

## Overview & Background

The mission of the Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs (ACC&D) is to advance non-surgical fertility control so as to effectively and humanely reduce unwanted cat and dog populations. To achieve this mission, ACC&D provides scientifically sound and animal welfare-oriented resources to stakeholders, supports the appropriate distribution of available products

*We gratefully acknowledge the ASPCA, Animal Assistance Foundation, and iCatCare for sponsoring this Think Tank, and the Institute for Human-Animal Connection for hosting the event.*

**ASPCA**



**ANIMAL ASSISTANCE  
FOUNDATION**



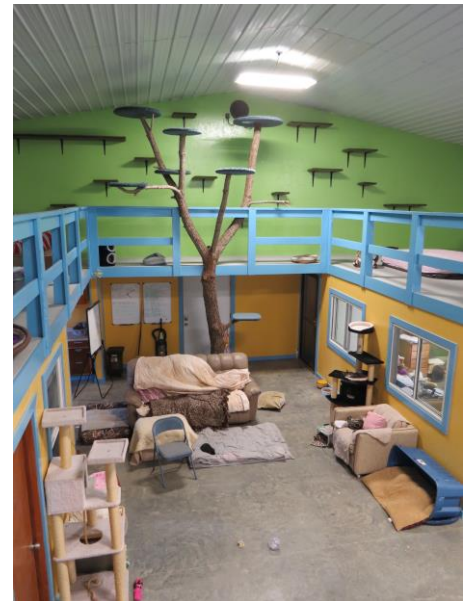
**international  
cat care**



suitable for the humane control of cat and dog populations, and facilitates research on topics relevant to the application, acceptance, and use of non-surgical fertility control methods.

ACC&D has become increasingly active in advancing promising new tools and technologies; in the past 18 months, the organization has managed or sponsored studies of innovations with significant promise. The first study evaluated GonaCon™ contraceptive vaccine in a simulated free-roaming cat colony; the second evaluated an ear tag to identify dogs and cats treated with non-surgical fertility control (in this study, rabies vaccination in free-roaming dogs served as a proxy for contraception).

In both studies, ACC&D encountered ethical quandaries regarding study design, selection of animals, welfare of animals involved, impact of the study on the local



*GonaCon study facility (interior)*

community, and more. Please click on the links for a fuller description of the [GonaCon](#) and [ear tagging](#) studies and the ethical challenges involved.

The ethical questions asked in these studies are not comprehensively addressed in current literature, guidelines, and policies (see [literature review](#)). Namely, animal research addressed in literature is commonly performed in laboratory (versus field) settings and under the auspices of an Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee (IACUC). Individual animals in the study or others of their species rarely if ever benefit from the research in which they are involved.

The work of ACC&D and others does not fit into this paradigm. Studies are taking place outside of a laboratory, often with pets. Though interventions carry varying degrees of risk to individuals taking part, the intention is that the intervention being evaluated will benefit the individuals, and/or others of their species. The type of research in question also introduces a significant “human” component insofar as there is need to engage communities, animal owners, and animal guardians, who all become stakeholders in an intervention.

To address this gap, ACC&D convened experts from diverse fields to address questions surrounding ethical decision-making when trialing innovations in the field on dogs and cats. This is ACC&D’s sixth Think Tank, with prior meetings focusing on topics ranging from gene silencing to population modeling to methods of marking non-surgically sterilized dogs and cats.

The Think Tank convened 24 participants (see bios [here](#)), including philosophers, bioethicists, field practitioners, social workers, academics, and veterinarians. To enhance the perspectives and expertise incorporated into the Think Tank,

participants additionally conducted interviews with colleagues with “on-the-ground” experience.

As the first formal gathering on a broad and complex topic, the Think Tank covered wide-ranging territory. The meeting yielded several clear next steps for projects and activities to address ethical decision-making challenges for future ACC&D projects and others experienced in the animal welfare field. It is the beginning of an evolving project that will be strengthened by broader input and participation.

The meeting was hosted by the University of Denver’s Institute for Human-Animal Connection in Denver, CO, and was generously funded by The Animal Assistance Foundation, The ASPCA, and International Cat Care.

## Attendees

With support of a Planning Committee, ACC&D identified Think Tank participants with expertise in a variety of areas: academic scholars with formal philosophy training, academics with field work experience; field practitioners with a sensibility for ethical issues, individuals with a global perspective and sensitivity to vulnerable populations, individuals with laboratory animal backgrounds, physicians with grounding in human medical ethics, individuals with wildlife reference points, animal sheltering experts, and individuals aiming to represent the perspective of those whose animals may be included in studies (with particular sensitivity to international work with free-roaming animals). Thanks to all those who participated!

## Planning Committee Members:

An asterisk (\*) indicates Planning Committee members only

**Note:** The views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of all members of the Planning Committee, participants in the Think Tank, or the institutions with which they are affiliated.

