

Memorandum

TO: Lane County Board of Commissioners
FROM: Catherine Susman
DATE: September 26, 2021
RE: Stray and Feral Cat Population Control

Lane County, like many local governments, has a feral and stray cat population problem. Feral and stray cats are estimated to make up between 40% - 60% the total cat population of the county.^[1] In 2019, Lane County made news due to allegations of lethal solutions being employed against the burgeoning feral cat population at the Lane County dump.^[2] The feral and stray cat population in Lane County is persistent and can easily get out of control. One unaltered cat and its offspring over a 10-year period can result in a population of 1,398,101 cats.^[3] For health and safety concerns for both the community and the cats, something must be done to limit the population. However, as demonstrated by the article, humane, non-lethal solutions are desired by the community.

Further, research has shown that employing lethal options to control the feral and stray cat population only results in a temporary, short-term reduction in population due to what is known as the “vacuum effect.”^[4] When feral and stray cats are removed and euthanized, it creates additional space in the colony, a vacuum, that will be filled by the remaining cats continuing to reproduce, thus quickly replacing any prior reduction in population. Rather than trapping, removing, and euthanizing, one solution that has been shown to result in lowering the feral and stray cat population is a trap, neuter, vaccinate, release (“TNVR”) program.^[5] Under a TNVR program, stray and feral cats are trapped, sterilized, vaccinated, and then returned to their original location. More information on TNVR programs including prior studies on such programs can be found at: [TNR | Trap, Neuter or Spay, Return | Catch & Release Programs for Cats \(alleycat.org\)](#). Also, attached to this memo is a logic model depicting the theory of how a TNVR program for Lane County can help significantly reduce the stray and feral cat populations.

As shown in the model, the independent variable is the TNVR program and dependent variable is the feral and stray cat population. Implementing and supporting TNVR program results or causes a long-term reduction in the feral and stray cat population by limiting the feral cat equation without creating a vacuum effect. Three of the main components (a.k.a. intervening variables) of a TNVR program include outreach, access to traps and access to veterinarians. TNVR programs rely heavily on both community and veterinarian volunteers, so outreach is critical. The more volunteers, the more feral/stray cats that are trapped, neutered, vaccinated, and returned. It is important to note community volunteers are critical to a TNVR program’s success not only in assisting with the trapping and taking the cats to a vet, either the volunteer vet or other vet, but also on returning the cats and helping to provide care for the cats once they are returned. While the cats are labeled as stray/feral, generally these cats have caretakers in the community. A TNVR program’s success depends on this generalization being correct. While the logic model shows more outreach results in more community volunteers, as noted in this explanation there are multiple dimensions to the work of community volunteers. A successful

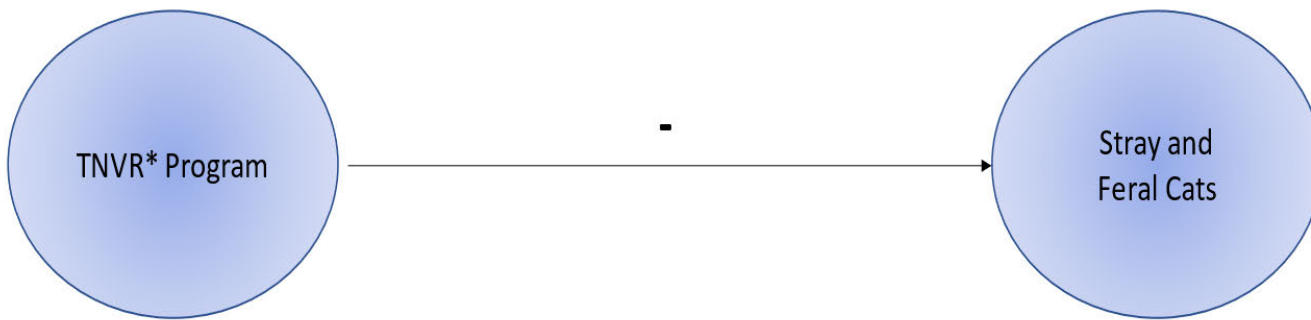
program depends on sufficient volunteers being available to fulfill these various dimensions. Further, as noted from other studies of existing TNVR programs, the lack of free/low-cost access to traps and to veterinarians can be barriers to program success. Access to traps and veterinarians, therefore, are key components to program success.

As part of implementing a TNVR program for Lane County, a review of the existing secondary sources comprised of previous research studies evaluating existing TNVR programs should be undertaken to identify success factors and barriers in implementing such a program. A review of existing County regulations should also be undertaken to determine if there are any barriers to implementing such a program.

