



Record-Keeping Practices in the Massachusetts Animal Sheltering Community

MAC Hot Topics in Animal Welfare
October 23, 2016
Theresa Vinic, M.S.
Center for Animals and Public Policy
Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University



1

Task Force Members

- Seana Dowling-Guyer (Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University)
- Sheri Gustafson (Mass Animal Fund)
- Kara Holmquist (MSPCA)
- Joann Lindenmayer (MAC board member and Chair)
- Anne Lindsay (MAC President)
- Emily McCobb (Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University)
- Alice O'Connor (MAC board member)
- Richard Panofsky (Consultant)
- Margaret Slater (ASPCA)
- Jean Weber (MSPCA)

2

Presentation Road Map

Survey Methods
↓
Findings
↓
Discussion
↓
Recommendations

3

SURVEY METHODS

4

Potential Participants

Intended survey population:

- municipal animal care and control operations and private animal shelter and/or rescue organizations
- headquartered within Massachusetts
- shelter and/or foster cats and/or dogs

5

Potential Participants

- Municipal Animal Control Officers list
 - 259 potential participants
- Massachusetts Approved Shelter and Rescue Organizations list
 - 192 potential participants
- Petfinder.com
 - 28 potential participants



6

Materials

- Online questionnaire utilizing Qualtrics
 - 58 total questions
 - Multiple-choice questions
 - Open-ended questions
- Five sections
 - Organization characteristics
 - Record-keeping practices
 - Information collection
 - Information reporting and analysis
 - Participant details

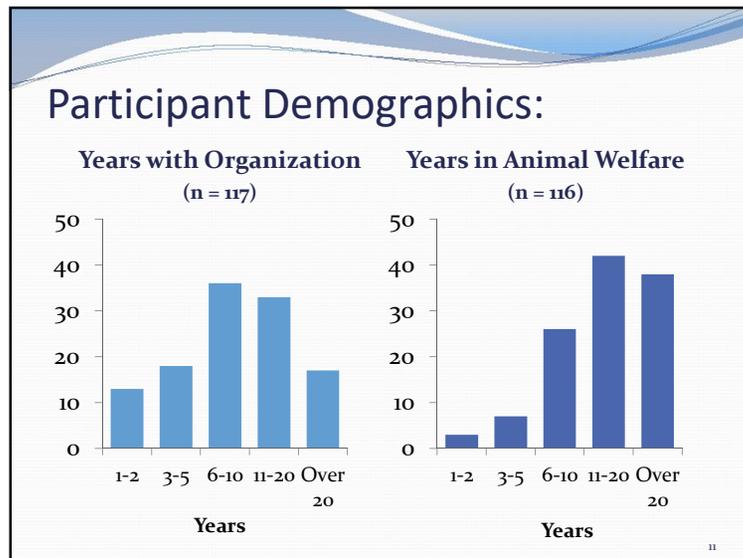
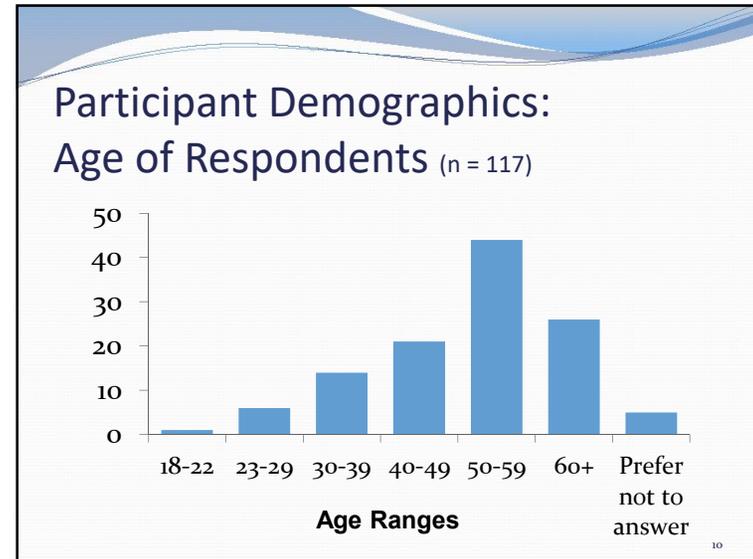
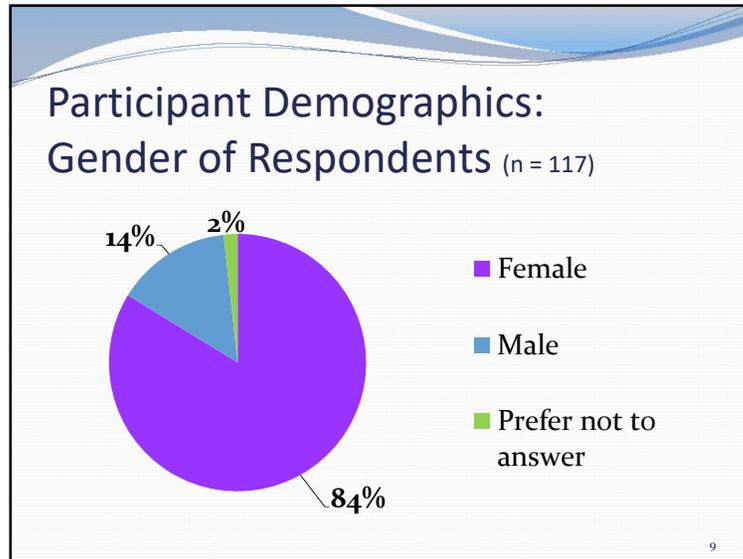


7

Procedure and Analysis

- MAC sent an introductory email to potential participants to encourage participation
- A link to the survey was ultimately sent via Qualtrics to 471 valid email addresses
- Responses were collected between June 30, 2015 and September 1, 2015
- 124 surveys were submitted - five were removed from the data pool
- Final analysis: 119 surveys (25% response rate)
- Analysis: descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis

8





Objectives

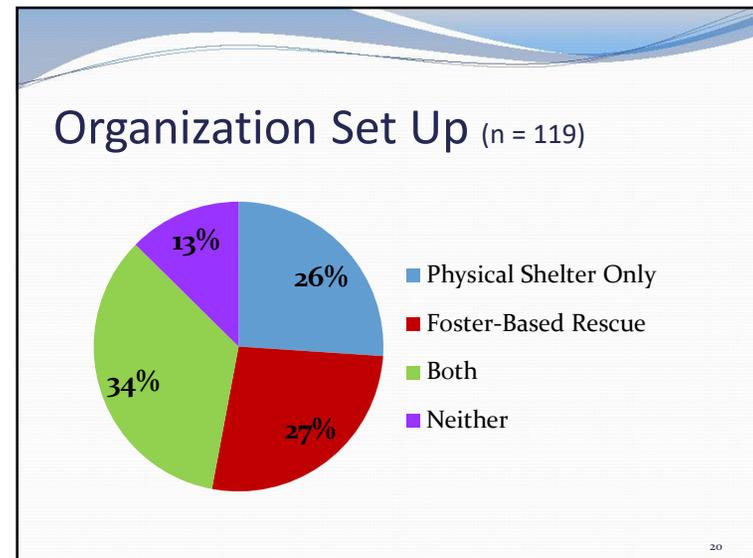
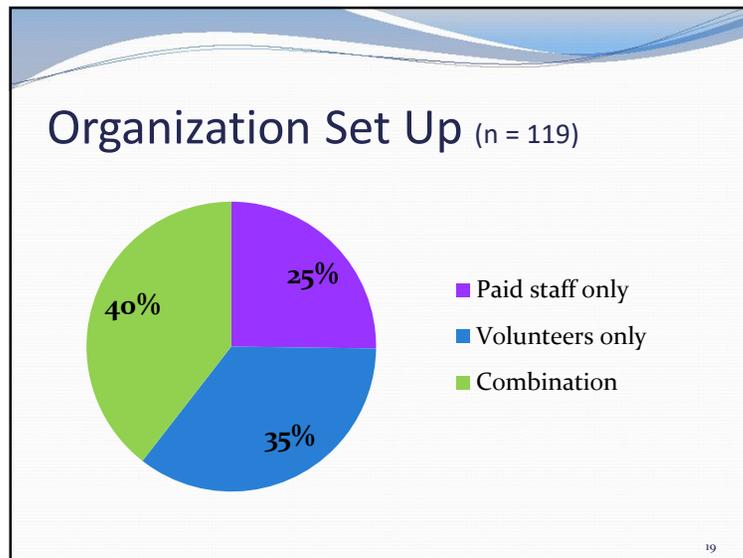
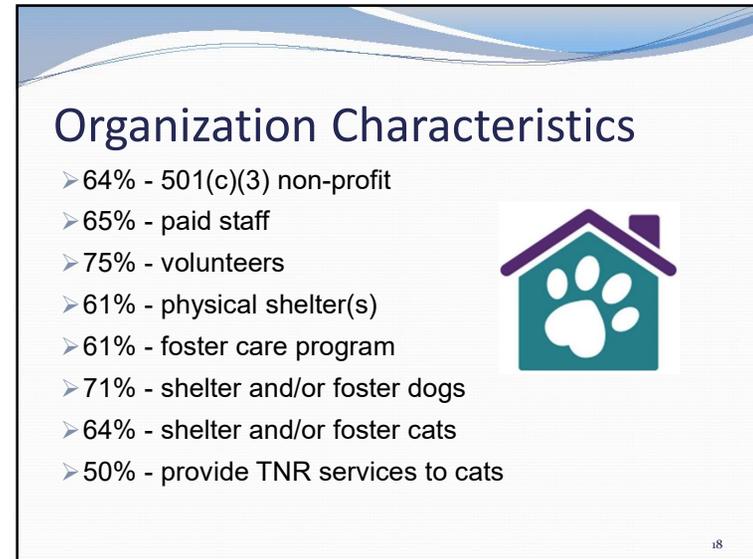
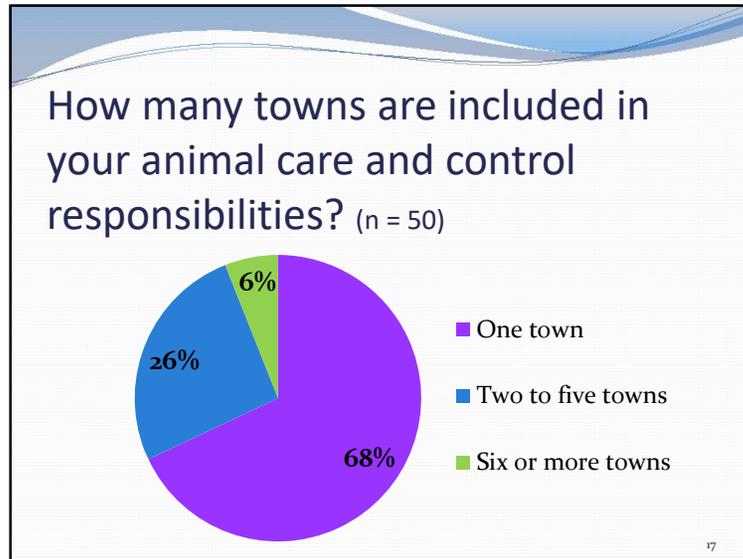
- What are the characteristics of organizations within the Massachusetts animal sheltering community?
- What kinds of information are organizations collecting, and how is this information being collected?
- How satisfied are organizations with their collection and use of information, and what resources would help them to improve?
- How are these organizations using the information they have collected and the resultant data?