<b>Kate Atema</b>	Program Director, Companion Animals, IFAW
<b>Deepashree Balaram</b>	Outreach Director, Global Alliance for Rabies Control
<b>Valerie Benka</b>	Project Manager, ACC&D
<b>Joyce Briggs</b>	President, ACC&D
<b>Hope Ferdowsian*</b>	Associate Professor, University of New Mexico; Consultant, Physicians for Human Rights
<b>Amy Fischer</b>	Teaching Associate and Extension Specialist, Animal Sciences, University of Illinois; ACC&D Board member
<b>Susan Getty</b>	Coordinator, ACC&D
<b>Rod Jouppi*</b>	Director, Animal Research Facility, Laurentian University; Chair, Animal Ethics and Welfare Committee, AAHA
<b>Peter Sandøe</b>	Professor of Bioethics (Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Department of Food and Resource Economics), University of Copenhagen
<b>Kara Schmitt, facilitator</b>	Consulting Partner, Rocky Mountain Center for Positive Change
<b>James Yeates</b>	Chief Veterinary Officer, RSPCA

## Think Tank Attendees (in addition to Planning Committee members):

<b>Michael Barrett</b>	Vice President, Grants Management, ASPCA
<b>Sarah Endersby</b>	International Cat Care (iCatCare); Senior Veterinary Advisor, CEVA
<b>Carmen Espinosa</b>	MSW/AASW Candidate, University of Denver
<b>Roger Haston</b>	Chief Administrative Officer, PetSmart Charities; former Executive Director, Animal Assistance Foundation
<b>Monica List</b>	Animal Welfare Specialist, Compassion in World Farming USA; Veterinarian; former Regional Veterinary Programs Manager, WSPA
<b>Carla Forte Maiolino Molento</b>	LABEA/UFPR - Animal Welfare Laboratory, Federal University of Parana
<b>Kevin Morris</b>	Associate Research Professor, Institute for Human-Animal Connection, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver; Consultant, Morris Consulting; ACC&D Board Treasurer

<b>Lisa Moses</b>	Veterinarian, Pain and Palliative Care, MSPCA-Angell Animal Medical Center; Chair, Animal Ethics Study Group, Yale Center for Interdisciplinary Ethics; Research Fellow, Center for Bioethics, Harvard Medical School
<b>Katie Parker</b>	Executive Director, Animal Assistance Foundation
<b>Carly Robbins</b>	MSW & AASW Candidate, University of Denver
<b>James Serpell</b>	Marie A. Moore Professor of Animal Ethics & Welfare, University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine; Director, Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society, University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine
<b>Andy Sparkes</b>	Veterinary Director, iCatCare
<b>Apryl Steele</b>	Chief Operating Officer, Dumb Friends League
<b>Phil Tedeschi</b>	Clinical Professor; Executive Director, Institute for Human-Animal Connection, University of Denver
<b>Vic Spain</b>	Senior Director, Applied Research, ASPCA
<b>Jesse Winters</b>	Senior Director, Community Outreach, ASPCA



*Participants from left to right: (back row) Carla Forte Maiolino Molento, Kate Atema, Peter Sandøe; (middle row) Andy Sparkes, Sarah Endersby, Michael Barrett, Amy Fischer, Kevin Morris, Apryl Steele, Jesse Winters, Roger Haston, Lisa Moses, Deepashree Balaram, James Serpell, Carly Robins, Vic Spain, James Yeates; (front row) Valerie Benka, Joyce Briggs, Carmen Espinosa, Monica List, Susan Getty, Phil Tedeschi.*

## Advance Work

### Establishing Scope

The need for resources applicable to current and future ACC&D field projects, as well as to a broader array of projects involving potentially similar ethical dilemmas (such as innovations involving shelter animals or clinical trials on client-owned animals), prompted this Think Tank focusing on ethical considerations of two main categories:

1. Filling gaps pertaining to a traditional definition of research (systematic investigation or study to answer a question or reach new conclusions), as applied to animals in a field context.\*
2. Innovation using treatments or interventions that are unproven. They might have never before been tested, or they might be novel for a particular context (e.g., location, population of animals). If they exist at all, study design and data collection are not systematic or a primary objective, and ethical review is not a legal or regulatory prerequisite. We include this focus because as-yet-unproven interventions can include both tremendous promise and uncertainty or risk for animals themselves and/or their associated human community(ies).\*

Outputs were intended to be applicable to international, veterinary, and sheltering communities.

\*For examples, click [here](#).

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

The processes of developing and implementing our GonaCon contraceptive and canine ear tagging studies prompted a number of ethical questions for ACC&D staff and Board members. ACC&D staff compiled questions relating to our studies, and

subsequently expanded questions to encompass a broader range of scenarios with varied locations; resources available within a community and initiative; and degrees of invasiveness and risk/benefit profile to animals, people, and communities. Questions were grouped into general considerations; animal welfare considerations; human/community considerations; and study design, protocol, and partners.

A draft list of questions was distributed to all Think Tank attendees prior to the event, and participant input and suggestions were incorporated. You can view the resulting document [here](#).

### Pre-Think Tank interviews

ACC&D Think Tanks balance the presence of multiple skill sets with a workable group size to accomplish set goals. We recognize the limitations of such a small group to be diverse and inclusive. To try to address this, all attendees were asked to conduct at least one interview of a person of their choosing in advance of the Think Tank so as to enrich the dialogue with more breadth of experiences and perspectives. A summary of pre-interviews follows:

Countries represented: Australia, Brazil, Chile, Denmark, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Thailand, United States (including Hawaii).

