

# The Community Dog Book

by Tasha Epp & Jasmine Dhillon

University of Saskatchewan  
Western College of Veterinary Medicine



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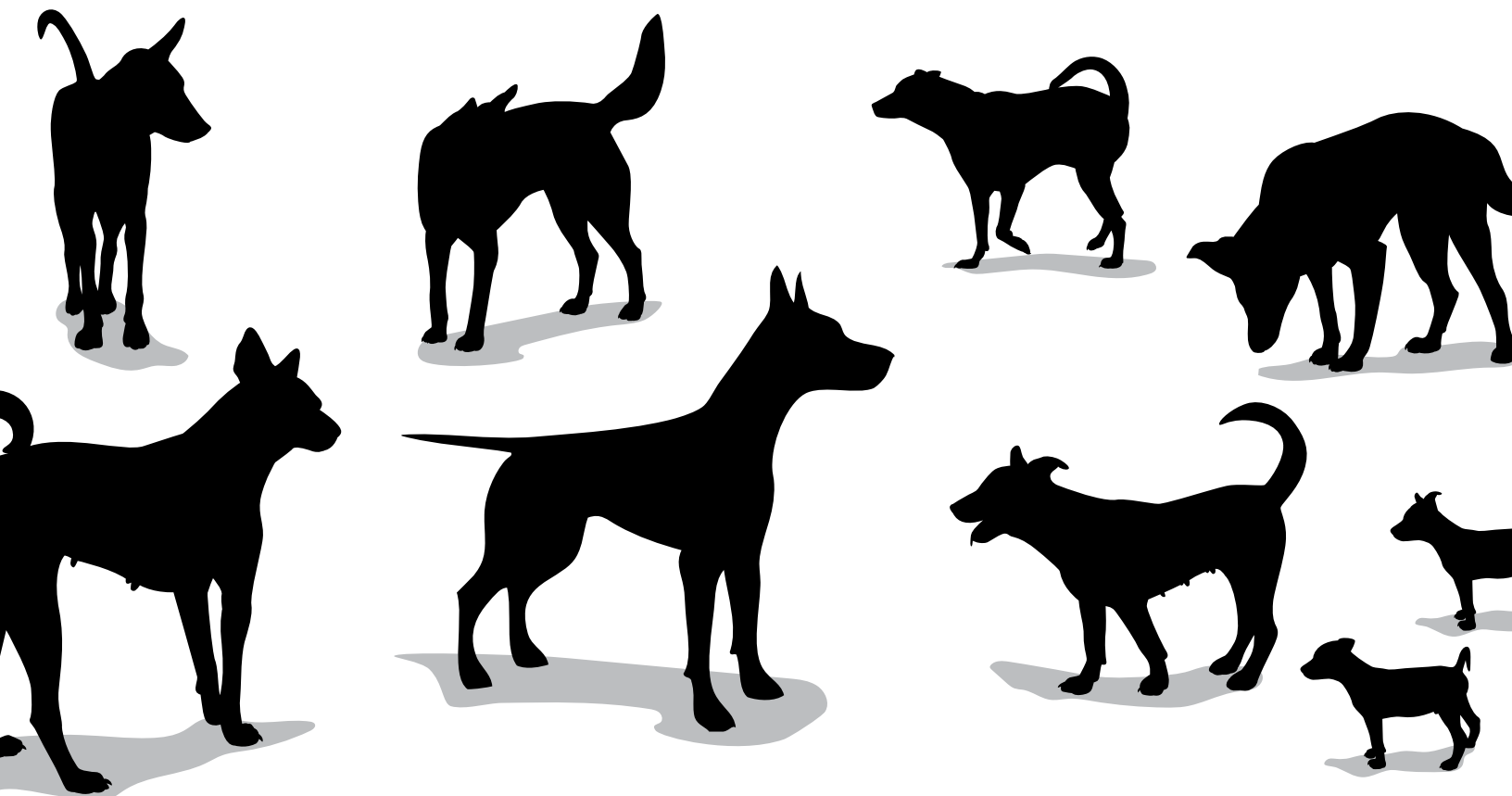
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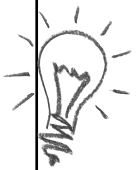




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## Markup this book



This workbook was designed to help you work through your dog-population management issues and figure out **the best ways for your community to address your specific situation.** To get the most out of this workbook, mark it up!

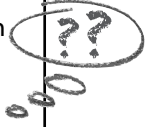
### Underline

Underline important points or ideas that make you stop and think about what you are reading.

### Write notes

We've designed the book with lots of white space that you can use to write notes about what you are learning, what others can teach you, and where you want to go to find answers. In the margins, add your own observations and the perspectives of others.

Add reference notes to other resources on the same topic.







# Introduction

## Background

If you are having problems with dogs in your community, this workbook will give you some ideas and help you develop a plan. The advice in this book comes from years of experience and discussions with many communities struggling with dog populations or dog-related issues.

## Where to start

A common question from communities wanting to deal with dog-related issues is, “where do we start.” This is a complex question, and the answer is not the same for everyone. For example, it depends on who is asking this question, what the dog-related issues are, what the time frame is for response, and what resources are available within the community to create possible solutions. Often, the best place to start is with a community assessment.

A community assessment is meant to draw together individuals from within your community to identify the most important dog-related issues (e.g., population control, or bite prevention) and determine what kind of support you might have within your community for solving those issues.

After a series of conversations with people from communities struggling with dog-related issues, we decided that a freely available workbook would be a useful way to guide communities on their journey—to help them identify the questions they needed to ask and to find the answers that would help them create healthier communities, healthier individuals and healthier dogs.

The suggestions provided in this workbook are not the only ways to figure out how to control dog populations and prevent dog bite issues. Each community can use the information presented here in different ways. In addition, communities might find better ways of identifying their issues and methods of creating healthier populations of dogs and people living with dogs. To capitalize on these successes, we hope communities will share what works and what doesn't with us and with each other.

A common question from communities wanting to deal with dog-related issues is, ‘where do we start.’

Often, the best place to start is with a community assessment.



As you work through the book, you and your community will be guided through the steps necessary to determine your particular issues and to start down the path of addressing those issues.

### Developing a plan

Use this workbook to conduct a community assessment. As you work through the book, you and your community will be guided through the steps necessary to determine your particular issues and to start down the path of addressing those issues. The workbook also provides a platform against which existing programs can be evaluated and improved as needed.

Since no two communities are exactly alike, the workbook is very flexible and can be used to develop unique plans specific to your context.

### Building on past successes

Please take the time to share your struggles, as well as successes, with us. It is only by sharing our successes and setbacks that we will create a health communities, healthy people, and healthy animals.

