



## **DRAFT Responses to Findings and Recommendations**

2022-23 Grand Jury Report:

*“Gimme Shelter and a Pound of Advice.”*

### **FINDINGS AND RESPONSES:**

**F1. Management has limited flexibility utilizing personnel within Orange County Animal Care across departments due to structured work rules, volunteer work restrictions, and employees working in departmental silos.**

**Response: Disagrees partially with the finding.**

Orange County Animal Care (OCAC) follows all County, state and federal workplace regulations to provide a safe and discrimination free work environment. Abiding by working classification requirements in accordance with state labor laws and union contracts is not unique to OCAC and is required in all County departments. While the County of Orange utilizes Classification Specifications for its positions, they are intended to capture general duties and responsibilities performed that distinguish a given classification from others and is not intended to specifically identify every duty performed by an employee. The classification specifications also outline the minimum qualifications required for each classification. As such, certain job duties/tasks are limited based on knowledge, skills, abilities, education, and certification.

**F2. Low staff morale exists within Orange County Animal Care.**

**Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding.**

OCAC monitors morale closely. Although staff is affected by external factors including protests, social media campaigns and organized efforts to destabilize OCAC, ironically staff morale is generally steady. Employee engagement activities are ongoing and proactive steps are being taken to safeguard staff and promote team cohesion.

**F3. Orange County Animal Care staffing is negatively impacted by vacant positions remaining unfilled for greater than six months due to burdensome hiring processes. This delay in recruitment and completion of hiring has resulted in qualified candidates declining job offers.**

**Response: Disagrees Partially with the finding.**

The County does not have any data to show that the vacancy rate has a substantiated negative impact on OCAC; however, it does acknowledge that the vacancy rate at OCAC needs to be reduced. Vacant positions are not a unique concern limited to OCAC, but rather one experienced throughout the County and beyond as Pandemic related shifts to the job market have impacted recruitments and hiring processes. OC Human Resource Services (OCHRS) is a department within the County Executive Office that follows the County of Orange Recruitment Rules and Policies and the legal requirements outlined in the State Local Agency Personnel Standards as it pertains to recruiting for vacant positions.

There is a current Human Resource Services County work group tasked with updating existing recruitment strategies related to all County recruitments with the goal of increasing timeliness and streamlining processes. OCHRS, OC Community Resources and OCAC have added resources to increase the speed of recruitment.

**F4. Based upon industry standards and best practices, Orange County Animal Care kennel attendants are understaffed to meet the needs of animals under care.**

**Response: Disagrees partially with the finding.**

OCAC prioritizes meeting the needs of animals in its care to meet or exceed industry standards and legal requirements. OCAC is working to fill all vacancies and will further evaluate staffing levels once fully staffed. Staffing levels are part of ongoing assessment and evaluation. Due to seasonal fluctuations in shelter animal population coupled with the varying needs of animals based on species and other qualifiers, generic industry guidelines are valuable points of reference in the evaluation process but are simply one of many factors to consider. OCHRS, OCCR and OCAC have added resources to increase the speed of recruitment.

**F5. Orange County Animal Care's operating policies and procedures manual is out of date.**

**Response: Agrees with the finding.**

Operating policies and procedures are living documents and require review and update on a continual basis. Updating OCAC's operating policies and procedures manual is an undertaking that OCAC takes seriously. It should be noted that recently a significant amount of resources has been focused on litigation response and unprecedented levels of PRAs which has diverted staff resources from the importance of a current P&P Manual. Staff resources are now being assigned with potential contractor assistance to prioritize review and updating efforts.

**F6. The Orange County Animal Care Volunteer program was stopped during COVID-19 and restarting the program has been slow, resulting in decreased animal socialization and enrichment.**

**Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding.**

The COVID-19 State of Emergency in California did not end until February 23, 2023. Throughout this time, OCAC suspended volunteer recruitment and selectively used volunteers as able given safety restrictions. The restart of the program has been careful and measured in light of COVID public health restrictions but in the last year has hosted monthly volunteer trainings to recruit and train new recruits.