Categories of topics represented in interviews:  
*Dog and cat health and population management in “field” contexts* (rabies vaccination clinics, spay/neuter campaigns, community-based dog population management, dog collaring, non-surgical fertility control)

*Human-animal relationships* (animal-assisted therapy, animal welfare education, affecting policy

and regulation change, impact of religion and culture)

*Animal sheltering* (animal transport, “No-Kill” movement, capacity for care, shelter euthanasia, shelter-neuter-return, trap-neuter-return, sheltering in communities with large numbers of free-roaming dogs)

*Veterinary ethics* (veterinary clinical research, animal blood banks, willed body donation)

### Common themes/concerns/issues:

Several themes emerged from the interviews conducted before the Think Tank, the most common of which were:

- The difficulties in getting consent for the treatment of dogs and cats without clear guardianship.
- Proper planning and study design as being key to ethical outcomes.
- The challenges presented when “incoming” cultural norms, priorities and dogmas are different from local ones, and the importance of understanding that different does not mean wrong. Several interviews specifically mentioned listening as being key to addressing these differences in opinion. (i.e. beliefs about euthanasia, castration, ear-tipping and tattooing, tension between foreign and local veterinarians).
- The importance of gaining trust and getting “buy-in” from stakeholders, particularly leadership, for the success of the project. (i.e. holding public hearings, conducting surveys).
- The tension between the larger picture and a focus on the individual animal. (i.e. SNR as a method of population control versus the unknown welfare outcomes for each cat, trying to establish protocols to ensure safety and

welfare for all while knowing individual animals are dying in the time it takes to create such protocols, caring for disabled animals in resource-poor areas, conducting efforts to help dogs and cats in areas where the local human population is also in need).

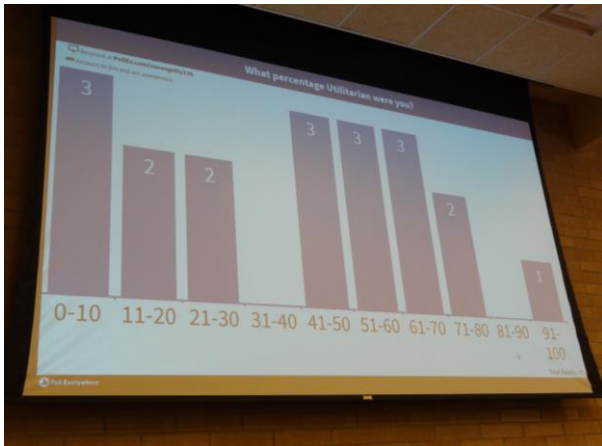
## An Ethics Grounding

Dr. Peter Sandøe provided a primer on key terms and concepts in ethics, particularly as they apply to establishing ethical guidelines related to the use of animals.

Any undertaking to establish ethical guidelines will likely face the challenge of different values and priorities among participants. By definition, ethical dilemmas constitute choices that are difficult ethically, as people are pulled in different directions by conflicting moral concerns. Moral reactions are a guide that each person has for his or her actions, and ethics is as an attempt by intellectual means to understand and improve one’s moral feelings. It is important to note, however, that differences in moral concerns or priorities need not preclude agreement on outcomes. Although people may view a situation from different perspectives (i.e., differ in theory) they can still agree on a common action (i.e., agree in practice).

Animal Ethics (AE) Dilemma ([www.aedilemma.net](http://www.aedilemma.net)) is a free online tool co-created by Dr. Sandøe to help people understand their dominant ethical values and framework. AE Dilemma distills different ethical frameworks toward animals into five primary categories: Contractarian, Utilitarian, Relational, Animal Rights, and Respect for Nature (for descriptions of frameworks, please view the website). User response to short case studies around use of and treatment toward animals sheds light on one’s values and ethical perspectives. The tool

further reveals that there can be multiple ethically defensible answers to an ethical dilemma based on one's viewpoint.



*Distribution of participants' Utilitarian responses*

Think Tank participants completed the AE Dilemma questionnaire and shared answers anonymously; responses revealed commonalities and differences in the group. In addition to prompting discussion of different ethical frameworks, the exercise yielded two key observations relevant to creating ethical guidelines. First, there can be major discrepancies between ideals (how people feel) and application (what people practice) that are shaped by real-life challenges and choices. Second, although anonymous results of the AE Dilemma “quiz” showed how ethical frameworks are spread across people, they did not convey how frameworks are spread within people. Everyone has a range of beliefs, which may pull from different ethical frameworks. While these conflicts may be addressed or resolved through thoughtful ethical inquiry, they also prime us to experience dilemmas within our lives.

## Think Tank Design and Structure

The Think Tank used Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a methodology that seeks to address complex issues/problems in a process that engages multiple perspectives, encourages creativity, and emphasizes solution-focused thinking. The methodology, with the support of a professional facilitator, encouraged participants to *Discover* what currently exists in the field, *Dream* about future possibilities to enhance this work, *Design* resources/tools that would support bringing these dreams to life and create action plans to move prioritized work forward (*Destiny*).

The Discover and Dream phases were conducted with the full group. The Design and Destiny phases divided participants into groups focusing on three individual, albeit overlapping, topics:

- Veterinary - clinical trials and novel treatments
- Sheltering - North American/European animal welfare agency initiatives
- International - international welfare initiatives (global scope, but particularly sensitive to work in developing countries)

## Think Tank Summary

Below is a summary of Think Tank outcomes, organized by AI phase.

