



Risk Tolerance & the Role of Non-Profit Organizations

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Risk Tolerance defined as a HASS Value

Risk Tolerance, as a value in animal services, is built on the idea that non-profit organizations (NPO) should nurture growth within their organizations to be able to address the most urgent needs of people and animals in such a way that the impact can be absorbed. HASS groups should be prepared to take risks, absorb impact, and work to grow tolerance, all at once.

When nonprofits that have power from community funding, support, and resources, fail to take risks, they not only let the community down, but they also pass the buck to smaller organizations that may not be able to absorb the impact from risk as well or at all. Loss of smaller organizations destroys the ecosystem and leaves more work for fewer organizations to accomplish.

Additionally, when a non-profit labels themselves as a resource for the community, they are saying that they are able to address needs within their mission statement. If a group addresses “low hanging fruit” from their mission while failing to account for the most vulnerable populations, they leave those vulnerable populations with little or no alternatives.

Justice demands that HASS nonprofits leverage their position in the community to address current gaps in lifesaving and equity. To do this, nonprofits should constantly nurture their organization to become more risk tolerant to help people and animals in every way possible.



Gap Analysis

1. Who in shelters needs support?
 - a. Animals still dying in shelters
 - i. Dogs with parvo
 - ii. Neonatal puppies and kittens
 - iii. Pregnant mothers
 - iv. Dogs and cats with contagious disease
 - v. Dogs and cats exposed to contagious disease
 - vi. Animals with mild to moderate trauma
 - vii. Animals with mild to moderate medical conditions
 - viii. Large breed adult dogs especially pitbull-type dogs* for space
 - ix. Cats of all ages and medical status
 - x. Community cats
 - xi. Dogs and cats with known and perceived behavior issues
 - xii. Heartworm positive (and 4DX positive) dogs
 - b. Solutions needed
 - i. Low difficulty: Healthy, adoptable animals
 - ii. Moderate Difficulty: Heartworm positive, friendly pit/pit-mix
 - iii. High Difficulty: Dog aggressive, parvo potential/parvo positive, distemper risk, distemper positive, not vetted, not tested
2. Who in communities needs support?
 - a. Support Needed
 - i. 1 in 3 pet owners cannot afford medical care for their pet
 1. As of 2020 on average 12.2% of households in the United States live below the poverty line
 - ii. 1 in 3 pet owners have previously relinquished a pet for behavioral issues
 - iii. Community members in housing crisis
 1. Percentage of owner-relinquishment shelter intakes are once again increasing as the COVID 19 pandemic continues: 2019 (34.6%), 2020 (20.6%), and January-February of 2021 (29%).
 2. On average 13.5% of surrendered dogs and cats in 2020 were due to housing conflicts.
 3. Consideration: As of March 2021, over 11 million families are behind on their rent or mortgage payments: 2.1 million families are behind at least three months on mortgage payments, while 8.8 million are behind on rent.
 - b. Solutions needed
 - i. Low Difficulty: Pet food pantries, vaccine clinics
 - ii. Moderate Difficulty: Mid-progressive RTO programs



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- iii. High Difficulty: Owner support, temporary foster programs, free vet care, housing options
3. What shelters/organizations need support?
- a. Support Needed
 - i. Shelters with limited or no funding
 - 1. Example: The average amount of funds allocated per care of each animal intaked into the shelter system in three southern Texas city shelters within a three-hour distance is \$94 per animal for the entire year.
 - 2. According to [a study produced by Rutgers University](#), the average cost of care for a shelter animal is \$700- \$875 annually.
 - 3. With the estimated cost over 9 times the average funds allocated in these three shelters, they will only be able to provide the absolute minimum of food and care without additional support.
 - a. *Calculations based on public budget data and animal intake numbers for 2019-2020 in Laredo, Mission, and Divine, Texas.*
 - b. Solutions needed
 - i. Low Difficulty: Assist in the supply and demand chain by allowing animals from high population areas to be transported into your organization, Advocacy in your community
 - ii. Moderate Difficulty: Mentorship, Provide funding and in-kind options, Partnerships with community organizations and private medical practices for medical care and alternative medical options, Assist in the supply and demand chain by allowing animals from high population areas to be transported into your organization
 - iii. High Difficulty: Advocacy outside of your community, Assist in the supply and demand chain by allowing animals from high population areas to be transported into your organization, Assist in program implementation
4. Who is being left out of the conversation when discussing solutions?
- a. Opportunities for growth
 - i. BIPOC in leadership positions
 - 1. Based on a Human Animal Support Services survey of 61 organizations across the country, over 50% of survey respondents stated 0-5% of key decision-makers (board, leadership, vols, staff) are BIPOC



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- ii. Written policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion across organizations, allowing more inclusive solution discussions
 - 1. Over 44% of HASS survey respondents stated they have “unwritten policies that promote DEI”
- b. Solutions needed
 - i. Low Difficulty: Allow community participation and feedback, Utilize modern hiring practices, make sure volunteers and staff accurately represent your community, Performing an organizational assessment, Translating materials into other languages
 - ii. Moderate Difficulty: Create a diverse applicant pool for all job levels, Ensure diverse leadership
 - iii. High Difficulty: Partnerships with organizations/communities that are hard to reach, Partnering with human social services, Performing community-wide assessments



Risk Tolerance Quiz

Where does your organization land on the risk tolerance spectrum? Take this risk tolerance quiz and find out!

