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Counting the Contributions: Benchmarking for Your Organization and Your State

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A vibrant collage with a yellow background. A black and white cat is positioned in the center-left, looking towards the right. In the foreground, there are several stacks of gold coins of varying heights. The background is decorated with a blue grid pattern and a white polka-dot pattern. The word "counting" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font across the middle-right section of the image.

counting



An analysis of
per-capita donations
can help shelters
assess their
effectiveness
in raising funds
and awareness in
their communities

the contributions

Benchmarking for Your Organization and Your State

BY ANDREW ROWAN, Ph.D.

In the 20 years that I've been collecting data on shelter demographics, the animal welfare field has witnessed dramatic declines in the number of unwanted pets. By now most shelter workers have seen the statistics: 13.5 million dogs and cats, or about 22 percent of those in U.S. homes, were euthanized in shelters in 1973, compared with 3 to 4 million—or less than 3 percent of the nation's household pet population—today.

But despite the success in measuring the effectiveness of the '70s-era "LES" (legislation, education, sterilization) approach to addressing animal homelessness, attempts to gather other basic data have lagged far behind. I continue to be amazed that no one (not even the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy) has developed an accurate count of the number of shelters in this country. To date, we still rely on the flawed lists kept by American Humane and my own organization, The Humane Society of the United States.

About three years ago, former HSUS Vice President Martha Armstrong and I tasked two graduates of Tufts University's Center for Animals and Public Policy—Colin Berry and Bryn Conklin—with developing a comprehensive shelter list. Thanks to their hard work, The HSUS now has a nationwide list of animal organizations, including shelters.

By collecting information from tax forms posted on GuideStar.org, Berry and Conklin also compiled financial data on individual non-profits and summarized it by state. These figures were then divided by state population totals to arrive at a per-capita donation figure. The resulting figures help us assess the level of support for animal protection in each state.

The benchmarks presented in the tables on the following pages are intended to serve only as a guide for further study and debate. While we've attempted to gather as much information as possible, a few precautions should be noted when interpreting the results. First, not all duplicates have been found and removed in current state lists. Second, existing organizations have undoubtedly been omitted, albeit inadvertently, and there may be some errors in classification of shel-

more than \$25,000 in annual income.) Fourth, municipal shelters do not normally report their income and expenses on 990s, so we have financial information for only a few of these entities. Since municipal entities account for almost 45 percent of all shelters, we are missing data on a substantial amount of income devoted to sheltering dogs and cats.

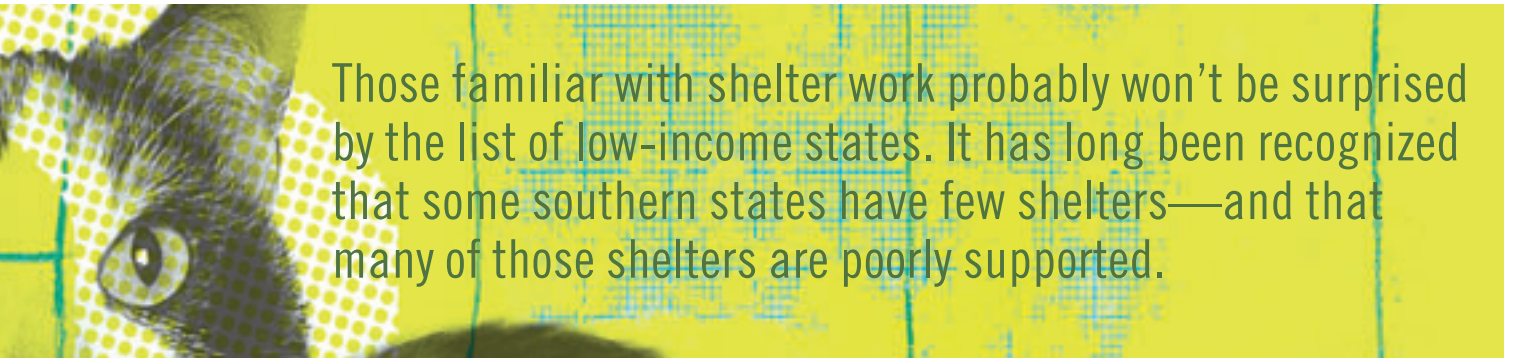
Despite these caveats, I believe it is important to publish the data if only to serve as a baseline for further refinement. Useful benchmarks can help advance the shelter profession while also highlighting those states and operations that are most in need of help.