Sincerely,

Tasha Epp and Jasmine Dhillon  
Workbook creators

[tasha.epp@usask.ca](mailto:tasha.epp@usask.ca)





# Community assessment exercise

## Major steps

### **Step 1: Define the issue(s)**

- Identify stakeholders and their roles
- Document the concerns of all stakeholders
- Describe your situation
- Outline your objectives

### **Step 2: Determine your options**

- Identify possible policies or programs
  - Broader collaborations
  - Community interventions
  - Veterinary interventions and health Initiatives
- Draft an intervention plan

### **Step 3: Document the changes**

- Indicators of success:
  - Improved conditions for the dogs in terms of food, water, and shelter
  - Improved dog health and well-being
  - Changes to dog population size or composition
  - Healthier dog-human interactions in your community
  - Improved public perceptions concerning dogs in the community

### **Step 4: Share lessons learned**



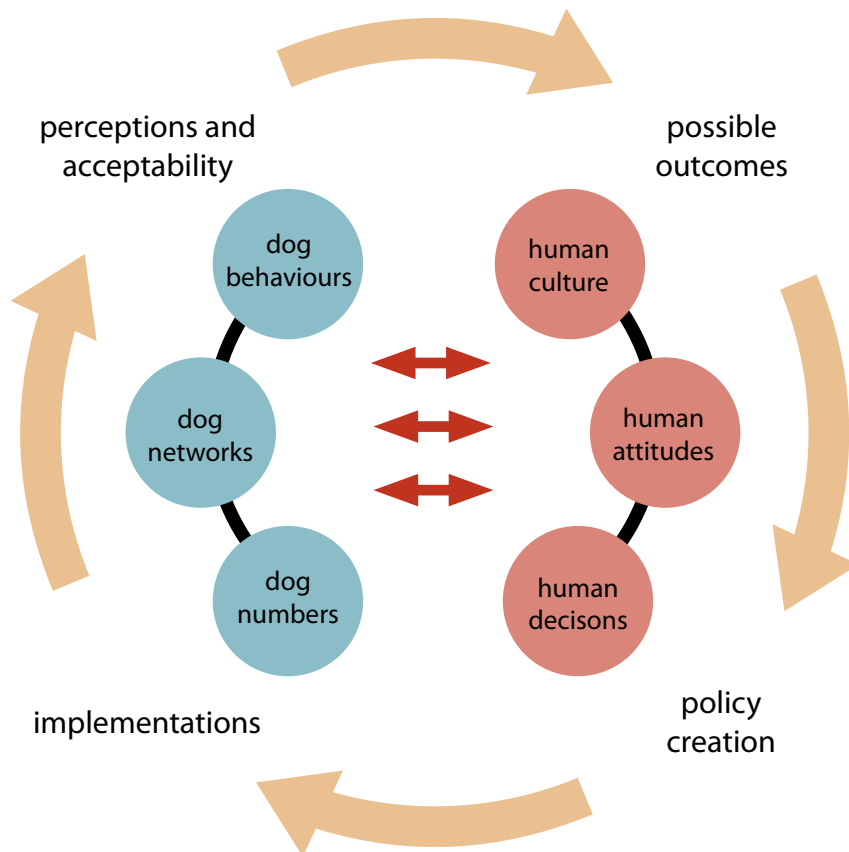
# Step 1: Define the issue(s)

No two communities will have exactly the same issues relating to dogs in their communities or the same size or composition of dogs within their boundaries. As such, no single intervention program will fit all communities. Unique strategies must be developed for each community to achieve widespread community participation and support. Each community must build plans that are sensitive to local beliefs regarding dogs and the role dogs play in the life of their community.

No two communities will have exactly the same issues, so no single intervention program will fit all communities.

To create a community-specific plan, you must determine what your specific issues are and consider those issues from the perspectives of the people, the animals, and your community.

## Cycles Influencing Community Decisions



The list of possible project leaders or working group members should include or represent everyone in the community who is affected by the dog population.

## Identify stakeholders and their roles

The first step is to decide who should be asked to participate. To create an open and transparent process, an individual advocate should be identified or a small working group of interested community members should be selected to lead the project. This individual or group will be responsible for gathering information and presenting that information back to the community.

The list of possible project leaders or working group members should include or represent everyone in the community who is affected by the dog population. The working group can determine if anyone from outside of the community should be asked to provide input. The goal is to ensure a range of views is considered, with as much “buy-in” as possible in the initial stages of information gathering.

Possible participants could include the following:

- Governing bodies from within or outside the community
- Elders and other community leaders
- Community members
- Outside experts as required (e.g., veterinarians, not-for-profit groups, academic communities, educators, and the media).

## Document the concerns of all stakeholders

An important place to start is to ask where things are at right now. What are the main issues? The exact questions that you ask are not as important as being open and listening to what people have to say. You will have to talk with individuals as well as groups. You can use a predefined set of questions or just have an open informal conversation.

When you are gathering information use questions or prompts such as these:

- Tell me about the dogs in this community.
- How do dogs and people interact in our community?
- What does the perfect community with people and dogs living here look like?
- How have the issues changed over time?

These questions are good ways to get open feedback. The answers to these questions will help you determine what the main concerns are within your community. The key is to identify the most-often-heard themes without dismissing the quiet voices in the room.





## Describe your situation

### What do you know about the dog population in your community?

Begin by summarizing what you already know about the size and composition of the dog population in your community. You may need to ask for assistance from outside groups to help you describe the current situation. Not every community will need all the information described below.

### Work Session 3

Answer the following questions. Depending on the size of your community, answering these questions may take a lot of manpower or resources.

How many restrained, restricted, or free-roaming dogs are there in your community?

Restrained: \_\_\_\_\_

Restricted: \_\_\_\_\_

Free-roaming: \_\_\_\_\_

Where do these dogs come from (within or outside of the community)?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*continued...*

### Common dog roles in communities

- Pets/companions
- Hunting dogs
- security dogs
- working dogs (such as sled dogs)
- Service dogs (for people with special needs)

### Types of dog movement

**Restrained** – A dog whose mobility, movement, and freedom is completely limited (such as within a fenced area or in a house).

**Restricted** – A dog whose movement within the community is controlled (such as by a leash or chain).

**Roaming** – A dog not currently under direct control or restricted by a physical barrier (e.g., a dog that is not on a leash or contained within a fence, but is in proximity to its owner).

**Free-roaming** – A dog that is roaming in public areas while not under the direct control of or supervision by its owner.

## Types of dog ownership

**Individually owned** – A dog with one individual or family who claim ownership or cares for that animal's needs.

**Community owned** – A dog with more than one individual/family group who claim ownership or care for that animal's needs in a communal manner.

**Feral** – A dog descended from domesticated animals but born and living in the wild. Generally feral animals do not have contact with humans and are not socialized.

**Semi-feral** – An animal that was born and lives in the wild without socialization but has random interaction with humans for management or care purposes. May also refer to an animal that was once cared for by an individual but is now surviving without interaction with humans.

**Stray** – A dog that was owned previously, and as such is somewhat socialized, but is now lost, abandoned, or has run away and is fending for its own needs.

Work Session 3 (... continued)

Who owns the dogs in your community? (See sidebar.)

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What is the health status of these dogs?

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What is currently in place in your community to control dog populations?

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Work Session 3 (... continued)

Does anyone provide care for stray or feral dogs in your community?

yes       no

If yes, who?

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### Community dogs

In many communities free-roaming dogs are tolerated or even enjoyed. Most of these free-roaming dogs are owned.

Owned free-roaming dogs are usually tolerated by the people in a community and are generally well cared for by their owners. However, when population control is not managed (see page 35), the increasing number of unwanted dogs are sometimes abandoned by their owners.

Owned dogs that have been abandoned often don't know how to fend for themselves. They scavenge for food near homes, beg for food, or prey on wildlife. They are often unable to find sufficient resources (food, water, and shelter) for their survival (see page 33).