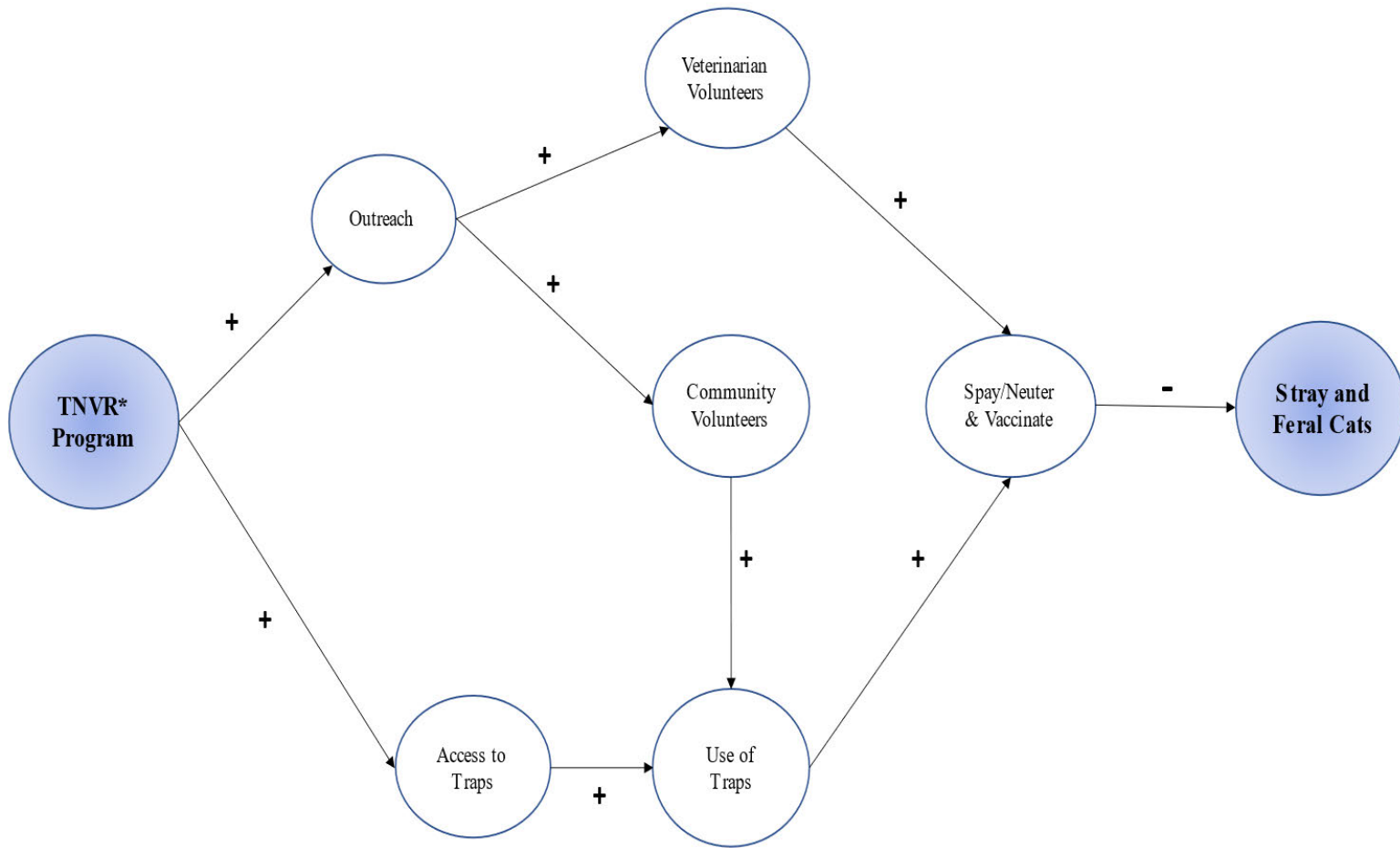
In addition to undertaking research of secondary sources, evaluation research including performance measurement should be undertaken to determine if the Lane County TNVR program is producing the expected outcomes. Such methods would likely include a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative assessments. To gather performance data, the County should track the number of requests for traps and use of the traps. Additionally, the County should have the volunteer veterinarians track and report the demand for their services and number of cats they spayed/neutered and vaccinated as part of the TNVR program. Further since such programs depend heavily on volunteers, the County should track the number of community and volunteer veterinarians participating in the TNVR program.

Additional data for performance evaluation could be from targeted surveys of the community and veterinarian volunteers participating in the TNVR program. Such surveys could cover topics including how the respondent volunteer became involved in the program to help determine the effectiveness of outreach efforts. Additional topics for the surveys could include questions on volunteer respondent's experience with and views on the program as well as the ways in which respondent volunteer assists with the TNVR program. Depending on survey responses, it may be helpful to perform more in-depth qualitative interviews with a subset of the surveyed volunteers.

Lastly, to obtain a key source of data to evaluate the short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes of the TNVR program, the County should undertake the quantitative measurement of the feral/stray cat population both at the commencement of TNVR program and periodically thereafter. While undertaking recurring counts of the entire population feral/stray cat population of the County is likely labor and cost probative, the County could focus on a few discrete feral/stray cat colonies, such as the one at the Lane County dump, and use the data obtained from those evaluations as a proxy for the effect of the TNVR program on the total feral/stray cat population of the County.



*Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, and Return (TNVR)



*Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, and Return (TNVR)

References

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2. Deffenbacher, C. (2019, August 11). Lane County denies cats are purposely killed in landfill after brief investigation. *The Register-Guard*. Eugene, Oregon. Retrieved September 2021, from <https://www.registerguard.com/news/20190811/lane-county-denies-cats-are-purposely-killed-in-landfill-after-brief-investigation>
3. Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon. (2021). *The Feral Cat Equation*. Retrieved September 2021, from Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon: <http://www.feralcats.com/the-feral-cat-equation>
4. Alley Cat Allies. (2021). *The Vacuum Effect*. Retrieved September 2021, from Alley Cat Allies: <https://www.alleycat.org/resources/the-vacuum-effect-why-catch-and-kill-doesnt-work/>
5. Alley Cat Allies. (2021). *Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)*. Retrieved September 2021, from Alley Cat Allies: <https://www.alleycat.org/our-work/trap-neuter-return/>