



**February 15-17, 2017: ACC&D Think Tank on Ethical Decision-Making in  
Innovation for Animal Welfare**

**Ethical considerations and questions for field “interventions” with dogs and cats**

Below are questions that may be relevant to a researcher, organization, or veterinarian when implementing an intervention (e.g., a program, procedure, or research). The questions tacitly assume that interventions or research involving animals can be conducted ethically. Therefore, the key consideration is how to intervene in the most ethical manner, especially when an intervention is novel within particular circumstances, and when the potential outcomes and risks or harms are not well known.

Questions assume that individual animals, dog or cat populations, and/or the broader animal community have the potential to benefit from the intervention. This is in contrast to research in which the individual animal and other individuals from the same species may never experience benefits. Given the “field” orientation, questions also assume that people and communities will engage in or be affected by the intervention, as well, in various capacities.

Questions were originally developed with ACC&D’s specific projects in mind: marking dogs in Kenya and evaluating a contraceptive vaccine in US cats. However, questions have been expanded with the goal of encompassing a broader range of scenarios with varied locations; resources available within a community and initiative; and degrees of invasiveness and risk/benefit to animals, people, and communities. Relevant questions and considerations from this list may differ according to the particular scenario.

We do not envision answering the questions below as the endpoint, but rather view the questions as a way for those involved to frame their own evaluations, and as a component of creating guidelines for field interventions.

**General considerations**

- Who are the relevant primary stakeholders, including animals, and what are their interests?
- What is the nature of your responsibility to the individual animal, to the owner, to the community, and to any other major stakeholders in the intervention? How is that navigated when there are competing interests?
- What responsibilities do the other stakeholders have to animals, owners, and community?

- Has due diligence been performed (e.g. literature reviews, etc.) to establish whether the intervention poses any unforeseen risks, is redundant, is likely to add benefit, or could be improved?
- Have strategies to minimize the risk to the animal and community associated with an intervention been fully explored?
- What are the criteria and thresholds for determining when it is more ethical to not intervene?
- (Applicable to all questions), who is the appropriate and ultimate decision-maker(s)?
- How will the decisions be implemented (e.g. assessments made, compliance encouraged/enforced)?
- How will the effectiveness/efficacy of the intervention(s) be evaluated?

#### Animal welfare considerations

- Standards of veterinary care
  - What minimum veterinary standards are required for the intervention to proceed ethically?
  - Is the availability or standard of veterinary care different in the community where the intervention is taking place, particularly as compared to the community of those implementing the intervention/what the implementing organization's supporters would expect?
  - (How much) should veterinary care exceed or match the local or expected standards?
  - What veterinary care must be available to address adverse reactions to the intervention, and what are the protocol and safeguards for addressing any adverse events?
  - Should veterinary care for unrelated issues be provided to animals in the intervention, if they would otherwise not receive care?
  - Should veterinary care be provided to animals not in the intervention, if they would otherwise not receive care?
  - What are the health and welfare criteria for excluding particular animals from the intervention, if necessary?
- Standards of animal handling
  - What are protocols and standards for handling animals for intervention treatment, and how are those standards enforced?
  - (How closely) must handling standards align with standards in the community of those implementing the intervention?
  - If local standards are lower, (how much) must handling standards exceed standards in the community where the intervention is taking place?

- Are there any minimum (universal) standards that should be in place regardless of local standards or those recommended by funders or other external stakeholders?
- Pain/discomfort and 3Rs
  - What measures have been taken so that animals experience minimal distress or pain?
  - What level of pain and stress is acceptable in light of the benefits to the individual who is part of the intervention? The benefits to the broader animal community?
  - How is harm (physical, psychological, social) measured and evaluated?
- Complications
  - What risks apply to animals involved?
  - What level of ongoing observation, assessment, and subsequent action are needed to sufficiently mitigate the risks?
  - What risk assessment and contingency planning needs to be in place?
- Individual animal benefits and welfare
  - Will intervention or absence of intervention increase animals' vulnerability and risk? Does each animal experience a similar level of risk?
  - Is there/should there be a protocol for assessing vulnerability as objectively as possible, and would high vulnerability be a criterion for exclusion? Or could high vulnerability be a criterion for prioritizing action?
  - What are the benefits to the individual animal undergoing the intervention, as compared to the broader animal community?
  - What are the harms or risks (physical, psychological, social) to the individual undergoing the intervention, as compared to the broader animal community?
  - What levels of harms and risks are acceptable for proceeding?
  - How much potential benefit does there need to be for the individual animal to balance potential harms to that animal, or vice-versa?
  - Against what standards are "adequate" or "good" welfare for cats and dogs measured in an intervention?
- Endpoints
  - What animal welfare criteria should be used to justify ending the project overall?
  - What animal welfare criteria should be used to justify ending an individual animal's participation?