- F7. Orange County Animal Care’s Behavior Evaluation Committee evaluates dogs for euthanasia without written guidelines, policies, or procedures, resulting in inconsistent outcomes over time. Behavior evaluated euthanasia outcomes are dependent on the experience and personal considerations of the individual committee members and management rather than written objective standards.**

**Response: Disagrees partially with the finding.**

It is inaccurate to suggest that the OCAC Behavior Evaluation Committee (BEC) operates without structure or consistency. The OCAC BEC evaluates dogs per euthanasia guidelines to ensure consistency in the decision evaluation process. Behavior evaluated outcomes are dependent on each individual animal and, since OCAC cannot directly control its intake, the percentage of outcome results vary based on the condition and the circumstances surrounding the animal being evaluated rather than a consistent pattern over time. The County does agree, however, that the experience and training of the individuals on the BEC is critical to an accurate and well-rounded evaluation of the animal, and the BEC positions are structured to provide experience and knowledge across all areas of the shelter that interact with the animals.

- F8. The rate of behavioral euthanasia of dogs has increased significantly over the last 2 years.**

**Response: Disagrees partially with the finding.**

The increase can be correlated to the significant increase in the population of unsocialized dogs with behavior/aggression issues that have been abandoned or surrendered by their owners in the last two years in the wake of the pandemic. This tragic trend is occurring across the region, state and nation. Although data from the report indicates dog behavior related euthanasia increased, the OCAC dog save rate has remained stable over the past 2 years and well above the 90% called out in the Strategic Plan. Euthanasia is driven by the type and condition of animals that come into the shelter. OCAC cannot directly control the types of animals needing intake and in fact has focused specifically on prioritizing sick, injured, aggressive, and stray intake.

- F9. Orange County Animal Care does not employ a professional or trained and certified animal behaviorist to oversee the shelter’s dog enrichment program, resulting in dogs with declining behavior being placed at greater risk of being euthanized.**

**Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding.**

It is shortsighted to suggest that training and evaluation should be restricted to a single member of staff when it is intentionally designed that animals have numerous critical interfaces with multiple members of staff during their pathway through the shelter. All OCAC employees working with animals are hired based on their experience and training. Ongoing training and certifications are a critical part of employee development and provide consistent evaluation of animals at the shelter. With this approach OCAC has been able to adapt to the changing demographic of dogs coming to the shelter and has expanded programming to provide more pathways for positive outcomes such as the TLC program and our rescues partner placement program.

**F10. While many county and city animal shelters throughout the state have active Trap, Neuter, and Return programs, Orange County Animal Care stopped its Trap, Neuter, and Return program, reportedly on the basis of the County Counsel's legal opinion that the program violates a California statute related to willful animal abandonment.**

**Response:** The County will not respond to this finding based on the Attorney-Client privilege. The Office of County Counsel is prohibited from responding to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations due to the attorney-client privilege.

**F11. The termination of the Trap, Neuter, and Return program is correlated with an increase in adult cat euthanasia rate at the shelter.**

**Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding.**

No direct correlation has been established between Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR) and adult cat euthanasia at OCAC. TNR reduces reproduction in adult cats but has not been demonstrated to directly correlate to adult cat euthanasia. Euthanasia is driven by the type and condition of animals that come into the shelter. OCAC cannot directly control the types of animals needing intake and in fact has focused specifically on prioritizing sick, injured and aggressive.

**F12. There have been public concerns and requests expressed over the years for public programs to include a spay/neuter program by Orange County Animal Care.**

**Response: Disagrees with the finding.**

Members of the public have requested free spay/neuter services of privately owned pets, but shelter resources and city funding are scoped to only support shelter animals. Cities are free to allocate funds to provide vouchers to local veterinarians for this service. To assist the public, OCAC partners with HEART for low cost spay/neuter clinic once per month.

