

REPORT:
The City of Houston
Bureau of Animal Regulation and Care
2009 Multi-Stakeholder Initiative

Prepared by MCV Consulting
July 2009



BARC 2009 MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVE REPORT

I. BACKGROUND

In response to repeated challenge and criticism from various stakeholder groups and the local media on the City of Houston's management of the Bureau of Animal Regulation and Care (BARC), the Mayor's Office launched an initiative in the spring of 2009 to solicit input from BARC's major stakeholder groups on the issues that plague BARC and animal welfare in the city and then bring representatives of those groups together to find community-based solutions to those problems. The five major constituencies identified by the City were:

- BARC management and employees;
- BARC volunteers and members of the animal rescue community;
- Animal advocates;
- Concerned citizens;
- Community animal welfare professionals.

In March of 2009, the City of Houston hired MCV Consulting, a Houston-based consulting firm specializing in the design and facilitation of multi-stakeholder engagement programs, to design and facilitate this initiative.

II. THE METHODOLOGY

The methodology MCV Consulting employs involves collecting information from key players in and outside the system, in this case BARC, to surface the range of perceptions about what the issues are and what is causing them. *This is not fact-finding mission or an operational review and assessment.* Rather, the process focuses on *surfacing the perceptions and assumptions* that the key stakeholders hold about what is going on. These perceptions and assumptions drive behavior and results and therefore must be identified, discussed and understood across all stakeholder groups in order to enable them to effectively solve together to systemic solutions where accountability for success will be shared.

The information is gathered through a combination of a public on-line questionnaire, confidential individual interviews and focus groups. As we review the questionnaire responses and material from the interviews and focus groups, clear themes emerge that highlight which issues are at the heart of the problem and what the different perspectives on them are. In selecting the themes to report back, we work with objectivity to look for the ideas that were expressed with most frequency and endeavor to eliminate our own personal viewpoints and opinions when summarizing them. The themes constitute the strategic agenda for the work that follows in a facilitated meeting with representatives from the system's stakeholder groups to discuss the themes and work collaboratively toward solutions.

It is often the case that the feedback from processes such as this is difficult for many stakeholders to receive and accept. It is not unusual for those reading the themes summary and illustrative quotes to become defensive and argue that what is being reported is not the truth. It is essential to remember that what is being reported are "perceptions" of reality as experienced by the various stakeholders, and therefore must be dealt with as valid versions of the truth; the adage "perception equals reality" never applied more than in a process where a range of impassioned stakeholders are involved.

III. THE PROCESS

We facilitated a three-staged process than took place from March through June of 2009:

- Phase I: A public on-line questionnaire;
- Phase II: One-on-one interviews and focus groups;
- Phase III: A one-day multi-stakeholder roundtable workshop.

Phase I:

MCV Consulting began the process by collecting information through a public on-line questionnaire that was posted on the BARC website and distributed electronically through various animal welfare list servs. Respondents were encouraged to disseminate the questionnaire URL to others who might be interested in offering their opinions.

Phase II:

In the second phase, MCV Consulting practitioners conducted a series of confidential one-on-one interviews and focus groups with members of all five identified stakeholder groups, as well as with former BARC employees. All participants were guaranteed anonymity in the reporting back of the collected data. The focus groups were conducted in person, as were the majority of the interviews; in some cases, the interviews were conducted by phone, and in two cases, input was gathered via email exchange.

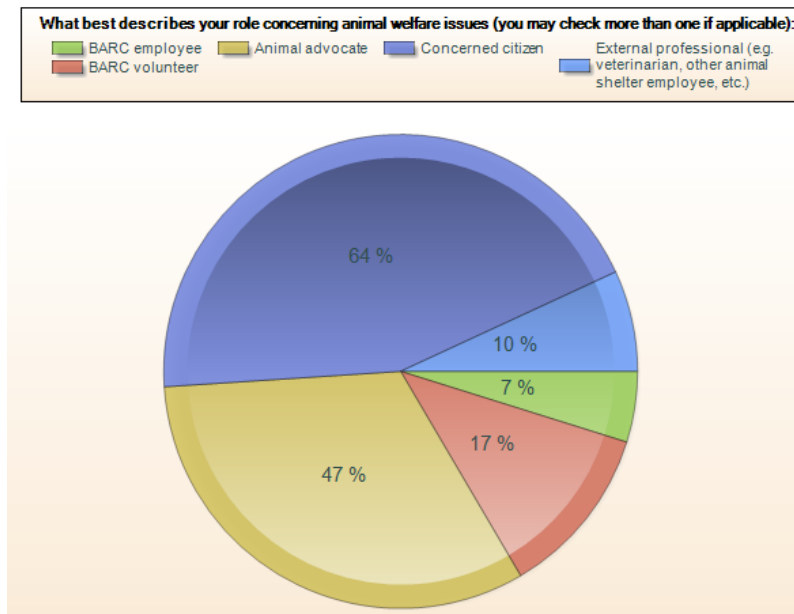
Phase III:

As the final phase, MCV Consulting facilitated a one-day multi-stakeholder workshop to present the results of Phases I and II and to work with the stakeholders toward collaborative solutions.

IV. THE RESULTS OF THE PROCESS

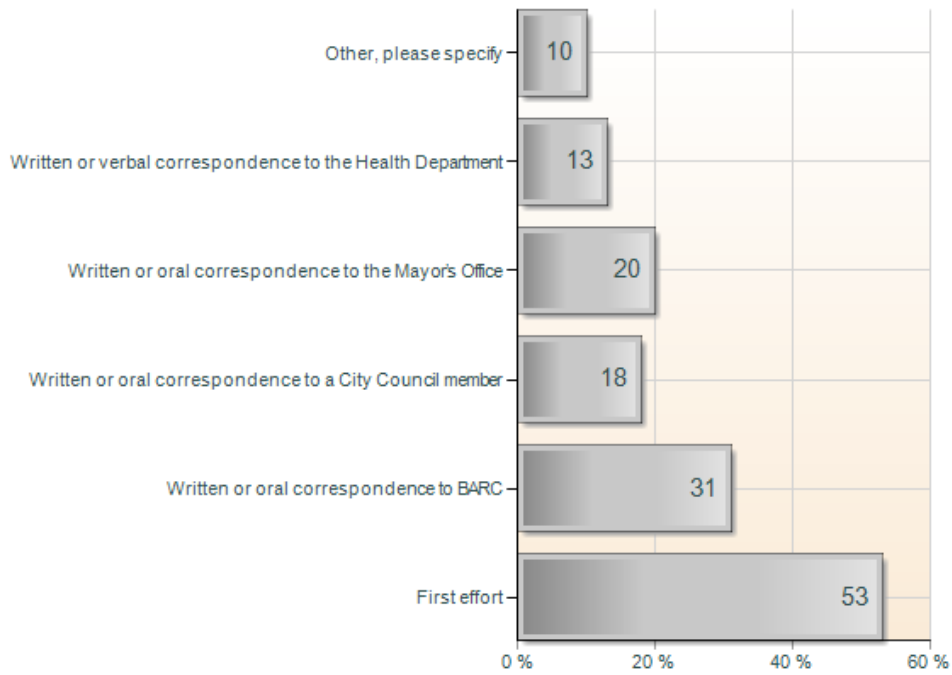
A. PHASE I: ON-LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was open from March 23 – June 23, 2009. During that time there were 651 visits resulting in a total of 214 completed questionnaires. The full list of questions appears in Appendix A to this report. The respondents self-identified the stakeholder group to which they belonged, and the percentages broke out as follows:

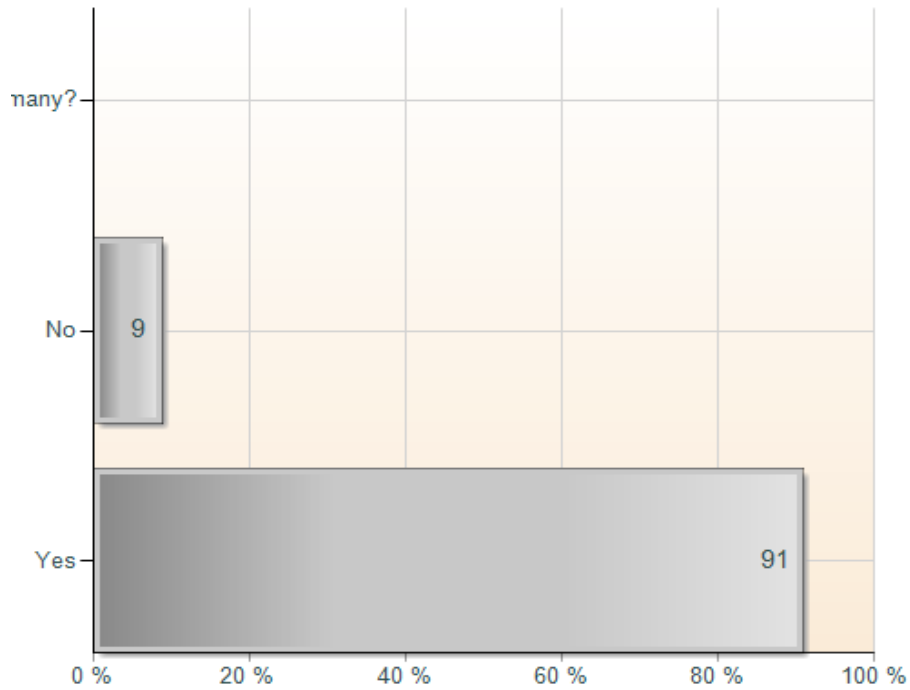


Below are the responses to the multiple-choice questions.