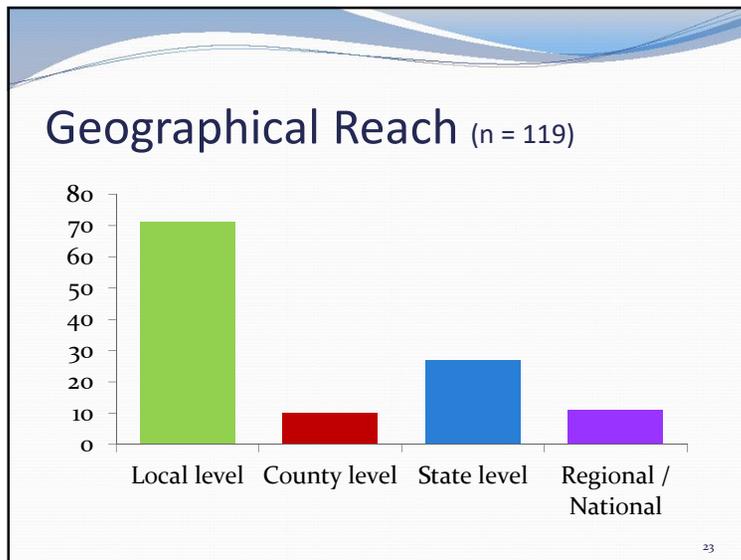
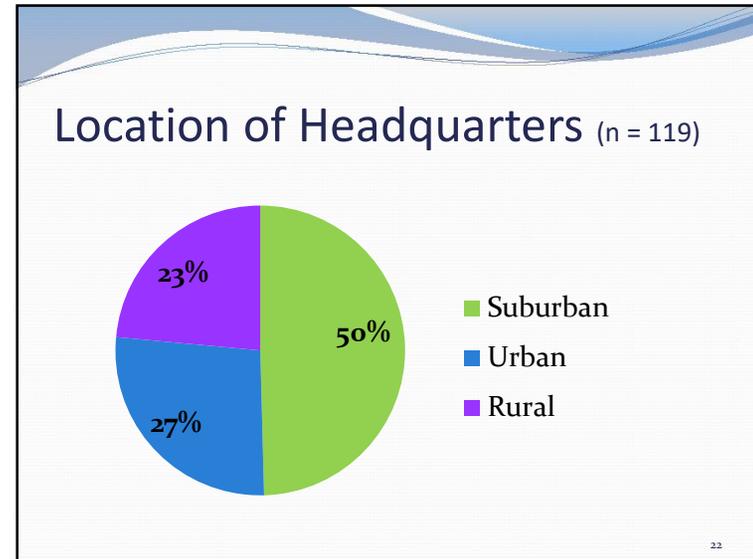
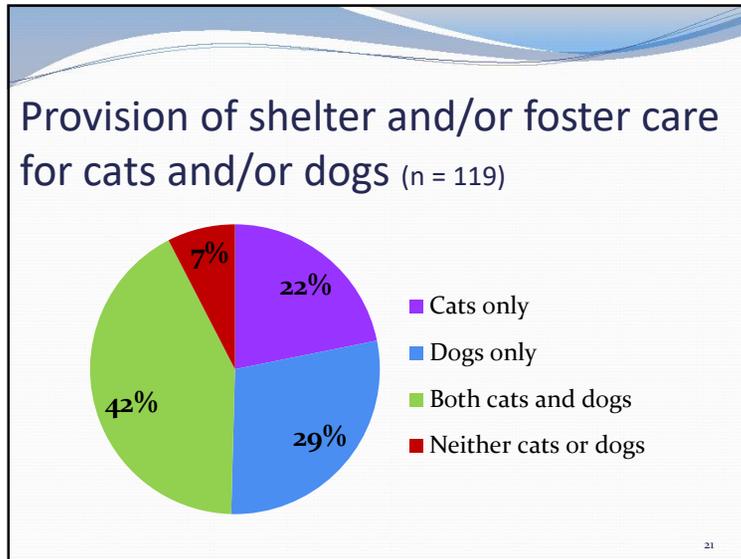
Objective One:

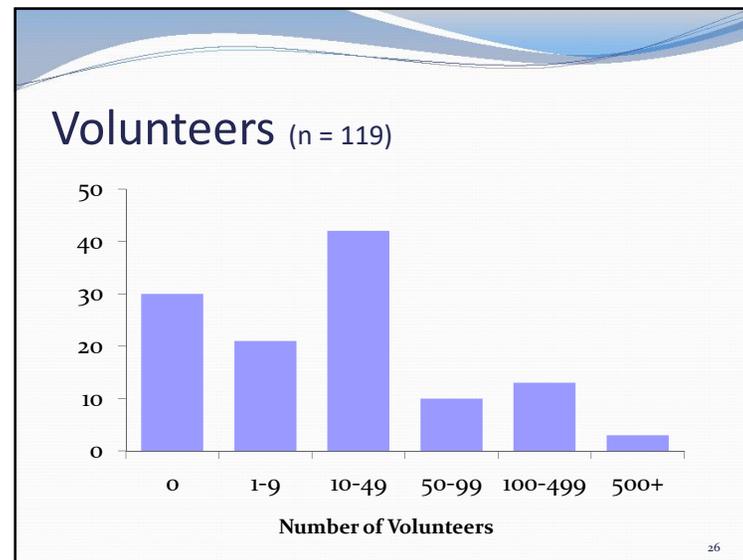
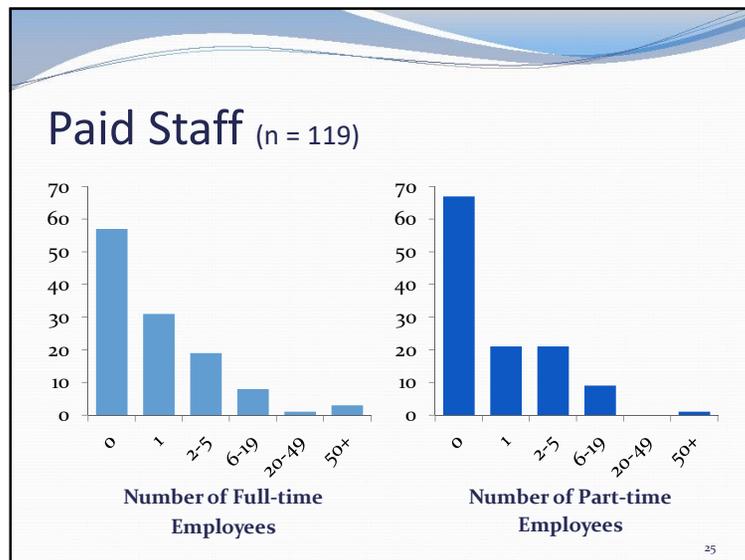
What are the characteristics of organizations within the Massachusetts animal sheltering community?

Which of the following best describes your organization?