**F13. The current adoption appointment system restricts public access to the dog kennels, thereby limiting potential adopters' access to all available animals.**

**Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding.**

The adoption model has restricted unescorted access, but all adoptable animals have always been accessible to the public through online viewing and in-person visits. Furthermore, in 2022, OCAC provided 10,457 adoption visits for an average of nearly 30 visits per day. There is consistently an average of 58 appointments available per day for public access clearly demonstrating the shelter has not met its threshold for adoption visit availability and is currently able to meet the needs of the Community. OCAC uses industry best practices and continues to find ways to serve the public and our animals such as a pilot project that is under development for kennel viewing later this summer.

**F14. Orange County Animal Care's engagement with some animal rescue partners is negatively impacted due to differences of opinion in appropriate animal care policy.****Response: Respondent agrees with the finding.**

OCAC is a large scale, municipal shelter tasked with balancing public safety and animal welfare. As a way-station for animals, OCAC seeks positive placements for animals in its care when appropriate to do so by, in part, partnering with over 250 sister shelters, rescue partners and networkers. While interested in input and collaboration, animal care at OCAC cannot be tailored to or directed by individual personal opinions. In this highly charged industry, it is not unusual for there to be differences of opinion, but OCAC is guided by state laws and regulations and its Strategic Plan.

**F15. Internal and community engagement does not adequately communicate the shelter's mission and operating strategy.****Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding.**

OCAC hired a full-time Public Information Officer in October 2022 to focus on external communication; prior to October 2022, this position did not exist but instead held other responsibilities as well. This is an example of OCAC's prioritization of external communication to the public. OCAC's goal is to participate in at least 200 community events in 2023, whether it be adoption events or public outreach. Despite consistent messaging to stakeholders and focused attention on program communication, OCAC cannot control print news coverage and social media efforts designed to incite controversy.

**F16. The information currently on the Orange County Animal Care website for low- cost spay/neuter is not up to date with regard to referrals and prices for spay/neuter procedures.****Response: Disagrees wholly with the finding.**

Prices have never been posted on the OCAC website as they are set by independent practices and are outside the purview of OCAC. The low cost spay/neuter information posted on the OCAC website is supplied solely for informational purposes, and OCAC has no responsibility or obligation to provide this content. The website is updated annually for the community's benefit, but it should be noted that the information is subject to change at any time as local, privately owned clinics routinely update services and hours.

- F17. The OC County Counsel's office misstated to the Grand Jury the scope of its commitment to serving and assisting the Grand Jury in its investigations into County governance respecting managing conflicts between the Board of Supervisors, OC departments and agency clients, and the Grand Jury.**

**Response: Disagrees wholly with this finding.**

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES:**

- R1. By October 1, 2023, OC Human Resource Services should review and update recruitment strategies to significantly increase the timeliness of recruitment of vacant positions and to anticipate vacancies due to retirement, resignations, transfers. (F3)**

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.**

OC Human Resource Services is a department within the County Executive Office that follows the County of Orange Recruitment Rules and Policies and the legal requirements outlined in the State Local Agency Personnel Standards as it pertains to recruiting for vacant positions. There is a current Human Resource Services County work group tasked with updating existing recruitment strategies related to all County recruitments with the goal of increasing timeliness and streamlining processes. Strategies are being implemented as they are developed.

- R2. By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should review hiring practices to facilitate process improvements to expedite filling OCAC vacancies. (F3)**

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.**

Since the end of the state-imposed lockdown due to COVID-19, OCAC, OCCR and OCHRS have met monthly to review OCHRS hiring practices within OCCR. Position vacancies in HRS recruiting, ongoing COVID impacts, and a competitive job market presented challenges to achieving full staffing levels. As a result of these meetings, HRS recruiting staff assigned to OCCR was expanded with both permanent and extra help positions to address reducing the vacancy factor and increasing the speed of recruitment. Finally, OCAC assigned the oversight of all recruitments to their business office to ensure OCAC hiring managers have

consistent support and tracking of recruitments. Review of the recruitment process is ongoing and OCHRS, OCCR and OCAC are working collaboratively toward achieving and maintaining full staffing levels. Staff at OCAC's are the program's most valuable resource.

