considering the possibility of improving them or even replacing them with previous programs that seemed to work better.
- The communication aspect of the foster program needs thorough assessment. Communication channels connecting the coordinators, staff, volunteers, and foster parents themselves seem to be severed to a great extent; information gathered by staff and volunteers doesn't seem to reach the foster parents, and complaints don't get any kind of response.

Culture Change

- Team dynamics need a rigorous revision, including looking to better define the hierarchy scheme, clarify documentation, responsibilities, and procedures, improve communication between departments, management, staff, and volunteers, provide training to staff and volunteers to improve efficiency and quality of work, hire more staff, and raise the screening standards for new hires.
- A stronger and inclusive connection with the community is necessary. Appropriate ways to build and improve the relationship between MCAS and the community they serve are by holding events like open visiting days at the shelter, hosting adoption pop ups in public spaces, facilitating workshops for pet owners and adoption counseling events for future adopters, carrying a clear and effective Social Media campaign to showcase the work that is being done by the county, available services, and opportunities to join MCAS through career paths or volunteer programs.

Facilities and Amenities

- While MCAS is currently in the process of considering a new shelter facility, it is important to prioritize community feedback throughout the process to help increase animal care and fix current facility issues.
- More land needs to be included in MCAS's expansion plan to support adequate animal infrastructure in MCAS's new facilities, including the introduction of green areas for animals, larger animal medical facilities, animal quarantine kennels, soundproof rooms and a clear separation of louder rooms from the quiet ones to ensure animals don't suffer from stress and overstimulation.
- Create spaces dedicated to community activities, and more offices for staff to avoid overcrowding, and provide a bigger sense of privacy to working staff.
- Facilities should feel inclusive and welcoming to visitors and potential adopters; having indoor waiting rooms, private meet and greet areas, and child-friendly facilities will help increase positive experiences and create a more comfortable and welcoming environment.

Access and Interactions

- Information, training, and resources provided to volunteers and fosters need to be kept up to date and accessible to promote excellence in animal welfare.
- Standardize information and experiences across all communication platforms, including in per son communication, by creating standard answers to common questions and resources for staff and volunteers to use when answering questions. Internal policies and procedures should also be standardized and included in resources for staff and volunteers.
- Both MCAS's website and social media should highlight adoptable animals, promote lost animals, and be frequently monitored to keep information accurate, relevant, and accessible. It is especially important to post up-to-date information about animals found by the field personnel or have people that can answer the phone over the weekend to help people find out about their lost pets.
- Update MCAS website to include user-friendly and intuitive layouts.
- Communicate consistently through social media and include engaging content that puts relevant information into user viewer-friendly formats.
- Have notes on animal behavior, personalities, medical history, and special needs be required for all adoptable animals. Implement a system that compiles this information, making it readily available and accessible to all staff, volunteers, and potential adopters.
- Improve phone call processes by making MCAS's phone number easily accessible through other communication platforms, like social media and the website, while implementing phone trees to cut down on wait time. All staff should also have training on how to answer phone calls to improve customer experience and platform reliability.
- Having all resources and information provided by MCAS available in multiple languages is key to creating inclusiveness, accessibility, and increasing communication. Many community members do not have English as their native language, which can create barriers to communication between volunteers, staff, and potential adopters.
- Continue creating inclusive spaces where MCAS can keep listening and learning from the communities they serve. Having a process or space where communities can continue to give MCAS feedback will go a long way towards achieving sustainable and consistent progress in both community engagement and animal welfare.

Adoption Process

- Make the spay and neuter services more well known to the public. This service can be very expensive for communities.
- Expand MCAS' in-house spay and neuter program.
- Parameters and documentation need to be improved and followed consistently. Key procedures like accepting strays, owner surrenders, and future adopter screening also need to be evaluated and revamped.
- When animals are being logged for adoption, staff need to take better notes and fully register the animals' conditions so that adopters don't end up returning pets to the shelter because of unwritten medical or behavioral conditions.
- Provide adoption counseling. Counselors need to give enough information about the dogs or their needs, including full and accurate medical histories, before allowing any adoptions.

Policies and Procedures

Evaluate all systems and processes to focus on upholding MCAS's mission statement and values. With MCAS turning to more corporate style management, the organization seems to have lost focus on the services and care it is meant to provide, both for animals and their community. With the organization seemingly focused on quick turnarounds and figures, a major overhaul of the current system is recommended to provide transparency and accountability for management and staff and to refocus the organization on excellence in animal welfare.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that MCAS has done much great work over the years and that there is a lot of room to grow to have a better and greater impact on pets and the people who treat, care for them, and will love them going forward. It will take a strategic, concerted effort to really address the issues and concerns highlighted in this paper. It is also clear that MCAS works to fill a felt need in the community, and that there is a great need in the community. Lara Media Services appreciated having the opportunity to do this work to amplify and elevate the voices of the community.

Reference

[1] Audit finds Multnomah County animal shelter failed for years to spend donor money earmarked for veterinary services, outreach, (2023, 06,09) The Oregonian. From https://www.oregonlive.com/politics/2023/06/audit-finds-multnomah-county-animal-shelter-failed-for-years-to-spend-donor-money-earmarked-for-veterinary-services-outreach.html

APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONNAIRE

Strengths, Improvements, and Culture

1. What do you feel are Multnomah County Animal Services' strengths?
   (ex. Customer service, Investigations and Field Services, Adoptions, Community Outreach/ Public Information, Licensing, Care of Pets in the Shelter).
2. Where do you feel are the areas that need the most improvement at MCAS?
3. Please provide your thoughts on any specific strengths or improvements for Animal Services.
4. What is your impression of the work culture at MCAS?
5. Please share with us ideas on how to improve the work culture at MCAS.

Facilities/amenities

6. What is your impression of the MCAS shelter facility?
7. Please provide us with any suggestions for how the current facility could be improved.

Access and Interactions

8. How would you rate your interaction with MCAS in the last 5 years?
9. How easy or difficult is it to access information from MCAS?
   (ex. Website, phone, in-person, Social Media).
10. Do you have any suggestions for how MCAS can make it easier to access information and interact with the community?

Adoption process

11. If you or someone you know have adopted a pet through MCAS in the past 5 years, were the following adoption processes helpful?
    (ex. Access to information about the pet prior to adoption, Adoptions counseling, Facility pet viewing and adoptable pet interactions, General interactions with MCAS staff, Website information on adoptable pets).
12. Did you receive follow-up communication from MCAS post-adoption?
    ◦ Was the follow-up communication helpful for you?
13. Is there any more information about your experience adopting a pet at MCAS, that you would like to share?

Policies and Procedures

14. What are the top 5 values you believe should be prioritized by MCAS when developing policies and procedures?
    (Here are some examples (this or something else). Welcoming, Reunification of pets and their humans, Clear communication, Community Centered, Care of shelter and foster pets, Respectful, Empathy, Ethical, Safety, Resource-based, Equity Focused, Accessibility).
15. Please include any additional comments you would like to share with us.