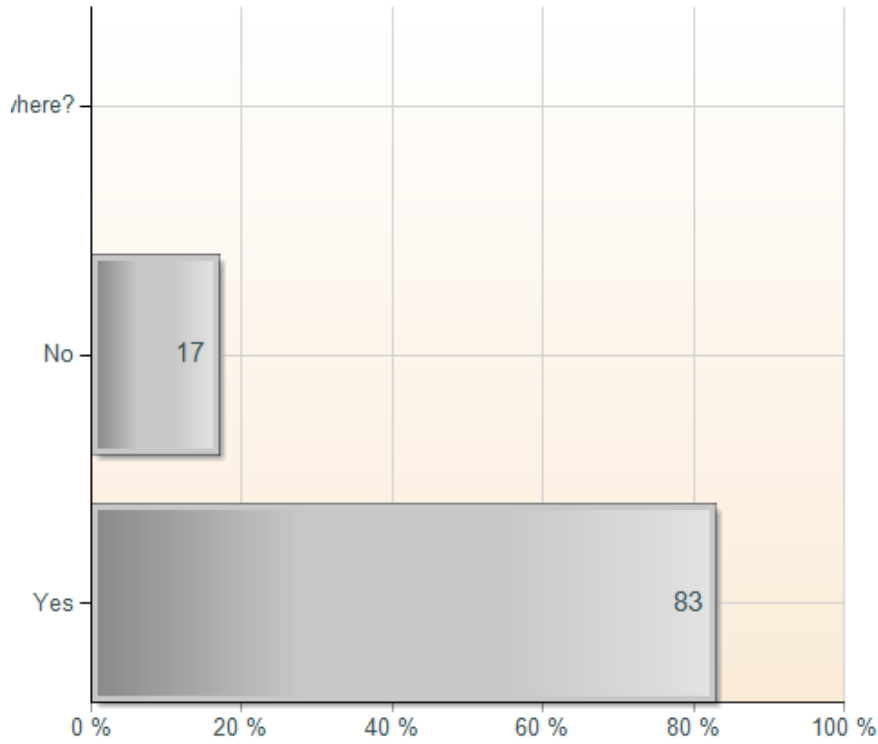
Is this your first effort to offer input to the city regarding BARC? If not, please describe the nature of your previous efforts:



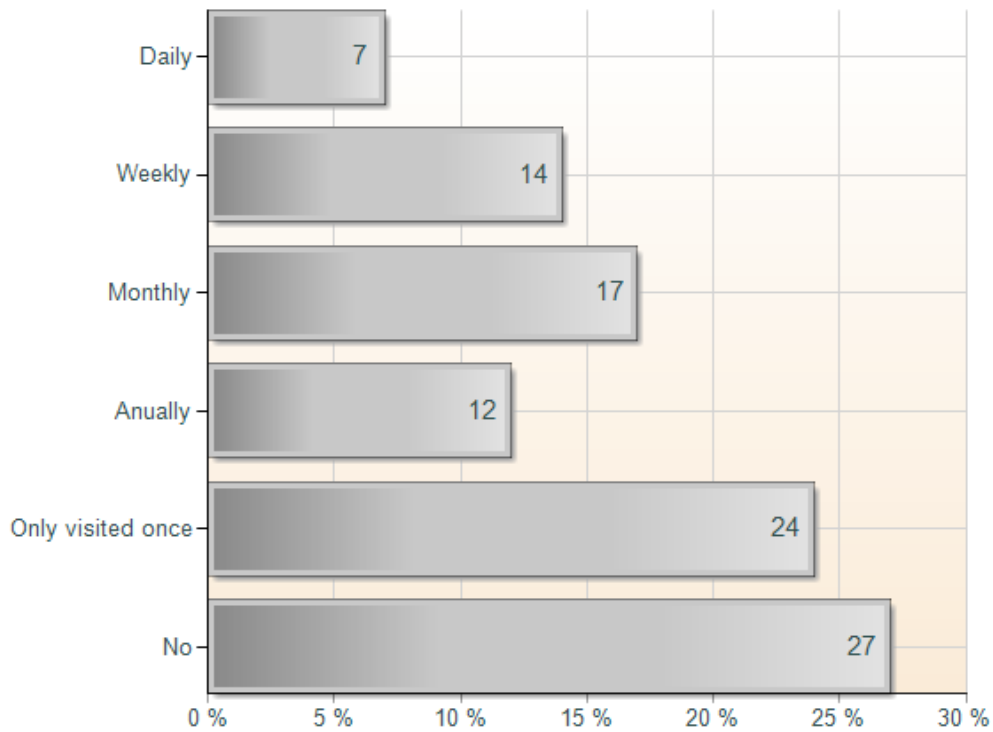
Do you have a pet?



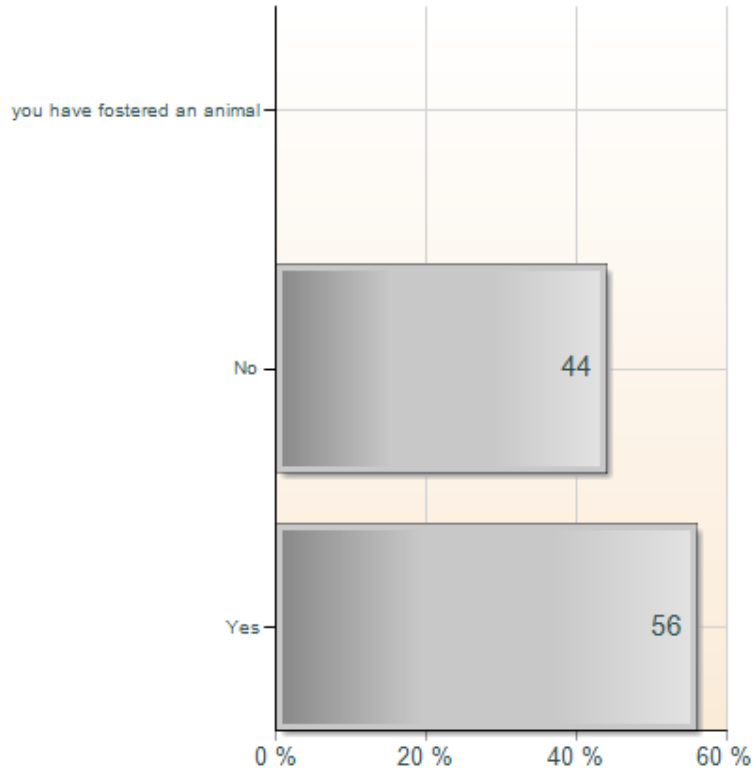
Have you adopted a pet?



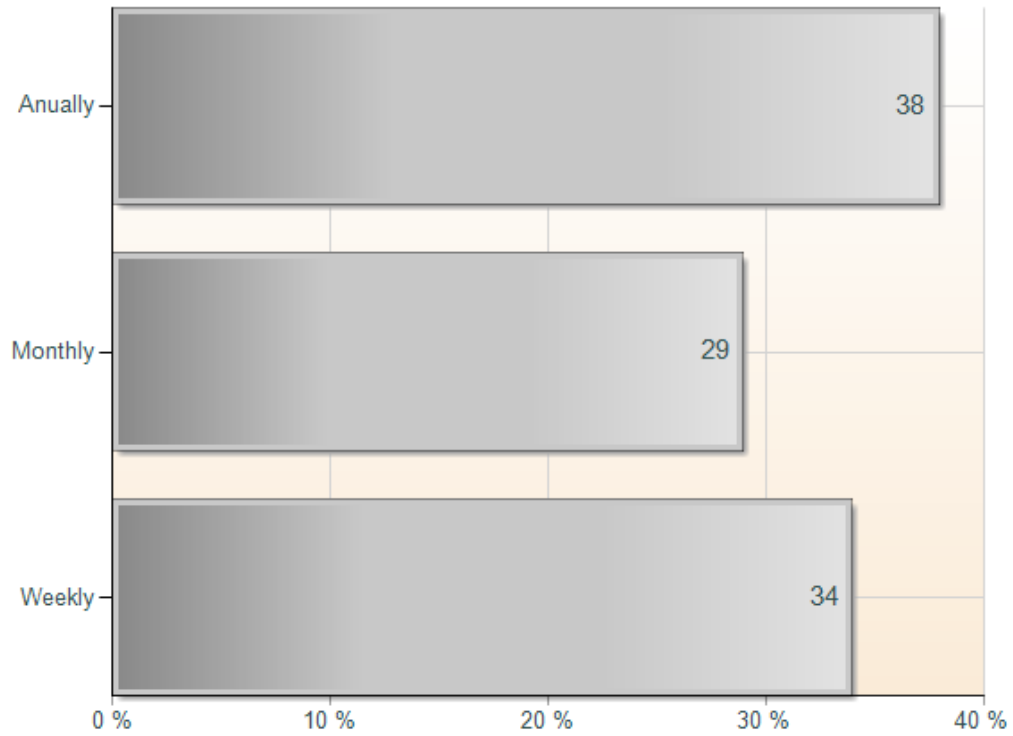
Have you visited the BARC facility? If so, how often have you visited?