The Head Count, State by State

Table 1 on page 38 breaks down by state the number of people, animal groups, and shelters, both pub-

That figure climbs to \$4.33 per year when the revenue of national organizations is accounted for. The amount varies considerably from one state to the next, however, and can be affected by geography. For instance, animal organizations in Washington, D.C., appear to raise more than \$18 per capita. But because of the cohesion of the Washington metropolitan region and the loyalties many suburbanites feel toward the nation's capital, Washington's per-capita figure most likely includes donations from Marylanders and Virginians to the Washington Humane Society and the Washington Animal Rescue League, two D.C. shelters included in the survey.

Of the 50 states, the most successful in terms of donations per capita are Massachusetts (\$9.06), Vermont (\$7.28), Colorado (\$6.10), and Montana (\$5.90). When



Those familiar with shelter work probably won't be surprised by the list of low-income states. It has long been recognized that some southern states have few shelters—and that many of those shelters are poorly supported.

ters and non-sheltered groups (such as fostering organizations that operate out of homes). Third, the financial information on GuideStar is incomplete, either because an organization is not yet listed (as is the case even with some of the larger groups) or because it does not make enough money in a year to file "Form 990" with the IRS. (Form 990 is an annual reporting return filed by most federally tax-exempt organizations that earn

lic and private. Of the 9,512 animal organizations accounted for, 3,353 are shelters, including 1,554 municipal facilities and 1,809 private entities that may or may not be involved in animal control.

Financial information listed in this table may help shed some light on local and regional funding situations. When income of national organizations is excluded, the average donation per capita for the country as a whole is \$3.48 per year.

income from national organizations is included, New York, Utah, and Virginia also climb the list of top donation-getters. When those incomes are excluded, the latter three states fall down closer to the national average. States with animal welfare-related donations falling below \$2 per capita include Alabama (\$1.48), Arkansas (\$1.56), Georgia (\$1.83), Idaho (\$1.26), Kentucky (\$1.55), Louisiana (\$1.39), Mississippi (\$1.13),

