STANISLAUS
Animal Services
AGENCY

Five-Year Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2027 – 2032

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Executive Summary

Stanislaus Animal Services Agency (SASA) is a government-run animal shelter located in Modesto, California. Established in 2009 as a joint powers authority, the shelter serves the communities located in its partners' jurisdictions: City of Modesto, City of Ceres, City of Hughson, City of Patterson, City of Waterford, and the unincorporated areas within Stanislaus County. City and County leadership serve on the SASA Board and support the SASA Executive Director and staff who operate the shelter in service to the community.

Over the next five years, SASA will work to improve services to those we serve, animals and humans alike. With a focus on our vision, mission, and values, staff will direct their efforts in alignment with five strategic priorities to accomplish a series of objectives following a specific action plan. Progress will be monitored annually, with activities and adjustments in operations occurring as needed throughout the five-year period.

Under the premise and understanding that governments provide animal shelters to serve as a public safety and welfare system that protects animals, supports public health, and benefits communities in a variety of ways, the following five-year strategic plan serves as comprehensive guidance for operational change, improvement, expansion, and ultimately, excellence in the field.

"Adopting one animal may not change the world,
but for that animal, their world changes forever." – Unknown

Stakeholder Research and Engagement Process

In July 2025, SASA contracted with **Stevenson Wallace** to facilitate the development of a comprehensive Strategic Plan for the Agency. To ensure the plan reflected the needs, expectations, and experiences of SASA's partners, staff, and the broader community, Stevenson Wallace launched an extensive stakeholder research process beginning in September 2025.

This multi-method engagement effort included:

- **Surveys of SASA Board members and SASA staff**, designed to assess organizational strengths, challenges, and priority areas for investment.
- **Two facilitated focus groups with elected officials** from partner jurisdictions to gather insights on community expectations, service gaps, and priorities for SASA's future direction.
- **A total of 13 in-depth interviews with partners, peers, and industry leaders**, including representatives from animal welfare organizations, veterinary associations, county departments, municipal shelters, and regional experts. These conversations provided nuanced perspectives on SASA's current operations, long-term challenges, and opportunities for service enhancements.

To deepen shared understanding and synthesize stakeholder feedback, a public SASA Board strategic planning session was held in January 2026. During this session, Board members, staff, and community participants reviewed the results of the stakeholder research, defined what success in animal welfare should look like for Stanislaus County, explored resident sentiment through public comment, and identified initial next steps for addressing community requests and SASA's resourcing needs.

Following the January session, the JPA established a Strategic Plan Ad-Hoc Committee at its March 2026 meeting. The Committee was comprised of representatives from Stanislaus County, the City of Hughson, and the City of Waterford and was charged with overseeing the evaluation, refinement, and implementation of strategies emerging from the January retreat. Working in partnership with the Executive Director, the Committee collaborated closely with Stevenson Wallace to develop a Strategic Plan that would strengthen SASA's core functions, improve service delivery, and align resources with the needs of the County's animals and residents.

Although Stevenson Wallace delivered an initial draft plan, the Ad-Hoc Committee determined that the document did not meet the necessary standards for clarity, feasibility, or alignment with stakeholder input. As a result, the Committee reconvened independently to revise, expand, and strengthen the plan. The final version reflects that additional work and represents a more accurate and actionable roadmap informed by the full breadth of stakeholder engagement, operational insights, and community priorities.

Summary of Key Stakeholder Insights

Through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and facilitated discussion, stakeholders surfaced several consistent themes that informed the Strategic Plan.

Chronic Underfunding and Staffing Shortages

Stakeholders overwhelmingly described SASA as under-resourced relative to the level of service expected by the community. Staffing shortages, including veterinary, field, and customer service staff, were cited as major barriers to meeting operational needs, preventing burnout, and improving service quality.

Need for Clearer Mission, Role Definition, and Communication

Across stakeholder groups, there was a strong desire for SASA to more clearly communicate its core functions, capacity limitations, and service expectations. Many noted that community confusion, such as misunderstandings about intake policies, licensing, or shelter capacity, contributes to frustration and reduces trust.