### Discovery

In the *Discovery* phase, participants drew on personal experience, interviews with each other, and pre-interviews to brainstorm current themes in their work involving animals, be it in a veterinary office, in an animal shelter, with free-roaming animals in a “field” setting, or other contexts. While the intention of this phase was to focus on the *best* of what currently exists, this proved difficult given the novelty of the topic. Instead, results were clustered thematically into animal welfare considerations,

human community considerations, and study design, protocol, and partners, although there is some overlap among categories. The topics below are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather a preliminary list of considerations that were shared during this session of the meeting.

## Animal Welfare

- *Animals as individuals:* Whether sheltered or free-roaming, in a veterinary office, or in a laboratory, it is critical to remember that each animal has individual needs; accounting for these needs requires going beyond simply being “animal-centered.”
- *Study objectives:* Prioritizing individual welfare can create tension with a study or project’s goals and objectives. Tension between individual animal welfare and the “greater good” also overlaps with issues of consent and selection of animals for a study.
- *Quality of life challenges:* Questions, challenges, and disagreements about an animal’s quality of life are particularly applicable to euthanasia decisions (is any life better than none?), but they can also apply to other common decisions made on behalf of animals (e.g., pregnant spays).
- *Legal status:* The legal status of individual animals (owned, in-shelter, or feral) can influence our views of them, and even affect what interventions are deemed “ethical.” Examples raised in conversation were return-to-field of cats in TNR/SNR programs, and feline blood banks using blood from sheltered/stray versus owned cats.
- *Accepting short-term unethical behavior for long-term gains.* It was noted that the process of improving animal welfare can sometimes entail accepting suboptimal animal welfare, or ethically problematic behaviors, in the short-term; such scenarios can pose ethical and tactical challenges. An example is a dog on a heavy chain. If immediate

unchaining (assumed to be the “ethical” outcome) is not possible, gradual steps (e.g., switching from a metal to a cloth collar) might be used toward the ultimate goal of building trust with an owner and achieving long-term objectives.

- *Protocol for foreseeable concerns:* There is a need to establish plans for addressing foreseeable animal welfare concerns in any animal research or intervention.

## Human/community considerations

- *Community engagement and respect for local stakeholders:* Engagement of and respect for local stakeholders are particularly relevant when implementing an intervention in a community, a key example being population control of free-roaming owned dogs. The group emphasized the importance



*Gathering group input in the “Discovery” phase*

of community engagement from the start, since local stakeholders are invaluable in the design of a successful intervention. The group specifically noted the importance of inclusivity in community engagement, including ensuring that the perspectives of less

empowered populations are incorporated into discussion and planning, and permitting robust conversation amidst existing power structures.

- *Differences in perspectives about what is “right.”* This has several manifestations in relation to interventions for animal welfare. It speaks to the



facts that those implementing the intervention should not assume that only their perspective is “right,” or the only ethically defensible option, and that a different approach to or belief about animal welfare should not be considered “wrong,” or an ethically indefensible option. This said, the group also emphasized that becoming involved in an intervention confers responsibility for the animals and outcomes, and one cannot necessarily defer to the community’s views as being ethically acceptable. One example of potential conflict is ACC&D’s ear tagging study, in which some members of the local community appeared to accept a higher level of pain/discomfort than the person implementing the study.

- *Conflict between personal and organization views:* This can manifest in different contexts; one example is when a person is working within an institution that has an established set of ethical frameworks that cause them concern.
- *Changing views and resulting burdens:* It can be difficult to shift toward new ethical norms, unlearn past practices, and prevent feelings of guilt about past actions that are now viewed critically. An example of this, drawn from an advance interview, is the “No-Kill” movement in the United States. It is important that animal shelter leadership who previously relied heavily on euthanasia not let ethical justification of the use of euthanasia in the past create barriers for what may be possible in the changing context of the present and future. The decisions they made in the past may well have been a product of a different ethical scenario. At the same time, it was noted during the Think Tank discussion that a movement such as “No Kill” carries with it as many problems as it does possibilities, speaking to the complexity of shifting practices in animal welfare.
- *Euthanasia:* Euthanasia is a highly emotional and ethically fraught topic with relevance to both

animal welfare and human/community considerations. Participants emphasized the need for communication about euthanasia decisions and practices, and recognition that a person’s individual history might affect his or her views.

- *Weighing consequences when the outcome is unclear:* Participants spoke of ethical quandaries associated with unknown (versus known good or bad) outcomes. This issue is particularly, albeit not exclusively, applicable to interventions with free-roaming animals. An example is TNR/SNR as an alternative to euthanasia; although some cats are closely monitored outdoors, the outcomes of many are unknown.
- *Full disclosure and/or consideration of information:* Participants noted that sometimes people, including pet owners faced with the option of a novel treatment for their animal, do not consider all positive and negative possible outcomes as they decided about an intervention. In some cases, there is the perception on the part of the researcher that people do not want the responsibilities of knowing details. (One example was the belief that owners do not want to know all potential side effects or possible negative outcomes associated with their animal’s participation in a clinical trial.) In other cases, people want to believe that an intervention will offer benefit, and weigh this more heavily than the risk. This creates challenges for informed consent.