Most unowned free-roaming dogs are underfed and in poor health.



## Make a map of the dogs in your community

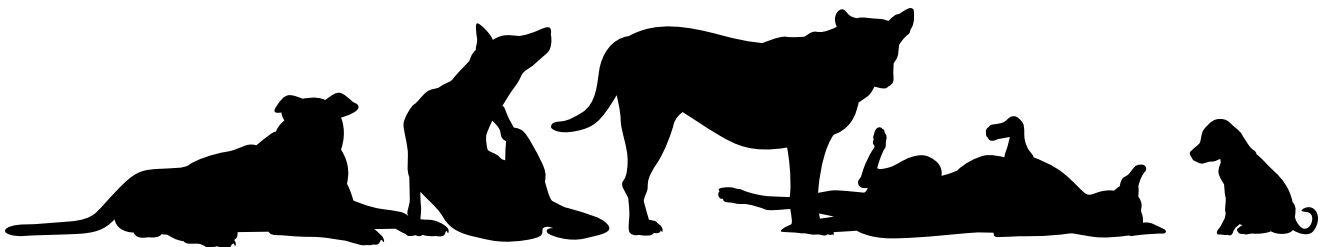
Consider using a digital tool like Google Maps to help you develop an accurate map of your community.

Are there locations in your community where dogs like to hang out, pack up, or cause disruptions?

Consider areas such as the following:

- schools
- playgrounds
- hospitals
- hotels
- junkyards
- garbage piles
- wooded areas and green spaces

These are often high-risk areas for unwanted aggressive interactions (including bites) between people and dogs.



## Work Session 4

Use this space to draw a map of the main features of your community or use an existing map. Mark on the map or make a list of any high-risk areas within your community.



## Dealing with dog bites

If preventing dog bites is the main reason your community wants to establish a dog population management program, remember this:

**Any dog can bite at anytime and anywhere . . .  
for a variety of reasons.**

Here are just a few of the reasons why a dog might bite:

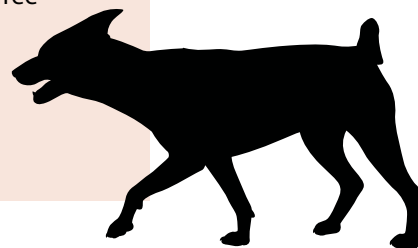
- A dog might have health issues that cause it to behave aggressively.
- A dog might be aggressive if it is defending its territory.
- A dog might be aggressive if it was not taught at an early age to interact in normal, positive ways with humans.
- A dog is more likely to be aggressive if it has been mistreated.
- A dog is more likely to become aggressive when it is scared.
- A dog's genetic makeup might make them more likely to be aggressive, but this kind of behaviour is more commonly a result of upbringing.

It is usually the situation and not the dog that determines when a dog will bite.

Problems happen when people and dogs are not speaking the same language. A dog may be showing signs that it could bite, but people do not always understand those signals. Sometimes there is just not enough time for a person to process the information (realize what is happening) before a bite occurs.

To ensure healthy dog-human interactions, early socialization is very important. Even well trained and socialized dogs can bite, but the risk is considerably less than it is when the interactions involves free-roaming stray or feral dogs.

A dog may be showing signs that it could bite, but people do not always understand those signals.





January

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December

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## Outline your objectives

It's best to select one primary goal and possibly one secondary goal.

Once you have collected the information you need, it is time to identify your primary goals or priorities for the dog population management program you are developing.

It is best to select one primary goal and possibly one secondary goal. These goals will help you choose from the options in step 2 and decide what sorts of changes to document in step 3.

Following are some examples of possible goals:

- Encourage responsible dog ownership.
- Promote beneficial interactions between dogs and community members.
- Stabilize or reduce the dog population in your community.
- Reduce the number of dogs roaming free within your community.
- Improve or maintain the health of the dogs within your community (and thereby reduce health risks to people in your community).
- Reduce the number of unwanted or aggressive encounters between dogs and people within the community (e.g., dog bites).









## Step 2:

# Determine your Options

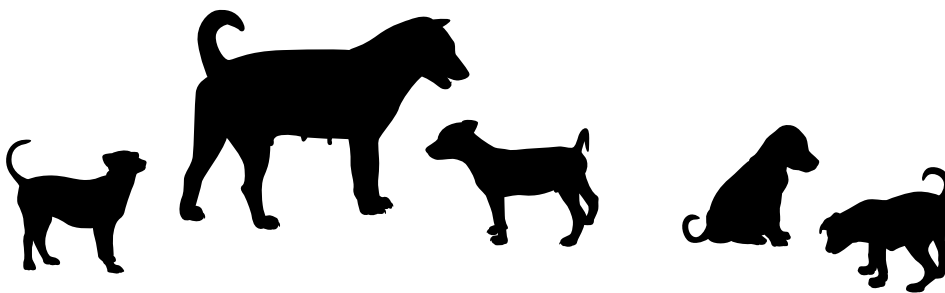
No two communities have identical issues, concerns, or problems when it comes to animal populations. Therefore, each community should create their own animal management program and should not simply implement an existing program, even if it is working well in another community. The underlying principles or options may appear to be similar, but customizing the plan to the specific needs of each community will ensure it is effective and can be maintained over time. Dog population management does not offer a one-size-fits-all solution.

The overall objectives of dog population management are:

- Fewer, healthier, and better-behaved animals
- Responsible owners who train their pets to have good behaviour (See more about responsible dog ownership on page 36.)
- Pet owners who look out for the health and welfare of their animal companions

The best-laid plans start with committed and responsible animal owners within their own communities. Building capacity within your community through education, thereby changing attitudes and perceptions of what it means to be a responsible pet owner, will result in significant change.

Dog population management does not offer a one-size-fits-all solution. Customizing a plan to the specific needs of each community ensures it will be effective and can be maintained over time.



Many organizations and groups provide information on creating dog population management programs and dog bite and rabies prevention programs.