Additionally, there is a current Human Resource Services County work group tasked with updating existing recruitment strategies related to all County recruitments with the goal of increasing timeliness and streamlining processes. Strategies are being implemented as they are developed.

**R3. By October 1, 2023, OC Community Resources and Orange County Animal Care should review their current staffing allocations of Animal Care Attendants to reflect NACA guidelines and to provide appropriate staffing allocations for animal care, feeding and enrichment. (F3, F4)**

**Response: The recommendation requires further analysis.**

Review of staffing allocations is ongoing and OCHRS, OCCR and OCAC are working collaboratively toward achieving and maintaining full staffing levels. Staff at OCAC are the program's most valuable resource. When full staffing is achieved, the staffing model will be analyzed over a six-month period and allocations will be reviewed by OCHRS in line with industry recommendations.

**R4. By October 1, 2023, OC Community Resources and Orange County Animal Care should review their current staffing allocations of all positions within the OCAC and reallocate resources to increase Animal Care Attendants to reflect NACA guidelines to provide appropriate staffing for animal care, feeding, and enrichment. (F3, F4)**

**Response: The recommendation requires further analysis.**

Review of staffing allocations is ongoing and OCHRS, OCCR and OCAC are working collaboratively toward achieving and maintaining full staffing levels. Staff at OCAC's are the program's most valuable resource. When full staffing is achieved, the staffing model will be analyzed over a six-month period and allocations will be reviewed by OCHRS.

**R5. By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should review and update policies, procedures, guidelines, and practices to assure they are accurate and reflect current operating practices. (F5)**

**Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.**

The County will be contracting with an independent consultant to focus concentrated efforts on review and update of policies, procedures, guidelines and practices. Although paused during the COVID-19 lockdown and post-lock down due to staffing shortages, review and update of policies, procedures, guidelines and practices have resumed. Included in the contracted scope will be identification of

organizational responsibility of this function and a process for ongoing review, consideration, and introduction of new P&Ps.

- R6. By June 30, 2024, the Board of Supervisors should evaluate the strategic option of creating a Joint Powers Authority for the County and fourteen contract Cities to take ownership and shared responsibility for the financial and operating policies and practices of OCAC. (F1 thru F16)**

**Response: Requires further analysis.**

Agreements between the County and the 14 partner cities that contract for animal care services expire in 2026. Options for future service delivery models will be evaluated in advance of expiration of contracts.

- R7. By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should establish written guidelines, policies, and procedures as standards for evaluating animal behavior for use by the Behavior Evaluation Committee. (F5, F7)**

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.**

The OCAC BEC will continue to evaluate dogs for euthanasia using existing and updated guidelines, policies, and procedures to ensure consistency in the decision evaluation process and guidelines will be updated as needed. Behavior evaluated outcomes are dependent on each individual animal and, since OCAC cannot directly control its intake, the outcome results vary based on the condition and the circumstances surrounding the animal being evaluated.

- R8. By December 31, 2023, in the interests of transparency, Orange County Animal Care management should add a representative from a rescue organization to serve as a non-voting, at-large member on the Behavior Evaluation Committee. (F7, F14)**

**Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.**

This will not be implemented as the Attorney General opined (No. 18-1001) that municipal agencies are ultimately responsible for decisions regarding public safety and therefore to determine if an animal is safe to place back into the community rather than rescue or 501(c)3 organizations. OCAC will continue quarterly meetings with the Rescue Partners and to provide expanded animal information for each case when and if possible, through its online OC Rescue Track website.