Table 1: Number of Entities and Per-Capita Donations by State

State shelter summary	Population	Total # Entities (Including Non-Sheltered Groups)	Total Shelters	Municipal Shelters	Private Shelters	Total \$ Raised	\$ per person	Shelters per 100,000
Alabama	4,557,808	164	74	35	39	\$6,731,396	\$1.48	1.62
Alaska	663,661	38	18	9	9	\$1,591,089	\$2.40	2.71
Arizona	5,939,292	162	47	20	27	\$26,993,093	\$4.55	0.79
Arkansas	2,779,154	161	97	42	55	\$4,327,426	\$1.56	3.49
California	36,132,147	891	213	100	113	\$170,927,494	\$4.73	0.59
Colorado	4,665,177	229	70	31	39	\$28,445,147	\$6.10	1.50
Connecticut	3,510,297	208	63	48	15	\$13,392,685	\$3.82	1.79
Delaware	843,524	21	4	0	4	\$3,617,586	\$4.29	0.47
District of Columbia	550,521	12	3	1	2	\$9,970,023	\$18.11	0.54
Florida	17,789,864	473	125	39	86	\$69,985,398	\$3.93	0.70
Georgia	9,072,576	189	65	23	42	\$16,561,977	\$1.83	0.72
Hawaii	1,275,194	26	9	0	9	\$6,062,219	\$4.75	0.71
Idaho	1,429,096	74	19	11	8	\$1,796,118	\$1.26	1.33
Illinois	12,763,371	362	145	89	66	\$36,337,793	\$2.85	1.14
Indiana	6,271,973	211	119	53	66	\$17,482,843	\$2.79	1.90
Iowa	2,966,334	117	60	27	33	\$7,526,048	\$2.54	2.02
Kansas	2,744,687	121	62	36	26	\$7,559,319	\$2.75	2.26
Kentucky	4,173,405	102	42	13	29	\$6,452,075	\$1.55	1.01
Louisiana	4,523,628	102	37	23	14	\$6,277,155	\$1.39	0.82
Maine	1,321,505	120	51	19	32	\$7,272,916	\$5.50	3.86
Maryland	5,600,388	118	32	9	23	\$16,430,464	\$2.93	0.57
Massachusetts	6,398,743	207	65	22	43	\$57,985,916	\$9.06	1.02
Michigan	10,120,860	390	193	140	53	\$34,137,675	\$3.37	1.91
Minnesota	5,132,799	156	71	21	50	\$14,744,350	\$2.87	1.38
Mississippi	2,921,088	73	40	21	19	\$3,307,920	\$1.13	1.37
Missouri	5,800,310	203	81	53	28	\$17,220,219	\$2.97	1.40
Montana	935,670	71	30	11	19	\$5,516,073	\$5.90	3.21
Nebraska	1,758,787	45	17	8	9	\$7,279,846	\$4.14	0.97
Nevada	2,414,807	48	15	6	9	\$2,851,037	\$1.18	0.62
New Hampshire	1,309,940	58	22	3	19	\$5,332,348	\$4.07	1.68
New Jersey	8,717,925	298	72	39	33	\$38,069,895	\$4.37	0.83
New Mexico	1,928,384	93	39	15	24	\$6,893,864	\$3.58	2.02
New York	19,254,630	406	119	21	98	\$70,270,408	\$3.65	0.62
North Carolina	8,683,242	325	132	66	66	\$15,697,759	\$1.81	1.52
North Dakota	636,677	19	11	4	7	\$1,168,909	\$1.84	1.73
Ohio	11,464,042	475	119	34	85	\$42,455,719	\$3.70	1.04
Oklahoma	3,547,884	139	62	36	26	\$6,890,743	\$1.94	1.75
Oregon	3,641,056	144	63	29	34	\$11,486,294	\$3.16	1.73
Pennsylvania	12,429,616	274	82	5	77	\$44,252,989	\$3.56	0.66
Rhode Island	1,076,189	51	28	22	6	\$3,052,680	\$2.84	2.60
South Carolina	4,255,083	124	53	15	38	\$9,583,664	\$2.25	1.25
South Dakota	775,933	32	14	10	4	\$1,358,154	\$1.75	1.80
Tennessee	5,962,959	190	64	31	33	\$9,938,990	\$1.67	1.07
Texas	22,859,968	748	234	141	93	\$54,403,866	\$2.38	1.02
Utah	2,469,585	134	45	40	5	\$6,077,558	\$2.46	1.82
Vermont	623,050	69	47	32	15	\$4,538,245	\$7.28	7.54
Virginia	7,567,465	348	106	51	55	\$30,518,758	\$4.03	1.40
Washington	6,287,759	176	53	16	37	\$32,437,437	\$5.16	0.84
West Virginia	1,816,856	133	34	11	23	\$4,042,100	\$2.23	1.87
Wisconsin	5,536,201	232	59	5	54	\$22,819,867	\$4.12	1.07
Wyoming	509,294	69	28	18	10	\$2,391,253	\$4.70	5.50
Total	296,410,404	9512	3353	1554	1809	\$1,032,464,800	\$3.48	1.13

Accounting for Revenue of National Organizations

Income generated by national organizations was excluded from Table 1. A combined \$252,072,483 in revenue was generated by the following organizations in 2004: American Humane, the American Anti-Vivisection Society, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Best Friends, the Foundation for Animal Protection, Friends of Animals, The Humane Society of the United States, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the National Humane Education Society, North Shore Animal League America, PETA, and the World Society for the Protection of Animals.