- 1. Your organization has a new program, case, or animal that needs funding so you reach out to your supporters for financial support. Which best describes your process?**
 - a. Someone from our team that has little to no experience in fundraising and/or communications puts together a social media post and/or email quickly stating we urgently are seeking financial support.
 - b. Someone from our team has a fundraising and/or communications background that can work on a scheduled, targeted campaign. We carefully evaluate what photos we use, when we ask, and how we ask, but we are not always able to send out immediate requests when needed.
 - c. We have a set communications strategy and/or calendar that we can't stray from without approval from high-level management. We use funds already in our budget.
- 2. What kind of response do you get from your supporters when you ask for help?**
 - a. We ask for help often but never get enough donations to cover expenses.
 - b. We are careful when we ask for help and our supporters trust that we only do so when it's strongly needed. This relationship builds consistency and they come through when truly we need them!
 - c. We have many supporters and cash reserves so it's okay if we don't always get financial support for urgent cases. We have a safety net.
- 3. Your organization has a true emergency with an animal in your care. You have to reach out to your foster and volunteer base to get help beyond what your staff can provide. How do you ask for help?**
 - a. We ask only approved and trusted volunteers and fosters. Sometimes it is successful and sometimes it is not.
 - b. We put a call out to our entire community and make it easy and accessible for people to help. Sometimes it is successful and sometimes it is not.
 - c. We don't take or keep cases that our staff can't handle in situations like this.
- 4. Your organization has an emergency case that does not have a happy ending. (ex. behavior euthanasia, a puppy who was featured in media later died, etc). What do you do next?**
 - a. We focus on the next urgent request needing attention and do not place any additional resources on this case.
 - b. We share this information with our community of supporters, provide information on how we can do better next time, and ask for their help. Most people respond well and we try to make it easy for them to help us.



- c. We would not share this information. Our shelter chooses not to engage in pushback from the community.
- 5. **Your community has a high need for complex cases that you can't currently handle on your own. What do you do?**
 - a. Take on what we can and beg for help!
 - b. We are constantly pushing ourselves to take on more by adjusting programs to accommodate different or more advanced needs.
 - c. We are focused on how we serve our community, do it well, and see no reason to change our current process.
- 6. **Your team works hard all the time. What is morale like?**
 - a. Staff are discouraged and burnt out but continue to move forward in an effort to save all the animals they can.
 - b. It ebbs and flows. We try to anticipate burnout and support our staff and volunteers as best as possible but we also acknowledge that our field comes with a lot of tough work.
 - c. We hire more staff to spread work out so no one gets burnt out and/or we avoid taking on behavior or risky medical cases to prevent potential future euthanasia.
- 7. **There is an emergency hoarding case in your community. Can your organization help?**
 - a. We will take in as many animals as we can and figure it out as we go.
 - b. Yes, we have emergency fosters on-call and emergency funds available so that we can assist with unexpected emergencies. We will stretch ourselves somewhat thin to take some of the harder cases.
 - c. We will take friendly and social animals and write a press release to share our efforts.
- 8. **Your organization's cash reserves policy is best described as:**
 - a. Nonexistent. If we've got it, we spend it.
 - b. Low-Moderate: 1-3 months. We know we can survive by cutting back if we need to.
 - c. Strict. We have well over 3 months of operating costs to ensure we are never at risk of being low on funds.
- 9. **Your organization's focus is best described as:**
 - a. We focus on emergencies and difficult cases. If we don't help them, who else will?
 - b. We primarily focus on an easier population of animals and use that to propel our organization forward so we can also help the tougher cases. Focusing on easier populations gives us the bandwidth to develop additional programs that can focus on difficult cases and the root of the problem.
 - c. We focus on what we know our organization can handle. We try not to overburden our team and we work towards slow growth and increase our capacity for care.



10. If asked to do something outside of our comfort zone our organization would:

- a. We will do whatever is needed, but it's going to be difficult, and we likely can't adhere to best practices.
- b. Take the leap and work hard to make it happen safely.
- c. Decline.