- R9. By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should hire an animal behaviorist or certified dog trainers to work with aggressive animals to reduce the high rate of dogs being euthanized and enhance their adoptability. (F8, F9)**

**Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.**



A single OCAC position is not responsible for evaluation of the animals triaged through the shelter and placed in their best and most appropriate placement. Every OCAC staff member who interacts with animals is recruited with minimum qualifications that require animal experience and handling expertise. Additionally, staff participate in ongoing trainings such as Fear Free Sheltering, bite prevention, safe aggressive animal handling. OCAC's model is reliant on expertise in every section (intake, medical, kenneling, fostering, rescue and placement) to ensure that the animals find their best outcomes and that the shelter maintains its commitment to the save rates as called out in OCAC's Strategic Plan. Furthermore, as a high-volume municipal animal shelter OCAC does not train aggressive dogs to increase their adoptability. OCAC's responsibility is to accurately evaluate animals and to move them as quickly as possible out of the shelter and on to the best placement given their circumstance. It should be noted that the dog save rate for OCAC is 94 percent, well above the rate called out in the OCAC Strategic Plan.

**R10. By December 31, 2023, the Orange County Board of Supervisors and Orange County Animal Care management should request that County Counsel reconsider its opinion about the shelter's former Trap, Neuter, and Return program, or seek an independent second opinion to County Counsel's opinion, to ascertain whether the program can be re-established, or a modified version of the program can be implemented. (F10, F11)**

**Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.**

The Office of County Counsel is prohibited from responding to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations due to the attorney-client privilege.

**R11. By July 1, 2024, Orange County Animal Care should implement a low-cost public spay/neuter program. (F12)**

**Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.**

Members of the public have requested free spay/neuter services of privately owned pets, but shelter resources and city funding are scoped to only support shelter animals. OCAC currently partners with HEART, [www.heart4pets.org](http://www.heart4pets.org), for monthly, mobile low cost spay and neuter services at the County shelter. In addition, Cities are able to contract for additional services as needed or desired.

**R12. By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should hold all- hands staff meetings at least every quarter. (F1, F2)**

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.**

OCAC renewed its All-hands Meetings on 6/20/23 and the upcoming meetings are scheduled at quarterly intervals.

**R13. By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care, OC Community Resources, and OC Human Resource Services should conduct annual surveys of staff to monitor morale and identify opportunities for operational improvement. (F1, F2)**

**Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.**

OCAC renewed its All-hands Meetings on June 20, 2023, and upcoming meetings are scheduled on quarterly intervals. The meeting includes various feedback loops to solicit staff input. Additionally, OCAC has Labor Management Committees in place to monitor morale and identify opportunities for improvement.

**R14. By December 31, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should open the shelter to the public for walk throughs to maximize opportunities for the public to adopt animals under the care of the shelter. (F13)**

**Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.**

The recommendation is not warranted. As of the date of publication of this report, cat and exotic animal kennels were open for escorted public walk through. OCAC continuously reviews and initiates new programming targeted at maintaining and increasing adoption rates while ensuring public safety. On July 19, 2023, OCAC initiated the Kennel Connection – a pilot program designed by staff, spearheaded by the Director, and implemented with the assistance of volunteers, to feature in-kennel viewing hours of adoptable dogs and cats on a pre-identified schedule. As a pilot program, it will be evaluated for animal benefit and shelter efficiency and revised as needed.

**R15. By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should look for new ways to be more inclusive and engaged with volunteers and the rescue organizations that are necessary for the shelter's success. (F14, F15)**

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.**

Clear and consistent communication is critical and OCAC values maintaining positive volunteer and rescue relationships. This is inherently challenging given the vulnerable pet population entering the shelter, the rapid assessment and placement they require and the highly emotional opinions of external stakeholders that factor into these decisions and placements. OCAC values both volunteer and rescue organizations and has worked diligently with both over many years.

OCAC has hosted monthly Volunteer Coffee meetings over the past year, has held monthly volunteer trainings, hosts an active online Facebook social media site and celebrates the achievements of shelter volunteers and foster volunteers through two annual recognition events. In addition to this, OCAC has renewed its Volunteer Roundtable Meetings on June 21, 2023, with upcoming meetings scheduled on a quarterly basis and has engaged in a refresh of the OCAC Volunteer program now that recruiting has resumed post-COVID.