Customer Service and Responsiveness Issues

Stakeholders consistently cited challenges in reaching staff by phone, delays in response times, limited walk-in availability, and inconsistent follow-up. Improvements in customer service training, staffing levels, and communication protocols were identified as essential to strengthening community trust and overall satisfaction.

Insufficient Veterinary Capacity

Surgical and clinic capacity emerged as one of SASA's most urgent needs. Stakeholders highlighted significant spay/neuter backlogs, limited ability to support public-facing clinics, and the need to grow veterinary staffing, either internally or through contracted partnerships, to improve animal flow and expand community access.

Overcrowding and Rising Animal Overpopulation

Stakeholders reported concerns about persistent shelter overcrowding, increasing stray and feral populations, and limited capacity to perform spay/neuter surgeries and Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR) efforts. Many emphasized the need for expanded population-control strategies and upstream interventions to reduce shelter intake.

Strong Interest in Upstream, Community-Based Solutions

Interviews and focus groups emphasized the importance of preventing animals from entering the shelter whenever possible. Stakeholders strongly supported expanding owner-support services, community vaccine clinics, TNR programs, and foster networks, as well as increasing field services for licensing and canvassing.

The following five-year plan will provide guidance and direction to strengthen core functions, improve customer service, address internally and externally identified issues, and provide a strong foundation on which to build and expand services that are planful and thoughtful. Through the strategies identified within the plan, staff and partners can work together in support of a stronger, more sustainable shelter operation that has the capacity to continue to develop with the flexibility needed to meet the changing needs of this community.

Vision, Mission, Values

Vision

A leading shelter that preserves public health and safety, protects animals in crisis, and promotes responsible pet ownership, while working to remediate animal overpopulation in the community

Mission

To champion a safe, healthy community for animals and the humans who love them

Values

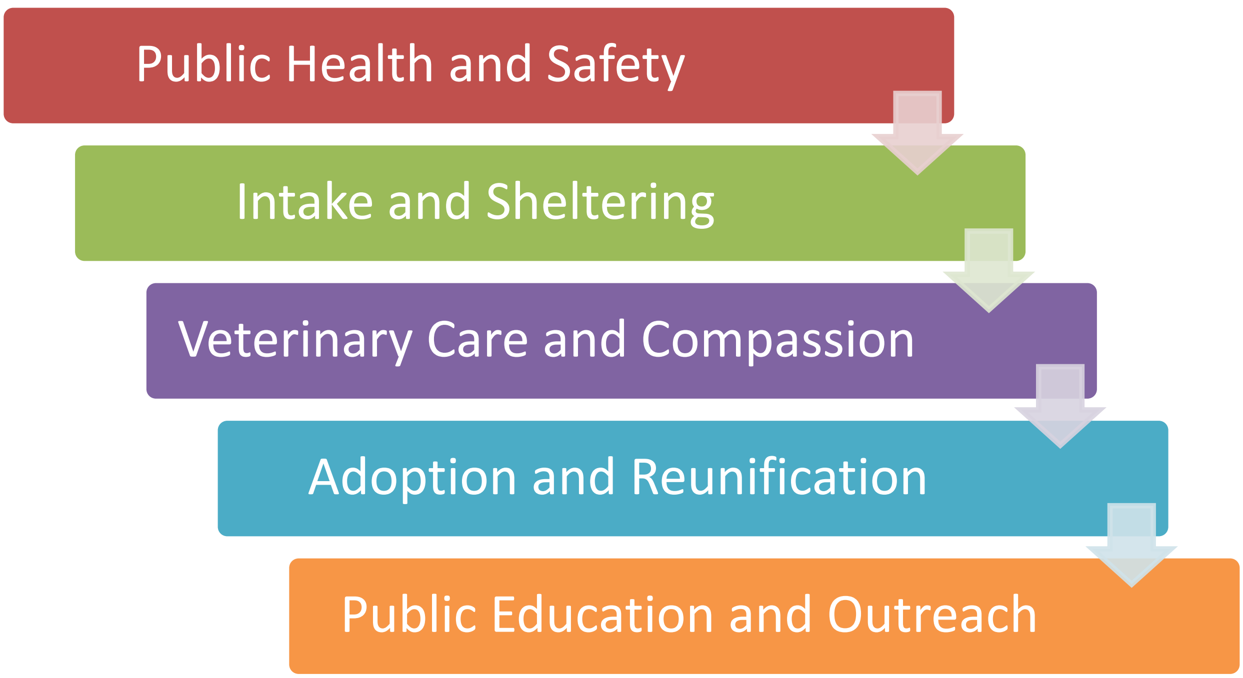
We are committed to compassion, transparency, and quality animal care, working with our community to save lives, prevent suffering, and promote public health and safety through an adherence to the following values:

