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A Mixed-Methods Exploration Of Opportunities For Barriers And Bias During Off Site Animal Adoption Events

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Abstract

Introduction: Adopters and animal shelter leaders are calling for higher equity in services provided by animal shelters to their communities. Specifically, restrictive pet adoption processes have been proposed as a threat to equitable service. The study had three specific goals: (1) to describe the basic characteristics of off-site adoption events, (2) to describe the adoption processes in use by shelters and to determine if there is any potential for unconscious bias in these processes, and (3) to determine if adoption practices differ depending on the characteristics of the animal shelter.

Methods: A total of 484 participants reported on how they conduct adoption events and their adopter selection procedures. Characteristics of organisations and their adoption event procedures were described and compared across organisation size using Chi-squared tests. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions asking about screening procedures were analysed through inductive thematic analysis.

Results: Commonly, adoption events were held weekly ($n = 158$, 33.1%) in locally owned stores ($n = 259$, 54.4%), with volunteers engaging directly with potential adopters ($n = 423$, 88.5%). Just under half responded that adopters could take pets straight home from the event ($n = 229$, 47.8%) and that the adoption process does not require a home visit ($n = 276$, 57.7%). Qualitative analysis revealed three major groups of themes: 'methods of selection', 'information gathered by the animal shelter', 'information provided by the animal shelter'. The sub-theme of 'Vibes' (coded for 39.4% participants, $n = 175$) encompassed decision-making based on intuition or feeling when meeting or observing potential adopters face-to-face. Generally, larger organisations held adoption events more frequently, were more likely to let adopters take animals straight home, and did not require a home visit. However, both types of organisations showed a potential for implicit bias when selecting adopters.

Conclusion: Our results suggest that procedures of adoption events in animal shelters vary across organisation, with some practices differing based on organisation size. Given that our results suggest possibility for implicit bias when screening adopters during adoption events, we conclude that there is a need for increased awareness, research, and training to address the issue of implicit bias in animal sheltering organisations.

Keywords: *animal shelter; implicit bias; shelter management; capacity for care*

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In 2006 and 2021, two different articles in the New York Times scrutinised the difficult process of adopting animals from shelters and rescues from the public perspective.^{1,2} Both articles, although 15 years apart from one another, discussed barriers (e.g. having children, having too small a yard) that eventually deterred people from adoption altogether. Similar sentiments have been discussed in research – prospective pet owners often report negative emotional responses

to long, onerous, and sometimes invasive adoption processes.³

While traditionally restrictive adoption processes have been a point of frustration for public members, little is known about how shelter staff select adopters. An emerging belief that animal shelters provide a needed social service to the community may have contributed to industry leaders calling for a reduction in 'barriers to adoption'.^{4,5} As an alternative to traditionally

restrictive adoption practices, some animal shelters promote ‘conversation-based’ (or ‘open’) adoption, which typically remove screening processes in favour of conversation-based approaches, meaning that few adopters are rejected because of hard set rules.^{6,7} In 2001, Balcom and Arluke⁶ interviewed one shelter with traditional adoption policies and one with conversation-based adoption policies. The latter reported that few adoption applications were rejected; instead, shelter management encouraged staff to view potential adopters as well-intentioned and focused on finding potential adopters an animal to adopt.⁶ Since this study, resources such as ‘Adopters Welcome’ promote and outline conversation-based adoption as a means to increase flow of animals out of shelter facilities.⁷ The impact of the conversation-based adoption approach has since been investigated, demonstrating that open adoptions do not negatively impact adopters’ attachment to or care for their adopted pet.⁸ Many national animal welfare organisations now encourage the use of conversation-based approaches in order to reduce hurdles that may prevent adoption of animals from shelters and rescues^{9,10}; although the popularity of these programmes is relatively unknown.

One concern is that traditional adoption procedures discriminate against marginalised communities.^{3,11} Griffin and colleagues¹² found that 89% of the surveyed United Kingdom (UK) organisations always used home visits to select adopters; however, half of the organisations that cited using ‘standardized’ home visit procedures also required the person conducting the home visit to make subjective judgements about the suitability of the potential adopter and their home. Home visits and similar adoption procedures may allow for discrimination against more vulnerable populations, such as low-income individuals, racialised individuals, or renters.³ In an ethnographic study, Taylor¹³ found that interviewed shelters used phrases such as ‘gut reaction’ to describe the subjective feelings that lead them to accept or reject potential adopters. Even with more conversation-based adoption approaches, animal shelter staff bias may give way to discrimination in the adoption process. For example, Balcom and Arluke⁶ found that although the interviewed shelters differed in their traditional versus open adoption policies, both cited negative ‘gut feelings’ that lead to rejection of potential adopters. Previous literature suggests that this is a cause for concern as subjective decisions based on sociolinguistic and other cues about people are likely to bring out unconscious racial and gender bias in the workplace,^{14,15} court system,¹⁶ and tenant selection.¹⁷

In addition to concerns of inequity, it is also possible that adoption barriers contribute to welfare concerns of animals inside shelter organisations. Many facilities still struggle with animal intake that exceeds their capacity to care for them, which leads to poor health and welfare of

animals in care,^{18–20} increased risk of euthanasia for animals,^{21,22} and compassion fatigue among shelter staff.²³ Animal shelters aim to maintain a manageable capacity in order to provide better care for animals within facilities and to maintain resources to respond to community needs.²⁴ One strategy employed by animal shelters to maintain reasonable capacity is through increasing adoption of animals, such as through adoption events. Adoption events occur when organisations bring adoptable animals to public spaces to connect with community members in hopes of increasing adoptions directly for those animals.²⁵ Although the aim of adoption events is to increase the flow of animals out of shelter facilities, traditional adoption processes may restrict people from taking home an animal from these events, which may be counterproductive to the goal to reduce shelter populations. However, few studies have investigated the pervasiveness of potentially restrictive adoption practices, and no studies have done so in the context of adoption events. The current study aims to address multiple gaps within the literature regarding barriers to adoption and the use of off-site adoption events by animal shelters.

This exploratory study surveyed animal shelter and rescue personnel about off-site adoption events and the adoption processes at their organisation with a focus on unconscious bias. The specific aims of the study were three-fold. Firstly, we aimed to describe basic characteristics of off-site adoption events in a United States of America (U.S.) sample of animal shelter and rescue organisations. Secondly, we aimed to describe the adoption processes reported by animal shelters to understand whether the methods and information gathered by shelters allows for the opportunity of unconscious bias. And thirdly, we aimed to determine whether these adoption practices differ based on animal shelter characteristics. Because of the descriptive nature of this research, we did not have any specific hypotheses about the characteristics of adoption events and shelters’ adoption processes. However, larger, public shelters have previously been shown to have fewer procedural requirements, whereas smaller, private rescues tended to have increased restrictions on adoption.^{3,6,26} As such, we hypothesised that the prevalence of potentially restrictive adoption policies will differ by organisation size and type.