## Online resources

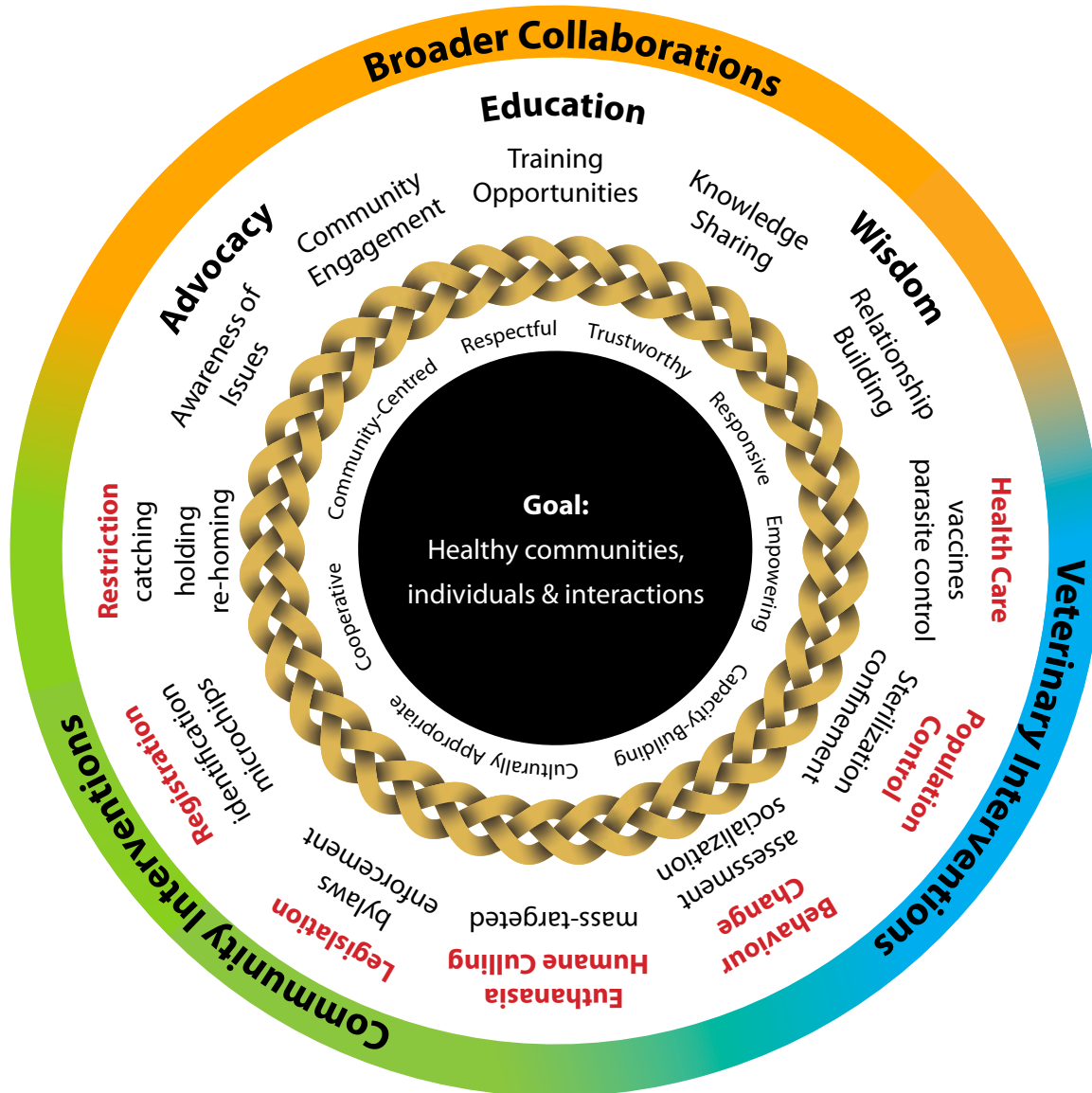
Communities do not have to develop dog population management programs on their own. Many organizations and groups provide information on creating dog population management programs and dog bite and rabies prevention programs.

Here are some of organizations that share their resources online:

- World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) [www.worldanimalprotection.org](http://www.worldanimalprotection.org)
- International Federation of Animal Welfare (IFAW) [www.ifaw.org](http://www.ifaw.org)
- International Companion Animal Management Coalition (ICAM) [www.icam-coalition.org](http://www.icam-coalition.org)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)
- Alberta Spay and Neuter Task Force [www.abtaskforce.org](http://www.abtaskforce.org)
- Blue Paw Trust (BPT) [www.bluepawtrust.org](http://www.bluepawtrust.org)
- Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMMRIC) [www.amrric.org](http://www.amrric.org)

The following diagram (adapted from a diagram in the article “Finding Pathways for Bite Prevention and Decreasing Dog Populations: The process of animal control for indigenous communities in Canada,” published in the *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing*) shows the options that are available to communities. These options are outlined in more detail in the following pages.

## Dog Population Management in the Community



**Source:** This illustration is an adaptation of an illustration in the following article.

Dhillon, et al, 2016. Finding Pathways for Bite Prevention and Decreasing Dog Populations: The process of animal control for indigenous communities in Canada. *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing: Te Mauri-Pimatisiwin*, Volume 1, Issue 2.

Increased awareness of the dog-related issues can unite and empower a community and encourage people to create and maintain a dog population management plan.

## Broader collaborations

### Advocacy

Every community needs an advocate, someone who is very interested in the development a dog population management plan, will help maintain interest in the plan over time, and can be relied upon to make sure it is put into action.

### Work Session 8

Who is or should be your community advocate?

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Increasing awareness of the dog-related issues and building community partnerships to help tackle these issues were important aspects of Step 1 in this workbook. Increased awareness can also unite and empower a community and focus attention on a shared cause for concern. This shared understanding can strengthen the community and encourage people to create and maintain a dog population management plan.

### Education

Education is the single most important element of any comprehensive dog population management plan. Behaviours and attitudes influence how people view and interact with animals, particularly man's best friend—the dog. Any well-developed dog population management plan or dog bite prevention program should include some form of education.

Keep the following in mind:

- Human attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours are among the most powerful forces to ensure sustainable dog populations.
- Most successful dog bite prevention plans focus on teaching people to understand the signals animals give before they bite.

Education and training opportunities will build skills and capacity within your community that can help make the community healthier. Education can be directed toward dog owners, bylaw officers, community planners, school

students, or interested community members. Providing training opportunities may require support from interested partners outside of your community.

### Work Session 9

What kind of education is needed within your community?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are there specific skills you would like to develop in your community?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are there specific members of your community who should receive training?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How can that education be provided?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Education is the single most important element of any comprehensive dog population management plan.

Education can be directed toward:

- dog owners
- bylaw officers
- community planners
- school students
- community members

Building relationships with others is particularly helpful if special knowledge is required for certain parts of your dog population management program.

### Wisdom

Building relationships with others, individuals or groups, within and outside your community, can help you develop and maintain your programs. This is particularly true if special knowledge is required for certain parts of your program. For example, veterinary groups or dog rescue groups can be great partners in the development of dog population management programs.

## Work Session 10

What kind of support might you need from outside your community?

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Who could provide that support?

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Sharing resources, knowledge and training opportunities with other communities can help those communities start or continue programs in their regions. This workbook helps individual communities work on their own issues, but we hope communities will share their experiences with others.



## Work Session 11

What communities do you want to work with?

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What resources do you have that could be shared with other communities?

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This workbook helps individual communities work on their own issues, but we hope communities will share their experiences with others.

## Community interventions

There are many ways a community can develop dog population management with the resources it already has. These resources include legislation (and enforcement), registration of animals, re-homing lost pets, and controlling access to food sources so that dogs rely solely on their owners for food.

### Legislation

Legislation (such as bylaws) must take into account what will be acceptable to the community and what can be enforced. To be effective, legislation must be enforced or it will be a waste of time. Legislation often involves changing the free-roaming status of animals in the community by enforcing confinement.

Revising existing legislation or drafting new legislation can be time consuming and requires careful and realistic planning.

## Work Session 12

Does the community already have bylaws?

- yes     no

If yes, describe those bylaws.

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If yes, are there elements of the bylaw that need to be changed to make them consistent with your dog-management objectives?

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Is there a means of enforcement of these bylaws?

- yes     no

If yes, describe your enforcement options.