### **Study design, protocol, and partners**

- *Planning and groundwork:* Planning and groundwork are essential precursors to utilizing “best practices” and implementing a program or intervention in an ethical manner. However, the time required for planning can be at odds with an impetus for urgent action. This can cause inherent tension. The degree of appropriate planning and groundwork

might depend on what is planned—e.g., a known intervention versus a novel study.

- *Ethical guidelines*: Ethical guidelines were discussed in multiple capacities, including the lack of ethical guidelines for this type of research, the importance of discussing formal ethical guidelines on this type of research, ethics committee approvals (i.e., IACUC-type institutional committees), and whether it is possible to translate an ethical framework for work with humans into a framework for work with animals. More broadly, it was queried if it is possible to “protocolize” ethical decision-making.
- *Advocating for animals within a study*: It was noted with surprise how willing pet owners can be to volunteer their animals for invasive procedures. This prompted the question of who will advocate for an animal’s best interest in a study, including if that advocate is not the owner or guardian.
- *Distribution of benefits*: The benefits of study findings are often not distributed evenly, particularly when working in disadvantaged communities; fair distribution of potential benefit was highlighted as a justice issue. This has relevance for nonsurgical fertility control in terms of where products are tested for safety and efficacy, relative to where those products will ultimately be approved for use, and what they will cost.
- *Conflict resulting from different regulatory frameworks*: Regulatory frameworks vary by country and institution, which can pose conflicts and challenges when planning a project in more than one location. It was noted that even participants in this particular Think Tank were starting from completely different regulatory frameworks for oversight of, e.g., pet animals enrolled in clinical trials, a field that is ethically and practically complex (therapeutic misconception, third-party for-profit initiatives enrolling animals in studies). Conversations among participants also suggested some geographic

differences in how researchers want this field to be regulated, and willingness of owners to enroll pets in studies.

- *Study design*: The topic of study design emerged in multiple ways, including how to handle control (non-treatment) groups, how to develop and implement exclusion criteria (of communities, partners, and animals), and the importance of ensuring that study design is of high quality and capable of answering the research question.
- *Funder and funding recipient*: It was noted that there can be challenges aligning the roles and objectives of funder and funding recipient, particularly when implementing a novel project.
- *Identifying and defining ethical dilemmas*. In order to resolve conflict, one needs to know how to identify it, and have the terminology to describe it with clarity and without stigma. It was observed that sometimes individuals don’t have the “tools” to identify when they are experiencing ethical conflicts, particularly with others in the workplace, nor do they have the language, perspectives, or knowledge to work through those ethical conflicts. Participants also felt that in some fields, there is a stigma to discussing ethical conflicts, and therefore they are suppressed and unresolved. A “best practice” would therefore be to give people the tools to identify and substantively address ethical dilemmas.

## Dream

In the *Dream* phase, participants were asked to envision what positive changes could exist five years in the future after successful use of the framework/tools initiated at the event, and then to name the guiding principles that must be in place to support these advances. Many of these principles, listed below, are drawn from those guiding research on human subjects and have specific connotations in the context of ethical research:

- Transparency
- Justice
- Curiosity and openness
- Diversity
- Dignity
- Integrity
- Non-harmfulness
- Beneficence (maximizing potential benefits)
- Integrity for all
- Humility
- Courage
- Empathy
- Honesty
- Inclusion
- Minimizing power distance

## Design and Destiny

The *Design* phase (determine “what should be”) consisted of identifying the key activities, questions, and processes that address considerations identified during the *Discovery* phase. Participants approached these *Design* elements as they apply to “sheltering,” “veterinary,” and “international” contexts. It is important to note that while the three groups focused on specific animal welfare contexts, there is overlap among the groups with regard to certain ethical considerations and strategies.

The *Destiny* phase (creating “what will be”) involved the creation of three preliminary action plans (one for each sub-group) to move that which was created in the *Design* phase forward. The subjects of action plans were chosen based on participants’ prioritization of the many possibilities identified during the *Design* phase.

Discussions and outcomes of the *Design* and *Destiny* phases are presented together, as the content of the latter built directly on the former.

## Veterinary Group

The veterinary group focused on research or interventions that do not fall within traditional research contexts. Group members recognized that certain types of research are not required to undergo review by an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) or Institutional Review Board (IRB). The group also recognized that there are contexts in which ethical review does occur, but those who conduct it do not typically have the relevant training and perspective to provide useful guidance; an example might be studies involving owned animals in a community setting.<sup>1</sup> By extension, the group noted the need to develop resources for clinical and field trials for which ethical issues are not well delineated, even if those trials have undergone formal review.

Discussion covered a range of topics, including initial justification for a study; standards for animal welfare, study design, and data management; publication of negative results; the need for a clear baseline view of animal welfare in a local community prior to designing a study (especially pertinent with cross-cultural work); how to create an alternate institutional or community review; advance planning for provision of care if needed during a study; humane endpoints (predetermined

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to emphasize that ethical review and oversight regulations, practices, and policies vary by country. In the United States, for example, the IACUC and IRB review processes are decentralized (institution-specific). Any institution receiving federal funding must conduct IACUC or IRB review of research involving animals and humans, respectively; some non-governmental grantors and academic journals also require ethical review. However, this could exempt non-governmental organizations, for example, from the requirement of ethical review before conducting research or novel interventions with animals and/or in communities.

physiological or behavioral signs that define the point at which an experimental animal's pain and/or distress is terminated, minimized or reduced); separation of roles (investigator, funder, recruiter of study participants) to avoid conflicts of interest; transparency and articulation of clear common goals among all participants; and consent as protection for both animal and owner or caretaker. It was noted that consent can be particularly complicated if the animals involved are not owned, or if ownership is not clearly delineated. How to address the related issue of therapeutic misconception (those who enroll themselves or others in clinical research believing that they will benefit, and assuming that if something bad happens, they will be taken care of) was also discussed.