Methods

All procedures were approved by Texas Tech University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB2017-660). Animal shelter professionals (i.e. staff, owners, directors) were invited to complete an anonymous 20-min survey about off-site adoption events using commercial survey software (Qualtrics). Recruitment occurred during October to November, 2017 via a Maddie’s Fund® email list, which contacts individuals representing shelter and

rescue organizations. The original survey had a total of 59 questions (including consent) and included questions about housing and management of cats and dogs during adoption events, and staff opinions about visitor selection of dogs and cats at adoption events. The analysis in the present study uses a subset of the survey that pertains to adoption selection practices at off-site adoption events (11 categorical questions about shelter characteristics, 8 categorical questions about off-site adoption event characteristics, and 2 open-ended questions about shelter adopter selection procedures during off-site adoption events).

The survey started with a description of the aims of the study and a request for participant consent. Thereafter, the participants were asked a screening question (whether they were an owner, director, or staff member of an animal shelter, rescue group, or a humane society). While it was individual members of organisations who completed the survey, questions were reflective of the organisations' procedures. Participants were then asked questions about their organisation (e.g. location, use of foster homes, maximum capacity), the adoption events hosted by their organisation (e.g. frequency, location, individuals in charge), and potential barriers (e.g. requirements of home visit, latency between application and adoption).

The full survey with all questions seen by participants is found in the Appendix.

The two-open ended questions directly explored potential areas of bias: 'Describe how you typically talk to a potential adopter in your own words. What information do you typically provide right away? Do you wait for them to ask you certain questions?' and 'Describe your process of screening or talking to the adopters. What is the official process of the shelter/ rescue? Do you screen based on personal information/vibes? How do you decide whether the dog will go home with the adopter?'

Quantitative analysis

All data were analysed descriptively using R.²⁷ Prior to analysis, some levels were never selected and were dropped from analysis ('How often does your facility have adoption events outside of the shelter' Answer: 6-'Never'; 'On average, how many days does it take before a cat goes home to the adopter after the adopter submitted an application?' Answer: 6-'NA'; 'On average, how many days does it take before a dog goes home to the adopter after the adopter submitted an application?' Answer: 6-'NA').

Some new categories were created, and respondents assigned to those categories based on text responses for questions that allowed 'Other' responses. A new organisation type was added (Municipal government contract) and contained responses such as '*private 501c3 that operates city shelter*' and '*private humane society with govt contracts*'. A new location for holding adoption events was created 'Community areas' and included churches,

community centres, fairs, and public areas. A new level ('Leadership') was added to the questions about individuals in charge of running adoption events and talking to adopters. As well, 'Fosters' was added as a response for those in charge of talking to adopters at events. To the question 'Does your usual adoption process require a home visit?', the level 'Species/breed/case specific' was added to include answers that identified that the shelter has different policies for specific types of animals. Regarding the type of training, the shelter provided staff and/or volunteers to talk to potential adopters, two additional levels were added (none/minimal training, adoption counselling).

Characteristics of the organisations and adoption events were analysed descriptively and are presented as frequencies of each response. For each question, the responses were cleaned by removing blanks and then the total remaining respondents' answers were used to calculate percentages. Therefore, the sample size of respondents for each question varies slightly.

Chi-squared analyses were used to reveal differences of prevalence of adoption event characteristics and qualitative responses across organisation size. Organisation size was roughly estimated by their maximum capacity. To compare organisation size, maximum capacity was aggregated into three levels: 'Fewer than 50 animals', '50–150 animals', and '150+ animals'. As we were unsure of participant's knowledge of their organisation statistics such as yearly number of animal intake, we utilised this rough proxy for organisation size. For adoption event characteristics where respondents could select multiple responses, a Chi-squared analysis was run on each level of the variable. The comparisons with statistically significant differences are reported ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Qualitative analysis

Participants were asked two open-ended questions that were analysed qualitatively. Because of the similarities in question wording and responses, both questions were coded at the same time with the aim of understanding what practices animal shelter and rescues use to select adopters during adoption events.

Open-ended responses were analysed using inductive analysis.²⁸ One author (LL) reviewed the responses and created an initial codebook. The primary (EY) and secondary (BK) coders used the initial codebook to separately code 25 random responses. The coders compared the responses, discussed findings, and edited the codebook based on discrepancies. This process was repeated for an additional two sets of 25 random responses until the codes were agreed upon. Then the coders, each independently, coded half of the dataset according to the final codebook with a 10% overlap of responses. For each code, the overlapped responses were analysed for inter-coder

agreement using Cohen's kappa. Codes with a Cohen's kappa less than 0.65 or a frequency of less than 5% were removed. The qualitative results are presented as the prevalence of the theme across all responses. Each response could contain more than one theme. Quotes presented in the qualitative results were selected based on best representation of the responses.

To understand differences in adoption practices based on organisation size, the qualitative data were also tabulated by organisation size. The data are presented descriptively as the prevalence of the theme by number of animals in the shelters' care at maximum capacity. The proportions of each code were compared by organisation size using a Chi-squared test for each qualitative code about the methods of screening.

Results

Descriptive analysis

Organisations

A total of 484 participants completed the survey. Organisations throughout the U.S. responded to the survey, with 47 (10.3%) from the Northeast region, 114 (25.0%) from the Midwest region, 164 (36.0%) from the South region, and 131 (28.7%) from the West region. The states with the highest number of respondents were California ($n = 56$, 12.3%), Texas ($n = 26$, 5.7%), Ohio ($n = 24$, 5.3%), and Arizona ($n = 22$, 4.8%). There were no respondents from North Dakota, South Dakota, and Hawaii. Most respondents were a part of a private rescue

or humane society that had both dogs and cats ($n = 238$, 49.8%), had a brick-and-mortar facility ($n = 477$, 92.5%), used foster homes ($n = 442$, 92.5%), and had staff in their organisation ($n = 290$, 58.6%). The respondents' organisation characteristics are summarised in Table 1.

Adoption events

The highest proportion of organisations reported hosting adoption events weekly ($n = 158$, 33.1%). The adoption events were most commonly hosted in locally owned stores ($n = 259$, 54.4%), community areas ($n = 90$, 18.9%), and car dealerships ($n = 80$, 16.8%). Respondents reported that volunteers ($n = 298$, 62.5%) and shelter staff ($n = 224$, 47.0%) were primarily in charge of running adoption events. Volunteers ($n = 423$, 88.5%) and shelter staff ($n = 266$, 55.7%) were also primarily responsible for talking to potential adopters. All descriptive characteristics of adoption events are summarised in Table 2.