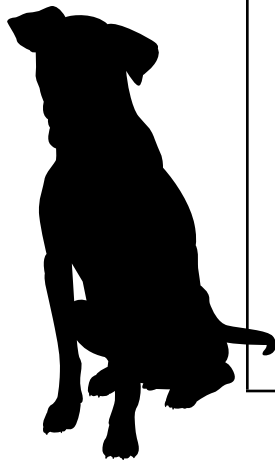
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### Registration and identification

Registration, such as owner registries and some form of animal identification (e.g., dog tags), can reinforce a sense of ownership and responsibility. Identification, either permanent or temporary, must be visible when the dog is away from its owner.

Registration is important when trying to return a lost animal to its owner, but registration must be enforced and managed from a centrally accessible location. Microchips (i.e., a small device placed under the skin of the dog that, when read by a scanner, provides a permanent, traceable registration number for that dog) have been used in some communities to easily identify registered dogs and determine who they belong to if the dogs are lost or found roaming free.

### Restricting access to resources

Free-roaming dogs (especially when they do not have owners) often rely on resources (food, water and shelter) on public property for their survival. We recommend that communities restrict access to resources such as food by managing the local dump, properly disposing of carcasses after hunts, and using animal-proof garbage containers.

Restricting access to resources on public property will discourage owned dogs from roaming, but it will also endanger the survival of feral dogs that depend on these resources. For that reason, reducing access to resources should only be done in addition to making alternative provisions for feral dogs.

In areas where stray or feral dogs are not a huge concern, restricting access to potentially unhealthy food sources like garbage can be more important for disease control than for population control.

Registration and identification can reinforce a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Restricting access to resources on public property can endanger the survival of feral dogs that depend on these resources and should only be done in addition to making alternative provisions for feral dogs.

Targeted euthanasia (killing) of unwanted or problematic dogs may be necessary, particularly where there are no options for re-homing or when there is an immediate need to decrease the number of dogs in a community.

(For more, see page 36.)

### Shelters and re-homing

Having a shelter in your community provides an opportunity to contain lost animals and to reunite lost pets with their owners. If animals cannot be reunited with their owners, re-homing, potentially in other communities with greater resources, may be a next step.

#### Work Session 13

Does your community have a shelter or access to a shelter or fostering program?

yes       no

If yes, describe your shelter or fostering options.

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If no, how does your community plan to approach the situation of killing unwanted or problematic animals?

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Targeted euthanasia (killing) of unwanted or problematic dogs may be necessary for some communities. If the community does not have access to veterinary services, the use of a humane killing methods, such as shooting, may need to be considered. This can be a very difficult and traumatic experience for everyone involved, so this type of measure must be carefully planned and carried out.

## Sponsorship for owned dogs

It does not always make sense to simply remove dogs from a community by re-homing or euthanasia.

Sometimes dog owners lack the skills or resources they need to properly care for themselves and/or their animal companions. They might need additional support to learn how to manage problematic behaviour in their animals, or they might not have enough money to cover all of the necessary expenses. When this is the case, the owner is often unwilling to surrender their dog, and, if the dog is removed without permission—which should never be done—the owner may simply replace the dog. If the owner didn't have the resources to properly care for the original dog, they typically will not have the resources to care for the replacement, either.

Rather than making an owner give up a dog, a better option might be to develop a sponsorship program. Communities can raise funds—even just a few dollars per day—to provide food, simple medical care for dogs within their community, and training opportunities for dog owners in their time of need.

A sponsorship program could involve an application process and defined criteria for providing care, or people and dogs in need could be identified on a case-by-case basis.

It might help to have some guidelines defined in advance to help match owners in need with donors. The program could also create a collection system for one-time gifts or regular donations. The sponsorship program could be implemented in partnership with an established rescue group so that re-homing, if required, could still be accommodated.

Keeping dogs within the community with their owners, particularly those dogs that are socialized and spayed or neutered, can help to stabilize dog populations as well as maintain the strong bond that exists between an owner and their dog.

Keeping dogs within the community with their owners, particularly those dogs that are socialized and spayed or neutered, can help to stabilize dog populations.



### **Behaviour change as a result of surgical sterilization**

The use of surgical sterilization (spaying and neutering) as a method of population control may also change the roaming behaviours of dogs. Some dogs are less likely to roam after they have been sterilized.

Spaying and neutering are known to decrease the aggressiveness of some dogs, but other factors (such as the health of the dog, how old the dog was when it was sterilized, and learned behaviours) make these changes unpredictable.

Having fewer unsterilized dogs in a community will decrease the likelihood of dogs forming roaming packs and of male dogs fighting over female dogs in heat. This, in turn, may result in fewer aggressive encounters between humans and dogs in the community.

## **Veterinary interventions and animal health initiatives**

### **Population control**

Dog populations grow for many reasons, but the most important is indiscriminate breeding. The range of options available for stabilizing dog populations includes:

- Surgical sterilization
- Chemical sterilization
- Confinement of dogs in heat

While the first two options require veterinary involvement, the final one can easily be done by dog owners.

### **Euthanasia**

It may be necessary to humanely kill stray animals. Dogs who are suffering, injured, or have behavioural problems can have difficulties interacting safely with people. In these cases, veterinary-assisted euthanasia can benefit a community.

In communities that have no alternate methods to control dog populations, culling (selective killing) may be a last resort. No community wants to resort to this option, but when necessary it can be carried out humanely.

### **Health care**

Along with stabilizing the population from further growth, veterinary services can assist with the overall health of dog populations through vaccination and parasite control. Just as with people, preventative medicine can extend a dog's lifespan and improve quality of life. However, healthier females also have a greater capacity to produce puppies. Therefore improved health must be paired with sterilization or confinement.

## Behaviour change

The process described in this manual of assessing the role of dogs in the community (see page 9) is a great way to begin the process of identifying what behaviours may need to be altered in either the animals or the humans.

Behaviour change involves aspects of both community interventions and veterinary interventions / animal health initiatives.

### Roaming

Often communities that have a lot of free-roaming dogs need to change the human behaviour that is causing this to happen. Changing this behaviour may be the single most effective strategy for reducing the number of free-roaming dogs in the community.

For example, many communities already have bylaws that are intended to restrict roaming and encourage owners to keep their dogs at home (e.g., keep dogs in a fenced yard or tie dogs up when they are outside without their owners). However, these bylaws are often not enforced or enforced inconsistently.

For bylaws to be an effective way to reduce the number of free-roaming dogs in a community, those bylaws need to be acceptable to everyone in the community. Ultimately, it is the owners of the dogs that need to ensure the changes happen.

### Responsible dog ownership

A common phrase used in discussing dog management is “responsible dog ownership.” If you use this term in your community, you need to define what that phrase means in your community and make sure it is acceptable to local dog owners.

One of the most important aspects of responsible dog ownership is socialization, teaching a dog how to behave around humans and other dogs. Dogs that aren’t socialized can grow up to be fearful of other dogs and people, and that fear can lead to aggressive behaviour.

If dogs are well-socialized, especially from an early age, they are less likely to develop behavioural issues. Dogs need to be socialized to people, other dogs, and situations outside of their normal routines to become well-rounded members of the community. This socialization can happen through formal training (i.e., obedience training), but also informally as the owner earns the dog’s respect and establishes his/her role as the leader and caregiver for the animal.

