What if…
Cross-Departmental Teamwork Scores are Low?

How employees work with one another can make or break the positive working environment. Teamwork is an important component to successful shelters and a common growth area, too. Problems with teamwork rarely have some single, root cause, so working with your employees to identify what works and what doesn't work is paramount to getting teams to work together. Use these steps below to identify and improve common problem areas with interdepartmental teamwork:

Start here:
- "**Step Zero**" should always be to set up a committee of employees from all affected areas of the organization (e.g., one from each department) to address teamwork issues and brainstorm ways to foster better working relationships. Your own employees can generate shelter-specific best practices to resolve teamwork issues. Have the committee come up with **5-10 ideas** to improve cross-departmental teamwork. You can start by asking employees to think about what other departments can do to help them *and* what they can do to help other departments.
    - Rethink brainstorming: Consider asking employees to present their ideas in written form, so that everyone's ideas are considered
    - Teamwork and communication go hand-in-hand, so addressing communication within the same committee may likely yield more effective teamwork solutions
    - Teamwork is an ongoing process, so reconvene this committee quarterly (or as-needed) to identify successful strategies and opportunities for improvement.

What else can you do?
- Encourage staff members to be *more empathetic* toward their co-workers, their roles, and their responsibilities with these strategies:
    - Job shadowing or **job rotations** can instill a better sense of "we're in this together"
        - Rotate employees through different departments on a 2-week basis so they can train and learn more about what the department does
        - Create a "full experience" job rotation as a capstone, so that employees can participate in every aspect of a shelter function, like adoption
    - Joint training (and realistic team problem-solving activities) provides an opportunity to form relationships and share important information
    - Create cross-department project groups that require employees of different departments to work together
- If you find that co-workers do not get along because of conflict, refer them to **PetSmart Charities** where they can find several webinars, including one on conflict management.
    - It's also a good idea to have all managers and supervisors complete this conflict resolution training
- Appoint an ambassador or a liaison to facilitate communication between units or departments with consistent communication issues
    - Avoid allowing this person to become a messenger relaying messages between the units; instead, they should be identifying long-term solutions

- o Try to identify personnel with already-strong communication skills
- o This ambassador should promote good communication strategies, like two-way communication over one-way communication, and look for problem areas
- o Even some additional attention from managers can encourage good communication
- Create an "*emergency assistance crew*" of employees who can rotate in and support departments in times of unusually high workload
  - o Update and change this list frequently so that all staff have the opportunity to work together
- Leadership should model and promote good teamwork behavior for other employees
  - o When in doubt, employees will look to their leaders (and direct supervisors) for information on how to interact with others in the organization.
  - o Set clear goals for the organization and identify ways in which various departments can work together to achieve that goal more efficiently

Got it. Now what?
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of various positions and units
  - o Ideally, various positions should be defined to complement and collaborate rather than overlap
    - ▪ Over time, employees have likely taken on duties outside of their formal job descriptions
    - ▪ Overlapping responsibilities or unclear job definitions can lead to "turf wars"
    - ▪ You do not need to necessarily remove those responsibilities from employees; instead, think about whether those duties should be formally assigned to that specific person—the goal is to discourage redundancies, conflict, and overlap
  - o This may mean redefining existing jobs somewhat, shifting around responsibilities, updating job descriptions across the shelter, etc.
    - ▪ Consider returning to "Step Zero" above before making changes to gather employee feedback on what they think are the appropriate or best responsibilities for each position
  - o A "matrix" job structure can supplement this approach—employees are given tasks in their core area along with a selection of tasks from other areas or departments that they must manage daily
- Address situations affecting communication among employees across different departments—structural arrangements such as layout, schedules, and role ambiguity (unclear designation of responsibilities) can impede communication and teamwork by disconnecting employees from one another
  - o Start by rethinking the layout of the organization: can units that must interact frequently be moved more closely together to encourage more frequent and informal communication?
    - ▪ Adjacent units are more likely to engage in more frequent and informal communication than physically separated units
    - ▪ Revising your layout may require thinking about organizing your units around communication needs over task or process needs—for example,

adoption staff may need to be in more frequent communication with front desk staff to coordinate adoptions

- o Shiftwork (especially for shelters with a significant proportion of part-time employees) may interfere with communication and even foster an "us versus them" mentality—encourage cohesiveness regardless of shift or part-time status
    - Encourage managers to identify times for meetings and even social gatherings that will include employees from all affected shifts
    - Encourage employees to use asynchronous forms of communication that allow for responses and feedback (e.g. email) over "one-way" forms of communication (e.g. leaving a note for the next shift) to promote inclusiveness and reduce "us versus them" attitudes
- During slower seasons, set aside a day or a few hours at the beginning or end of the work day to close the shelter and dedicate the time to Staff Development Days
    - o Many of the ideas described above could be set up for staff development time
    - o This is a great opportunity to train employees on job rotations and allow employees to teach employees in other areas about their jobs in a stress-free environment
    - o The important point is to send a message to your employees that you are invested in their development and success, and provide them a means to work together to improve their teamwork

What about teamwork among volunteers and paid staff?

If you find that employees and volunteers do not get along, tensions between the two can stifle the shelter's potential. Developing positive interactions between these two groups can be beneficial to building teamwork and shelter performance. Many of the same suggestions above apply, and we have some additional resources for volunteer management below. It is worth reiterating that the way leaders manage volunteers will set a precedent for how employees interact with those volunteers.

The **HSUS** provides several resources for volunteer managers, including a volunteer management **discussion group**, volunteer management **library**, and a staff development training called **Everyone Ready**®, that includes a module on building successful relationships between volunteers and paid staff.

Additionally, **PetSmart Charities** offers a webinar called, Teach Them Well, which includes suggestions on how employees can work better with the volunteers they oversee.