Chi-squared analyses revealed evidence of association between organisation size and the frequency of adoption events ($X^2_{(8, 478)} = 24.8$, $P = 0.002$), whether the adopter could take the animal straight home from an adoption event ($X^2_{(4, 478)} = 87.7$, $P < 0.001$), and whether the organisation required a home visit ($X^2_{(4, 478)} = 115.0$, $P < 0.001$). Generally, larger organisations held adoption events more frequently, were more likely to let adopters take animals straight home, and did not require a home visit (Table 2). The size of the organisation was associated with the number of days until cats ($X^2_{(8, 302)} = 26.7$, $P = 0.001$) and dogs ($X^2_{(8, 379)} = 70.3$, $P < 0.001$) went home after an adoption application. A larger proportion of organisations

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents' animal shelter organisation

Variable	Level	<i>n</i>	%
Type of organisation ($n = 487$)	Private rescue or humane society	238	49.8
	Dog rescue	77	16.1
	City/county/municipal shelter	66	13.8
	Cat rescue	53	11.1
	Breed-specific rescue	29	6.1
	Municipal/government contracts (constructed)	14	2.9
	Other	1	0.2
Brick-and-mortar facility ($n = 477$)	Yes	278	58.3
Use foster homes ($n = 478$)	Yes	442	92.5
Have staff in the organisation ($n = 475$)	Yes	290	58.9
Maximum capacity ($n = 479$)	Fewer than 50 animals	159	33.2
	50–150 animals	168	35.1
	150–250 animals	61	12.7
	250–350 animals	34	7.1
	350–450 animals	19	4
	More than 450 animals	38	7.9

For some variables, new levels have been constructed through re-classification based on open-ended responses in the 'Other' level.

Table 2. Characteristics of adoption events among the total population and stratified based on the size of the organisation

Variable	Level	Total		Size of organisation					
				Fewer than 50 animals		50–150 animals		150+ animals	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
		478		159		167		152	
Frequency of adoption events	Weekly	158	33.1	39	24.5	53	31.7	66	43.4
	Every 2 weeks	63	13.2	21	13.2	31	18.6	11	7.2
	Monthly	93	19.5	34	21.4	25	15.0	34	22.4
	Every few months	67	14.0	23	14.5	25	15.0	19	12.5
	A few times per year	97	20.3	42	26.4	33	19.8	22	14.5
		479		159		168		152	
Type of engagement with potential adopters	Half approach people or wait to be approached	201	42.0	53	33.3	76	45.2	72	47.4
	Engage people as they walk by	162	33.8	57	35.8	57	33.9	48	31.6
	Wait for potential adopters to approach	116	24.2	49	30.8	35	20.8	32	21.1
		478		159		168		152	
Can the adopter take the animal straight home from the adoption event?	Yes	229	47.8	42	26.4	73	43.5	114	75.0
	No	153	31.9	83	52.2	57	33.9	13	8.6
	Depends on the animal	97	20.3	34	21.4	38	22.6	25	16.4
		478		159		167		152	
Does your usual adoption process require a home visit?	Yes	142	29.7	90	56.6	42	25.1	10	6.6
	No	276	57.7	49	30.8	96	57.5	131	86.2
	Species/breed/case specific (<i>constructed</i>)	60	12.6	20	12.6	29	17.4	11	7.2
		302		71		112		119	
Number of days until cats will go home after an adoption application	1 day	183	60.6	28	39.4	67	59.8	88	73.9
	2–3 days	70	23.2	25	35.2	25	22.3	20	16.8
	3–5 days	30	9.9	10	14.1	15	13.4	5	4.2
	About a week	14	4.6	5	7.0	4	3.6	5	4.2
	Usually a few weeks	5	1.7	3	4.2	1	0.9	1	0.8
		379		139		134		106	
Number of days until dogs will go home after an adoption	1 day	159	42.0	26	18.7	60	44.8	73	68.9
	2–3 days	77	20.3	33	23.7	25	18.7	19	17.9
	3–5 days	56	14.8	30	21.6	19	14.2	7	6.6
	About a week	70	18.5	40	28.8	23	17.2	7	6.6
	Usually a few weeks	17	4.5	10	7.2	7	5.2	0	0.0
		477		159		166		152	
Type of training provided for staff to talk to potential adopters*	Inform them about shelter/rescue policies	412	86.4	135	84.9	141	84.9	136	89.5
	Inform them about appropriate animal handling at events	402	84.3	131	82.4	137	82.5	134	88.2
	Instruct them on how to talk to an adopter	347	72.7	103	64.8	118	71.1	126	82.9
	Teach them marketing strategies	112	23.5	30	18.9	26	15.7	56	36.8
	None/minimal training (<i>constructed</i>)	18	3.8	7	4.4	6	3.6	5	3.3
	Adoption counseling (<i>constructed</i>)	13	2.7	3	1.9	5	3.0	5	3.3
	Variable/other	6	1.3	2	1.3	2	1.2	2	1.3
		476		157		168		151	

Table 2. (Continued)

Variable	Level	Total		Size of organisation					
				Fewer than 50 animals		50–150 animals		150+ animals	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Location of adoption events*	Chain pet stores	366	76.9	102	65.0	136	81.0	128	84.8
	Locally owned stores	259	54.4	80	51.0	82	48.8	97	64.2
	Community areas (constructed)	90	18.9	34	21.7	22	13.1	34	22.5
	Car dealerships	80	16.8	8	5.1	22	12.5	51	33.8
	Chain outdoor sports stores	62	13.0	14	8.9	19	11.3	29	19.2
	Shopping malls	53	11.1	3	1.9	17	10.1	33	21.9
	Other	67	14.1	23	14.6	17	10.1	27	17.9
		477		159		166		152	
Person in charge of running adoption events*	Volunteers	298	62.5	123	77.4	105	63.3	70	46.1
	Shelter staff	224	47.0	28	17.6	77	46.4	119	78.3
	Leadership (constructed)	26	5.5	14	8.8	11	6.6	1	0.7
	Other	3	0.6	2	1.3	0	0.0	1	0.7
		477		159		166		152	
Person who talks to the potential adopters*	Volunteers	423	88.7	137	86.2	147	88.6	139	91.4
	Shelter staff	266	55.8	54	34.0	87	52.4	125	82.2
	Leadership (constructed)	17	3.6	7	4.4	9	5.4	1	0.7
	Fosters (constructed)	12	2.5	6	3.8	5	3.0	1	0.7

Percentages were calculated within each question by removing blank responses. Therefore, the sample size of respondents for each question varies slightly and the sample sizes reported in the first row of each variable. For some variables, new levels have been constructed through re-classification based on open-ended responses in the 'Other' level.

