

Part Two: Accreditation? The Impact and Benefits are in the Details!

This paper continues the discussion from the GFAS e-newsletter (February 2020), of the direct impacts and benefits animal welfare sanctuaries and rescues experience as a result of their commitment to become GFAS accredited or verified. While it is broadly accepted that GFAS certification provides recognition to sanctuaries and rescue organizations worldwide confirming their provision of humane and responsible care, few understand the direct impacts and benefits other than the applicants themselves.

For a six-month period in 2019, direct accreditation outcomes were tabulated for 37 groups that completed their certification (new groups, renewals, verifications and accreditations). Direct accreditation outcomes were defined as specific actions taken by organizations during the process of becoming certified to meet GFAS standards of best practices. These could be in animal care, management, governance, policy development and safety. In total 45 specific GFAS standards were addressed by sanctuaries and rescues during their application process.

Table 1 shows the most frequent actions/improvements made by animal sanctuaries and rescue organizations as a direct result of their involvement in the GFAS accreditation process. Not surprisingly, the top three areas of impact involve improvements in **risk management**. We all agree that caring for animals-in-need requires compassion and dedication. It is a labor of love and it is very hard work. Despite good intentions, many animal welfare organizations have failed, or have reached the end of their resources placing the very animals they care about in jeopardy. Caring is essential but so is good business management, solid financial resources and ethical governance practices.

Table 1

GFAS Accreditation Impacts on Organizations July-December 2019		N=37
Category/Standard	Percent of Groups Impacted	
PF-6 Security: General Safety Monitoring	35%	
G-7 Strategic Planning	32	
S-6 Disaster Preparedness Plans and Protocols	30	
S-2 Animal Care Standard Operation Procedures	27	
H-1 Housing and Fencing	24	
S-9 Human First Aid	24	
F-4 Insurance and Risk Management	22	
F-1 Budget and Financial Reports	16	

G-2 Ownership of Rescue/Sanctuary Property and Contingency Planning	16
G-3 Succession Planning	16
G-4 Board of Directors/Trustees or Equivalent	16

PF-6 Security: General Safety Monitoring

Covered in more detail in GFAS e-newsletter (February 2020), thirty-five percent (35%) of sanctuaries and rescues that were certified during the 6-month tabulation period made significant improvements to the fire safety of their facilities. All barns, stables and indoor animal housing are essentially a fire waiting to happen. Although GFAS Standard PF-6: Security: General Safety and Monitoring specifies more than just fire safety, 35% of organizations certified by GFAS made specific fire safety improvements (**Table 2**). Some changes were as simple as the addition of a fire alarm or a fire extinguisher, or the more complicated improvement to electrical wiring, but each improvement that could potentially prevent a fire or save a life, is invaluable.

Table 2

PF-6 Security: General Safety Monitoring



- Improvement to fire safety status of facility with installation of sufficient smoke alarms and fire extinguishers
- Required extra measures to be taken to protect animals from fire, flood and hazards such as removal of hay from building in which animals are housed
- Required extra measures to be taken to protect animals from fire, flood and hazards such as removal of hazardous and flammable materials
- Improved electrical, heating and cooling equipment increasing safety of facility

G-7 Strategic Planning

The second most frequent change that sanctuaries and rescues accomplished during their application process was in strategic planning. Strategic planning impacted thirty-two percent (32%) of the applicants during this tabulation period.

GFAS standard G-7 Strategic Planning specifies that a sanctuary/rescue have at least a three-year strategic plan in writing. The strategic plan should contain a description of primary goals and activities to achieve those goals. The sanctuary/rescue should have a long-term financial plan in writing that projects future revenue and expenses, consistent with the priorities set out in the strategic plan.” **But, why is this important?**

A common analogy explaining the importance, is to compare the purpose of a strategic to the purpose of a script for a group of actors. A script lays out the plot of the story, line by line. Without this direction, actors would be making up the story as they go, ending with nothing potentially but confusion.

Like a script, a strategic plan determines where an organization is going over the next few years, how it’s going to get there, and how it’ll know if it got there or not. There are a variety of perspectives, models and approaches used in strategic planning. It does not have to be complicated, but it should address:

1. What is the real purpose of the sanctuary/rescue?
2. What are the results you want to achieve?
3. How can you best achieve this?
4. Who will make this happen?
5. Do you have the resources (people and finances) to make it happen?

GFAS staff provide guidelines, examples and encouragement to help organizations develop their multi-year strategic and financial plans. Providing good animal care and compassion is not enough. Major donors, community leaders, law enforcement officials and staff and volunteers expect sanctuaries and rescues to have written plans.

Table 3

G-7 Strategic Planning

- Improvement in long range financial planning consistent with strategic plan
- Promoted and guided the development of a strategic plan for improved risk management and sustainability of the organization



- Impacted risk management and sustainability by requiring updated strategic plan that outlines the goals and course of action needed to shape the future of the organization

S-6 Disaster Preparedness Plans and Protocols

The **third** most frequent improvement or change sanctuaries and rescues implemented, was their preparedness for disasters and emergencies (Table 4). Thirty percent (30%) of accreditation/verification applicants made significant progress to their disaster plans and protocols. Disasters can arise in various forms whether they are natural disasters or man-made disasters. Natural disasters could be winter storms, droughts, tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, tsunamis' and floods. Examples of man-made disasters include closures of a nearby sanctuary/rescue, large hoarding situations, terrorism, dangerous animal escapes, injuries or a property fire. GFAS helps guide sanctuaries and rescues to write detailed plans that address their most likely emergency events, determine how vulnerable the sanctuary or rescue may be, and determine ways to mitigate the consequences of an occurrence.

Table 4

S-6 Disaster Preparedness Plans and Protocols

- Strengthened disaster preparedness by developing/revising plan
- Strengthened disaster preparedness by requiring regular drills/training to ensure procedures are followed and effective



- Strengthened disaster preparedness by ensuring emergency information is posted in appropriate locations

The GFAS Accreditation process requires time and commitment. It is not a pass/fail process but one where nonprofit sanctuaries and rescues are given the opportunity to identify their strengths and challenges and with GFAS resources and mentoring, increase their likelihood of providing humane and responsible animal care for many years.