- Public Health and Safety
- Compassion and Respect
- Animal-Focused Care
- Humane, Evidence-Based Decision-Making
- Transparency and Accountability

Core Functions and Strategic Priorities

Core Functions

Under California Government Code Section 25802, local boards have the authority to maintain, regulate, and govern public animal shelters. Stanislaus Animal Services Agency is responsible for the following core functions as a government-managed and operated animal shelter in support of its six distinct jurisdictions:



Strategic Priorities

With a clear focus on the agency's core functions and a strong determination to advance benefits to the community it serves, the Stanislaus Animal Services Agency will address the following five priorities over the next five years:

Priority 1
- Address surgical backlog for adoptable animals

Priority 2
- Increase communication and engagement with our community

Priority 3
- Invest in the retention, skills, and satisfaction of our staff

Priority 4
- Improve customer service, coordination, and responsiveness

Priority 5
- Expand access to affordable veterinary care and services

"To do two things at once is to do neither." – Publilius Syrus

Five-Year Objectives and Action Plan

Priority 1: *Address surgical backlog for adoptable animals*

Objectives

- Increase spay and neuter surgeries of adoptable animals
- Reduce reliance on Foster-to-Adopt program[1]
- Improve shelter surgical capacity

Action Plan

- Fill vacant veterinary support positions to ensure sustainable surgical rotation
- Evaluate hospital operations and implement any needed adjustments to maximize surgical capacity
- Prioritize spay/neuter surgeries to address Foster-to-Adopt animals to increase permanent adoptions
- Utilize additional contract veterinary support to reduce surgical backlog, providing some spay/neuter surgeries for appointments for the public

Staffing Needs

- Consider additional contract veterinary support in addition to existing full-time staffing

Budgetary Needs

- One-time costs associated with increased surgeries to address backlog, including additional medication, supplies, contracted support, and staff time, as needed
- Ongoing costs associated with percentage of appointments for public-facing spay/neuter appointments

[1]Foster-to-Adopt program extends the time SASA is responsible for adoptable animals by prolonging adoption into the animal's forever home due to its unaltered state, representing a liability to the agency regarding ongoing care, illness, and/or injury.

Priority 2: *Increase communication and engagement with our community*

Objectives

- Improve access to timely shelter information and key data points
- Increase engagement with members of the community
- Reduce confusion and the spread of misinformation

Action Plan

- Launch an engaging, modern website with user-friendly dashboards and key data, linkable from each partner agency's website
- Provide access to shelter policies that are clearly stated and consistently followed
- Grow social media presence to emphasize success stories, clear roles, and available resources
- Evaluate and expand adoption promotional opportunities
- Assess and restructure volunteer opportunities and volunteer program operations
- Clarify roles and responsibilities through memoranda of understanding with rescue partners

Staffing Needs

- Consider a new position (either part-time, shared, or full-time allocated) focused on public information, communications, community engagement, promotions, marketing, and customer service

Budgetary Needs

- One-time costs associated with website design and implementation
- Ongoing costs associated with addition of communications support staffing

Priority 3: *Invest in the retention, skills, and satisfaction of our staff*

Objectives

- Improve overall job satisfaction of our staff
- Increase training and development opportunities for staff at all levels of the organization
- Increase positive acknowledgement of accomplishments