The veterinary group proposed a Guidance document for approval of studies, and this served as the topic of the “Destiny” section. The concept for the Guidance document began with the idea that when designing a study and seeking funding, there must be certain minimum criteria for the well-being of animals and humans (owners, guardians, community members) involved. Not all of these criteria are captured in current ethical review structures (including, e.g., explicit humane endpoints; an opt-out provision; protection of vulnerable individuals and populations; and a means of creating consent and agency for unowned animals, i.e., guardianship to prioritize the welfare interests of the individual).

The group created a preliminary table of contents for a Guidance document, consisting of the statement of intent for the research (the “why”) and standards for research integrity and quality, guiding ethical principles, research guidelines, implementation guidelines, and oversight. Several individuals at the

Think Tank expressed interest in and commitment to advancing this resource.

## International Group

The “International” group focused on international animal welfare initiatives, which could range from research for animal welfare (such as ACC&D’s dog ear tagging study) to implementing new projects in a community (e.g., dog population control). The scope was global, with group members particularly sensitive to the unique considerations that emerge with work in developing countries, and with free-roaming animals.



*Dog with prototype ear tag (and green antibiotic spray)*

The group began by laying out what it perceived as current challenges and gaps in ethical decision-making on an international scope. Diverse beliefs, tensions around euthanasia, and social inclusion and governance issues were major foci, as was the need to establish goals and measure results.

After discussing some current practices for implementing projects, and challenges and consequences that can result, the group determined that in a nutshell, an “ethical” project must have three broad components: 1) Good planning, 2) Good evaluation, 3) Ethical guidelines/considerations. This is applicable across project locations and with various types of initiatives. Each of these three categories includes many sub-components. Group members returned to these three principles in the process of discussing what a “tool” for ethical decision-making in international projects might entail.

The group determined that the objective of the proposed “tool” should not be to make ethical decisions or provide direct ethical advice for a person or group setting up a program (i.e., we want to avoid creating a “how-to” guide). Instead, its objective should be to ask the proper questions and give people appropriate case studies to facilitate the inclusion of ethics in planning projects and model ethical decision-making.

The group determined that achieving these objectives includes two broad components:

1. An easy-to-use, logical, adaptive (based on project location, participants, etc.) online process to prompt thinking about animal welfare, community relations, local laws and values/morals, veterinary standards, and the ethical and pragmatic need to carefully and explicitly incorporate data collection and analysis *before* launching a new community intervention. The purpose of the tool is to model and facilitate the process of asking ethical questions, not to provide a “how-to” guide. This prompted the question of what the tool would provide as far as concrete help. This may entail providing similar case studies that could be used as reference. The group proposed using existing case studies used by ACC&D in preparation for the Think Tank, as well as developing new ones, possibly based on some of the interviews conducted by TT participants.
2. A “checklist” (details to be determined) for funders to probe the concept of ethical thinking and lead grantees to the interactive ethics tool. The concept of a checklist led to discussion of the relationships between funders, project design, and project output. Namely, funders can be integral to encouraging groups in the field to address ethical challenges in their project design. At the same time, funder expectations can potentially limit organizations’ abilities to focus on less quantifiable, yet very important, outcomes (e.g., numbers of

animals spayed/neutered vs. engagement of a community for long-term project success).

More specifically, the group identified and refined a multi-point strategy for advancing the project. The primary outcome would be a customized ethical decision-making tool designed to prompt those initiating a project/intervention to ask questions that appropriately address ethical considerations, incorporate stakeholder perspectives, and acknowledge relevant governance issues. Advocacy and marketing of the tool to encourage use; evaluation of its efficacy, utility, and impact; and translation to multiple languages were viewed as essential components in the longer-term. The need for a mentoring network was also recognized, which would provide resources and guidance at the start of a project (to try to help those implementing a project avoid ethical challenges), as well as provide support of a problem emerged.

There are some similarities and parallels between what is envisioned for this tool and the formal document that the veterinary group envisioned; hence, there will ideally be collaboration between the groups working on the respective projects. Several Think Tank participants committed to work in various capacities to advance this interactive tool.

### **Sheltering Group**

This group focused on animal welfare organizations (named “Shelters” but intended to have broader application to non-sheltering animal advocacy groups) engaged in innovations to help animals. The consensus was that ethical dilemmas are common for animal welfare organizations and staff, not surprising as life and death decisions are made; limited resources make choices between the welfare of individual animals versus animal populations commonplace. Further, participants agreed that

ethics is seldom formally discussed (in fact, it can be stigmatizing to admit to facing an ethical dilemma); existing guidelines for this field do not discuss ethical issues in depth; and limited tools are available to aid communication on the topic or help navigate ethics-related conflict for the agencies and audiences that are involved. Group members with backgrounds in shelter operations felt that stress related to ethical dilemmas has a detrimental impact on productivity, morale, and staff/volunteer retention and well-being.

