



# Helping Low Income Pet Owners- Free Spay/Neuter Surgery

Project #  
20-511

County: Baltimore City

Number of Cats Spayed:	240	Number of Dogs Spayed:	144
Number of Cats Neutered:	230	Number of Dogs Neutered:	118

Amount Received: \$47,600	Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): 0
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### Project Synopsis:

This project targeted 700 owned pets from the low-income zip codes in Baltimore City of 21217, 21223, 21225, 21229, and 21230 so that BARCS could provide no-cost spay/neuter surgeries and rabies vaccinations.



### Project Description:

Baltimore City has only a handful of low-cost veterinary clinics and public transportation does not permit pets, therefore, routine veterinary care or help with spay/neuter surgery is almost non-existent for low-income pet owners. BARCS always strives to do more for these pet families. BARCS provided free spay/neuter surgery and rabies vaccines to 732 owned pets from targeted low-income zip codes in Baltimore City. Most of these zip codes are our areas of highest surrender and Animal Control impounds.

As a result of the pandemic, we found it necessary to request a Change of Scope for an extension of this project through March 2021 so we could achieve our goal. With that, we also requested that several other low-income zip codes in Baltimore City be added as we were getting far more requests for free spay/neuter surgery from at-risk neighborhoods that were not included in the initial targeted zip codes provided for in this grant.

### Summary of Approach:

We can't thank the Maryland Department of Agriculture enough for supporting the free spay/neuter surgery and rabies vaccinations for 700 under-resourced owned pets. We added at least two surgery spots daily to accommodate these owned pets with a plan to increase that number over time.

Even prior to the start of this grant cycle our Resource Coordinators were taking calls from literally hundreds of underserved pet owners feeling they need to surrender their beloved pet because they are lacking resources each year. Our Intake Prevention team leaves no stone unturned to offer necessary resources so their pet can be kept with their family, which also includes free spay/neuter surgery and rabies vaccinations. It is from this



under-resourced population of pet owners that we selected the free spay/neuter surgery candidates in the targeted zip codes. Churches and neighborhood groups in these targeted zip codes, as well as Animal Control, helped us to promote this free spay/neuter project up until COVID-19.

The total goal of 732 owned pets for this project is only from the targeted zip codes of 21217, 21223, 21225, 21229, and 21230. With a Change of Scope we added 21202, 21213, 21215, 21216, and 21231. We have performed many more spay/neuter surgeries on owned pets from other low-income zip codes throughout Baltimore City. We also offered free transportation for anyone in Baltimore City that was unable to drop off or pick up their pet for spay/neuter surgery up until the pandemic.

In March 2020, as the pandemic unfolded, our activities and many programs were placed on hold, including all surgery. Our staff was restricted to working only on day-to-day operations. For safety and contact tracing, many of our 75 employees were working from home and the balance had been divided into two teams of approximately 20 employees that worked at BARCS only on specific days.

In addition to the mandatory shut-down of surgery due to COVID-19, BARCS was also in the process of clearing our shelter of as many animals as possible in anticipation of the move into our new City-built shelter located in the zip code of our highest intake. The actual move took place on May 5, 2020, when BARCS ceased all operations a week prior to the move and approximately one month after moving in to iron out any logistical issues with the new building and to get any remaining animals and new animals coming in daily, settled.

Surgery reopened in mid-June on a limited basis. The BARCS surgery team started to play “catch-up” by contacting the more than 2,000 new pet owners that adopted an animal from BARCS during the height of the pandemic. Best practices during the pandemic were to send all of these pets home unaltered with an agreement that the owner would bring their pet back to BARCS once contacted for their spay/neuter surgery. We did this for all unaltered redeemed pets, as well. Our TNR program also resumed mid-June and the BARCS surgical team began altering any community cats that came in.

With a reduced medical/surgical staff and no longer having two vets operating on the same day as was previously done, the number of surgeries continued throughout the summer was also reduced. For this reason, we had not yet resumed altering underserved-owned pets since we were just able to keep up with spay/neuter of our shelter animals and TNR until the fall.

