GUIDE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT: ANIMAL CONTROL

Local governments administer animal control in various ways. It is important to understand how your jurisdiction manages animal control so that you can effectively advocate for change. Your first step in a campaign for change will be to orient yourself to your local government structure, identify the appropriate decision makers, and build lines of communication with them.

**Structure**

There is no single local government structure. Determining how your animal control is governed will be your first step. The diagram on page 2 includes the most common structures, but your community could easily operate differently or have no animal control function at all.

Animal control is locally (city or county) administered; however, there may be state laws that govern these agencies or that must be enforced by these agencies. (For example: each state has animal anti-cruelty laws to enforce and there may be state laws that regulate animal shelters. There may also be local ordinances particular to your area that the local agency or contractor enforces.)

To find out about your local animal control structure, start by checking your local government’s website or call your city or county elected representative. If you don’t know who your representatives are, you can look them up on the internet, in the blue pages section of most phone books, or at the library.

**Follow the money trail**

Once you know what type of system your animal control operates under, it is important to understand where it obtains its money (see diagram). For example, if animal control is contracted to a nonprofit organization, municipal funding might be determined by a written contract and supplemented by grants from foundations and donations from the public. Government agencies and for-profit contractors sometimes have counterpart nonprofit entities so that they can apply and qualify for grants and donations.
Structure Examples

Example 1

Maricopa County in Arizona has one of the largest animal control agencies in the U.S. The Maricopa County Animal Care and Control (MCACC) is a county (government operated) department with 158 full-time equivalent personnel whose director reports to the County Chief Financial Officer. Their annual budget is nearly $11 million: Animal Control (Enforcement) - $2.8 million, Pet Adoptions - $1.8 million, Dog Licensing - $1.3 million, Animal Sheltering - $1.7 million, Animal Welfare Safety Net (primarily low-cost spay/neuter) - $32,000, Administrative Services - $868,000, Information Technology - $47,000, General Government - $2 million. MCACC receives minimal funding from the County (3%) and is responsible for obtaining their own operating funds through: Licenses and Permits (50%), Intergovernmental Revenues (28%), Charges for Services (15%), Fines and Forfeits (negligible), and Miscellaneous Revenue (4%). The human population is over 3.5 million.

Example 2

Prince George’s County in Maryland has an Animal Management Division (AMD) within the Department of Environmental Resources (DER). The President of the DER supervises the Associate Director of AMD. Animal Control services are not contracted out to non-profit organizations or private companies. They have an annual budget of around $3 million. Revenue sources include: Animal Licenses - $145,000 and Fines and Fees - $102,000. They are also supplied money directly from the County. AMD has 12 field officer positions. A total of 16,343 animals were “handled” and 1,919 we adopted. AMD has a joint reduced cost spay/neuter clinic with the SPCA/Humane Society of Prince George’s County. The human population is 846,123.

Either City and/or County run...

- Elected Officials
  - City Council
  - City Hall
  - Mayors Office

- Contractor
  - Nonprofit
    - SPCA
    - Humane Society
  - For-Profit
    - Government

- Government Agency
  - Public Works
  - Public Health Department
  - Health and Human Services
  - Sheriff/ Police
  - Animal Welfare Division

Funding Through
- Government
- Grants
- Foundations
- Donations
- Government

- Funding Through
- Government
- Gifts
- Foundations
- Donations
- Government


www.goprincegeorgescounty.com/government/agencyindex/der/amd/
http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html (U.S. Census Bureau) - accessed 3/27/07
Example 3

The City of Alexandria contracts their animal control and animal shelter management services to the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria (AWLA). They are supervised under the Special Operations Division of the Alexandria Police Department and are required to submit monthly reports to the Chief of Police. The shelter director and Chief Animal Control Officer are subject to approval by the City Manager and the City Council. AWLA is given a $1 million grant from the city for its contract, but as a non-profit it also fundraises an additional $500,000, and receives $30,000 from dividends and interest. A total of 3,094 animals were received, 1,213 were adopted, and 1,352 were euthanized. The human population is 138,000.

Management Contract between City of Alexandria and Animal Welfare League of Alexandria – IRS Form 990 – filed for 2005
2005 Annual Report submitted to the Virginia State Veterinarian, available at:
http://www.virginia.gov/vdacs_ar/cgi-bin/Vdacs_search.cgt?link_select=facility&form=fac_select&access=0&fac_num=174&year=2005

Oversight and Accountability

When operating a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program, it is in your and the cats’ best interest to maintain communication and build a relationship with your animal control, but it is more important to figure out who is really making decisions. There should be something written into the contracts or law (based on your community’s structure) that determines oversight and accountability by an elected body of officials or an agency of the government. It is important to determine which person or department is specifically responsible. Finding a copy of the contract or laws could be as easy as looking online or as involved as filing a public records request. You have a right to information about how your government operates. Do not be discouraged if you do not get what you want right away. We suggest you try to get the information in this order:

1. Look for laws online.
2. Ask the help desk at your library.
3. Contact your local representative.
4. Call city hall and ask for the government agency responsible for the contract.
5. Call or email the government agency responsible and ask for a copy of the contract.
6. Go in person to the government agency responsible and ask for a copy of the contract.
7. Call the mayor’s office.
8. Submit a public records request to the government agency and request a copy of the contract for animal control.

Some states require animal control pounds and private shelters to report their statistics to the state. Many states and local ordinances require that the pounds and shelters maintain records on individual animals; other pounds and shelters have decided to do so on their own.

Public Records Laws

Each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia has public records laws similar, though not identical, to the federal Freedom of Information Act. State public records laws authorize members of the public to access documents and other public records from state and local government bodies. The laws differ in some respects so it is important to read and be familiar with the requirements of the specific state law that you are invoking. In particular, be aware that jurisdictions differ on what information must be recorded by their government agencies. Keep in mind, the government has no obligation to create a record that does not exist to respond to a public record request.

The public records laws of the states and the District of Columbia are available on the web. For example, FOIAAdvocates lists the citation as well as the text of each state’s public records laws at http://www.foiadvocates.com/records.html. Each state legislature also maintains a website on which it posts the current laws of the state. Local governments may also have laws or policies on such administrative issues as to whom the public record request should be sent, and whether a special form should be used for the request. These administrative details are likely posted on your local government’s website.

To get the information you desire, you may need to submit multiple or follow-up requests for the same or similar information. Be prepared to be persistent. You have a right to this information.