Have you fostered an animal?

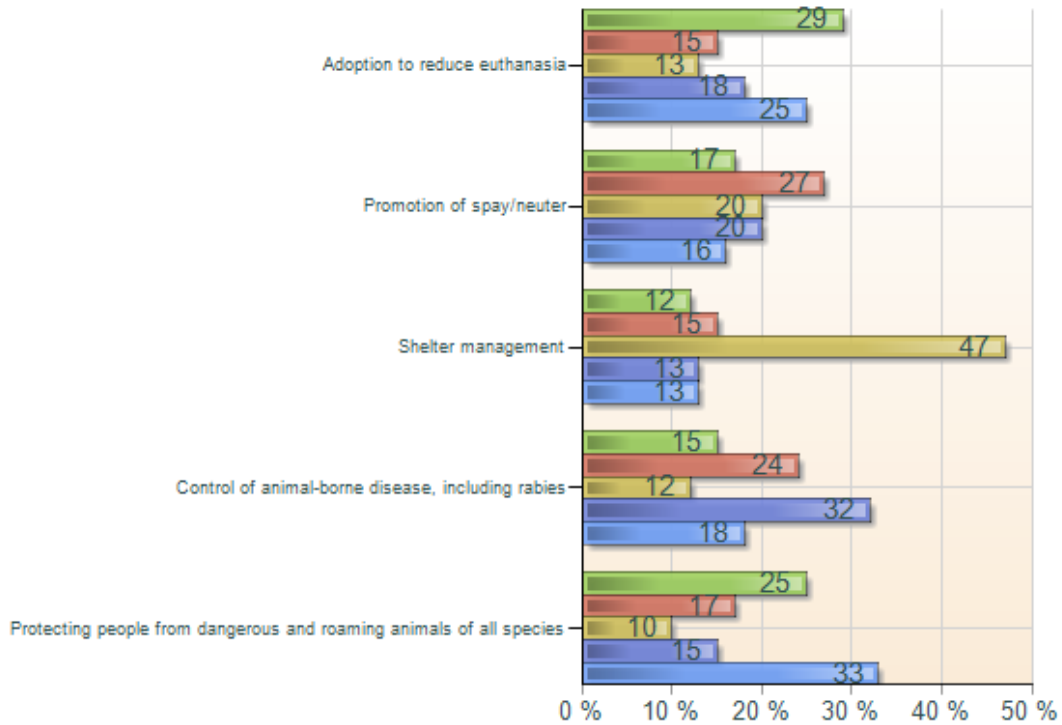


If you are a foster, how often do you foster?

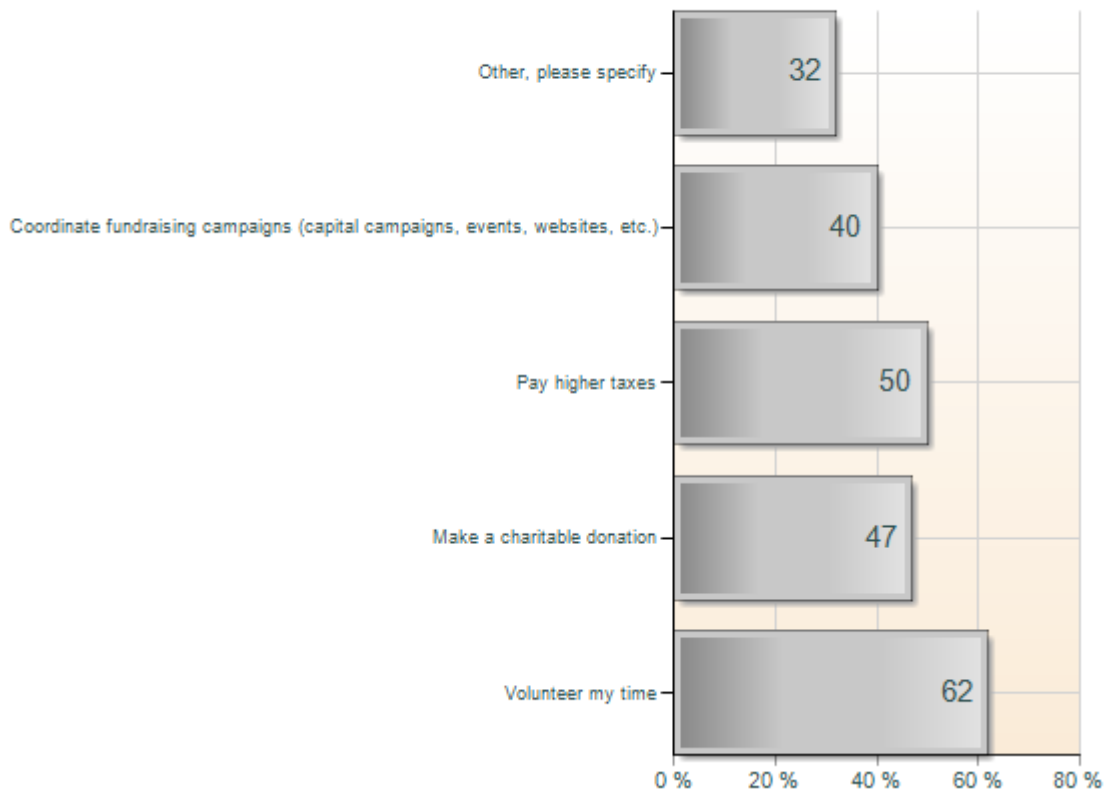


Please put these priorities in order from highest priority to lowest priority for which you believe the City of Houston's Bureau of Animal Regulation and Care should be mandated to control.

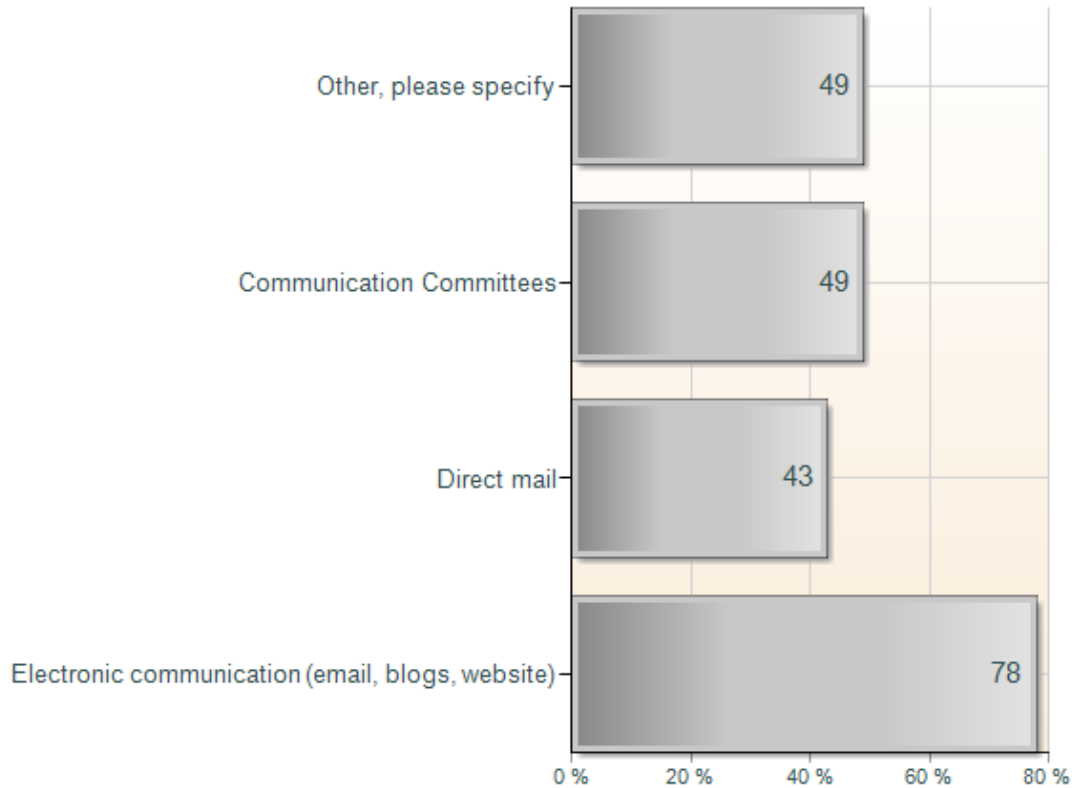
1 2 3 4 5



What would you personally be willing to contribute to the improvement of BARC's quality of service?