When this income is added to total and per-capita income figures in Table 1, the total amount donated to local and national animal welfare organizations in this country climbs to \$1,284,537,283, or \$4.33 per person.

We want to hear from you! Our efforts to compile a comprehensive national shelter database can only be completed with your help. If you see discrepancies between our charts and your own statewide statistics, or if you have more information you'd like to share, please send an e-mail to arowan@hsus.org or asm@hsus.org.

Nevada (\$1.18), North Carolina (\$1.81), North Dakota (\$1.84), Oklahoma (\$1.94), South Dakota (\$1.75), and Tennessee (\$1.67).

Those familiar with shelter work probably won't be surprised by the list of low-income states. It has long been recognized that some southern states have few shelters—and

that many of those shelters are poorly supported. What is not clear is whether the lack of support is a function of culture or of a lack of opportunity. For example, the Louisiana SPCA and other New Orleans animal organizations were raising more than \$4 per capita—higher than the national average—from the population of New Orleans and its surroundings even before Hurricane Katrina. Low funding for animal protection in parts of the South and Southwest may simply arise from a scarcity of groups accepting donations rather than hostility toward animal protection. The northern plains states and northern Rocky Mountain states are also in the bottom of the pack in terms of per-capita donations—with the exceptions of Montana (\$5.90) and Wyoming (\$4.70)—indicating that state cul-

ture probably has less to do with the rankings than the effectiveness and presence of local shelters.

The last column in Table 1 reports on the number of shelters per 100,000 residents. The average is 1.13 shelters, but some states—including Arkansas (3.49), Maine (3.86), Montana (3.21), Vermont (7.54), and Wyoming (5.50)—are well above the national average. Interestingly, Maine, Montana, Vermont, and Wyoming also rank high in per-capita donations. Perhaps the high density of shelters in these states also maximizes the potential donation income.

Using the benchmarking information presented in Table 1, individual organizations can assess their fundraising success and judge which states are doing well and which are doing poorly in terms of public support. Because local and

MAKING CENTS FROM THE PACKAGE DEAL

While the state-by-state data is helpful, it would be even more useful to have data on individual organizations and on the details of their fundraising success. For example, Table 2 shows how six randomly selected animal shelters of roughly the same size raise their funds. Each has a different pattern of income generation. Organization 2 appears to have a successful merchandising operation while Organization 3 has a successful events program. By “packaging” the more successful activities into a comprehensive fund-raising model that could be emulated by multiple organizations, the income of all shelters could likely be increased, perhaps by a substantial amount.

Table 2: Distribution of income sources from six randomly selected shelters

Shelter	1	2	3	4	5	6
Events	\$12,000	\$20,000	\$195,000	\$20,000	\$10,000	\$25,000
Publications						
Tag Sale						
Donations	70,000	245,000	140,000	500,000	150,000	200,000
Canister Program	1,000					
Bequests	11,000	20,000				
Interest/dividends	40,000	1,000	2,000	10,000	15,000	4,000
Trusts/Foundations	62,000					
Grants					250,000	
Municipal Contract	75,000					140,000
Merchandise	41,000	60,000				
Catalogue sales				12,000		
Adoption fees	125,000		15,000			175,000
Service fees		50,000			15,000	12,000
Direct Mail			30,000			
Member fees			5,000	10,000	45,000	
Total	437,000	396,000	387,000	552,000	485,000	556,000

THE MONEY TRAIL BY DECADE

Since 1950, the number of animal welfare organizations has grown from about 100 to more than 3,000, as shown in Table 3. The majority of shelters have been established in the last 30 years; in the early 1960s, then-HSUS president Robert Chenoweth estimated the number of shelters in the country at 600. An examination of all entities currently classified as D20 (animal protection groups) in the IRS database shows that the vast majority of animal organizations (74%) were founded after 1990. While it is probable that the founding dates of shelters are not quite as skewed toward the recent past, it is likely that at least half the shelters in existence today were founded after 1980.