Organizations that might be able to help:

- Vets without Borders Canada
- Veterinary Schools across Canada
  - University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
  - Western College of Veterinary Medicine
  - Ontario Veterinary College
  - Université de Montréal Faculté de Médecine Vétérinaire and Atlantic Veterinary College
- Dogs with No Names
- Not for profit groups across Canada

## Community Veterinary Requests

Many organizations (see list to the right) work to provide veterinary care in places that do not currently have access to veterinary services. If you want to set up veterinary services in your community, you can contact Tasha Epp, the creator of this workbook, at the University of Saskatchewan. (Her contact information is provided on page 47.)

Following is a list of questions these organizations might ask to help them can get a clear understanding of your community's needs.

- What is the name of your community?
- Who is making this request?
- Where is your community located?
- What is the population of your community?
- What kinds of medical/health services are available in your community?
- Has your community met to discuss and define their dog-control issues?
- Does your community have an advocate or group dedicated to dog control?
- Has your community met to consider options available for dog control?
- Do you have bylaws or dog-control programs in your community?
- Has your community had issues with dog bites, dog attacks, or dog-related deaths?
- What can you tell us about the dog population in your community? For example, what is the size of your dog population? Do dogs roam freely in your community?
- What kind of animal health services is your community requesting (i.e., surgery, wellness, or both)?
- What kinds of educational opportunities do you have in place concerning dogs, dog issues, and dog-bite prevention?



# Step 3:

## Document the Changes

### Define indicators for success

Has your dog population management program been successful? To measure your success, you will first need to figure out what has changed since the program began. Go back to the information you collected at the start of this workbook and compare your current situation with the information you collected about what the situation was prior to the program, or at least near the start of the program.

It will be helpful to define a set of indicators (measurable signs of change) based on the objectives you set in Step 1 of the workbook (see “Outline your objectives” on page 22), the options you choose in Step 2 and the resources you have available for gathering information. To measure the success of your program, you should be gathering information regularly so that you can evaluate the success of your program and make adjustments as necessary.

It might be helpful to ask partners and stakeholders within or outside of your community to help with collecting information.

Following is some of the information that you should be collecting.

#### Improved dog well-being

Exactly what is required for a dog to have good health and well-being depends on the local environment, the dog’s purpose and role in the community, and local contexts. In essence, freedom from hunger, thirst, disease, pain, and discomfort are important for dogs to be a happy and healthy.

- **Access to resources:** For communities with a lot of free-roaming or stray, or feral dogs, one indicator of adequate access to resources (food, water, and shelter) is often a decline in the number of dogs accessing garbage or engaging in public property destruction. For communities that do not have many free-roaming, stray, or feral dogs, the proportion of dogs with access to these resources is less important.
- **Need for donations:** An increasing need for food donations or shelters may signal an increasing dog population. A decreasing need for

For an in-depth description of how to monitor and evaluate dog population management programs, download a publication called *Are We Making a Difference? A Guide to Monitoring and Evaluating Dog Population Management Interventions*, which is available online through the International Companion Animal Management (ICAM) Coalition:

[www.icam-coalition.org](http://www.icam-coalition.org)



### Body condition score

There are several ways to assess a dog's body condition score (using either a 5 or 9 point scale) and there is a lot of information available online.

Here are a couple of useful places to start:

- [www.proplan.com/dogs/dog-care/monitoring-your-dog-for-ideal-body-condition](http://www.proplan.com/dogs/dog-care/monitoring-your-dog-for-ideal-body-condition)
- [www.cliniciansbrief.com/sites/default/files/sites/cliniciansbrief.com/files/BCS\\_Canine.pdf](http://www.cliniciansbrief.com/sites/default/files/sites/cliniciansbrief.com/files/BCS_Canine.pdf)
- *Are We Making a Difference? A Guide to Monitoring and Evaluating Dog Population Management Interventions*, (ICAM) pg. 105
- [www.aac.ca/en/forms/\\_pdf/dogBodyConditionScoring.pdf](http://www.aac.ca/en/forms/_pdf/dogBodyConditionScoring.pdf)
- [www.wsava.org/sites/default/files/Body%20condition%20score%20chart%20dogs.pdf](http://www.wsava.org/sites/default/files/Body%20condition%20score%20chart%20dogs.pdf)

donations of food or shelters may signal that owners have the resources necessary to meet the needs of the dogs in their care.

- **Body condition:** A very simple measure of improved health in dogs is body condition. Even from a distance, it is easy to see if a dog looks healthy and well-fed. Body condition is a reflection of the dog's capacity to find adequate food and water, but it can also indicate when a dog has health issues such as high numbers of parasites or a disease.

|               | underweight      |   | ideal |   |              | overweight |   |   |   |
|---------------|------------------|---|-------|---|--------------|------------|---|---|---|
|               | ←—————→          |   |       |   |              |            |   |   |   |
| 5-point scale | 1<br>(very thin) | 2 | 3     | 4 | 5<br>(obese) |            |   |   |   |
| 9-point scale | 1                | 2 | 4     | 4 | 5            | 6          | 7 | 8 | 9 |

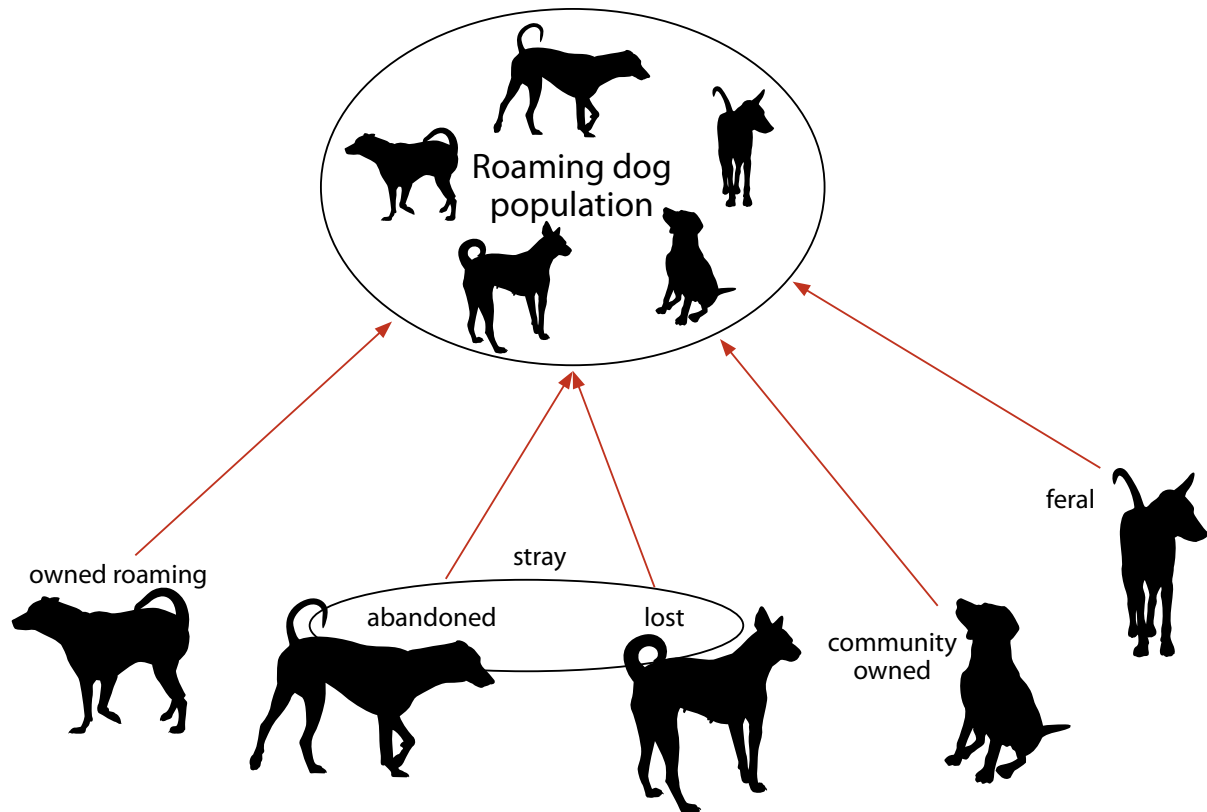
### Improved access to health care

If veterinary services are a part of your community's intervention plan, an assessment of animals coming into the clinic year after year can be a good source of information on the health status (improving, declining, or stable) of the dogs in your community.