What can BARC do to improve its communication with the community?



Below are the major themes and illustrative comments from the open-ended sections of the questionnaire.

No More False or Failed Attempts to Fix BARC: Fix it NOW!

- *PLEASE for the love of all that is good in the world FIX THIS PLACE!! Make Houston a leader in animal welfare and not an embarrassment.*
- *How come it's taken so long for the City to respond to the years of pain and persistence by the volunteers?*
- *I hope this survey isn't just to make us be quiet for a while. I hope it's actually going to be used and taken seriously.*
- *The Health and Human Services Dept has only RECENTLY become involved in how BARC is mismanaged due to all the negative publicity. If it hadn't been for the publicity, things would continue as they were.*
- *I have worked in and out of BARC for at least 8 years. Throughout this time, management and the city have made promise after promise - all the while doing little to improve the lot of both animals and volunteers who try to help. It APPEARS management is now soliciting input from citizens and volunteers. I hope that this time, because it has been done before, this is a sincere attempt to improve the truly horrible conditions at BARC*

Internal Issues at BARC

BARC is Devoid of Strong Leadership, Management and Employee Accountability

- *BARC has poor management from the top to the bottom.*
- *There does not seem to be any management at all at the facility.*
- *Put someone in charge that will actually care about the daily lives of the animals and be aware of what is going on around them.*
- *Hire a director that is a good manager, has knowledge of all the players and how they work together.*
- *Hire better managers and give them authority. Authority meaning they actually have power to negatively reinforce employees doing wrong or doing nothing.*
- *Implement policies and procedures and actually hold employees ACCOUNTABLE!!*
- *One of my biggest concerns centers around management and employees - they won't work hard because they have nothing to work towards - raises, bonuses that actually reward the good ones....not everyone (slackers).*
- *Office politics rule there. Lots of pointing fingers and work not getting done by employees.*

Clean Up the Staff and Focus on Training

- *Hire staff and employees that genuinely care for animals and/or who take pride in their job responsibilities.*
- *Hire quality staff with knowledge of animal behavior and provide continuing education for staff members!*
- *Get better trained and higher paid staff. Your core should be stronger, and that would be best treated from the inside out.*
- *The terrible staff and their lack of training is my #1 concern. Granted, a lot of the bad employees have been let go, but others are still there and practicing.*
- *BARC needs much better training and selection of employees. Clean up from the inside out.*
- *Monitor staff more closely and discipline slackers accordingly.*
- *Get employees in there who really care for the animals' welfare. Yes, there are a few that are great! But a lot aren't.*
- *Get rid of the staff who do not like animals and let the volunteers do more work.*
- *My number one issue with BARC is so many apathetic, unhelpful and untrained staff.*

Eliminate Catch and Kill as the #1 Priority at BARC

- *BARC seems to be more interested in just moving the animals out by euthanasia than anything else.*
- *I see a catch and kill mandate without any regard to animal care.*
- *It is like pulling teeth to save a dog.*
- *Catch and Kill is the only goal at BARC. It is an outdated method of population control that virtually guarantees high bite rates in a community.*
- *The current policy is euthanize as much as possible.*
- *What's working well at BARC? Euthanasia is going strong.*

Develop, Communicate and Enforce Effective Processes, Policies and Procedures

- *BARC needs a major overhaul--of programs, of employees, of promotion, of computer systems, etc.*
- *The priority at BARC seems to be making new policies that most likely won't be followed instead of making the daily lives and suffering of animals better.*
- *There are unclear policies, procedures and communication for volunteers, rescue groups, staff, etc.*
- *They need a foster care/adoption counselor and/or Foster Division (many are there waiting for hours to check out) – please give us a much less convoluted process for fostering.*
- *Please have 24-hour drop-off capability. Rescues occur at all times, not just before 6:00 pm.*
- *Make the system for getting animals out less cumbersome and more streamlined.*
- *Actually investigate calls received within a day or two of the call!*

Leverage Volunteers/ Involve the Community /Achieve Success Through Partnerships

- *Work with Rescue Groups/PR campaigns to let the residents know about BARC's adoptable animals.*
- *BARC has a rare opportunity right now to transform itself into an operation that actually cares about the animals because citizens are wanting and trying to help. BARC has not embraced those offers of help, but has, instead, pushed people away by going behind closed doors.*
- *There are so many concerned citizens. Please utilize their input, volunteer time, etc.*
- *Have the City be active with the volunteer groups to find satellite adoption locations like Highland Village*
- *Use the media to recruit more volunteers and Fosters for the animals*

- *Have a community Advisory Board that works with BARC but can publicly voice status.*
- *They should be working very closely with the SPCA - if a dog needs more advance medical care they should be able to send them there.*
- *I would like to see BARC work very closely with animal rescue groups and other animal shelters who have a higher visibility in the public's eye and not make that process so difficult!*
- *Harris County's shelter is much cleaner than BARC. Share protocols for shelter care. Share number of intakes, adoptions, etc. Harris County focuses on rabies. Refer rabies cases to Harris County.*
- *I think the city and county should work as one. They need to work in partnership and have the same policies including scanning, micro-chipping, spay/neuter.*
- *Partner with Lakewood church to be out front on Sunday afternoon with adoptable animals. Partner with a shelter in the Northeast to take animals after being in foster care for 3 weeks. There are tons of shelters in the NE that would LOVE to have the puppies that come into BARC.*
- *BARC should have regular meetings with Humane Agencies/Rescue groups to address current issues as they arise. Bring back organizations such as the Pet Overpopulation Task Force for Houston and Harris County--hold regular meetings. Bring back the Shelter Advisory Committee--you are in violation of state law by not holding meetings thereof.*
- *Allow volunteers to help and raise funds. Allow parolees to do their service hours at the facility*
- *Work with more rescue groups and fosters for adoptions. Allow more volunteers to come in BARC and help.*
- *BARC can be a wonderful place. There are people who care out there and will donate their time, money and experience for the welfare of the animals. This could be a huge community clean up in the process with enough educating and volunteering we could get the appropriate bills passed to prevent shelter overflow and educate people to adopt instead of buying that cute puppy that usually ends up in a shelter anyway because its not potty trained. Animals bring people together. I have been to many events and it is true, people who love their animals are loving people and they generally stick with other animal lovers.*

Community Animal Welfare Issues

We Need City-wide Public Education / Awareness about Responsible Pet Ownership

- *We need education for the public about spaying and neutering; we should promote spay and neuter campaigns citywide.*
- *Adoption to reduce euthanasia is very important, but until we can help control the companion overpopulation problem, the best solution is spay/neuter. Currently, the shelter is inundated with kittens and puppies, and until we can control the numbers of animals coming into the shelter, it will be very hard to end euthanasia of healthy animals.*
- *I would strongly recommend aggressive cooperative efforts to reach the poor neighborhoods with frequent, user-friendly spay-neuter campaigns.*

- *MOST dogs that enter BARC are less than 2 yrs old - so, if major spay/neuter campaign had been done 2 years ago, the number that entered BARC would be GREATLY reduced.*
- *People need to be responsible and get their pets spayed and neutered. If more people would spay and neuter their pets we would have less animals at BARC and other animal control facilities and shelters.*
- *They should organize more activities on a monthly basis to provide more education in the areas where there are more neglected animals in order to educate and inform the citizens.*
- *Communication: generalized information to the public on procedures picking up strays, dangerous animals, and other violations that need to be addressed.*
- *Put spay-neuter info in water bills!*

Increase the Number of Free/Low Cost Spay-Neuter Facilities in Houston

- *Create more TNR programs, mobile units and free clinics/ sliding scale services.*
- *I know of only one facility that will neuter feral animals for \$10 to \$20. At one time I had as many as 9 cats that I was trying to find help for. It cost me \$100's of dollars, but most cannot afford that.*
- *ALL animals should be either spayed or neutered. Citizens can 'sponsor' an animal and pay the cost for surgery, or make donations so that more locations can provide low-cost surgery.*
- *I would like to have more private vets provide spaying/neutering services at a reduced cost. I think more pet owners would be likely to have their pets altered, if it weren't for the cost.*

B. PHASE II: INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Five focus groups and 21 individual interviews were conducted by MCV Consulting between May 6 and June 18. The breakdown was as follows:

Participants in Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Stakeholder Category	Focus Groups	Interviews
BARC Management / Employees	5	3
Volunteers / Rescuers	4	4
Animal Welfare Advocates	4	1
External Professionals	5	4
Concerned Citizens	7	5
Dept. of Health & Human Services	-	4
TOTAL	25	21

The themes heard in the focus groups and interviews reinforced and elaborated upon many of those expressed in the on-line questionnaire. They are listed below:

The Situation at BARC is Unacceptable and Has Been Allowed to Persist for Far Too Long

The message was sent loudly and clearly that the state of BARC is unacceptable and has been for a long time. The issues are bountiful and run the gamut from ineffective leadership and management, to lack of training and communication to inadequate/outdated/unenforced operating systems, policies and procedures.