52% (n = 62)	Private animal shelter or rescue organization
37% (n = 44)	Municipal animal care and control
11% (n = 13)	Private animal organization that holds municipal animal control contracts

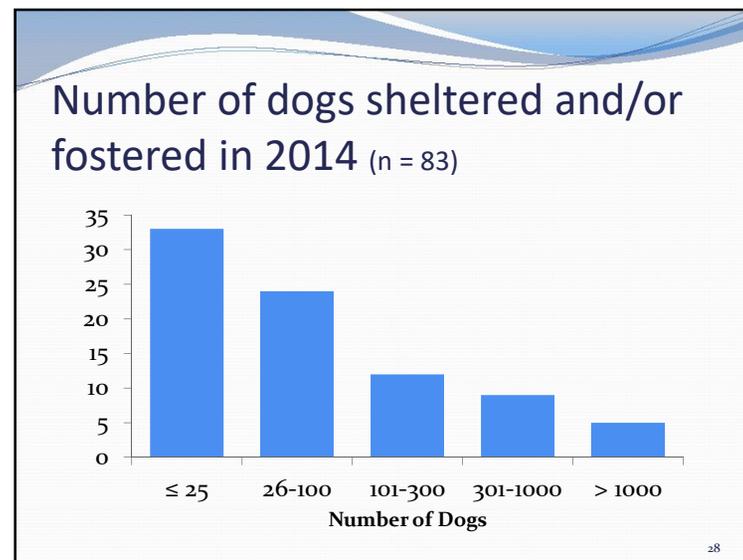


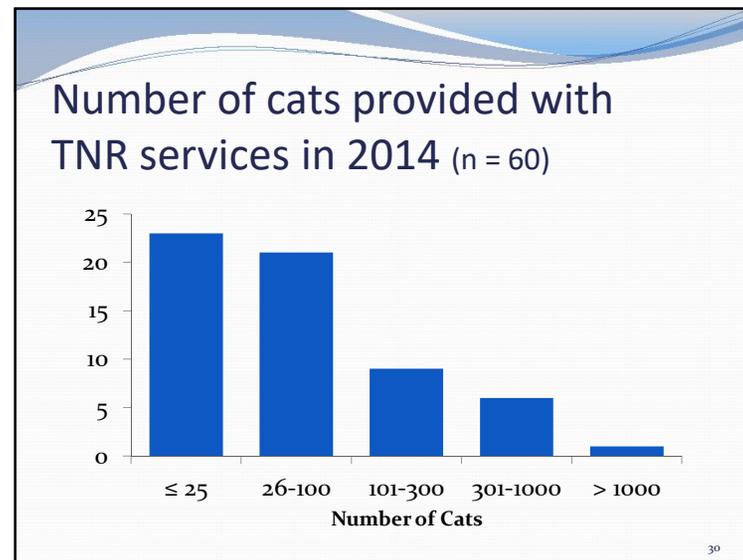
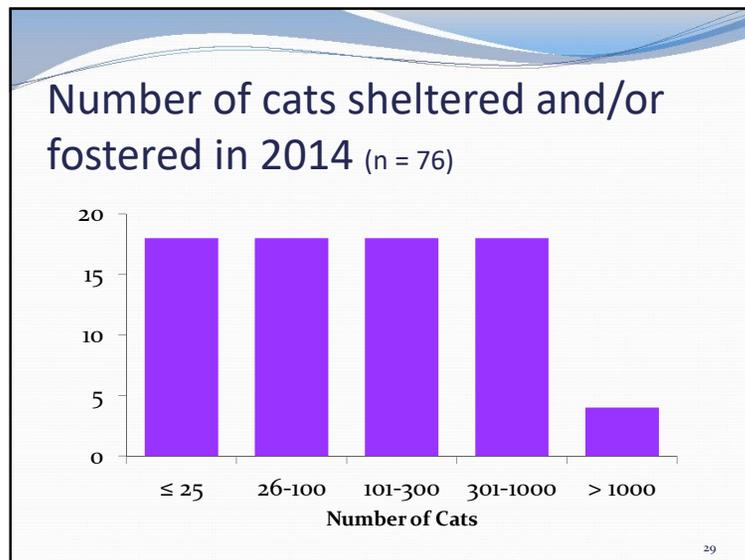




Reported data from 2014

- 15,678 dogs (n = 83)
- 27,087 cats (n = 76)
- 8,818 TNR (n = 60)

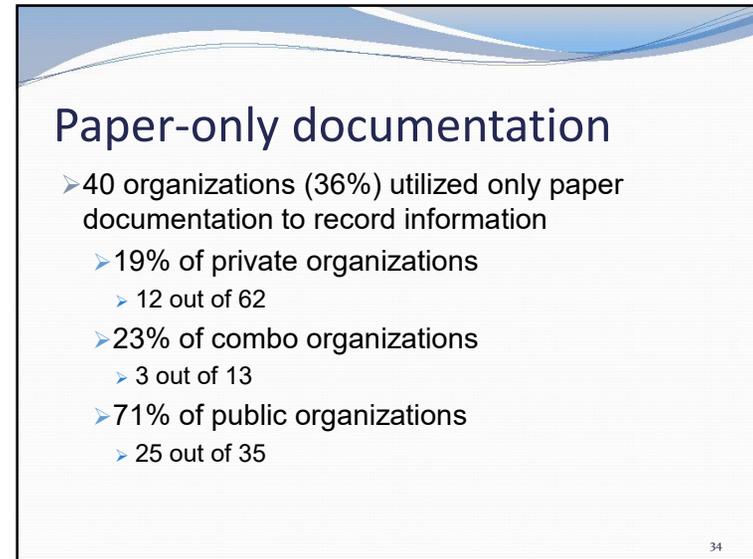
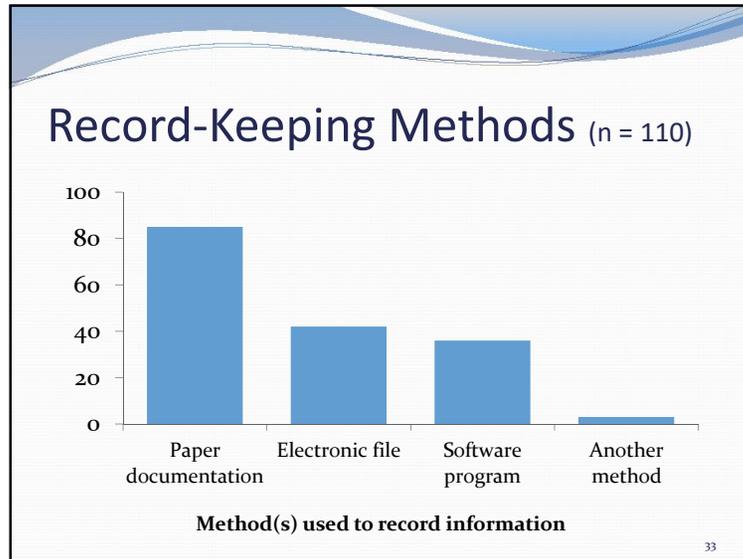