OCAC values the role that non-profit rescue organizations play as they are uniquely designed to focus time and resources on specific animals with medical or behavioral conditions that require more intensive care or attention than a municipal shelter can provide. Rescue organizations are integrated into daily operations via the shelter web-based tool, Rescue Track which is a daily communicator regarding the animals that require specialized care and their condition, prognosis, and projected outcome without intervention. Communication with rescue organizations is maintained by the OCAC rescue team and will be enhanced by continuing to communicate daily about animals in need, offering one-on-one walk-throughs to meet individual animals in need of rescue placement, and continuing Rescue Roundtable meetings.

It should not go without notice however that compassion fatigue is a critical issue in the animal care community, and that it impacts OCAC employees, volunteers, and representatives of rescue organizations equally. Each animal is unique, has their own story and is evaluated based on their specific condition. That being said, OCAC's responsibility as a municipal shelter is to provide for animal welfare as well as community safety. Difficult decisions regarding euthanasia can, and do, create unavoidable stress between various stakeholders and shelter staff, as all parties strive to find positive and humane outcomes for the animals in OCAC's care.

**R16. By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care should schedule quarterly meetings with community stakeholders to facilitate transparency and engagement. (F14, F15)**

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.**

OCAC holds regular quarterly meeting of the Community Outreach Committee, which is an advisory committee to the Orange County Board of Supervisors, in addition to quarterly Rescue Roundtable meetings and Volunteer Roundtable meetings.

**R17. By October 1, 2023, Orange County Animal Care management should update the information currently on its website for low-cost spay/neuter of feral cats with regard to referrals and prices for spay/neuter procedures. (F16)**

**Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.**

Prices have never been posted on the OCAC website as they are set by independent practices and are outside the purview of OCAC. The low cost spay/neuter information posted on the OCAC website is supplied solely for informational purposes, and OCAC has no responsibility or obligation to provide this content. The website is updated annually for the community's benefit, but it should be noted that the information is subject to change at any time as local, privately owned clinics routinely update services and hours.

**R18. Beginning with the 2023/2024 Grand Jury training, and all training thereafter, County Counsel should provide detailed instruction about the circumstances under which the County Counsel's office might recuse itself from assisting with Grand Jury investigations and the alternatives available to the Grand Jury under such circumstances. (F17)**

**Response: The Office of County Counsel is prohibited from responding to the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations due to the attorney-client privilege.**

**Additional Information Provided in Support of Response:**

- OCAC 2022 Positive Placement Infographic

DRAFT



**OC Animal Care**

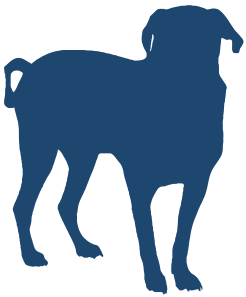


**2022**

**POSITIVE PLACEMENT**

Through the adoption model, partnerships in the community, robust foster and rescue programs, programs like Pooches on the Patio, and dedicated staff and volunteers, OC Animal Care found positive placement for over 8,400 dogs and cats that entered our shelter in 2022.

## 2022 SAVE RATES FOR DOGS & CATS



**94.18%**  
dog save rate



**73.64%**  
cat save rate



The save rate includes a variety of positive placement including adoptions, return to owners, and transfers to sister shelters or rescue agencies.



Positive placement includes all live outcomes and are reported in the annual statistics.

OF THE  
**82.07%**  
OF DOGS & CATS  
THAT WERE  
POSITIVELY PLACE



**46.57% OF DOGS & CATS WERE ADOPTED**

*The 10-year average adoption rate for OC Animal Care is ~35.2%.*

**19.83% OF DOGS & CATS WERE TRANSFERRED**

**15.67% OF DOGS & CATS WERE REUNITED WITH OWNERS**



On average, about 19 out of every 20 dogs that enter OC Animal Care find a positive outcome.



The percentage of placement is found by dividing the number of outcomes by the number of total live outcomes plus other outcomes.

**To view the complete shelter statistics over the last ten years, visit  
[www.ocpetinfo.com/about-us/shelter-statistics](http://www.ocpetinfo.com/about-us/shelter-statistics).**