- *BARC reminds me of one of those puzzles where you look for 10 things that aren't right. I stand in the lobby and right away see 10 things that wouldn't cost any money to fix.*
- *We're lacking training, processes and procedures across the board.*
- *We don't have clear processes for terminating people. They just pass people along.*
- *Since it's impossible to get a raise for doing a good job, the only way to get a pay raise is to get promoted to a new job. However, that often means that there's a vacancy left in your old job, and so now, to get a raise, you have to do both jobs.*
- *Every day is something new, and it's not being communicated directly to us from our supervisors. Those [employees] who aren't fortunate enough to go to the Incident Command meetings don't really know what's going on. People are confused – they're hearing one thing from their supervisor and another from Incident Command.*
- *People are so totally frustrated, and there is virtually a complete lack of response. What are you to take away from that?*
- *If I express a concern, my supervisor goes around and around and never gives me an answer.*
- *Animals that have already been authorized for euthanasia are being vaccinated.*
- *To me, the big problem is lack of training. It's not that people don't want to perform at the level that is required; it's usually that they just don't know how.*
- *We're hiring people here who aren't really knowledgeable and then not training them; they are going to get us into trouble.*
- *The staff is not trained to recognize when an animal is getting sick. That kind of training is critical in a kennel.*
- *You can't find out who makes the euthanasia decisions. You have to be able to trust the reasons for why an animal was euthanized. There's a huge accountability problem.*

The Community's Trust in the City and BARC Has Been Shattered

Many people believe that the Mayor and City officials have not made a commitment to fix the serious situation at BARC. The multi-year legacy of “fixes that fail” by BARC’s management and the City has eroded stakeholders’ good will and trust to the point of severe skepticism, distrust and outright disgust. There is a perception among many (internally and externally) that when the outcries reach a high enough decibel, the City responds with a “window dressing” effort to appear as though they are committed to fixing BARC, when, in the final analysis, the initiative has no teeth or lasting impact (the 2005 Mayor’s Animal Protection Task Force was the most often cited example).

- *Through the years, things will blow up at BARC, so they'll throw up some process, then the heat goes down and nothing changes.*
- *There's a cycle of cleaning out BARC when the heat gets turned up high enough. Then it just slides right back down.*
- *BARC is the lowest on the totem pole in HHS. We're the stepchild.*

- *Every leader I've talked to over there has said they don't get support from City Council. All Council members are concerned about its not hearing complaints from their constituents.*
- *The City does not meet its responsibility to BARC. Friends of BARC have supplemented vet and basic supplies. I got a pained call from a volunteer a year ago that BARC had stopped doing adoptions. The reason was that BARC had run out of toner and the City's contract with the vendor had changed. They couldn't get new toner and therefore couldn't print the adoption certificates, so they simply stopped doing adoptions. I bought toner myself and took it over there.*
- *It confounds volunteers as to why the situation is still not being handled.*
- *I am very afraid to rescue any new dogs from BARC at this time. I cannot financially or emotionally handle another distemper case.*
- *BARC's reputation has gotten so bad that you can't get someone to pick up an animal because of sickness. In caring for sick animals your funds get depleted quickly and people think 'that free dog or cat isn't worth it. What you're doing is at the long-term emotional and financial expense of adopters.*
- *There's a breakdown in the chain of accountability. Is it the City, BARC, constable – who's responsible? Doesn't seem like they know.*
- *There is plenty of money out there [for animal welfare], but people want accountability.*
- *We've had such an increase in stray dogs. People trying to find more reasonable priced places to live are just leaving their animals behind.*
- *Citizens live in fear of retaliation from their neighbors. I won't ever call [BARC] again. I advised them several times that the incidents are occurring at my neighbor's address, but they show up at my door and not the offenders. No one wants their neighbor to know they were the ones who called.*
- *They are loosing the cooperation of the community when they do not treat the people calling in with respect.*
- *After making call after call to BARC threatened that if they didn't do something I'd go to the media. He said they picked up 16 dogs but there are so many more. They're everywhere. Kids are running around playing with these stray animals who are sick. I have to tell them to stay away because you never know what these dogs will do.*
- *For you not to respond in a timely manner to people who are fearful is shameful.*

BARC Has No Clear Guiding Mission

Every stakeholder group identified the lack of a decisive mission at BARC as a firm obstacle to alignment and improvement at the agency. Many pointed to the institutional conflict between animal “control” and “care” and the fact that the default priority at BARC seems to be “catch and kill.” A universal theme was the need to identify a clear, unifying mission and then rigorously communicate it and enforce it both internally and externally.

- *They changed the name from “Bureau of Animal Rescue and Control” to “Rescue and Care.” Now we have lousy animal control and care. There is no vision, no mission for the program at BARC.*
- *It’s still a catch and kill philosophy – it goes back to the old days. The intentions may be good, but it’s still catch and kill.*
- *BARC needs to decide what it’s going to be when it grows up: animal welfare, control, or both.*
- *You must look at the bigger picture and see how things are interrelated; for instance you cannot have the ACOs working independent of a larger mission.*
- *The left and right hands don’t know what each other are doing. There is no singular mission.*
- *Right now the cry is to reduce euthanasia. If that’s the priority, then we should be placing our resources in alignment with that. In reality, 50% of our resources are invested in animal control, 40% in taking care of the animals while they’re here, which leaves 10% for adoption and rescue. Does the whole Houston community really want the main priority to be reduction of the euthanasia rate? I don’t know... Some just want the strays out of their neighborhoods and are OK if the outcome is euthanasia. Where is Houston on this issue? Which is the greater priority – reduced euthanasia or public health? Whatever it is, we need to align the organization with what the community really expects.*
- *If we could get a strong mission and plan for BARC, I think the mainstream public would back it and become engaged.*

Repeated Turnover in Leadership Has Left a Wake of Damage In and Outside of BARC

Four BARC Bureau Chiefs over the last five years and the recent installation of HHS’s Incident Command, has left volunteers, rescuers and advocates alike feeling pummeled by the constant change. Reactions range from cultivated apathy and hopelessness to cynicism, passive aggression and outright anger. In general, we heard various stakeholders say it’s not worth investing their time or energy in learning new processes, policies and procedures because they’ll soon be replaced by new ones. The consistent turnover also promotes a lack of accountability and allows those who are incented to maintain the status quo to succeed in doing so.

- *They’re always in crisis mode. The procedures change everyday. There’s no consistency.*
- *All the recent changes have caused a lot of confusion. We implemented a new schedule on May 2nd. People had to sign the schedule saying they’d received and understood it. Even so, three employees missed Saturday.*
- *I don’t know who I’m supposed to contact at BARC now because there’s been so much change.*
- *There’s no continuity from one leader to the next. We haven’t been consistent with Bureau Chiefs. When we start into a flow, then new management comes in and everything we were doing gets reversed. It breaks the spirit after a while.*
- *BARC needs constant leadership in place for more than two years and the support of City Council.*
- *Our organization has a loose partnership with BARC, but we have to reestablish a new relationship every time leadership changes there.*

- *I've already made my mind up with the new Bureau Chief. I'll ride it out, but if it doesn't get better, I'll cut my losses and leave.*

BARC's Organizational Culture is Highly Toxic

As one of the byproducts of the chronic turnover in leadership, the culture at BARC has devolved into severe dysfunction. Finger pointing and scapegoating are the norm when things go wrong, causing many employees to be in constant fear of being written up, losing their job or their license. There is a "tar and feather" syndrome at work where whistle blowers, innovators and those seeking legitimate improvement are penalized and/or run off while poor performers are protected by the system. High performers either leave or are eventually dragged down to the lowest common denominator.

- *We have an in-house problem. I always tell new employees, "You're a mustang now, but you're gonna get broke." People come in here and see someone else doing the least amount possible and getting by with it. It's only a matter of time before they ask, "Why am I trying so hard?"*
- *Employees may well start off caring, but get sucked in and demoralized and give up. They stop caring. Everyone feeds off one another. They get jaded and think there is no better way.*
- *Within the organization I must watch my back – I can't trust anybody.*
- *Everyone is trying to cover their track because you may be held accountable for situations out of your control. We're set up to fail.*
- *A lot of employees feel threatened and defensive on a daily basis.*
- *I get accused of protecting my job. Well yes, I have to. It's a like a doctor fighting with an insurance company. I'm caught in a tug of war between the administration and the ethics issues.*
- *It's a culture of fear, fighting and testosterone.*
- *It's a culture that has to change. It will take someone very tenacious.*
- *We need to move from a culture of suspicion and fear to one of trust and cooperation.*
- *Maybe we need to find legal ways to protect BARC employees when they're trying to do the right thing for the animals and the community.*
- *If we don't find a way to protect and encourage the good employees, they'll leave. We have to give them support.*
- *There is a definite pattern at BARC of defending the offender and going after anyone who makes waves or files complaints. Good employees are afraid of retribution by fellow employees.*
- *Innovative responses get smacked down, but bad employees can stay on for years and years.*
- *Every email or voice mail here is recordable. Every disciplinary action is public record. It's so scary. Something can come back and bite you in the ass if someone decides they want to get you.*
- *We have a "shoot the messenger" culture here.*

BARC's Physical Plant and Location Present Significant Barriers

Not surprisingly, many talked about the limited size of the BARC facility, the fact that its physical design isn't conducive to basic sanitation and animal comfort, and the public's difficulty in locating the facility, if they even know it exists. Also typically cited were the hours of operation that restrict the public's access during the week, especially for those who work.