Table 3: Number and Size of Organization According to Decade of Founding*

Approximate Decade Founded	# of Nonprofits	% of Total Nonprofits	# Filing 990 (% filing)	Current Total Annual Income (\$millions)**
Before 1950	109	1.9	104 (95)	\$701.2
1950s	113	1.9	108 (96)	343.7
1960s	194	3.3	188 (97)	190.8
1970s	469	8.0	423 (90)	234.0
1980s	596	10.2	521 (79)	161.2
1990s	1,803	30.7	1,074 (60)	276.5
2000s	2,564	43.7	726 (28)	46.7
Unknown	18	0.3	17 (94)	7.4
TOTAL	5,866	100	3,161 (54)	1,961.5

* Figures for this table were pulled from the IRS database and include animal NGOs (D20NTEEC Classification) categorized by their IRS ruling dates, which are approximately the same as founding dates.

** The numbers in this column represent the current annual income for private nonprofit organizations founded in each decade. For example, the current annual income for organizations founded in the 1980s is \$161.2 million. The figures exclude municipal agencies because they do not typically file 990 forms with the IRS.

national private animal welfare organizations whose income is reported via GuideStar raise an average of \$4.33 per person, a community of 100,000 people should be donating about \$433,000 per year to animal causes just to keep up with the national average. This figure would no doubt be affected by the median household income

in a given community as well as by community traditions and support for animal protection over the years. Competition from other animal protection groups in the area might also reduce an organization's income. Nonetheless, the \$4.33 per capita figure provides a useful baseline for shelter managers to examine their performance in raising funds.

The Cost of Animal Control?

Finally, an analysis of information gathered by the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) adds some further questions for shelter directors. Not all the data was usable; the following analysis is based on reports submitted by 47 private entities, 14 municipal animal control entities, and 18 pri-

The sample size is small, and those who submit data to the SAWA annual report are no doubt heavily self-selected. Nonetheless, these numbers call into question the trend for private sheltering organizations to jettison animal control in their communities.

ivate entities with animal control contracts. The 47 private entities raised an average of \$2.30 per person in their communities and brought in a further \$1.02 in service fees and retail operations. The range was wide: the most successful organization raised \$6.45 per person, while 13 of the shelters raised less than \$1.50 per person. In terms of service fees and retail operations, it appears that anything above \$2 per person in the community represents a very healthy program. An approximate breakdown of income showed that about 20 percent came from fees for service (adoption and veterinary programs), 16 percent from planned giving, 12 percent from direct mail, 10 percent from events, 5 percent from retail, 5 percent from interest, 4 percent from grants, and 28 per-

cent from miscellaneous sources.

The 14 animal control agencies received about \$4.79 per person in local government funding. By contrast, the 18 private entities with animal control contracts received only \$2.60 per person from local government, indicating that private entities with these arrangements are subsidizing animal control. By the same token, however, those entities raised an average of \$4.16 per person and brought in an additional \$1.41 in service fees and retail income—for a total income of \$8.17 per person. This is more than double the income of the 47 private entities without animal control contracts. In other words, there may be real compensations for taking on animal control (although of course the benefits would have to be weighed against the costs of pro-

viding the services). While agencies may end up subsidizing municipalities, it is possible that the visibility leads to a significant increase in public donations. The sample size is small, and those who submit data to the SAWA annual report are no doubt heavily self-selected. Nonetheless, these numbers call into question the trend for private sheltering organizations to jettison animal control in their communities.

The data presented here is not by any means watertight, but perhaps this article will prompt others to do a more rigorous job of benchmarking. 🌸

Andrew Rowan is the executive vice president of operations for The Humane Society of the United States and CEO of Humane Society International.

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