Clinic records will indicate how many dogs are accessing veterinary services, as well as the types of services they are getting and how often. The proportion of your community's total dog population that has accessed veterinary services can be simple measure of success.

With the addition of veterinary services (particularly basic veterinary care, vaccines, and deworming), it is possible that the dogs in the community will begin to live longer and healthier lives. This in turn might increase the likelihood that female dogs that have not been spayed will give birth more often or have bigger litters.

Maintaining veterinary services rather than providing only sporadic services will be an important consideration for your community's intervention plan. Much like humans, dogs can develop health issues as they age that they did not have when they were younger.



**“Where do all the roaming dogs come from?”**

### Changes to the dog population size or composition

Dog populations can be estimated a few different ways:

- Door-to-door surveys are the most time consuming, but this is the most accurate assessment of dog numbers and demographics.
- Counting the number of free-roaming dogs over multiple days is also time consuming and it will be less accurate as it does not account for dogs that are not roaming.
- If your community requires dog registration, those records will help you estimate the number of dogs in your community, as well as breeds, ages, and genders.
- For communities with shelters or partnerships with not-for-profit re-homing organizations, the number of lost, returned, or re-homed dogs can help estimate your overall dog population.

Using these indicators, you can estimate how many dogs are living in your community, as well as the age, gender, and breed of the dog population. By

Communities without access to veterinary care sometimes need to decrease the number of dogs in their community. Before it becomes necessary for your community to ethically kill roaming dogs, consider working with a rescue group or the veterinary community to remove some dogs from the community without “shoot days.” It is important to record the number and types of dogs that are removed.

A good indicator of population growth is the number of lactating females or females with puppies. A decrease in the number of lactating or pregnant females is an indicator of population stability.

However, an increase in the number of pregnant or lactating females may also be an indicator of improved dog health, especially among roaming dogs.

Aggressive behaviour by dogs is often caused by prior events of cruelty toward the dogs. For example, when people shout at dogs to get away or throw stones at them to scare them off, the dogs become fearful of humans and respond defensively when they encounter people. (See “Dealing with dog bites” on page 21.)

On the other hand, repeated acts of kindness, such as petting or feeding a dog, can make the dogs less fearful and result in positive dog–human interactions.

repeating these estimates every year, you will be able to see trends in population growth (stable, increasing, or declining). You will also want to watch for trends regarding the health status of the dogs and the number of dogs that are roaming.

Remember—it may not be a matter of too many dogs in your community, but rather too many free-roaming dogs. So, clarifying the objectives of your intervention program will help you to figure out which indicators of success to measure (e.g., overall population size or free-roaming dog population size).

### Healthier dog–human interactions

Increased awareness of potential unhealthy dog–human interactions can be a useful indicator of the success of education portions of your intervention program.

Often, the dog–human interactions that get attention are the negative interactions. These unhealthy dog–human interactions often involve dog bites.

The number of dog bites in a community can be a good assessment indicator for your intervention program. However, in the beginning, there may actually be a rise in the number of reported dog bites and negative dog–human interactions due to increased awareness within your community. Therefore, dog bite numbers should be assessed over the long term rather than short term.

The severity of dog bites, location of incidents, time of year, and the situations in which the bites occurred are all valuable pieces of information. Changes that suggest bites are becoming less-severe may be just as important as having fewer bites overall.

A decrease in the number of severe bites that require medical attention and rabies vaccinations (rabies is a concern when someone is bitten by an unvaccinated dog) can be an indicator of improved dog health in the community and of the success of your intervention program.

A simple and effective indicator would be to record the amount of dog feces in public areas. Document the amount of feces and the public areas where it is most commonly found. Finding a lot of dog feces in one place is a key to identifying congregation spots for free-roaming dogs.

**Dog-human interactions**

|                                 | <b>Dog behaviours</b>  |  | <b>Human behaviours</b>  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
|                                 | between dogs   | between dogs and people  | between people and dogs  |
| Positive interaction (friendly) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Licking, nudging with noses, or grooming each other</li> <li>Wagging tails</li> <li>Playing</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relaxed, wagging their tails gently</li> <li>Appearing interested, but not intense</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Petting a dog</li> <li>Calling a dog to come or using friendly sounds (e.g., kissing noise, clicks, slapping thighs)</li> <li>Feeding a dog</li> </ul>      |
| Negative interaction            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growling, showing teeth, barking, biting, fighting</li> <li>One dog cowering, rolling over, or fleeing with tail tucked</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rigid stance with ears pulled back or forward, and teeth bared</li> <li>Growling, showing teeth, barking</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shouting or clapping hands to scare a dog</li> <li>Throwing something at a dog to scare/hurt the dog</li> <li>Hitting or kicking a dog</li> </ul>           |
| Ambiguous interactions          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looking away</li> <li>Licking lips and nose</li> <li>Putting ears to the side and furrowing brows</li> <li>Panting for no apparent reason</li> <li>Yawning when they shouldn't be tired</li> <li>scratching when they aren't itchy</li> <li>keeping tail low and wagging only the end of the tail</li> <li>Shaking off (like after a bath)</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kissing /hugging a dog that is not well known to you</li> <li>Playing in ways that may be perceived as aggressive (such as pulling a tail, etc.)</li> </ul> |

Dogs will never bite without warning. (See, Ladder of Aggression, <https://avsab.org/ladder-of-aggression/>.) They will give signals that they are anxious or fearful. Other dogs are very good at reading these signals, but people don't always see or understand the subtle, but mounting, warning signs. Following are some good on-line resources to learn more about dog body language:

- The Canine Body Language Chart ([www.canine-strategies.com/the-canine-body-language-chart.html](http://www.canine-strategies.com/the-canine-body-language-chart.html))
- World Health Organization, "No bites = No Rabies" campaign ([www.who.int/rabies/resources/animated\\_gif/en/index2.html](http://www.who.int/rabies/resources/animated_gif/en/index2.html))
- Body Language of Fear in Dogs (<https://drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/dog-bite-prevention-week-poster-on-the-body-language-of-fear-and-aggression/>)

Many of the diseases that dogs can transmit to humans are of little risk to communities in Canada. However, in Western Canadian communities where dogs have access to the decomposing entrails and internal organs from infected wild game that has been killed for food (such as moose or deer), the risks could include tapeworms (specifically *Echinococcus*). University veterinary colleges can provide information about the health risks dogs might be exposed to in specific communities or regions.