#### Human/community considerations

- Spheres of input and authority
  - Who/what comprises the "community" for this project?
  - Who has relevant responsibility or authority for animals in the intervention?

- Has knowledge regarding responsibility or authority for the animals been sought amongst different categories of local residents (government/health authorities, veterinarians, animal activists, NGOs, etc.)?
- Whose consent is needed to proceed in an ethical fashion, and how will that consent be obtained and documented? How is it ensured that all relevant stakeholders' input is considered,
- What steps are needed to ensure that an individual animal guardian understands that s/he can decline or end participation in the intervention?
- What steps are needed to ensure that consent is received from the correct guardian(s) or caretaker(s)?
  - If working with an animal with an owner, does one family member's consent suffice? When is consent from a minor acceptable?
  - If working with loosely owned or community-owned animals, how will consent be obtained, if needed?
- Format for informed consent
  - What does informed consent entail? How is informed consent documented?
  - What level of transparency and detail about the study purpose and intentions is necessary and ethical, and how should it be conveyed?
  - What language(s) is (are) necessary for written or verbal information to ensure that all stakeholders can engage?
- Human-animal relations
  - What role(s) do the animals have in the community?
    - How does that affect expectations of community support for the project?
    - How does this affect responsibilities of those implementing the project?
- Compensation and incentives
  - What compensation is appropriate and effective for different stakeholder groups (e.g., participants, partner organizations, local volunteers and employees)?
  - Does the community see the intervention as relevant to them? If not, is it ethical to proceed?
  - If research is conducted to benefit populations outside of those in the intervention, will the participating community and animals benefit from study results?
  - What opportunities exist to offer benefits to the participating community and animals?
- Community and guardian considerations

- Who is exposed to the intervention? What is the process for ensuring that the intervention does not have adverse effects on the community (e.g., if community members view an animal in distress as part of the intervention)?
- What happens when there are differences between how those implementing an intervention and guardians value dogs and cats?
- Are there religious, cultural, or social reasons why an intervention may not be considered appropriate? If so, should the intervention be adapted (and how)? Should local attitudes and moral values be evaluated as a first step of the intervention?
- How do existing beliefs and attitudes about cats and dogs impact the approach of the study?
- Are there any individuals or groups in the community engaged with cats and dogs? If so, is it appropriate to work with or without them?
- What are the best ways of engaging and informing community members about the project (e.g. printed notices, door-to-door introductions, town hall meetings, etc.)?
- What community social norms or moral values are relevant to the intervention? Does the implementing team agree with these ethics? If not, how is this broached?
- What is the history of research in the target community? Is it open to or leery of an intervention? If leery, is it ethical to proceed? Is it important to work to better understand the community's attitudes as a first step of the intervention?
- Endpoints
  - Are there community-related endpoints to the study? E.g., what scenarios with individual or stakeholder group opposition would end the intervention?
  - If the intervention is beneficial to the community, (how) will it be continued?
  - How will the success of the project be evaluated from a community perspective?
  - How will community members obtain results in a format that is understandable and useful?

### Study design, protocol, and partners

- Data Quality
  - Are the decision-making processes, intervention, data quality, and data management of a sufficiently rigorous design to ensure meaningful results and learnings? If not, is it ethical to proceed, and under what circumstances?
  - Is a control group warranted and acceptable and, if so, what does it look like?
  - At what point is a statistically significant result (and associated numbers of animals) warranted in a research study?

- Were all measurable indicators included in the planning, conduct, and reporting of the results included (e.g. population numbers and dynamics estimations)?
- Funding
  - Does funding or other forms of sponsorship for the intervention influence the protocol and approach? To what extent is this sort of influence appropriate and acceptable?
- Study partners and personnel
  - What is the process for selecting partners and personnel with whom there is a strong working relationship and capacity for a mutually agreed upon set of ethical guidelines and standards?
  - Would the project be able to proceed if those involved disagree on any of the standards or protocols?