*Denotes questions where participants were able to select all that applied.

with more than 150 animals rehomed within 1 day (cats = 73.9%, dogs = 68.9%) in comparison to those with 50–150 animals (cats = 59.8%, dogs = 44.8%) and fewer than 50 animals (cats = 39.4%, dogs = 18.7%). The association between the size of the organisation and the type of engagement with potential adopters at adoption events was not significant ($X^2_{(4, 479)} = 9.0, P = 0.06$).

Among the select-all questions, there was no evidence of association between the organisation size and the type of training(s) selected by respondents. There were associations between organisation size and selecting chain pet stores ($X^2_{(2, 476)} = 9.7, P = 0.008$), community areas ($X^2_{(2, 479)} = 6.3, P = 0.04$), car dealerships ($X^2_{(2, 479)} = 21.5, P < 0.001$), and shopping malls ($X^2_{(2, 479)} = 15.8, P < 0.001$). Generally, organisations with more than 150 animals had a high proportion of respondents host events at all of these locations (Table 2).

Additionally, organisation size was associated with selecting volunteers ($X^2_{(2, 477)} = 49.1, P < 0.001$), shelter staff ($X^2_{(2, 477)} = 76.6, P < 0.001$), and leadership ($X^2_{(2, 477)} = 12.9, P = 0.002$) as the person in charge of running adoption events. Similarly, organisation size was associated with selecting volunteers ($X^2_{(2, 477)} = 10.6,$

$P = 0.005$), shelter staff ($X^2_{(2, 477)} = 21.5, P < 0.001$), and leadership ($X^2_{(2, 477)} = 7.3, P = 0.03$) as the people who were responsible for talking to potential adopters. For organisations with fewer than 50 animals, volunteers were more commonly in charge of running adoption events (77.4%), while organisations with more than 150 animals more commonly selected shelter staff (78.3%). On the other hand, organisations with more than 150 animals had the highest proportion of select volunteers (91.4%) and shelter staff (82.2%) as the people in charge of talking to adopters.

Qualitative analysis

For qualitative analysis, responses were removed from the original dataset if they did not answer either of the qualitative questions ($n = 444$). Qualitative analysis revealed three major groups of themes. The first group was 'methods of adopter selection', which included themes that outlined practices that animal shelters used to evaluate potential adopters. The second group of themes were 'information gathered by the animal shelter', which included themes that discussed the types of personal and pet-related details that were asked by the animal shelters

from potential adopters. The third group was ‘information provided by the animal shelter’, which included types of details about the pet or animal shelter that was provided to the potential adopters during the adoption process. Themes are ordered by prevalence within each group. Responses could contain multiple themes, therefore the percentages do not sum to 100.

Methods of screening

Questionnaire: The majority of participants (62.4%, $n = 277$) discussed using an initial questionnaire, survey, or application to begin their adoption process. Most respondents discussed gathering personal information about the potential adopter, their family, and their environment. For example, ‘We have an application that includes information regarding the family, the housing, how the animal will be housed, etc.’ (P205). Many respondents discussed that the questionnaire is used to guide conversations with staff during the adoption process. One respondent said, ‘We have an adopter survey designed to provoke an open conversation about adoption. Once the potential adopter fills out the survey, we engage in a conversation about what they are looking for and try to help them find the right match in a potential pet by asking questions and offering advice and suggestions’ (P219). Often, the application itself was used to decide whether the applicant was fit for an animal. For example, ‘Many times once we send them away to do that long and involved application, we never hear from them again which is a good thing because they either thought about it more or decided the application was too in depth’ (P250). On occasion, respondents did not agree with the questionnaire, ‘I’m not a fan of the written questionnaire but the shelter wants it to “keep people from changing their stories.” Yeah, the questionnaire is there to make it easier to deny adoptions’ (P145).

Vibes: The second most common theme mentioned was *vibes* (39.4%, $n = 175$). Participants in this theme discussed decision-making based on intuition or feeling when meeting or observing potential adopters (e.g. ‘We also depend on personal judgement to guide the approval process’, (P331), ‘Usually a lengthy conversation with a potential adopter tells us what we need to know, therefore personal information or vibes is important’, (P264)). Some participants believed that using gut-feeling reduced risk of return, ‘we have found that it is important to listen to our “gut feeling” along with reviewing the application as 90% of returns are adopters who looked great on paper, but we just had a gut feeling telling us it wouldn’t work. In all cases, we try not to discriminate based on that feeling’ (P267). Despite some participants stating they use open or conversation-based adoption practices, some still mentioned using feelings to make the decision. One participant said, ‘We have an open adoption policy unless we

get a gut feel that is not right and then we get a second opinion’ (P444), while another said, ‘We try to go with an open adoptions process. However, we all have biases and I can’t guarantee that employees don’t put off people they don’t feel good about’ (P434).

References: Participants in the *references* theme (31.8%, $n = 141$) discussed collecting personal or veterinary references from potential adopters. While some respondents always required references, in some cases, personal references were only required if the potential adopter did not have an established veterinarian, ‘We check vet references if possible, if not available, we ask for other references’ (P289). Some participants mentioned only checking references of unknown individuals (e.g. ‘We do check references if we do not personally know the individual’ (P404)), while others used references to follow up with concerns (e.g. ‘We do ask for a reference but we generally don’t check it except if we have a question or concern’ (P362)).

Meet and greet: Over a quarter of participants (27.7%, $n = 123$) discussed a meet and greet or playdate with the potential adopter, members of the family, friends, and/or current pets. For example, ‘We encourage any person that has a significant person in their life (girlfriend/parent/grandchild) and their dog to come to the meet and greet’ (P388). Some participants discussed qualifications for the meet and greet, for example, if the adopter had ‘dogs or kids 12 and under in the home’ (P280). Most participants in this theme conducted the meet and greet in the shelter or at an adoption event, ‘adopters complete an application. We then schedule a meet and greet or invite them to an adoption event to meet the dog’ (P63). Some mentioned that all household members must be present ‘everyone including other dogs, children and or spouse in the household need to come to the event to interact with the pet before we can let it go home. If everyone in the household was not available, this would be the time we would set up a future date for a home visit or for the family to visit the pet at the shelter’ (P470). Some described interactions during the meet and greet as the dogs’ choice, for example, ‘the dog decides if they want to go with them. If they refuse to interact or get really scared, we tell the adopters that it will not be a good fit’ (P190).

Home visit: Participants in the *home visit* theme (25.9%, $n = 115$) typically only mentioned home visits as a part of their application process, without further discussing the reason or procedures of the home visit. Some participants explained their purpose for home visits. For example, one participant said that visiting the potential adopters’ home, ‘gives us greater confidence in the adoption and adds to the relationship that is developed with the adopter’ (P447). Another participant said, ‘We may require a home visit with some breeds just to see if there are any laws in their area that would limit a certain breed of dog’ (P428).