### Rabies Fact Sheet

Rabies is a vaccine-preventable viral disease. In up to 99% of cases, domestic dogs are responsible for transmission of the rabies virus to humans.

If you have been bitten by an animal that might have rabies, immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water, and see a doctor as soon as possible to discuss whether post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is required. Effective treatment soon after exposure to rabies can prevent the onset of symptoms and death.

**Source:** World Health Organization Rabies Fact Sheet ([www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs099/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs099/en/))

### Improved public perceptions

Information on the number of dogs that are lost, returned, or re-homed may give an indication of changes in the public perception of dogs.

The number of complaints to governing bodies will also provide a picture of changing attitudes towards dogs or the changing levels of concern over dog issue(s) within the community.

An often overlooked indicator is the number of complaints involving property damage. Hard feelings between neighbours may result from unwanted damage caused by someone else's animal.

These types of complaints can provide a picture of what is going on in your community. While many intervention programs focus on numbers to assess problems and success, many communities find that the best way to determine their situation is to ask people in the community about their perceptions, attitudes, and stories.

Surveys asking community members about their perceptions towards dogs will give a very good indication of improvement regarding past concerns as well as any new or emerging issues. Focus groups, sharing circles, and informal conversations may be the best way to get community members to share how they perceive dog-related issues.

Finally, combining the numbers with the perceptions will give an overall picture of the health of the dogs and their interactions with people in your community. It is important to take a holistic view and use the information that makes the most sense in your specific situation.

## Possible impacts

| Desired impact                    | What to measure?  | Where to get the Information?   | What shows success?  |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Improved dog health and wellbeing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of dogs with doghouses</li> <li>• amount of dog food donated to owners in need</li> <li>• # of dog culls</li> <li>• changes to dog-care attitudes</li> <li>• body condition score</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• band office</li> <li>• rescue groups</li> <li>• vet clinic records</li> <li>• community surveys</li> </ul> | Happy and Healthy<br>Dogs have: freedom from thirst, pain, hunger, disease and distress.   |
| Access to health care             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # dogs accessing services</li> <li>• types and frequency of vet services accessed</li> <li>• # of dogs vaccinated, dewormed, spayed or neutered</li> <li>• kinds of diseases diagnose</li> <li>• types of parasites found in dogs</li> <li>• body condition score</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• band office</li> <li>• rescue groups</li> <li>• vet clinic records</li> </ul>                              | Access to health care can increase the health and well-being of dogs, but it can also increase the ability to reproduce!                     |
| Population size and composition   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # pregnant or lactating dogs</li> <li>• # roaming dogs</li> <li>• male to female ratio</li> <li>• % of dogs vaccinated</li> <li>• % of dogs neutered or spayed</li> <li>• dog to human ratio</li> <li>• # abandoned dogs</li> <li>• # dog licenses</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• band office</li> <li>• rescue groups</li> <li>• vet clinic records</li> <li>• community surveys</li> </ul> | Stable or decreasing populations may be the target OR Less roaming dogs may be the desired change.   |
| Healthier dog-human interactions  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # dog culls</li> <li>• # dog bites or severe dog encounters</li> <li>• # events of dog cruelty</li> <li>• # dog vaccinated for rabies</li> <li>• amount of dog feces in public places</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• band office</li> <li>• community surveys</li> <li>• public health</li> </ul>                               | Fewer dog bites is a goal of public health.<br>More dogs vaccinated for rabies means less risk of human rabies from dog bites that do occur. |
| Public perceptions                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # dog complaints (including property damage by dogs)</li> <li>• # unwanted dog encounters</li> <li>• # dog adoptions or relinquishments</li> <li>• attitudes towards dogs</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• band office</li> <li>• rescue groups</li> <li>• community surveys</li> <li>• RCMP</li> </ul>               | Safe and happy communities will be a result of healthier dog-human interactions.<br>Dogs can truly be "man's best friend."                   |





# Step 4:

## Share Lessons Learned

News media regularly report on dog population issues and dog bite incidents in communities across Canada, particularly when those incidents result in deaths.

There are numerous websites dedicated to community-driven, not-for-profit, or academic institution initiatives designed to combat many of the perceived issues surrounding dogs in communities.

Clearly there is tremendous need, but not always enough resources (ranging from personnel to finances to knowledge and skills) to meet all of the needs.

In 2012 and again in 2014, an event called “Dog Days” called together communities within Saskatchewan to share stories about dogs in their communities. Similar events have been held in other provinces in Canada over the years. While every community faces a different sets of issues, conditions, solutions, and levels of success or failure, a shared understanding of a number of issues came out of these sessions:

- Many communities face similar issues.
- Successes have occurred using many different methods (not all focused on veterinary solutions).
- Resources can be limited no matter where communities are located.

Many communities (with or without the help of outside organizations) are working on dog population control through a variety of methods. Often what is lacking is shared information—what works, what doesn’t work, and why.

It is very important that channels for communication are opened so communities can learn from each other. Sharing stories is an important way communities can support each other.

### Building a database

Much of the information that is presently accessible through word of mouth or online is anecdotal or only pertains to the first year or two of a dog population control program.

An information-sharing database has been set up at the University of Saskatchewan as a way to collect and share information about community-based dog population control programs. Ultimately, the goal is to showcase real-life situations and their long-term outcomes. By following the progress, and setbacks, in communities year after year, we will gather evidence of what works over the long term, what challenges still need to be overcome, and what collective resources need to be accessible to support success.

### Work Session 14

If your community is willing to contribute information to be added to the database, please start by compiling the following information:

What is the name of your community?

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Who will be your community contact and how can we reach them?

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What issues does your community face regarding dogs, dog populations, or dog bites?

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What has your community done to manage populations or prevent dog bites? How long have you been using these programs?

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*Work Session 14 (continued...)*

Do these programs appear to be working?

- yes       no

What information are you collecting to determine whether your program is meeting your community's goals?

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What organizations are your community working with to meet the goals for population management or dog bite reduction?

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Is there any specific feedback or advice that you would like to share?

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### Additional resources

The following articles are available for free online and showcase some great examples of communities in Canada where dog control initiatives have been successful:

- Dhillon et al., 2016. Finding Pathways for Bite Prevention and Decreasing Dog Populations: The process of animal control for indigenous communities in Canada. *Journal of Indigenous Well-being: Te Mauri Pimatisiwin*, 1(2).
- Brook et al., 2010. Evaluation and delivery of domestic animal health services in remote communities in the Northwest Territories: A case study of status and needs. *Canadian Veterinary Journal*, 51 (10): 1115-1122.
- Schurer et al., 2015. Stabilizing Dog Populations and Improving Animal and Public Health Through a Participatory Approach in Indigenous Communities. *Zoonoses and Public Health*, 62: 445-455.

## Work Session 15

Are you willing to have other communities contact you regarding the program that you have developed?

yes       no

If yes, please provide the name and contact information of the person we should contact.

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Are you willing to be contacted in the future to reassess how your community-based program is working?

yes       no

If yes, please provide the name and contact information of the person we should contact.

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## Contact us

If you would like to share your story or would like to be connected to a community showing success, get in touch with us.

Email Tasha Epp at [tasha.epp@usask.ca](mailto:tasha.epp@usask.ca).