- *There's no signage directing people to BARC. People don't even know we exist. We need to get more people in the door so we can send more animals out.*
- *You sit here at 11:30 AM when our doors open, and you see a "flood" of four to five people. The SPCA has 40 to 50 when they open their doors.*
- *I have been living in Houston for six years and never heard of BARC.*
- *We simply need more facilities. We have sick animals that we just don't have space for.*
- *We really have a long way to go in improving our physical environment. It's terrible. The comfort of the animals was never given any thought when this place was designed. Neither was the ability to clean and properly disinfect the kennels. What they created instead was a wonderful environment for bacterial growth.*
- *This environment is stressful for animals – the smell, the dark kennels, cats and dogs close together. What we know is stress accelerates disease development.*
- *If we can't fix the problem of irresponsible pet ownership, then we need to expand our facility because we're beyond full.*
- *We are now starting to put two dogs in one cage but that's not solving the problem. You're creating more space but you're also creating more problems.*
- *The shelter is running above capacity and that just creates more stress on the animals.*
- *They're saying their system is overcrowded. I was asked what they want me to do with these animals - they may have to put some down. I would hate that but they have to do what they have to do if the animals are sick.*
- *There are supposed to be 20 ACO's out on the streets. Right now there are only 11. Our intake and euthanasia are going to skyrocket because we are already bursting at the seams.*

An "Us vs. Them" Mentality Pits the Stakeholder Groups Against One Another

Rather than work collaboratively, the relationship between employees and volunteers/ rescuers/ fosterers is marked with mistrust and antagonism. The employees generally feel the volunteers look down on them and are out to prove their incompetence through "gotcha missions," while the volunteers/rescuers/ fosterers feel pushed away, underutilized and "locked out" by employees.

- *One of the biggest problems at BARC is the unrealized expertise of volunteers. Stop acting like it's us vs. them.*
- *The problem is the employees have been so antagonistic against the volunteers.*
- *The volunteers are treated like scum and whistle blowers instead of partners and community. You hear it all the time: us vs. them.*

- *I go around and write down employees' names and what they're doing. You document it and send it to the person you think is responsible, and you don't hear anything back. Why are the volunteers the ones who have to do the documenting and reporting?*
- *When you see the people from HHS coming over here, you can see them making gestures and looking down on us. We're not dumb. I have a Bachelor's degree, and there are some that have Master's.*
- *The "gotcha missions" by volunteers need to stop. The staff is very untrusting of volunteers because of this history.*
- *We need to come together as a community to address the problem and make the commitment to not trash each other. We need to come together, meet often and have open dialogue.*
- *You can't understand why I do what I do until you have walked in my shoes.*
- *People focus on the shelter staff, accusing us of killing all the animals and not caring. But we didn't go out and create the supply. Somehow, though, we become the bad guy when we're just trying to do our jobs and save as many as we can. We want nothing more than the number of animals that we see in here decline.*
- *People have rights to not be attacked by dogs. People who love animals spend lots of money on animal rights but people don't spend the same money or resources on people rights.*
- *It's about the animals, not the people. If you say, "No!" I'm going to say, "Yes!" if it means protecting the animal. If it's about saving that little puppy, I can be stubborn.*
- *My only concern here is the animals – not the people, not the volunteers, not BARC.*
- *We want to and are willing to help – through time, treasures or talents. What is missing is the person to talk to.*

The Perception That All BARC Employees Just Don't Care is Erroneous

The employees we spoke with stressed that they and many other employees came to work at BARC out of the sincere desire to help animals, and that remains their primary motivation. However, they find themselves working everyday with limited resources and constraints often outside their realm of control. While they acknowledged that there are certainly poor performers in the organization, they are very demoralized by the prevalent assumption that all BARC employees are lazy and would rather kill an animal than save it. They also talked about their frustration with the lack of training and how they often feel set up for failure by the inadequate training, the lack of communication from management and the poor processes, procedures and systems.

- *The biggest misperception is that we don't care about the animals. If people would come here for a month, they'd see what we've been up against. Certain volunteers see it and know.*
- *There are some legitimate complaints, but the focus on those makes it harder for those of us who do care and are trying to save as many animals as we can. The fact is every animal here can't be helped.*
- *We're always looked at as the bad people who don't care. We love animals. We don't want to euthanize them. Getting labeled like this... It makes you not want to come to work.*
- *I came here because I thought this was an opportunity to make a difference in an animal's life.*

- *Most vets go to school to save animals – not to euthanize. There’s a vet sitting in the back crying right now with good reason. Most people don’t understand what the employees go through here.*
- *A lot of the perceived problems at BARC aren’t because of BARC; for instance, we request mops and supplies every week and are told we just can’t get them.*
- *Most people just don’t understand how bad the stray situation is in Houston. You’ll think everything is going pretty well, then they’ll do a sweep. The rate of euthanasia is going to skyrocket every time we do these sweeps because we just don’t have enough room for all the animals.*
- *We started doubling up on dogs in the kennels, which impacts how animals behave. The kennel attendants were not informed of this and didn’t know they were supposed to put two bowls of food in the kennels which caused more issues of animals fighting and being underfed.*

The Persistent Negative BARC Publicity and Internet Hype Contribute to, Rather Than Improve, the Situation

Members of all stakeholder groups expressed their frustration with the relentless negative BARC media publicity, blogging and email blasting. They pointed to the fact that often what is reported is erroneous, exaggerated or taken misleadingly out of context. While everyone who spoke about this fully acknowledged how serious the situation is at BARC and that horrible things have indeed happened, they seemed to feel that bashing BARC publicly had become a sport that is harming more than helping get things corrected. They talked about the irresponsible lack of fact checking that goes on and referenced the children’s game of “telephone” as the model for how misinformation spreads quickly via the Internet about BARC.

- *The endless negative publicity blitz backfires: it discourages visits to BARC and adoptions, lowers employee morale and adversely impacts ability to attract quality talent.*
- *We had 20 dogs go out over the weekend through adoption, and none were returned. We busted it out with a skeleton staff, but then I go home and see an article in the Examiner about something that happened three weeks ago. It’s deflating.*
- *When you throw into the mix the outside groups and media constantly bombarding BARC, it’s shooting ourselves in the foot. How are we going to attract qualified people to work and volunteer there?*
- *The typical approach by the activists is to use the airwaves to stir people up with email chatter. A lot of inaccurate information goes out and explodes. There’s no effort to check reality.*
- *In all the stuff that goes out through the internet and the media about BARC, there is a definite lack of discipline of fact checking.*

A Cultural Shift Regarding Responsible Pet Ownership and Spay-Neutering is Needed Throughout the Houston Community

A major public mind shift in personal accountability for animal welfare is required. Every focus group and almost every individual we spoke with talked about the need for public education on the importance of spay-neutering, vaccinating, licensing, leashing and other dimensions of responsible pet ownership. The quote we heard most often was, “It’s a people problem, not an animal problem.”

- *I haven't seen a single animal come in here with their vaccinations. I want to say to people, "Have your pets spayed, neutered and vaccinated!"*
- *Responsible pet ownership must be promoted through animal welfare partnerships with the communities. Communities do not know that spay and neuter is the answer.*
- *We need a citywide spay and neuter education program like what they've done in San Francisco.*
- *People need to be responsible and get their pets spayed and neutered. If more people would spay and neuter their pets we would have fewer animals at BARC and other animal control facilities and shelters.*
- *The public calls BARC to come get their neighbor's cats without even talking to their neighbor.*
- *I think the leverage is in public education to keep animals out of shelters in the first place so we don't spend resources on adoption programs. Prevention is the strongest, most cost effective strategy.*
- *There is no one working on community delivery and fundamental community values.*
- *The dog doesn't have sense enough to put a leash on himself and tie himself up. That's the owner's fault!*

The Animal Welfare Issues in Houston Require Widespread Public Will to Commit to Long-term Community-based Solutions

The majority of those we spoke with felt that the solutions that will ultimately address the animal welfare problems in our city at a root cause level need to be community driven and transcend the inevitable transitions in leadership at both BARC and the City. There is significant desire for collaboration with the City and BARC on the part of community residents, but they want assurance that there will be strong leadership in place at BARC and accountability for fixing the many organizational issues outlined in this report. The community's trust will have to be earned through actions and positive results rather than promises, but the stakeholders we talked to see and own the community's part in reducing the number of animals that end up at BARC.