Permission to have pets: Respondents in the *permission to have pets* theme (13.5%, $n = 60$) mostly mentioned either written (e.g. copy of lease) or verbal approval from the property owner, landlord, or homeowners association that pets are allowed in the home. For example, ‘we have a pretty extensive adoption form that asks the potential adopter if they are renters or owners, if they are renters they will need to provide proof that their landlord is okay with them adopting an animal and having the animal live in the home’ (P469).

Background check: Participants in the *background check* theme (11.3%, $n = 50$) discussed conducting a form of background check on potential adopters. Some mentioned doing more general criminal background checks, while others used specific animal abuse databases. For example, ‘we also do vet checks, reference checks, home visits, and criminal background checks to ensure no one in the home has been convicted of animal abuse and/or domestic violence (which sadly often includes abuse of the family pet)’ (P366). Others mentioned an internal ‘do-not-adopt’ list. For example, ‘[we check] if they have had animals before and if they are on a do not adopt list’ (P261).

Conversation-based: In our sample, 9.7% ($n = 43$) explicitly mentioned using conversation-based adoption processes. For example, ‘we work with the [Humane Society of the United States] Adopter’s Welcome model’ (P126). Some described the process as a means to find the right fit for an animal. One participant said, ‘we use a conversation-based approach. We don’t have a clear black-and-white process, but we also try not to base our decision off of any vibe. We recognize that good pet homes don’t all look the same and that it can be easy for our biases to creep into our conversations. If we turn anyone away, we are completely transparent about why and try to educate them on things they can do to adopt in the future’ (P377).

Information gathered by the animal shelter

Previous ownership: The most common type of information gathered during the adoption process was about previous or current ownership of pets (36.7%, $n = 163$). Sometimes, respondents asked explicitly about the general care of their previous animal, (‘they have a dog that lives outdoor only-red flag we will not adopt to them because we want our pets to live indoors’ (P297)), health care of their previous animals (e.g. ‘we make sure previous and current pets have been spayed/neutered’ (P458)) or about breed experience (e.g. ‘We ask if they have ever had an Akita before’ (P346)).

Pet caretaking: Participants in the *pet caretaking* theme (24.1%, $n = 107$) discussed gathering information about the potential adopters intended care for the animal. Most respondents inquired about pet caretaking because of adoption criteria, for example, ‘cats must be kept indoors and not declawed’ (P189) and ‘we do not allow our dogs

to be chained or tethered’ (P351). Other respondents asked potential adopters about plans for the health and behaviour of animals, ‘our questionnaire asks where the dog will be when you are not home? If the adopters select loose in the home, I can ask what their confinement plan is if the dog displays signs of separation anxiety’ (P530).

Expectations: Less than a quarter of participants (24.1%, $n = 107$) gathered information about *expectations* of pet ownership from the potential adopter. Sometimes, this was in regards to animal care. One respondent asked about ‘their expectations around exercise for the new pet’ (P293). Others discussed the expectations for the cost of owning an animal. For example, one respondent said they talk about the ‘importance of lifetime commitment and financial responsibility for the animal’ (P305). Similar to many of the other types of information gathered by respondents, many stated that the importance of understanding expectations was proper matching of adopters with pets. For example, ‘we focus on pet owner expectations and what they want from a pet, then we make recommendations as to which ones are a good match’ (P284).

Cohabitants: Participants in the *cohabitants* theme (22.5%, $n = 100$) asked potential adopters about their household or family members. Most of the participants in this theme inquired about whether there were children in the home. For example, one respondent asked potential adopters, ‘do they have a busy household? Are children often present?’ (P524). Some respondents asked potential adopters if all family members agreed to the decision to adopt a pet. One respondent asked if ‘everyone living in the home is on board with the adoption’ (P383). Potential concerns about household members extended to those with roommates, particularly those who were young adults. For example, one respondent said, ‘we recently had a 21-year-old man come in to look at a 130 pound mastiff. The adopter lived with four other roommates in age from 20 to 24 years old. We truly want to place this gentle giant in a home where he will be forever. Our thoughts were that this young man didn’t know what he would be doing next year, let alone for the duration of the life of the dog. We look for a stable situation for them’ (P458).

Home: Some participants gathered *home*-related information from potential adopters (18.9%, $n = 84$). Most often, the respondent mentioned generally discussing the home environment (e.g. living situation, home conditions). Often, this was related to the type of home (e.g. ‘We ask if they own their own home or rent, and if it is a home with land [or an] apartment’ (P448)) or whether the home had a fenced yard (e.g. ‘we require a fenced in yard for our medium [to] larger size dogs’ (P289)). Some respondents inquired further about the yard environment. For example, one respondent asked ‘what height is the fence?’ (P346), while another respondent asked ‘is [the fence] a chain link or private?’ (P255).

Lifestyle: Participants in the *lifestyle* theme (6.5%, $n = 29$) described that they ask about the day-to-day life of the participants. Most often, this included their employment, how long they would be away from their home, or their activity level. For example, one respondent asked about ‘how active they are [and] how many hours the animal will be alone each day’ (P500). Another participant said, ‘if they work 12 hours 5 days I am not adopting a puppy to them’ (P225).

Undisclosed checks: A small number of participants (5.2%, $n = 23$) discussed gathering information through *undisclosed checks*. Often, this was done through Google Maps; for example, ‘if we have any concerns, we Google the address to see if it is a safe neighbourhood and if it lists fencing. If we do not get good vibes, we require a home visit’ (P359). Sometimes, respondents checked the adopter’s social media either before (e.g. ‘[we] check social media accounts looking for unmentioned pets, instability, red flags’ (P339)) or after the adoption (e.g. ‘we keep up with the dogs after adoption through social media’ (P152)).

Information provided by the animal shelter

Individual animal characteristics: The majority of respondents (53.8%, $n = 239$) provided information about individual attributes of animals, such as the temperament, skills, special needs, history, or preferences of the animal. Described attributes were both positive (e.g. ‘if kids seem hesitant, we tell them the dogs are friendly and may tell them how to approach or show any commands the dog might know, [for example], “this is George, he’s very friendly! He knows how to sit and might do it for you if you ask him nicely”’ (P280)) and negative in nature (e.g. ‘if an animal has a medical or behavioural issue, we disclose that when talking about the animal’ (P283)).

Some respondents discussed focussing on positive attributes when marketing animals, for example, ‘if we have significant concerns such as escape artist or some sort of aggressive/reactive behaviours, we do make that known. [We] usually focus on the positives initially, but we want to make sure things are safe for all’ (P355).