Building on the concept of compassion fatigue and associated workshops and education in the animal welfare field, the group felt that there would be value in helping individuals become aware of their own ethical lens, and in helping organizations articulate their ethical perspective to illuminate why certain decisions are made. Group members specifically addressed the resources that are needed for decision-making where ethical dilemmas are encountered, and the resources that are needed to educate employees about the stress and distress that can come with moral and ethical conflict, and to enable them to manage this pressure. They felt that the time is right for such an initiative, particularly insofar as agencies are working with the public in new ways as animal welfare trends change, and this shifting scope requires new tools.

Further key points from small and large group discussions about ethics in sheltering included:

- Sometimes you cannot uphold your ethical values at all or completely; it is helpful to acknowledge that in a situation.
- There can be a need to align values inside an organization as well as with the surrounding community.
- Other fields, including (human) nursing and training of US Army officers, have studied and

found value in coaching around moral “stress” or “distress.”

- Some consistent tools for reviewing situational ethics can be helpful for agencies working in community partnership, especially if they are shared and utilized by each partner.
- Agencies are working with the public in new ways as animal welfare trends change, and will need new tools to rise to that.
- Several members of the groups represented funders. For due diligence in reviewing grant applications and to encourage thoughtful program development, they yearned for tools in this area to offer applicants and leverage use of with their funds.
- We discussed that this need exists in US, UK, EU and global locations; this group is somewhat US-focused, and work piloted here could be adapted and expanded.

## Recommendations to advance this area

### *Moral (Di)stress workshop*

The group felt that a workshop on “moral stress” (specific name to be determined) would be very appealing and a tool for self-care, and this was a focus during the “Destiny” phase. A workshop would introduce concepts of ethical decision-making and moral dilemmas in animal sheltering (e.g., animal relocation, euthanasia, and other difficult situations that arise in the sheltering world) and bridge to the goal of innovative new programs within the field (a prime example being field studies of non-surgical fertility control). A compendium of case studies would be an important component of the curriculum, as the goal is to give people meaningful tools to identify what is taking place in their day-to-day work, and the subtle or profound effects of those ethical conflicts.

The need for a two-pronged approach was also discussed. First, attention must be given to individual employee well-being, and the burden of ethical issues that they may face. Second, organization-level ethical policy must be considered, and clear ethical guidelines established. It was emphasized, though, that a clear organizational policy should not preclude discussion and disagreement based on individual beliefs.

It will be important to measure the value and impact of the workshop, initially informally as a curriculum is being developed, and subsequently with formal pre- and post-metrics.

Although the circumstances that prompt moral stress may be unique within the animal welfare/sheltering field, the broader concept is experienced in other areas of work. Hospitals, for example, have clinical ethicists on staff who address the ethical issues common in this environment. There are opportunities to lean on existing models as this workshop is created.

Several participants in the workshop volunteered to advance a workshop focused on moral stress, including several experts who have conducted workshops on related topics.

### *Working with funders to leverage better ethical oversight of project designs*

There was discussion about the role of funders in ethical oversight of projects. It was recommended that ethics-oriented resources be developed that could be offered to groups seeking funding.

### *Ethics coaching certification for animal welfare professionals*

On a longer timeline, the group felt that it would be desirable to have a certification program for leaders

and trainers coaching organizations and their teams to navigate ethical dilemmas. Ultimately it was felt that this should be managed by a national organization—in the United States, this might be SAWA, which is already managing the CAWA (Certified Animal Welfare Administrator) certification. It would be necessary to clearly delineate what the certification is intended to provide and how certified people would use this credential.

### *Animal ethics committees at the community level*

To fill the role of an IACUC or IRB customized to the needs of assessing new companion animal programs, it was felt that in the ultimate evolution of this project, community animal ethics committees would be commonplace, where diverse stakeholders can input on key decisions made related to animal and community welfare. Use of these for hospitals was referenced.

### **Initial Think Tank Outcome Resource**

The Advance Work section (page 5) references “Ethical considerations and questions for field ‘interventions’ with dogs and cats,” a document prepared for additional input from Think Tank participants. This document was roundly supported by attendees as an initial outcome of this Think Tank; during and after the event, it benefitted from careful review and editing from a range of participants. You can access the document [here](#). We hope it is useful for those planning and implementing field work, especially as a first generation resource of those envisioned by participants.

## Cross-Cutting Themes

In addition to the area-specific discussions, the Think Tank process revealed several themes that applied to all focus areas:

### *Preliminary considerations around moral standing:*

We must reflect on moral standing (defined as the status of an entity by virtue of which it is deserving of consideration in moral decision making, and a key topic in debates about animal rights and bioethics) before beginning development of any tool.<sup>2</sup> This reflection is important, even if it is not ultimately resolved in the process of ethical decision-making. The animal research field is currently experiencing people coming together and creating new guidelines, or “soft law,” in contrast to formal international law or policy. An example of this is the [Singapore Statement on Research Integrity](#).

*“Failing forward”:* It is essential to share project failures (“failing forward”) to avoid repeating unsuccessful initiatives or interventions. This speaks to the need for data repositories to enhance research integrity and quality.