Mostly A: Your organization is not built to be risk-tolerant, but you see the need for work to be done, so you jump in anyway. Your efforts and courage are greatly appreciated. However, you are in high danger of burning out or getting into a situation that will jeopardize your organization. Take a pause and work to increase your risk tolerance so that you can continue to do the hard work, but absorb it more easily. *For ideas to get started with increasing your risk tolerance, look through the "B" responses in the quiz.*

Mostly B: You are doing a great job building your organization's risk tolerance, while also taking on an appropriate level of risk! As your organization progresses, you should fill out the risk assessment worksheet regularly to evaluate if you can push yourself to do more, or if you should take a pause to grow. *For ideas on how to further grow your risk tolerance, look through the "C" responses in the quiz, but keep in mind that as your risk tolerance increases, so should your risks in order to best serve pets and people long-term.*

Mostly C: Your organization does a great job with fundraising and not overburdening your staff or programs. For that reason, you are risk-tolerant and should be proud of that! However, every time you decline a risk, you unintentionally pass it to an organization less equipped to take it on in your community. To best serve pets and people long-term, it is the responsibility of organizations like yours to take more risks, develop a better communication and trust policy with your community, and take on your fair share of risk in an effort to strengthen the sustainability and health of your community. *For ideas to get started with increasing the risks your organization takes on, look through the "B" responses in the quiz.*



Sustainable Lifesaving Program Assessment

The [HASS Sustainable Lifesaving Program Assessment Tool](#) is built to help your organization identify gaps in programs needed for lifesaving, programs needed in the community to prevent unnecessary intake, and next steps that can be taken to lend your organization's skills to others in your area to build partnerships and thriving communities.

Step 1: To begin using this tool, identify which animal intake categories apply to your organization's current intake types. Choose all that apply and continue to Step 2.

Step 2: Follow the matching colors to the next column, "Programs Needed for Lifesaving". This column presents potential solutions to help serve the animals you are intaking while continuing to keep them out of a shelter environment. Evaluate which programs your organization is currently missing to determine the next steps. If there is a program your organization does not currently have, [click the link to learn more](#) about how to implement one! Once this step has been thoroughly considered, continue to Step 3!

Step 3: Follow the matching colors to the next column, "HASS Community Programs Needed to Prevent Unnecessary Intake". This column presents potential solutions that could be implemented within your community to help keep this category of animals with their owners whenever possible to avoid unnecessary intake. Consider the existing programs in your community that could help these types of animals and begin building partnerships between your organization and theirs. If there is a program your community does not currently have but needs, [click the link to learn more](#) about how to implement one! Once this step has been thoroughly considered, continue to Step 4!

Step 4: Follow the matching colors to the next column, "Lend Your Skills to Your Neighbors". This column will help you consider the next steps for how you can further help others within your means. Building partnerships and lending your expertise will not only give the resources needed to further lifesaving but will alleviate some of the pressure on your organization to take in as many animals of that type. Sharing these responsibilities will leave your organization more room for more advanced program implementation and the availability to begin taking in other types of animals, saving exponentially more lives!



Conclusion

Nonprofit organizations are empowered to make meaningful changes. When a non-profit builds itself up to be risk-tolerant in theory, but does not get out of its comfort zone of “low hanging fruit”, we put the onus on small organizations without the same resources or on the vulnerable populations themselves.

Because nonprofits are empowered, justice requires that they not only work to be better at addressing vulnerable populations, but that these organizations actually take that leap. Organizations will not be effective in implementing meaningful change without reflecting on their communities. Risk tolerance as a HASS value includes constant action and accountability.

Use the worksheet below to decide if your group should take a specific risk. Not only should you consider the effects on your organization, but also on the community you wish to support, as well as other organizations, and the vulnerable populations who have been historically left out of conversations surrounding solutions.

[HASS Role of the Non Profit Organization Risk Assessment Worksheet](#)



Complete Resource List

How to become more risk tolerant:

Fundraising/Philanthropy

[HASS Philanthropy Toolkit: Development and Fundraising](#)

[Fundraising: General Best Practices](#)

[Email fundraising tips](#)

Communications

[Become a better storyteller](#)

[Visual Communication Tools from Hearts Speak](#)

[Respect, Communication, and Documentation](#)

[Best Practices for Stronger Board Member Communication](#)

[Drafting a Nonprofit Communications Strategy](#)

Operational

[American Pets Alive! Operations protocols](#)

[Animal welfare internships](#)

[Maddie's University](#)

[Risk Tolerance Considerations for Project Managers](#)

[True Program Costs: Program Budget Allocation Template & Resource](#)

[Equity In the Center: Race Equity Cycle Pulse Check](#)

Additional Resources:

Recommended Reading

[Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis \(and the next\): Dean Spain](#)

[Decolonizing Wealth: Edgar Villanueva](#)

Document Research

[Best Friends Statistics About Dogs and Cats in US Households](#)

[Explore Economic Hardship Index in the United States | 2020 Annual Report](#)

[Shelter Animals Count COVID-19 Data](#)

[Best Friends Owner Surrender & Acquisition Source Analysis](#)

[New Report From Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Finds Over 11 Million Families At Risk Of Losing Housing](#)

[Rutgers: Animal Shelter Funding](#)

HASS/APA!/AmPA! Complete Resources and Toolkits

[HASS Programs and Toolkits](#)

[Austin Pets Alive!/American Pets Alive!](#)