Methods of screening by organisation size

The prevalence of each qualitative theme describing methods of selecting potential adopters is grouped by the organisations’ maximum capacity in Table 3. However, chi-squared tests for each code revealed no statistically significant differences in representation of themes across organisation size (all $P > 0.05$).

Discussion

Overall, organisations varied widely in the frequency and location of adoption events. For example, while the highest proportion of shelters/rescues conducted weekly adoption events, participant responses were evenly spread across the other frequencies as well. Organisations also reported procedural differences when hosting adoption events (e.g. location, people in charge). Respondents commonly reported that both volunteers and/or shelter staff oversaw events and were the ones to engage with potential adopters. Concurrently, Neumann²⁹ found that assisting with adoption events was the second most common duty performed by U.S. animal shelter volunteers (57.3%); although this study did not determine whether volunteers contributed to the actual processes of adoption.

As another example of varying protocols, generally, animals went home sooner than 5 days after an adoption application. However, the length of time to rehoming varied, with cats generally going home sooner than dogs. Further, approximately half of respondents said

Table 3. Frequency of qualitative themes describing methods of selecting adopters stratified by the maximum capacity of animal shelters and rescues ($n = 394$)

Code	Fewer than 50 animals ($n = 137$)		50–150 animals ($n = 132$)		150+ animals ($n = 125$)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Application/Questionnaire	78	56.9	83	62.9	81	64.8
Home Check	32	23.4	39	29.5	30	24.0
References	38	27.7	44	33.3	41	32.8
Permission to have pets	18	13.1	19	14.4	17	13.6
Meet and greet	41	30.7	32	24.2	40	32.0
Background check	17	12.4	17	12.9	14	11.2
Conversation based	14	10.2	13	9.8	13	10.4
Vibes	62	45.3	48	36.4	52	41.6

Qualitative themes that described methods of selection were produced based on open-ended responses to two questions (1) ‘Describe how you typically talk to a potential adopter in your own words. What information do you typically provide right away? Do you wait for them to ask you certain questions?’ (2) ‘Describe your process of screening or talking to the adopters. What is the official process of the shelter/rescue? Do you screen based on personal information/vibes? How do you decide whether the dog will go home with the adopter?’

that adopters can take animals straight home from adoption events. Indeed, not being able to take a pet home the same day may pose a barrier to adoption; a survey of public members found that the ability to take pets home the same day was one of the most valued characteristics of pet acquisition, particularly by those who had purchased, rather than adopted, their most recent animal.⁹ Similarly, Wang and colleagues³⁰ found that potential adopters in Taiwan found adoption applications to be too lengthy. As ease of adoption processes are valued by potential adopters, time to adoption after first application may indicate whether adoption processes are a barrier for adoption.

Our qualitative analysis revealed that the types of adoption processes used, as well as the reason why the process was used, varied across organisation. For example, most respondents disclosed the use of an application or questionnaire, although some respondents used questionnaires to drive conversations with adopters, while others used it to determine whether the adopter could go forward with the application. In the UK, 49% of surveyed animal shelters used pass/fail criteria for their application, where fixed criteria deemed whether the adopter was eligible to bring a dog home.¹² Similarly, an ethnographic study of multiple shelters found that approximately 50% of interested adopters were turned away at the initial inquiry phase.¹³ Another common adopter selection method, reported by a third of our respondents, was gathering veterinary or personal references from adopters. Here too, the criteria of selection differed by organisation, with some only checking references for some adopters, if there is a concern, or in every case. In an observational study implementing Capacity for Care in three Canadian animal shelters, recommendations to remove reference checks were made to reduce the length of stay for cats.²¹ Overall, our qualitative results indicate that, across organisations, protocols for common adopter selection procedures differed greatly spanning from more to less complex.

Several common adopter selection procedures used by respondents in our study may be inequitable because of logistical barriers. For example, some respondents reported that all members of the family or household had to be present for meet and greets with animals. Interviews of public members at a Taiwanese animal shelter found that potential adopters had difficulties with the restrictive location and hours of the shelter.³⁰ Similarly, Kresnye and Shih³¹ found that one challenge of adoption events was asking adopters to finalise the adoption at a shelter facility because of its isolated location. Basic procedures (e.g. hours of operation, location) may pose increased barriers to certain populations, such as those with family members working different schedules or those with mobility limitations.³²

Other procedures reported in our study may expose potential adopters to barriers based on personal or

economic circumstance. For example, home visits were reported by a quarter of participants. Similarly, Griffin and colleagues¹² found that nearly half of the characteristics deemed most important by the UK animal shelter staff pertained to the potential adopters' accommodation, including the yard, building type, and features of the accommodation. However, few organisations reported using a standardised method to conduct home visits. The subjectivity of home checks may allow for economic discrimination for those who do not live in owned, standalone homes.³³ In addition, the types of information gathered by animal shelter staff may also expose interested adopters to discrimination. For example, shelter staff commonly reported gathering information about the cohabitants of the potential adopters' household. Previous research shows that certain demographics, including families with children, are more likely to own pets.^{34,35} However, our results are congruent with previous literature that found that shelters often have requirements for the age of children,¹² which may deter families with children from adopting animals.

Finally, the use of subjective decision-making in the adoption process may expose potential adopters to unconscious bias. When asked, 39% of respondents reported using 'vibes' or 'gut-feeling' to determine whether a person was suitable to adopt an animal. Even those who employ open adoption practices noted using some degree of personal judgement to select adopters or pose additional criteria (e.g. requiring further application procedures). Indeed, implicit bias, or attitudes typically regarding ethnicity, race, age, or appearance that unconsciously impact decisions, may influence the adoption processes of organisations. In British Columbia, Canada, 52% of animals surrendered to shelters were adopted out to communities with low proportions of racialised and immigrant populations¹¹; however, more research is needed to understand whether this is because of implicit bias during the adoption process.

Our final study aim was to determine whether there are differences between adoption processes of smaller private rescues and larger animal shelters. In support of the previous findings,^{3,6,26} we found that large animal shelters had fewer logistical barriers during adoption processes compared to small shelters – higher frequency of holding off-site adoption events, ability to take a pet home the same day, and not requiring a home visit prior to adoption. However, there were no differences in all other potential barriers, including on the use of 'vibes' to select adopters. Our data suggest that the possibility of implicit bias when selecting adopters is present for both large and small animal sheltering organisations.