Objective Two:

What kinds of information are organizations collecting, and how is this information being collected?

32



Information Collected	Dogs (n = 83)		Cats (n = 76)	
Sex	82	99%	74	97%
Age (actual or estimated)	78	94%	73	96%
Breed(s)	82	99%	64	84%
Color(s)	80	96%	75	99%
Weight	60	72%	53	70%
Reproductive status	73	88%	65	86%
Vaccination status	76	92%	66	87%
Medical/behavior history (if known)	62	75%	55	72%
Microchip ID (if applicable)	75	90%	61	80%
Size (toy, small, etc.)	65	78%	-	-
Behavior evaluation results	45	54%	-	-
Declawed (if applicable)	-	-	56	74%
FeLV/FIV test results	-	-	59	78%

37

Date of intake (n = 109)

- 90% - always recorded the date of intake
- 6% - sometimes recorded the date of intake
- 5% - did not record the date of intake

Date of outcome (n = 110)

- 91% - always record the date of outcome
- 7% - sometimes record the date of outcome
- 2% - do not record the date of outcome

38

Intake Categories (n = 110)

- 86% - stray
- 83% - owner surrender
- 66% - return
- 63% - transfer
- 49% - law enforcement
- 46% - born in care
- 16% - owner requested euthanasia
- 15% - "other"
- 5% - does not record intake categories

39

Reasons for owner surrender (n = 90)

- 80% - always record the reason(s)
- 14% - sometimes record the reason(s)
- 6% - did not record the reason(s)

40

Information on an animal's location prior to intake (n = 109)

- 92% - city and/or zip code
- 76% - street
- 72% - address
- 66% - location (e.g., behind post office)
- 16% - other information
- 3% - did not record any information

41

Age of an animal (n = 110)

- 72% - years/months (actual or estimated)
- 56% - date of birth (actual or estimated)
- 50% - categories such as baby, juvenile, adult or senior
- 41% - categories such as kitten/cat or puppy/dog
- 3% - "other"
- 3% - does not record age

42

Outcome/Disposition Categories (n = 110)

- 89% - adopted
- 75% - euthanized
- 70% - returned to owner
- 64% - transferred
- 52% - died
- 33% - permanent foster / resident
- 5% - "other"
- 3% - does not record outcome

43

Euthanasia Categories (n = 110)

- 20% - euthanized – no other information recorded
- 73% - medical
- 48% - behavior
- 21% - law enforcement mandate
- 15% - owner requested euthanasia
- 3% - required holding time reached or exceeded
- 15% - "other"
- 11% - had never euthanized an animal
- 5% - do not keep records on euthanized animals
- None of the respondents selected that their organization recorded the reason "insufficient available space"

44

Objective Three:
How satisfied are organizations with their collection and use of information, and what resources would help them to improve?

45



Would your organization be interested in obtaining help to improve its record-keeping process?

- 69 out of 108 (64%) responded in the affirmative
 - 17 out of 17 (100%) somewhat or very dissatisfied respondents
 - 8 out of 10 (80%) neutral respondents
 - 44 out of 81 (54%) somewhat or very satisfied respondents

47

Would your organization be interested in obtaining help with summarizing or analyzing its data?

- 61 out of 109 (56%) responded in the affirmative
 - 15 out of 17 (88%) somewhat or very dissatisfied respondents
 - 8 out of 11 (73%) neutral respondents
 - 38 out of 81 (54%) somewhat or very satisfied respondents

48

Opportunities for Improvement

Respondents were asked:

- to indicate which aspects of their record-keeping process could be improved upon (n = 67)
- to identify what kinds of additional resources might be helpful with regards to strengthening their record-keeping process (n = 56)
- and to identify what kinds of additional resources might be helpful with summarizing and analyzing their data (n = 32)

49

Common Themes

- Record-keeping and data entry are frequently hampered by a lack of:
 - Time
 - Expertise
 - An adequate number of volunteers and/or staff
- Volunteers may not be trained properly
- Volunteers may have their own way of doing things
- There may be so many different volunteers that data collection may end up inconsistent or inaccurate