- *If we could work together regionally, we could address these issues. We're tired of seeing these high euthanasia rates for our region.*
- *It's not just BARC—we need public education.*
- *BARC is not the only problem. We're all in this together and responsible for fixing the problems.*
- *The City needs to launch a spay/neuter program especially in the low-income neighborhoods. The cornerstone of lowering the population is spay and neutering.*
- *We need a community Advisory Board for BARC that can take these issues and move them forward.*
- *Reducing the euthanasia rate requires educating a whole new generation on spay and neutering and what's involved in responsible pet ownership. We have to take a long-term approach to solving this and remain committed to it just like what's happened with the green movement.*

- *We need a unified public health mission with organizations like the SPCA, etc. Increased capacity for addressing health concerns through a large network of private vets providing free or low cost services is important.*
- *We need more people who are not necessarily “animal people” and look to non-traditional places for foster or adoption placement.*
- *This is a war not a battle. It will take a long time.*
- *Maybe we could create volunteer opportunities at BARC for follow up on cases. I can’t stand going there, but I could do that – kind of like a child advocate role.*
- *We must be able to assist people with their needs concerning animal care such as repairing fences, etc. People are struggling to put food on their tables, so fixing a fence to keep a dog in isn’t even a consideration.*

C. PHASE II: MULTI-STAKEHOLDER MEETING

The process culminated in a one-day meeting at the George R. Brown Convention Center on June 25, 2009 where we presented the feedback to the stakeholders and worked with them to identify community-based solutions to the issues plaguing BARC and Houston’s animal welfare in general. The Mayor’s Office sponsored the meeting. MCV Consulting was in charge of participant recruitment and worked very hard to ensure distributed representation across the stakeholder groups. 31 stakeholders attended, including representatives from the City and all five key stakeholder groups. The list of participants appears in Appendix B to this report. Below is a summary of the meeting process and output.

Agenda

9:00 AM	Welcome Introductions Review of Meeting Agenda, Objectives and Ground Rules Articulation of Participants’ Expectations/Hopes / Concerns for the Meeting
9:30	Introduction to Principles and Practices of Healthy Dialogue
9:50	Presentation of Themes from Stakeholder Focus Groups and Interviews Discussion
10:45	Break
10:55	Defining the Shared Vision for BARC and Animal Rescue/Care in Houston
12:00 PM	Lunch
12:30	Identification of Leverage Areas for Collaborative Action
1:30	Action Planning Report-outs and Feedback on Action Plans
2:30	Next Steps and Accountabilities
2:50	Closing Remarks
3:00 PM	Adjourn

Participants’ Best Hopes/ Concerns about the Meeting

Following introductions, the participants expressed their expectations, hopes and any concerns they had about the day:

- Gain a better understanding of one another {the different stakeholders in the meeting}
- Don’t let this die today... it is incumbent upon us to care for the animals
- What we do here must translate into the community and address their concerns about animals and what their life in the community deserves to be
- Use this meeting to improve BARC

- Leave with tools to engage and communicate solutions to the community
- Understand and identify ways major donors can trust the City with their money
- Develop win-win solutions for all
- Identify objective goals and committees to address the goals and follow through
- That this can be the beginning of something greater... not just a constructive dialogue
- Understand the breadth of the issue and that we see that this is a community issue and there are many opportunities
- Have others learn more about BARC and what we do well
- I'd like to get the optimism back... have hope!
- Don't let this be one more thing like the 2005 Task Force
- Animal control is the red headed stepchild in a city but is a *huge* priority in neighborhoods
- Understand the importance of spay and neutering as a root cause/solution
- We put on unbiased lenses; remember what people say is never quite true and never quite false
- We can say "Hooray!" and march with a banner back to the community with collaborative solutions

Shared Vision for BARC & Animal Care / Control in Houston

After hearing and discussing at length the feedback of the key themes from the questionnaire, focus groups and interviews, the participants worked together to generate the elements of their aspirational 10-year vision for BARC and animal welfare in Houston. The elements clustered into the 11 categories listed below. Each participant was then asked to vote on the four clusters they felt needed the *greatest near-term focus* and for which they wanted to develop collaborative action plans. The vote tallies are listed next to each vision header, and the clusters are listed in order of the group's prioritization.

1. Make Internal Cultural Shift at BARC to a TEAM OF ONE! (29 votes)

- Clarify BARC's Mission
- Create *One Team!*
- Proactive Training for All
- Strong Accountable Leadership
- Continuing Education (ex. TNR)
- Volunteer Training/Orientation
- Customer Service Orientation (internal customers as well as external)
- Establish Collaborative Culture with Volunteers and Employees
- Assign Specific Job Descriptions to Volunteers
- Animal Care – Volunteer/Employee Partnership
- Eliminate Operational Silos
- One Voice; One Message
- Clarify Lines of Communication and Points of Contact
- Increase Staff/Officer Training
- Partner with Universities for Training

2. Improve Internal Processes at BARC (20 votes)

- Ensure Proper Allocation of Resources
- Defined Foster Process
- Vaccinate Upon Intake
- Alternative Software Management
- Badges for Regular Volunteers
- Assign a Volunteer to Follow Up with Animals that Leave BARC Unsterilized
- Streamline Adoption/Rescue Process

3. Create Outreach and Partnerships Strategy (18 votes)

- Grooming/Supplies Donated
- TNR
- Spay and Neuter Program w/ Local Vets
- Collaborate with Community Groups, Civic Clubs, Churches, Super Neighborhoods on Education about Responsible Ownership
- Partnership with City Departments/ Meals on Wheels
- Private Support: Vets, Kennels
- Partnerships with Dog Trainers
- Partnership with PetSmart
- Education with School Districts
- Use Neighborhood to Take it to Community
- Outreach – METRO
- Postal Service: Education and Marketing Partnership
- Outreach – HOAs
- Partnership with Assisted Living, Child Care Centers
- Education System / ISDs
- Outreach – Police Department
- Outreach – Public Works “Water Bill”
- Adoption Shelters / Adoption Support
- Remote Adoptions (BARC Fund)

4. Launch Public Education Initiative (15 votes)

- Determine Root Cause for People Letting Animals Roam Freely
- Decrease Need for Animal Control
- TNR
- Spay/Neuter
- Pet Retention – Supply and Behavioral Support
- Lower Bite Cases so Houston is Out of Top 10 Most Bites in U.S. (Postal) – We’re # 2!

5. Increase Live Release Rate / Meet the Market (15 votes)

- Increase Animals Reclaimed by Owners
- Satellite Adoption Centers
- Examine Hours of Operation – Make More Market Friendly
- Increase Adoptions

6. Generate More Animal Welfare Programs (10)

- Community-based Vaccination Programs
- More Spay & Neuter Programs

7. Enhance / Enforce Ordinances & Laws (5)

- Lower Loose Dogs in Diseased and High Crime Areas
- Stop BYB & Puppy Mills
- Enforcement of Animal Laws

8. Create Alternate Funding Sources for BARC (5)

- Grants, Gifts, Sponsorships
- Fundraising Health Fairs
- Private Sector Fundraising
- Fundraising via a Community Board
- Fundraising Calendar
- Fundraising Dog Show
- Fundraising Car Wash

- PetSmart Grants

9. Improve Marketing & Public Relations (4)

- PSA's
- Better Advertising
- P.I.O. Regular Updates on Facebook page
- More Positive Stories
- Awareness of "Other" Animals: Procedures for Animals Other Than Cats & Dogs
- Strategic Marketing
 - Press Releases
 - Internet

10. Develop Inter-local Government Agreements (2)

- Agreements with Neighbor Cities & Counties

11. Address Facility Requirements (2)

- Evolving Facility-based Needs
- Satellite Adoption Centers

Leverage Areas for Action & Action Plans

The group chose the top five visions clusters as the areas of highest leverage and self-selected into teams to develop action plans for them:

1. Make Internal Cultural Shift at BARC to TEAM OF ONE!

Team Leaders: Chris Glaser & Nela Brown

Team: JoAnne Jackson
 Thomasina Colbert-Noll
 Barbara Harris
 Juan "Smile" Cardona
 Barbara Miller
 Noel Pinnock

Action Items: Bring It On! Team of One

- Develop standard operating procedures and review them quarterly as well as provide training and cross training:
 - Accountability (employees and volunteers)
 - Compliance
 - Training standards (point person)
- Define mission, vision, core values:
 - Communicating = mass
 - Delivery: 2 – 4 weeks
- Define the culture that we need to create:
 - Timeline: July – August
 - Tools: survey, partnership council
- Define/ Create/Publish:
 - Mission
 - Vision
 - Core Values
 - Timeline: July – August
 - Tools: staff meeting (develop priorities and behavioral practices), partnership, t-shirt (branding)
- Re-evaluate S.D.P.s to ensure alignment
- Develop training plan

2. Improve Internal Processes at BARC

Team Leaders: Lajeane Thompson & Abigail Noebels

Team: Ray Sim
Chantale Clark
Risha Jones

Action Items:

- Vaccinate on trucks on as soon as they come in before they go to a kennel
- Treat emaciated dogs differently
- Formal process for intake: process questionnaire
- Evaluate water/food schedule
- Find appropriate isolation areas and clearly define who qualifies
- Set up/utilize 2nd vaccination clinic
- Assign a point person to assist with adoption events
 - Define BARC's responsibilities in assisting
 - Reporting/tracking results
- Define who's doing what – who volunteers/rescue groups speak to if they need anything

3. Create an Outreach and Partnerships Strategy

Team Leaders: Tina Davis & Lance Marshall

Team: Lydia Caldwell
Debbie Allen
Brooke Summers-Perry

Action Items:

- Create Community Action Group:
 - Rep from Mayor's office
 - Different agencies and Group Leaders
 - Rescue groups
 - Neighborhood associations
 - City agencies
 - Committee will be formed and have 1st meeting by August 1st
 - Mission Statement by July 10th – Tina Davis
- Start Yahoo group for communication
 - By June 27th – Brooke
- Go to Super Neighborhood meetings
 - Lance organize – July 10th (bring an animal)
- Create BARC Outreach Council

4. Launch a Public Education Initiative

Team Leaders: Ria Van Dright & Dr. Claudia Sims

Team: Bett Sundermeyer
Susan Lamb
Charlene Goffney
Leigh Hollyer
Bonnie McMurtry

Action Items:

- Animal-kind info to schools
 - Target high risk schools

- TNR info sheet (cat)
 - Post Office deliver to homes
- Dog bite cases – info spay/neuter
- City of Houston laws (bi-lingual)
 - License
 - Vaccinate
 - Leash

5. Increase the Live Rate / Meet the Market

Team Leaders: James Oxford & Dwayne Compton

Team: Nicola Cooke
Linda Eggert
Mary Goldsby
Elena Marks

Action Items:

- Shift facility hours to meet customer needs 7 days a week
 - Staggered shifts
- Incentive programs – August
- Marketing – PSAs, ads
- Better photos / Better breed ID
 - Chameleon access
- Satellite adoptions
 - Permanent / temporary
- BARC Adoption & Retention Committee

Next Steps & Accountabilities:

In closing, the group named the next steps needed to move the process forward and agreed to meet again on September 25.

1. Identify meeting date of next Partnership Council Meeting
 - Barbara Harris to notify group of next meeting
2. Hold next Multi Stakeholder meeting September 25th 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM to review updated plans and progress
 - Tina Davis will be the point person
 - Elena Marks will identify space for the meeting
3. Distribute meeting participants' contact information
 - MCV Consulting
4. Sign up for BARC Yahoo Group: BARC, Rescues, Fosters & Volunteers
 - Contact Nela Brown for information

V. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This project faced a great deal of challenge from the start because of the substantial skepticism that had accrued across all stakeholder groups regarding any BARC-related effort initiated by the City. Some participated willingly and enthusiastically, but the majority were up front in their suspicion that this was yet another “window dressing” effort and that we (MCV Consulting) were acting as agents to advance the City’s agenda to pacify the public rather than play a neutral role in understanding and voicing all perspectives on the crisis at BARC. In some cases we were met with open hostility. Ultimately however, the stakeholders who participated in this process suspended their doubts and became highly cooperative, open and generous with their time and thoughts on what can be done to engage all interested parties in fixing the problems. We found that *the desire to*

improve animal welfare conditions in BARC and across the region is an extremely powerful and unifying goal around which all stakeholder groups are aligned. Even the much maligned BARC employees (in some cases clearly legitimately) contain a core among them that are deeply motivated by the passion to help animals and serve the public's safety through humane animal control, not by a penchant to mistreat or euthanize animals. The desire to work together across all stakeholder groups is enormous and, if channeled effectively, has the potential to successfully transform both BARC and Houston's approach to animal welfare. The challenge lies in removing the substantial barriers to that collaboration and rebuilding trust among the stakeholders.

It is the opinion of MCV Consulting that the number one priority must be the City instating *strong, competent leadership of BARC* that is *mandated, empowered* and *held accountable* by the City to solve the serious operational and cultural problems identified through this process and others. The leadership must be governed by the philosophy that *BARC's success will be achieved through partnerships* with the volunteers, fosterers, rescue groups, other regional animal welfare agencies, the corporate community and other viable partners (e.g., The Postal Service, Super Neighborhoods, HISD). Transparency and a *relentless focus on communication* throughout BARC, with its partners and with the community will be essential. Working with the stakeholder groups to support and advance the plans developed in the June 25 meeting is an excellent foundational opportunity for the City and leadership of BARC.

If the City can step up to this challenge, it will then be incumbent upon the media, animal welfare advocates and all stakeholders to *give BARC an authentic chance to succeed*. If continued, the current practice of BARC bashing in the media and on the Internet will only work against success and generate shared responsibility for failure among those who proliferate misinformation and aggressively over-report negative stories in the absence of positive ones.

In the final analysis, we sense that Houston is at a real inflection point as a community around how we approach animal welfare. This process began an open dialogue among the stakeholders and demonstrated the strength of the shared will and accountability for change. Nascent trust and a compelling vision for how the stakeholders can work together were established. If this is to be built upon and true change achieved, these dialogues must continue, and the City must do its part to ensure BARC has the kind of competent, strong leadership needed to help usher in an era of collaborative, community-based animal care and control in Houston.

Many thanks to all those who participated in this process.

APPENDIX A: On-Line Survey Questions

1. What best describes your role concerning animal welfare issues (you may check more than one if applicable):

- BARC employee
- BARC volunteer
- Animal advocate
- Concerned citizen

2. Is this your first effort to offer input to the city regarding BARC? If not, please describe the nature of your previous efforts.

3. Do you have a pet?

4. Have you adopted a pet?

5. Have you visited the BARC facility? If so, how often have you visited?

6. Have you fostered an animal?

7. If you are a foster, are there ways to improve BARC relations with fosters and possibly increase the number of fosters in BARC's program? (Please provide details.)

8. If you are a foster, how often do you foster?

9. Please put these priorities in order from highest priority to lowest priority for which you believe the City of Houston's Bureau of Animal Regulation and Care should be mandated to control:

- Protecting people from dangerous and roaming animals of all species
- Control of animal-borne disease, including rabies
- Shelter management
- Promotion of spay/neuter
- Adoption to reduce euthanasia

10. How do you think the City's BARC is currently mandated? Are the priorities listed above different? If so, what is BARC's current list of priorities from highest to lowest? (Please list all.)

11. What do you feel is working well at BARC?

12. What are your top three greatest concerns about BARC?

13. What immediate actions do you feel should be taken that would best address your concerns?

14. What long-term actions do you feel should be taken that would best address your concerns?

15. As a citizen, what do you feel are your rights and responsibilities concerning the management of BARC?

16. What do you feel the citizens of Houston should do to improve animal welfare in the city?

17. What would you personally be willing to contribute to the improvement of BARC's quality of service?

- Volunteer my time
- Make a charitable donation

- Pay higher taxes
- Coordinate fundraising campaigns (capital campaigns, events, websites, etc.)
- Other, please specify

18. What can BARC do to improve its communication with the community?

- Electronic communication (email, blogs, website)
- Direct mail
- Communication Committees
- Other, please specify

19. What do you believe is the ideal relationship between the city and county in addressing animal control, rescue and care?

20. What partnering would you like to see between BARC and other agencies/organizations to address the issues of animal welfare in the city?

21. Assuming no additional city funds were available, what do you feel could be done to improve BARC's quality of service?

APPENDIX B: June 25, 2009 Multi-Stakeholder Meeting Attendees

City of Houston

Anne Clutterbuck - City Council Member, District C
Thomasina Colbert-Noll - BARC Incident Command, Department of Health and Human Services
Ben Hernandez - Department of Health and Human Services
Risha Jones - BARC Incident Command, Department of Health and Human Services
Elena Marks – Mayor’s Office, Director, Health and Environmental Policy
Abigail Noebels – Staff Member, Office of Council Member Anne Clutterbuck
Noel Pinnock - BARC Incident Command, Department of Health and Human Services

BARC

Juan Cardona, Kennel Attendant
Dwayne Compton, Vet Tech
Tina Davis, Animal Control Officer
Chris Glaser, Animal Control Officer/Bite Case investigator
Barbara Harris, Vet Tech
Ray Sim, Bureau Chief
Dr. Claudia Sims, Veterinarian

Volunteers

Nela Brown
Ria Van Dright
Linda Eggert
Lance Marshall
James Oxford

Rescue Community

Chantale Clark – Furry Pals Rescue
Nicola Cooke, President LMN Feline Rescue
Mary Goldsby

Professionals

JoAnne Jackson – Director of Administrative Services, CAP
Susan Lamb – Community Program Manager, SNAP

Advocates

Lydia Caldwell
Bett Sundermeyer – President, No Kill Houston
Brooke Summers-Perry

Concerned Citizens

Debbie Allen – Pleasantville (substitute in attendance)
Charlene Goffney – United States Postal Service
Bonnie McMurtry, Andrews Kurth, LLP
Barbara Miller – President, 5th Ward Super Neighborhood Association