In October 2020, it became obvious that we would need a Change of Scope to request an extension to March 31, 2021, in order to be able to reach our goal. We also had some basic data gathered and it was apparent that low-income pet owners were coming in from pockets of underserved zip codes throughout Baltimore City and we needed to add in several more zip codes in addition to the original five zip codes in the grant application

By November 2020 some of the pandemic’s restrictions were lifted so we reopened our monthly low-cost vaccination clinic in November that assists as many as 300 owned pets with vaccines, microchips, and free spay/neuter vouchers on the first Saturday each month. These low-cost vaccine clinics are another target market for this free Pet-Focused spay/neuter project and we made sure everyone that attended received our flyer about free spay/neuter surgery with all of the pertinent information.

At the beginning of 2021, we resumed the marketing efforts for this program with social media posts and flyers posted throughout the targeted zip codes. With more zip codes added from the Change of Scope, more under-resourced pet owners began scheduling appointments for free spay/neuter surgery for their pets and we were able to reach our goal by the third week in March.

We resumed advertising in the recreation centers, churches, and community associations of the targeted zip codes. The Transformation Center, our partner in Brooklyn for hosting the monthly BARCS low-cost vaccine clinics, have been providing information about this free spay/neuter surgery project to their clients.



We have translated our information into Spanish since Cherry Hill (21225) has a large Hispanic population.

Now that we have a reduced shelter intake, we have more space on the surgery schedule for public drop-offs of free spay/neuter surgery for low-income owned pets. We have also changed the schedule so that one Resource Department staff member each day can assist the surgery staff early in the morning by efficiently checking in any public drop-offs for this project.

**Accomplishments:**

BARCS always practices compassion without judgment by administering progressive, barrier-free programs that assist vulnerable pets and their families. When Baltimore's at-risk pet owners fall upon hard times, BARCS will always do our best, with limited resources, to provide services and resources in any way we can--our hallmark as Maryland's largest open-admission animal shelter. We are so proud to have helped 732 underserved pets with free spay/neuter surgery and rabies vaccinations.

For this project, BARCS altered 470 owned cats (at a grant expense of \$35 each totaling \$16,450) and 262 owned dogs (at a grant expense of \$105 each totaling \$27,510) plus all 732 pets received a rabies vaccination (at a grant expense of \$5 each, totaling \$3,660). BARCS expended \$47,620 for this project from the \$47,600 in total grant funding.

BARCS has always worked closely with under-resourced pet owners in Baltimore City's most impoverished neighborhoods. As funding became available, we did our best to offer free pet clinics in the communities with the most need. Once we moved into our new City-built shelter in Cherry Hill, we were inundated with requests for free spay/neuter surgery, and also to partner with many agencies to offer free or reduced medical care for owned pets. While BARCS struggles to support new positions, we took a leap of faith and have created a new Community Pet Program. We just hired a Community Pet Program Coordinator to manage all of these requests and to develop more relationships in the City's underserved communities to determine how BARCS can best meet the needs of the City's most vulnerable owned pets.

**Lessons Learned:**

One of the changes we implemented was to make reminder calls the evening before to help ensure that appointments are kept. No shows tend to be the largest obstacle with scheduling and making reminder calls beforehand was a valuable lesson learned.

While this Pet-Focused grant focuses on ten targeted zip codes, we are finding that low-income pet owners are seeking our assistance for spay/neuter surgery from every zip code in Baltimore City. As such, we added several more low-income zip codes to our current Pet-Focused grant application.

BARCS is currently working closely with the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development to remove dog breed restrictions from their public housing developments of Perkins Homes and LaTrobe Homes--two of the oldest housing/Section 8 projects in Baltimore. Part of the plan to remove breed restrictions is that BARCS would spay/neuter any pets (dogs and cats) living in those public housing developments for free.

The most valuable lesson we learned is how flexible we are when facing a global pandemic.

**Attachments:**

Spreadsheet of all 732 Owned Pets, Spay/Neuter Flyer

**For More Information Contact:**

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**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
**SPAY AND NEUTER GRANTS PROGRAM**