50

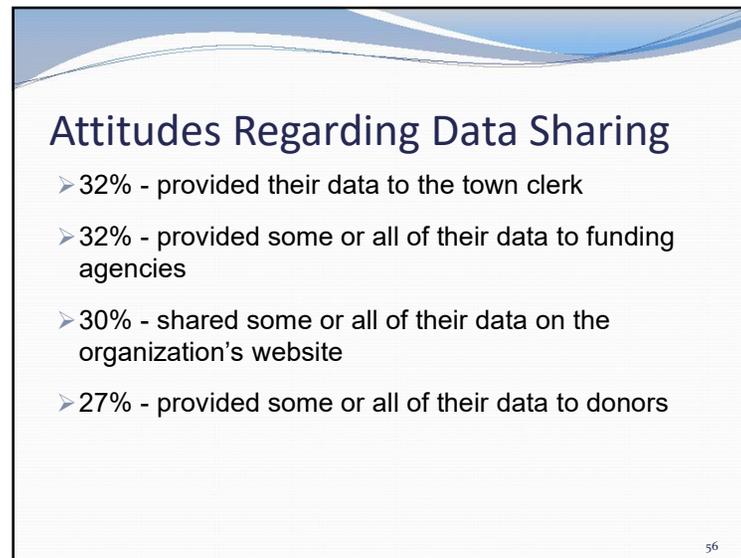
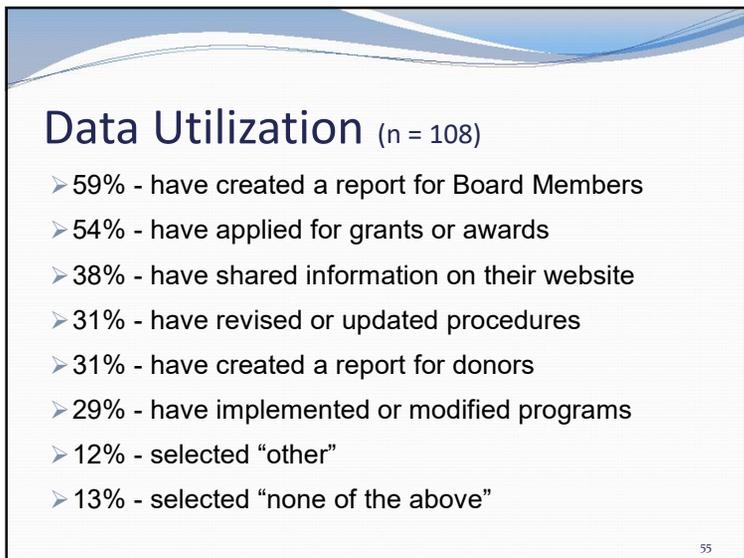
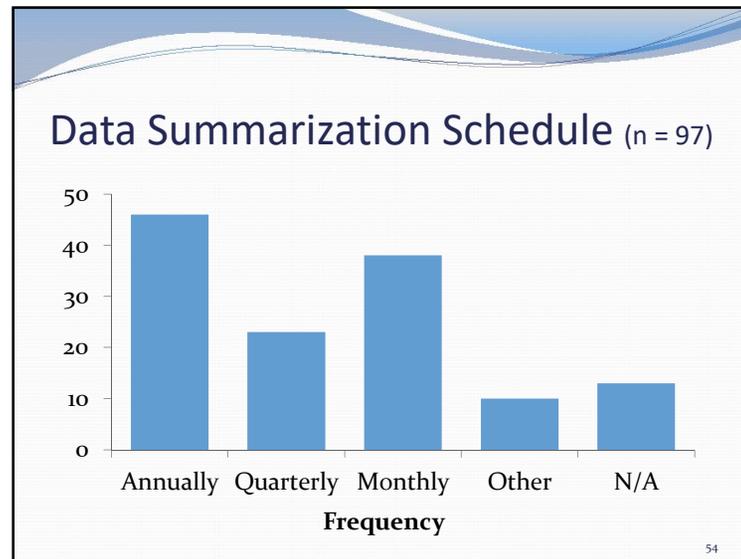
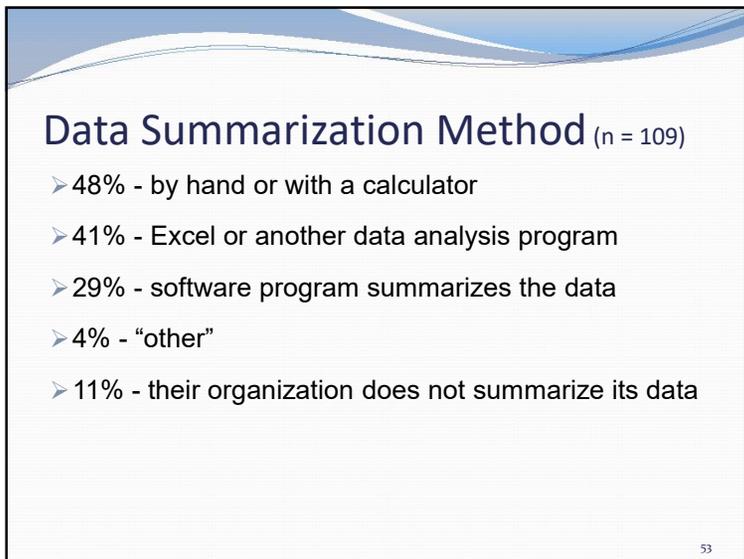
Common Themes

- Desire to switch to an electronic record-keeping
- Any computerized system needs to be:
 - User-friendly
 - Not overly labor intensive
 - Accommodating to numerous staff/volunteers
- Desire for standardized forms and/or programs
 - Forms/programs should be provided to organizations or made readily-available
 - Responses conveyed frustration with incomplete or otherwise inadequate records

51

**Objective Four:
How are these organizations
using the information they
have collected and the
resultant data?**

52



Attitudes Regarding Data Sharing

- 21% - had not previously shared their data but would be comfortable doing so
- 7% - would provide their data to the government but not the general public
- 7% - would only share their data if mandated by law
- 7% - would have difficulty providing comprehensive data

57

Additional Thoughts

“The more sharing the better. My data is your data.”

“Sharing is important.”

“I am all for this.”

“I like the thought of open honest transparent sharing of data. Then you truly know how an organization is doing and where they may need help.”

58

Additional Thoughts (n = 24)

- “We believe that MA Agricultural would be able to change/mandate the way we handle animal intake, what foster homes we use. We think they could be far too stringent with their rules and that they could force many of us to give up animal rescue because we could not comply with their myriad rules.”
- “Each shelter should be first visited to see means of operation such as, proper isolation upon intake, cleanliness, an well being of animals in shelter care... Mandate all animals should have medical chart and history as to where found, by whom, if known.”

59

DISCUSSION

60

How representative is this survey with regards to the overall Massachusetts animal sheltering community?

61

Potentially Underrepresented

- Public organizations
- Organizations with less comprehensive record-keeping practices
- Respondents who are dissatisfied with their record-keeping practices
- Organizations in need of more resources
- TNR-focused organizations

62

Cat-only vs Dog-only vs Both

- Prior research suggested that there were roughly equal numbers of cat-only organizations, dog-only organizations, and organizations that handled both cats and dogs within the state of Massachusetts
- Of the 75 survey respondents whose organizations were classified as private or combo:
 - 26 (35%) identified as cat-only
 - 22 (29%) identified as dog-only
 - 27 (36%) identified as handling both

63

What elements may have impacted the consistency of survey responses?