*Responsibility for individual animals:* There was discussion about who takes responsibility for the well-being of individual animals in a study or project, particularly when there is no identified “owner,” or when the owner may not be advocating for the animal’s best interest. The IRB review for a human trial, in which the parent is a proxy, was mentioned as a model for this issue. Questions included whether it is practical for a member of the

research team to be the animal’s advocate, and what needs to be in place to avoid conflict of interest.

*Type of project/intervention:* In guiding ethical thinking, there is a fundamental difference between testing an established protocol in a novel situation, and testing something that is fundamentally brand-new. Testing something that is new and not accepted practice enters more challenging ethical territory.

*Funder roles:* Several Think Tank participants represented funding organizations. For due diligence in reviewing grant applications and to encourage thoughtful program development, they yearned for tools to offer and leverage use of with their funds. It was also noted that strict parameters and expectations for efficient and effective use of grant funds carries the risk of limiting the ability for organizations to innovate—e.g., investing in the social change work to develop relationships and work through ethical issues as a basis for sustainable programs.

*Current ethical review:* This topic is particularly applicable to veterinary/clinical research but relevant to all groups. The ethical review processes and protocols that are currently in place vary by country, and certain research and interventions end up exempted from ethical review. Moreover, there are some types of interventions and research involving animals that are subject to ethical review (IACUC), but that ethical review is not well tailored to the type of research taking place. The IACUC’s perspective for review of studies of laboratory animals assumes that the research does not benefit the animals under study, whereas much research of companion animals has the potential to benefit participants through improved health or welfare. Work with companion animals, specifically pets, is not a primary purpose or focus of IACUCs, yet

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<sup>2</sup> Madsen, P. 2015. Moral Standing. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/moral-standing> (updated December 17).



fundamentals in the human-animal interaction realm expect review through existing IACUCs. This prompted discussion of the need for a new gateway for ethical review. Think Tank participants advised not treating dogs/cats as one would lab animals, but rather in more of a human medicine-type way, paying particular attention to regulations concerning research on children as a model. Even this, though, is not the right framework for many of the interventions being discussed—e.g., innovation to increase numbers of animals adopted. It was also proposed that ethical frameworks we are moving toward will need to be quite different from traditional IACUC and IRB models.

The role of the 3Rs was specifically addressed, with the suggestion that the only notion relevant to the topics of this Think Tank is the idea of “refinement” the other two Rs can sometimes be irrelevant. We need a separate set of ethical principles that moves away from the 3Rs.

These topics will be accounted for as projects advance.

## Think Tank Design and Structure

ACC&D was very pleased to organize this Think Tank, prompted by the specific projects that we have initiated, but also with recognition of a broader need within the animal welfare and veterinary fields for ethical guidelines on use of animals outside of “traditional” laboratory contexts. Participant feedback was positive (see section VII, below, for select quotes), and there was tremendous enthusiasm and motivation for moving forward with the project concepts outlined in this report.

We welcome your feedback on this report, the content of the Think Tank, and ethical issues within the animal welfare field that you believe deserve

further attention. Please provide feedback to [info@acc-d.org](mailto:info@acc-d.org).

## Excerpted comments from participants’ post-evaluation surveys

*I am so heartened to see the field considering ethics - and even defining what ethics entails - before nonsurgical sterilization products come along that will be applied hurriedly and excitedly. We are all excited to have those products, but I sigh a huge sigh of relief thinking that there might be an associated movement to ensure this is done responsibly from an animal welfare, community welfare and scientific standpoint. Thank you to ACC&D for thinking so far ahead on this one and identifying a very real need, whose benefits have potential to reach well beyond nonsurgical contraception.* **Kate Atema, Program Director, International Fund for Animal Welfare**

*I was very honored to be invited to participate in this think tank; the level of expertise in the room was truly amazing. I was also very pleased with the level of productivity and the practical outcomes of the workshop - I can't wait to see our plans unfold!* **Monica List MV, PhD Candidate in Philosophy, Michigan State University**

*This Think Tank was a one-of-a-kind opportunity for experts in the field of animal ethics to work collectively to move forward. We value the opportunity to provide support for meaningful work like this. I think that three distinct and defined action paths are the most important and exciting accomplishment.* **Katie Parker, Animal Assistance Foundation**

*The Ethics Think Tank organized by ACC&D was a critical time to stop, think, and plan on a topic that*

*we often address subconsciously. By spending thoughtful time on ethics and moral stress were able to create resources to facilitate good thought processes around these important issues...This was a very useful way to invest my time--both in meeting thoughtful and influential people and in framing these issues for myself.* **Apryl Steele, DVM, COO, Denver Dumb Friends League**

*The ACC&D organising team was incredible - as a planning committee member, I got to see some of the huge amount of work you put into shaping this event...I think we made more progress than I had anticipated!* **Deepashree Balaram, BVSc, Outreach Director, Global Alliance for Rabies Control**

*ACC&D is taking an important leadership role in the application of ethical decision-making to new animal welfare programs and initiatives.* **James Serpell, Marie A Moore Professor of Ethics & Animal Welfare, University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine**



*From left to right: James Yeates, Joyce Briggs, Lisa Moses, Deepashree Balaram*