Action Plan

- Pursue professional development opportunities to build staff skills and knowledge
- Leverage additional training resources through the County and City partner agencies to support staff retention, development, and overall performance
- Conduct "Stay Interviews" as opposed to "Exit Interviews" when it is too late, seeking real-time feedback on what works and what needs improvement
- Produce and issue an annual employee engagement survey, aiming for improvement year-over-year
- Evaluate organizational and classification structures along with staffing levels, recommending changes where appropriate

Staffing Needs

- Potential for one-time and/or ongoing support based on analysis of staff feedback and staffing studies

Budgetary Needs

- One-time costs associated with establishing professional development opportunities and conducting staffing studies

Priority 4: *Improve customer service, coordination, and responsiveness*

Objectives

- Improve customer service and interactions with the public
- Enhance coordination with shelter partners
- Improve responsiveness for calls, emails, and field services

Action Plan

- Invest in extensive customer service training, encouraging peer support and recognition among staff
- Evaluate partnership agreements, expectations, and policies, identifying areas for improvement
- Identify office inefficiencies, service gaps, and organizational structure, seeking solutions to address operational needs
- Evaluate benefits of using DocuPet and consider enhancing or pursuing another provider through RFP process

Staffing Needs

- Potential for additional staffing needs based on efficiency and gap analysis

Budgetary Needs

- One-time costs associated with training and efficiency study
- Potential ongoing costs associated with any staffing needs identified through efficiency and gap analysis

Priority 5: *Expand access to affordable veterinary care and services*

Objectives

- Increase frequency of vaccination clinics
- Increase capacity for affordable public-facing spay/neuter surgeries[2]
- Increase TNR capacity through partnerships and/or internal operations, focused on sustainability[2]

Action Plan

- Launch updated and more robust vaccination clinic schedule, including outreach and promotional materials to reach the community
- Leverage relationships with contract and local veterinarians to provide expanded affordable spay/neuter clinic slots with increasing frequency[2]
- Revitalize the LOVE Clinic to increase the number of affordable spay/neuter available to the public (could be achieved through RFP or internal staffing)[2]
- Identify and develop meaningful partnerships to expand TNR efforts, focused on sustainability to ensure efforts continue

Staffing Needs

- Consider additional contract veterinary support in addition to existing full-time staffing
- Potential for growth and development of the LOVE Clinic and additional veterinary staffing

Budgetary Needs

- Ongoing costs to support increased frequency of vaccination clinics
- Ongoing costs associated with additional contracted services
- Potential for additional ongoing costs associated with LOVE Clinic if supported by internal staffing resources

[2]Public-facing options will be prioritized for expansion once internal backlog (Priority 1) has been adequately addressed and mitigated

Timeline Overview (High-Level)

This strategic plan serves to guide policy direction, program development, and staff activities over the next five years. Following the identified objectives and action plan will be critical to the agency's success, closely aligned with strategic priorities that establish and strengthen core functions prior to considering the appropriate and planful expansion of services to the community. The following timeline will guide efforts toward this end and will be re-assessed annually for adjustment, as needed. Opportunities may arise sooner than anticipated, allowing for shifts in preliminary timing estimates and movement earlier in the process.

Years 1-2: Build Foundation

- Address spay/neuter surgeries to increase adoptions, allowing for some low-cost public options and TNR support as soon as reasonably possible
- Develop communications, marketing, and engagement protocols
- Launch updated website (with or without rebranding)
- Pursue professional development opportunities for staff
- Develop vaccination schedule to provide additional clinics

Years 3-4: Scale and Strengthen

- Evaluate organizational structure and efficiencies, seeking solutions for any identified gaps or inefficiencies
- Expand low-cost spay/neuter surgeries schedule, considering partnership and/or different business model feasibility
- Establish comprehensive and long-term TNR program

Year 5: Optimize and Finalize

- Evaluate and update fee schedule
- Update the Capital Improvement Plan for the next five years
- Achieve full maturity of programs, major capital improvements, advanced data reporting, and workforce development

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