Dogs and people: are we making a difference?

Vets Beyond Borders, AMRRIC and the Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences at The University of Melbourne hosted a workshop on improving the monitoring and evaluation of dog population management programs in Melbourne on 16 May. Monitoring and evaluation is an important but often neglected project activity for dog population management in Australia as well as in developing countries. A review of published studies on dog population management with respect to comprehensive approaches and outcome monitoring was conducted by the International Companion Animal Management (ICAM) Coalition resulting in the recently launched *Guide to monitoring and evaluating dog population management interventions*. The main focus of the workshop was to raise awareness and to actively use this guide with non-government organisations working in this complex area.

When establishing dog population management programs, as veterinarians, we tend to focus on getting in and fixing the problems using our veterinary know-how. While we usually have a specific aim in mind, we may not define exactly what 'success' looks like, and how we would measure it. Indeed, sometimes we neglect to take the time to assess the situation and include effective monitoring and evaluation techniques in our program design.

Monitoring and evaluation are important components of any dog population management intervention because they allow us to measure our impact and ultimately demonstrate whether or not our interventions are successful. This allows us to recognise what works and what doesn't, promoting improvements and efficiencies. The new guide has eight recommended impacts, each with suggested indicators and methods of measurement. Effective monitoring and evaluation are also essential in demonstrating to funding bodies the benefits of supporting dog population management interventions.

The workshop was attended by 50 individuals representing VBB, AMRRIC, WALDHepP, RSPCA, universities, CSIRO, World Animal Protection, HSI, consultants, evaluation and animal behaviour specialists and government. Keynote speakers were Dr Karma Rinzin (Murdoch University) and Ms Tracy Helman who spoke on holistic DPM models and measures of success. As well as bringing those involved in dog population management to the table to share their knowledge and experience, the workshop helped attendees to feel more confident in implementing effective monitoring and evaluation techniques from the guide. Great interest was shown in the various data collection and analysis tools highlighted, and participants relished the opportunity to establish collaborations for better monitoring and evaluation.

The guide encourages users to improve their dog population management impacts through the use of measurable objective indicators. Adopting a standardised approach, such as that in the guide, allows for interventions to be easily compared, enabling improved collaboration and ultimately, better results for the animals and communities where dog population management interventions occur.

We were overwhelmed by the participation and enthusiasm for the workshop and sincerely thank everyone who contributed to the success of the day. Given the positive response to the workshop, we hope that such a gathering will become an annual event. The ICAM Coalition is considering replicating this workshop globally.

For the workshop agenda please visit http://fvas.unimelb.edu.au/veam and follow the 'Events' link.

Dr Bonny Cumming
Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities – AMRRIC

Dr Andrea Britton
Vets Beyond Borders

Professor Mark Stevenson
The University of Melbourne

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Reference

1. Companion Animal Management (ICAM) Coalition. Guide to monitoring and evaluating dog population management interventions. www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/ICAM_Guidance_Document.pdf.