



Internal Strategic Issues Survey Summary Report

March 11, 2019

Background

This survey was the first step in the Potter League's 2019 strategic planning process. Invitations to participate in the online survey were addressed to 56 members of the Potter League staff, Board and non-Board members of Board committees. Forty-three recipients (76%) completed the survey between Feb. 21 and March 4.

This survey was designed to get all internal perspectives and important issues on the table and consisted of mostly open-ended questions requiring text responses. The results are not a valid quantitative measure of opinion. However, the extent of shared concerns and views is significant. The number of comments on the same or similar topics are noted in parenthesis.

Executive Summary

Responses overwhelmingly represented a very high degree of pride in connections to the Potter League and a very widely shared confidence in the excellence of the Potter League's work and care for animals. This positive view centered specifically on the high success rate and volume of animal adoptions, and more generally on the quality of care and compassion provided to all animals.

Animal adoption clearly remains the most prominent and valued program, but respondents recognize that the current model is likely to become increasingly expensive and difficult to sustain in the long term. Support for helping people, particularly low-income members of the community, to keep and care for their pets is also widely supported, reflecting an interest in expanding and publicizing the Potter League's benefits to people and the community and the "human-animal connection." A smaller number pointed to education and legislative advocacy as important strategies to protect animals.

Respondents identified three key challenges facing the Potter League:

- Growing constraints on the supply of adoptable animals and on the Potter League's core program.
- Concerns that increased competition for dwindling charitable assets locally will cut into resources.
- Worry that tight resources will limit growth and impair the quality of care.

Growth in was clearly seen as the effective response to these challenges. The Spay and Neuter Clinic acquisition is seen as opening the door to a statewide footprint, while others note the potential to expand fundraising to bigger statewide or even national audiences. Launching new money-making pet enterprises, such as day care, boarding and grooming were mentioned as well.

Summaries of responses to each question follow below.

How relevant is our mission today? (Scale of 1 to 5)

The Potter League Mission Statement

“As the heart of a humane community and in partnership with that community, the Potter League for Animals is dedicated to making a difference in the lives of animals. We promote the humane treatment of all animals and provide shelter and care for lost or unwanted companion animals. Through education, commitment to a standard of excellence in the care of animals, and fostering relationships between people and animals, we enhance the animals’ lives and enrich the human experience.”

“I love this mission statement... [yet] ... I believe we undersell how much we impact the human experience.”

All respondents found the statement “extremely” or “very” relevant.

83% rated it 5: “Extremely relevant”

17% rated it 4: Very relevant

Ten respondents called for no change in the statement. Another ten offered minor amendments, including:

- Cut the first clause as not needed.
- Change “unwanted companion animals” to “lost and companion animals in need.”
- More mention of the difference made for people and human experience.
- Add mention of education and legislative advocacy.
- Reference to emergency care
- Commitment to supporting the disadvantaged.

What are we proudest of?

“Our long history of commitment to helping animals find a loving, caring home.”

“The care our animals receive. We do everything in our power...”

“The generous support of the public, who volunteer time and donations.”

- High rates of adoption and program excellence (32)
- Service to the community, and outreach to those in need (29)
- High standard of daily animal care (23)
- High quality veterinary and behavioral care (13)
- Our wonderful people (10)
- The community’s support for the Potter League (8)

What do we do well?

“I think we listen to people and try our hardest to work with them to solve problems.”

- Compassionate care and excellence of services (16)
- Outreach and response to community need (14)
- Adoption (13)

What would we strengthen?

“Our mission, to keep animals in their homes, is very difficult due to the cost of vet care.”
“We need to address new revenue streams.”

This is the one area where staff and Board responses differed.

Staff comments touched on:

- Better internal communication: listening to and recognizing staff and volunteers (9)
- More resources: new revenue to support better computer program, more staff and training, (6)
- Better animal care: more staff time per animal, ringworm control (4)

Board comments focused on:

- Fundraising: estate planning, communicating need, new donors, major gifts. (5)
- Community service: Expanded pet care support for lower income people (5)
- Adoption: More and younger pets for adoption, more attention to receiving homes. (4)
- Staffing: More pay and incentives to retain talented staff. (2)

What should we stop doing?

This area had relatively few suggestions and only one repeated area of concern: staff concern with the high frequency of “back to back transports.” which created stress on staff and made it more difficult to provide excellent care for all. Other suggestions: Cut adoption fees for lower income people, fewer fundraising appeals, consider alternatives to school programs.

What worries us?

“Diminishing financial and leadership support from an aging support community. Without these assets, Potter will be held back in making advancements that ensure viability.”

- Having enough resources and the possibility of a shrinking donor base (19)
- Fewer pets available for adoption (8)
- Staff morale, pay and retention, being stretched too thin for the workload. (7)

What changes will we need to respond to?

“We have done such a good job with spay and neuter that we may need to start breeding.”

- Fewer animals in need of adoption (10)
- Changes in pet ownership and pet owner needs, especially need for low-cost care (6)
- Facility expansion and maintenance needs (2)
- Technology and artificial intelligence
- Climate change

What are our opportunities?

“Acquiring the Spay & Neuter clinic is a huge opportunity. Expanding and developing is very important.”

- Expanded services, especially boarding and day care, also hospice, behavioral training, low cost care (17)
- Spay/neuter clinic, particularly creating a statewide presence (10)
- Other: Use of new property, expanded collaborations with vets and partners, revenue-generating ventures.

Dreams for the Potter League

“Provide the highest level of care to each animal... this is a dream we are living now, and I hope we can sustain this.”

- Continued growth and excellence: (11)
- Nationwide recognition for leadership
- Creating a “humane campus”
- Advocate for more access to pets for elderly.

Key questions for planning

- How do we help more animals?
- Are we helping dogs in our community, or just dogs from other communities?
- What impact do we want to have? What does the community need?
- Are we a community resource or a national humanitarian partner?
- What are the goals and direction for veterinary and spay/neuter programs?
- Where will future revenue come from?
- What are our weaknesses and challenges?
- What is the future of Newport County?
- How big should we aim to be? What are the costs and feasibility of growth?