Several notable limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of these data. Firstly, the original aim of the survey was to only address the first aim: describe typical activities aimed at the adoption of cats and dogs at

off-site adoption events. However, the resulting data created an opportunity to further explore the existence of potential barriers to adoption. Because this was not the original aim of the survey, many questions could have been improved in order to more directly target adoption barriers, the possibility of implicit bias, and to remove leading questions. Namely, the qualitative questions ask directly about ‘vibes’. As such, it is expected that at least some respondents would use that term. Secondly, while the survey was distributed to representatives to answer on behalf of their organisation, we have no way of knowing whether the survey was then completed by multiple individuals at the same shelter. Finally, while our data does show logistical adoption barriers related to adoption events, it does not demonstrate the existence of implicit bias – only the possibility that it can affect adopter screening. To demonstrate the occurrence of implicit bias, an experimental study would need to be conducted that varies adopter screening practices, assesses implicit bias in individual staff or volunteers, and demonstrates a negative impact on adopter success. However, previous research has found that approximately 75% of people in the U.S. have some implicit bias,³⁶ and our study shows that current screening protocols at adoption events allow for people to express their bias.

Other limitations include the self-selection of participants as the qualitative results only represent what the shelter staff chose to disclose about their organisations’ practices. Therefore, the percentage of qualitative codes within a certain category (e.g. size of shelter) should not be used to assess prevalence of practices. Additionally, the data were collected in 2016, and adoption practices may have changed since then.

Conclusion

Our study provides insights into the adoption practices of animal shelters that host off-site adoption events. We found that animal sheltering organisations have procedural differences, including variations in the locations and frequency of events, and procedures for the selection of adopters. While animal shelters commonly use selection methods such as an application or questionnaire, reference checks, or meet and greets, the criteria and protocols for these procedures differ among organisations. These procedures may be logistical barriers to adoption, such as requiring all members of the family or household to be present for meet and greets with animals. Additionally, the reliance on subjective feelings, such as ‘vibes’ or ‘gut feelings’ about a potential adopter may open the door to unintended discriminatory selections of adopters. We found that large animal shelters had fewer logistical barriers compared to small shelters, but both types of organisations showed a potential for implicit bias when selecting adopters. We conclude that there is a need for increased research, awareness, and training to understand

and address the issue of implicit bias in animal sheltering organisations.

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Conflict of interest and funding

Sheila Segurson is employed by Maddie’s Fund, who provided funds for the study. Segurson assisted with initial questionnaire development and final edits of the manuscript but not with analysis nor interpretation of the data.

Statement of ethics

All survey materials and procedures were approved by Texas Tech University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB2017-660).

Author credit statement

This survey was originally developed by AP and SS. LHL, KB, and AP conceived the study objectives using a subset of the original survey. Data analysis was conducted by LHL, EY, BK, and AP. The manuscript was initially written by LHL, EY, and BK, with subsequent versions of the manuscript edited by all authors.

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Appendix – Survey

*Author note: Questions in **Bold** have been included in the analysis. Questions not in bold have not been included in the analysis of data for this study.*

Data for the analysed questions and accompanying R Code for analysis can be found at https://github.com/lexisly/adoption_events/

Q1 Information and Consent. Thank you for your interest in participating in this survey! This study sets out to better understand how adoption events are conducted across the United States. At this time, we are asking that only owners, staff, and administrators of animal shelters, humane societies, and/or rescue groups participate.

You will be asked to answer questions regarding your facility, the ways your adoption events are conducted, and your opinions about adoption events. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. There are no risks or direct benefits anticipated from participating in this study. You can close the survey at any moment if you would like to stop participation and your responses will not be saved. All data will be kept anonymous. No identifying information will be collected.

If you have questions, you can call or email the researchers conducting this study: XXXXX from the Department of Animal and Food Science XXXXX at Texas Tech University (TTU). TTU also has a Board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can ask them questions at 806-742-2064 or email them at hrpp@ttu.edu. You can also mail your questions to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409.

By clicking this box, I verify that I have read the information above and consent to participate in the study.

I consent (1)

Q2 Which best describes you?

- Owner, director, or staff of a shelter/rescue group/humane society (1)
- Not a staff member of a shelter/rescue group/humane society (2)
-

Display This Question:

If Which best describes you? = Not a staff member of a shelter/rescue group/humane society

Q2b Thank you so much for your time! At this time, we are only surveying staff of animal shelters/rescue groups/humane societies.

Skip To: End of Survey If Q2b- (1) Is Displayed

Q3 In what state is your shelter located?

▼ AL (1) ... WY (50)

Q4 Is your organization a...

- City/county/municipal shelter (1)
- Private rescue organization or humane society (dogs and cats) (2)
- Dog rescue (dogs only) (3)
- Cat rescue (cats only) (4)
- Breed-specific rescue (5)
- Other (6) _____
-

Q5 Does your organization operate out of a brick and mortar facility?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)
- Not sure (please explain) (3) _____
-

Q6 Do you use foster homes for your animals?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not sure (please explain) (3) _____
-

Q7 Does your organization have staff?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not sure (please explain) (3) _____
-

Q8 At max capacity, for how many animals does your facility/program provide care?

- Fewer than 50 animals (1)
 - 50–150 animals (2)
 - 150–250 animals (3)
 - 250–350 animals (4)
 - 350–450 animals (5)
 - More than 450 animals (6)
-

Q8 Approximately what percentage of your cats get adopted?

Q9 Do you use claw caps on the cats you bring to adoption events?

- Always (1)
 - Sometimes (2)
 - Usually not (3)
 - Never (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q10 Approximately what percentage of your dogs get adopted? (Please write NA if not applicable)

Q11 How long do dogs typically stay in your program prior to an adoption?

- Less than a week (1)
 - A few weeks (2)
 - About a month (3)
 - A few months (4)
 - About half a year or more (5)
 - N/A (6)
-

Q12 How long do cats typically stay in your program prior to an adoption?

- Less than a week (1)
- A few weeks (2)
- About a month (3)
- A few months (4)

- About half a year (5)
 - N/A (6)
-

*

Q13 If you know your average length of stay for cats, please enter it here (Please write NA if not applicable):

*

Q14 If you know your average length of stay for dogs, please enter it here (Please write NA if not applicable):

Q15 How often does your facility have adoption events outside of the shelter?

- Weekly (1)
- Every 2 weeks (2)
- Monthly (3)
- Every few months (4)
- A few times per year (5)
- Never (6)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q15 = Never (6)

Q16 Where does your facility hold these adoption events?

- Locally owned stores (1)
 - Chain pet stores (e.g. PetSmart, Petco, etc.) (2)
 - Chain outdoor sports stores (e.g. Cabellas, Academy, etc.) (3)
 - Car dealerships (4)
 - Shopping malls (5)
 - Personal private facility (rescue rents out a building for an event) (6)
 - Other (7) _____
-

Q17 On average, how long are your adoption events?

- less than 2 hours (1)
 - 2–6 hours (2)
 - more than 6 hours (3)
-

Q18 On average, how many dogs do you typically bring to adoption events?