64

Elements impacting consistency

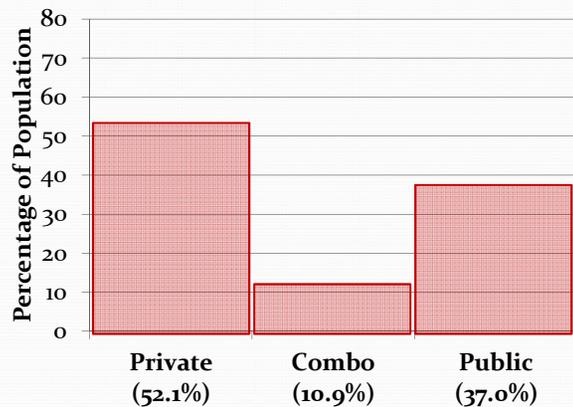
- Strong evidence that there is a lack of consensus regarding the definitions of various terms used within the animal sheltering community
- The inconsistencies highlight how important it is to understand the nuances of different types of organizations and the need to establish comprehensive definitions for pertinent terms

65

What does this survey suggest about the distribution of homeless animals amongst the various organizations within the state?

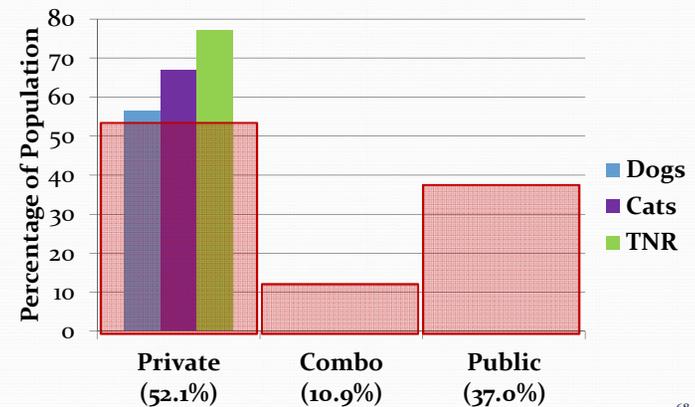
66

Distribution by Organization Type

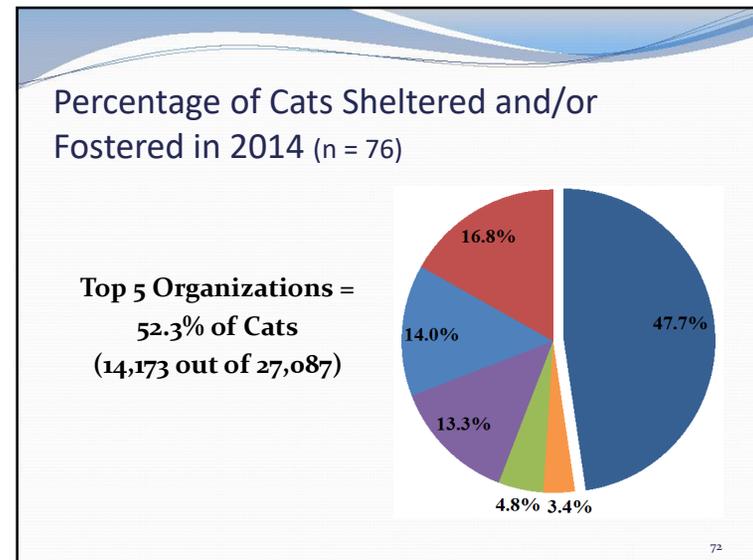
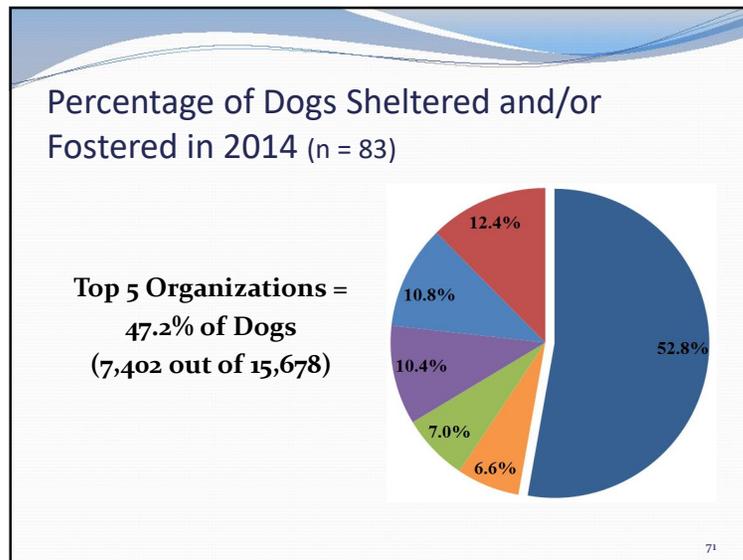
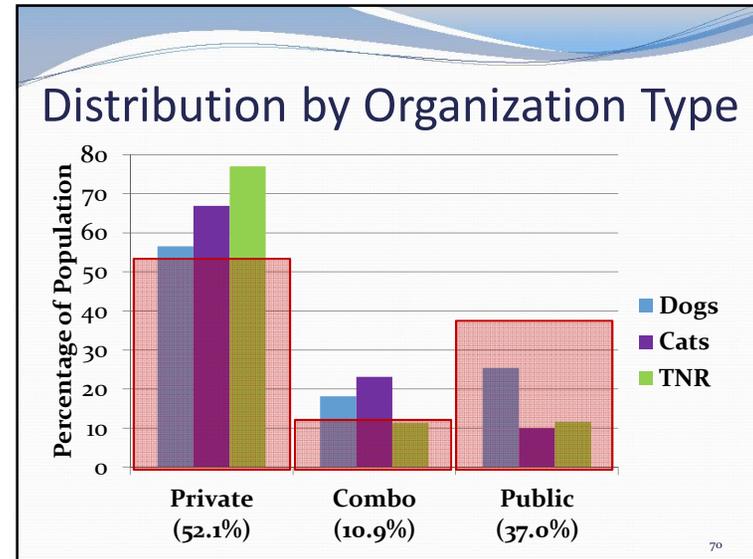
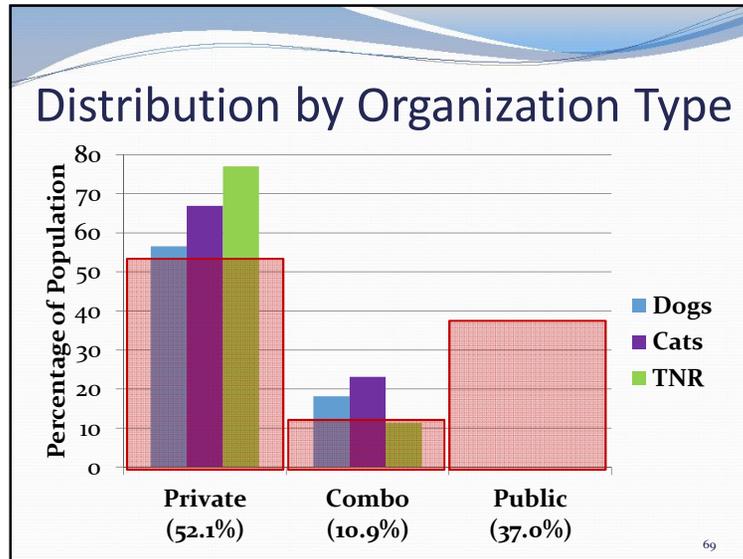