- 1–10 (1)
 - 11–20 (2)
 - 21–30 (3)
 - 31–40 (4)
 - More than 40 (5)
 - N/A (6)
-

Q19 On average, how many cats do you bring to your adoption events?

- Less than 5 (1)
 - 5–10 (2)
 - 10 or more cats (3)
 - Depends on if we have litters kittens (4)
 - Our facility does not have cats/bring them to adoption events (5)
-

Q20 On average, do you bring mostly large or small dogs to adoption events?

- Mostly large/medium (1)
 - Mostly small (2)
 - A mix of large and small dogs (3)
 - N/A (4)
-

Q21 Approximately how old are the dogs you take to adoption events?

- Mostly puppies (1)
 - Adults under 6 years of age (2)
 - 6+ Years (3)
 - All ages (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q22 Approximately how old are the cats you take to adoption events?

- Mostly kittens (1)
 - Adults under 6 years of age (2)
 - 6+ Years (3)
 - All ages (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q23 Do you bring blankets/bedding/towels for the dogs to lie on during adoption events?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - Sometimes (3)
 - N/A (4)
-

Q24 Do you bring blankets/bedding/towels for the cats to lie on during adoption events?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - Sometimes (3)
 - N/A (4)
-

Q25 Where do dogs stay while at adoption events?

- In crates (1)
 - In x-pens (alone) (2)
 - In x-pens (with a person) (3)
 - In x-pens (with other dogs) (4)
 - On a leash (5)
 - Other (6)
 - N/A (7)
-

Q26 Where do cats stay while at adoption events?

- Multiple cats/kittens in a large crate/cage (1)
 - One cat per crate/kennel/cage (2)
 - N/A (3)
-

Q27 Do you ever have cats being held by volunteers or staff during adoption events?

- Sometimes (1)
 - Only kittens (2)
 - Never (3)
 - N/A (4)
-

Q28 Do you usually have at least one dog leashed (rather than in a crate/pen) at your adoption events?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - N/A (3)
-

Q29 Are the dogs walked around the surrounding area?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - We do not have leashed dogs at our adoption events. (3)
 - N/A (4)
-

Q30 If you walk leashed dogs around the surrounding area of your adoption event, who walks these dogs?

- Staff (1)
 - Volunteers (2)
 - Potential adopters (3)
 - Other (4) _____
 - N/A (5)
-

Q31 Do you provide toys for your dogs while they are at the event?

- Always (1)
 - Sometimes (2)
 - Usually not (3)
 - Never (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q32 Do you provide toys for your cats while they are at the event?

- Always (1)
 - Sometimes (2)
 - Usually not (3)
 - Never (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q33 Do you provide edibles/rawhide/chew toys to your dogs at the events?

- Always (1)
 - Sometimes (2)
 - Usually not (3)
 - Never (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q34 Do you provide treats/catnip for cats at adoption events?

- Always (1)
 - Sometimes (2)
 - Usually not (3)
 - Never (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q35 Do any dogs wear vests that advertise adoption?

- Yes, all dogs (1)
 - Yes, some dogs (2)
 - Yes, but only the leashed dogs (3)
 - None of our dogs wear these vests (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q36 Do your cats wear collars and/or harnesses at the adoption event?

- Yes, the entire time (1)
 - No, never (2)
 - N/A (3)
-

Q37 Do your dogs wear collars and/or harnesses at the adoption event?

- Yes, the entire time (1)
 - No, never (2)
 - Yes, but only while being walked/on a leash (3)
 - N/A (4)
-

Q38 Do your dogs ever wear clothes? (e.g. Bandana, sweaters, Tutus, shirts, etc.)

- Yes, usually (1)
 - Never (2)
 - Sometimes (3)
 - Rarely (4)
 - N/A (5)
-

Q39 Do your cats ever wear clothes? (e.g. Bandana, sweaters, shirts, etc.)

- Yes, usually (1)
 Never (2)
 Sometimes (3)
 Rarely (4)
 N/A (5)
-

Q40 What size are the dogs that usually wear clothes? (e.g. Bandana, sweaters, tutus, shirts, etc.)

- Small dogs (1)
 Large/medium dogs (2)
 N/A (3)
-

Q41 Who is in charge of running and managing the adoption events?

- Shelter staff (1)
 Volunteers (2)
 Other (3) _____
-

Q42 Who answers questions/talks to potential adopters?

- Shelter staff (1)
 Volunteers (2)
 Other (3) _____
-

Q43 Do your staff/volunteers engage people as they walk by or do they let potential adopters approach them prior to engaging?

- They typically engage people as they walk by (1)
 They typically wait for potential adopters to approach them or ask questions about the animals (2)
 About half approach people and half wait to be approached (3)
 Not sure (please explain) (4) _____ w_____
-

Q44 At your adoption events, is it possible for an adopter to take the animal home straight from the event?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)
 Depends on the animal (3)
-

Q48 Does your usual adoption process require a home visit?

- Yes (1)
 No (2)
 Sometimes (please explain) (3) _____
-

Q49 On average, how many days does it take before a dog goes home to the adopter after the adopter submitted an application?

- 1 day (1)
 2–3 days (2)
 3–5 days (3)
 About a week (4)
 Usually a few weeks (5)
 N/A (6)
-

Q50 On average, how many days does it take before a cat goes home to the adopter after the adopter submitted an application

- 1 day (1)
 2–3 days (2)
 3–5 days (3)
 About a week (4)
 Usually a few weeks (5)
 N/A (6)
-

Q51 What is your policy on spaying and neutering of adoptable pets? For example, do all animals need to be fixed prior to adoption or do you allow unfixed animals to go home? Do you provide vouchers/certificates or contacts?

Q52 What kind of training do you provide to staff and/or volunteers on how to talk to potential adopters?

- Inform them about shelter/rescue policies (1)
 Inform them about appropriate animal handling at events (2)
 Instruct them on how to talk to an adopter (3)

- Teach them marketing strategies (4)
- Other (please explain) (5) _____

Q53 Describe how you typically talk to a potential adopter in your own words. What information do you typically provide right away? Do you wait for them to ask you certain questions?

Q54 Describe your process of screening or talking to the adopters. What is the official process of the shelter/rescue? Do you screen based on personal information/vibes? How do you decide whether the dog will go home with the adopter?

Q55 Do you try to ensure that your dogs behave a certain way at the events? If so, how? (Please write NA if not applicable)

Q56 Do you try to ensure that your cats behave a certain way at the events? If so, how? (Please write NA if not applicable)

Q57 In your experience, what behaviours that dogs display during events turn adopters off? (Please write NA if not applicable)

Q58 In your experience, what behaviours that cats display during events turn adopters off? (Please write NA if not applicable)

Q59 Thank you very much for participating in this survey! Your answers are very important and will pave the way for new research into adoption events!