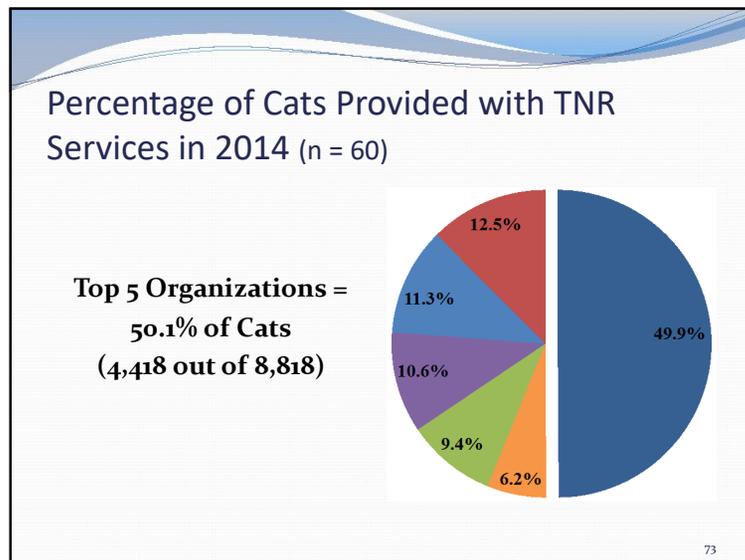
67

Distribution by Organization Type



68





What characteristics were more commonly found in those organizations categorized as Large or Extra-Large?

74

Organization Characteristics

The larger organizations were more likely to:

- have both a shelter and a foster care program
- have both paid staff and volunteers
- be registered as a nonprofit
- shelter and/or foster cats
- not restrict by dog breed
- be involved with TNR

They were less likely to be a public organization or be headquartered in a rural location.

75

Information Collection and Use

The larger organizations were more likely to:

- use an electronic record-keeping system
- use a software program
- record the date of intake and outcome
- create reports for Board Members and donors, share information on their website, revise and update procedures, and apply for grants/awards
- express a more favorable view towards sharing and reporting data and statistics

76

What patterns can be seen when comparing organization type with the various aspects of intake procedures?

77

Intake Procedures

- Private and combo organizations were more likely to:
 - have intake categories for owner surrender, returned, born in the care, and transferred
 - record the animal's date of birth or the animal's age in years/months
- Organizations with a municipal animal care and control function were more likely to:
 - record information on an animal's location prior to intake
 - have a law enforcement intake category

78

What can be said about organizations that use an electronic record-keeping system rather than paper-only documentation?

79

Electronic Record-Keeping System

- Organizations using an electronic record-keeping system were more likely to:
- be private or combo organizations
 - be larger in terms of staff, volunteers, and the number of animals provided with shelter and/or foster care services
 - have a foster care program, nonprofit status, volunteers, and a non-local geographical reach
 - be satisfied with their record-keeping process

80

Electronic Record-Keeping System

These organizations were also more likely to:

- record date of birth, reasons for owner surrender, and the dates for both intake and outcome/final disposition.
- create reports for Board Members and donors, share information on their website, revise and update procedures, implement and modify programs, apply for grants and awards, and summarize their data.
- express a more favorable attitude towards the idea of sharing and reporting animal sheltering data and statistics.

81

Electronic Record-Keeping for Dogs

- The 53 organizations with electronic records were more likely to record: coat, weight, reproductive status, vaccination status, medical/behavior history, microchip ID, size (toy, small, etc.), and behavior evaluation results.
- No difference: sex, age, breed, or color.
- The 30 paper-only organizations appeared more likely to record identifying marks.

82

Electronic Record-Keeping for Cats

- The 49 organizations with electronic records were more likely to record: breed, weight, reproductive status, vaccination status, medical/behavior history, microchip ID, declaw status, and FeLV/FIV test results.
- No difference: sex, age, color, identifying marks, or coat.

83

RECOMMENDATIONS

84

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Establish definitions for key terms
 - physical shelter location
 - to provide shelter
 - to provide foster care
 - transfer
 - stray
 - abandoned
 - feral / community cat
 - euthanized for medical reasons
 - behavior evaluation
 - length of stay
 - age

85

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Establish definitions for key terms
- 2) Focus on the larger organizations first
- 3) Collaborate with MDAR and/or the Animal Control Officers Association of Massachusetts (ACOAM)
- 4) Offer MAC grants related to record-keeping and data analysis
- 5) Offer classes and/or create online tutorials
- 6) Find / create / distribute instruction manuals
- 7) Solicit and provide reviews of software options

86

**Recommendation #8:
Create and pilot a centralized reporting mechanism for sharing canine and feline statistics from the Massachusetts animal sheltering community**

87

Any questions?



88