



BROOKS  
CONGRESS  
2020

# Challenges & Opportunities for Animal Protection

*A summary of feedback from animal protection  
leaders, presented at the Brooks Congress 2020*



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# Introduction

In February 2020, the Brooks Institute hosted nearly 80 of the most influential members of the animal protection community at the inaugural Brooks Congress. The event was designed to foster an environment of new thinking, inspiration, and collaboration with a focus on high-level strategies to achieve positive change for nonhuman animals. The Congress featured three renowned presenters, breakout sessions for small group discussion among all of the Congress Delegates, and structured time for reflective thinking, networking, and individual rejuvenation.

During the proceedings, each Congress Delegate was asked to provide a short response to the question, “What is the biggest challenge or opportunity for the animal protection movement?” The insights shared by these animal protection leaders reflect their deep expertise and unique perspectives that come from diverse backgrounds and disciplines. This summary paper describes the overall themes that these leaders raised during their talks, including the most important challenges and opportunities for the global animal protection community.

## Summary

Brooks Congress Delegates underscored the many challenges faced by the global animal protection community. Chief among those were understanding how to address notions of human exceptionalism and preeminence (i.e., traditional views of human dominance over animals) and a lack of evidence for what strategies and tactics have the greatest impact for animals. Other key challenges include ensuring animals are part of climate and environmental policies, healing the movement’s internal traumas, and increasing emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Although these challenges are substantial, the Congress Delegates identified more opportunities for the animal protection movement than challenges, on average. Among the most important opportunities is to make animals a meaningful part of the climate discussion and partner with environmentalists to enact policies that help both animals and the planet. Other key opportunities include conducting more high-quality research to determine the most effective forms of advocacy, generally increasing awareness of animal consciousness and sentience, and focusing more on humane education – especially influencing young minds and hearts.

In the following pages, we describe in greater detail the most important challenges and opportunities identified by the Congress Delegates.

# Most Important Challenges

*Brooks Congress Delegates discussed a variety of key challenges facing the global animal protection movement. Here we discuss the most prevalent themes.*

MAIN THEMES	Mentions <sup>1</sup>	Proportions <sup>2</sup>
Traditional views of animals	16	22%
Lack of research and data	16	22%
The climate change crisis	14	19%
Healing internal trauma	11	15%
Diversity & inclusion	9	13%
Lack of political power	8	11%
Inadequate laws and enforcement	8	11%

## TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF ANIMALS

A key challenge identified by the Congress Delegates is the longstanding and widely held belief that humans are exceptional and that animals exist for our benefit. This kind of “binary thinking,” as one leader described, gives people a sense of permission to be indifferent about the rights and freedoms of nonhuman animals. This perceived dualism creates a major obstacle to advancing animal protection efforts and suggests that making compassion toward all animals a cultural norm may require a paradigm shift for human society.

<sup>1</sup> Delegates were asked for their individual perspective of the biggest challenge for the animal protection movement. Some delegates offered one theme while others offered more. Of the 72 Delegates contributing, “Mentions” is the total number of times that the theme arose in Delegates’ comments. Because some Delegates mentioned just one “important” challenge and others mentioned more, there is a “weighting” of perceived importance that is missing from the raw numbers.

<sup>2</sup> “Proportions” is the number of theme Mentions divided by 72 (the number of contributing Delegates).

## LACK OF RESEARCH & DATA

According to the Congress Delegates, an equally important challenge for the animal protection movement is a lack of reliable data. Specifically, they noted a need to better understand behavior change and what strategies and tactics work best to create positive impact for animals. Comments ranged from general concerns about lack of research coordination and prioritization to more specific concerns about being able to accurately assess the impact and effectiveness of different animal-related programs, policies, and interventions.

## THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

The global climate crisis is commanding a great deal of attention and has a sense of urgency. For the Congress Delegates, another key challenge is ensuring that animals remain a relevant part of environmental advocacy and policies. Meeting this challenge, according to the speakers, may require establishing new forms of communication and collaboration that have historically gained little traction. Some speakers also noted that becoming more knowledgeable about climate issues may help increase credibility with environmental groups.

## HEALING INTERNAL TRAUMA

Among the top five challenges identified by the Delegates at the Brooks Congress is our need to acknowledge and address the movement's internal conflicts. This includes a general desire among speakers to increase collaboration among – and limit conflict between – animal protection groups. It also includes the movement's responsibility to acknowledge and remedy the trauma that has been created by its internal history of sexual harassment, racism, and gender disparity, as noted by several Congress Delegates.

## DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Another key challenge noted by the Congress Delegates is the need for more diversity, equity, and inclusion in the animal protection movement. Related to the previous challenge of healing internal trauma, speakers noted that important voices are absent from the movement and especially from the movement's leadership. Delegates noted that this lack of diversity limits innovation and makes it difficult to partner with other communities, but that it will be a challenge to build the movement's diversity in meaningful ways and ensure that those diverse voices are heard.

## LACK OF POLITICAL POWER

Although less prominent than the themes described above, the Congress Delegates described the lack of political power for animal advocacy as a challenge. In part, this appears related to a lack of funding, but some speakers also noted a lack of political infrastructure for the animal protection movement and a lack of political interest among some advocates. Often, Delegates mentioned this challenge in the context of the massive political power held by companies and industries that exploit animals, and the disparity that creates for animal advocates.

## INADEQUATE LAWS & ENFORCEMENT

The Congress Delegates also noted that a key challenge for the animal protection movement is the fact that current animal-related laws are woefully inadequate to protect animals from harm. They noted that there is too much reliance on industry self-regulation and few meaningful laws or animal welfare standards in countries where the most animals are mistreated or consumed. In countries and regions where such animal welfare laws or standards exist, governments may not have the resources or sufficient desire to adequately enforce them.

## DELEGATES' OTHER KEY CHALLENGES:

- Concerns that animal-related causes garner a miniscule proportion of individual and institutional charitable giving and the challenge of finding new sources of income for the animal protection movement, especially unrestricted income.
- In the legal and policy arena, the challenge of shifting the field away from a focus on individual acts of animal cruelty to increasing emphasis on legal objections to institutional animal suffering and defining animals as more than property.
- The rapidly increasing consumption of farmed animals in growing countries (e.g., China) due to population dynamics and growing personal wealth, which will create substantially more demand to raise and slaughter animals for food.

# Most Important Opportunities

*Brooks Congress Delegates discussed a number of potential opportunities for the global animal protection movement. Below we discuss the main themes.*

MAIN THEMES	Mentions <sup>3</sup>	Proportions <sup>4</sup>
The climate change crisis	18	25%
Data-driven advocacy	17	24%
Growing awareness and empathy	17	24%
Humane education and youths	16	22%
More and better collaboration	14	19%
Animal product alternatives	13	18%
Intersectional advocacy	11	15%

## THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

In addition to being a major challenge, Congress Delegates noted that the climate crisis is also an important opportunity for the animal protection movement. The changing climate is putting a spotlight on human behavior and underscoring the need to alter our practices, including those that relate to animals. Speakers noted that the ecological crisis creates opportunities to make animals relevant to the conversation, partner more closely with environmentalists on joint campaigns, and address animal protection in the context of environmental policies.

<sup>3</sup> Delegates were asked for their individual perspective of the biggest opportunity for the animal protection movement. Some delegates offered one theme while others offered more. Of the 72 Delegates contributing, "Mentions" is the total number of times that the theme arose in Delegates' comments. Because some Delegates mentioned just one "important" opportunity and others mentioned more, there is a "weighting" of perceived importance that is missing from the raw numbers.

<sup>4</sup> "Proportions" is the number of theme Mentions divided by 72 (the number of contributing Delegates).

## DATA-DRIVEN ADVOCACY

Just as the lack of evidence for what advocacy approaches have the most impact was noted as a key challenge, there is an opportunity to conduct high-quality research to determine our strategies and tactics. Specifically, the Congress Delegates mentioned the chance to better understand behavior change and to conduct research that has practical applications for animal advocacy. Other opportunities noted by speakers are identifying best practices for measuring impact and working with experts in the social sciences and other fields to generate reliable data.

## GROWING AWARENESS & EMPATHY

Delegates of the Brooks Congress also noted an increasing awareness of animal consciousness and sentience that appears to be leading to an increase in empathy. Many of them believe that there is a chance for humans to rediscover our connection with nature, which presents an opportunity to cultivate even more empathy for animals. There was also a general sense among the speakers that people are becoming more passionate about animal causes, which may lead to changes in attitudes and behavior and more involvement in animal protection work.

## HUMANE EDUCATION & YOUTHS

According to the Congress Delegates, the opportunity to build empathy toward animals may be greatest when it comes to young people, in part because today's youths already demonstrate compassion toward animals and some of them reject human exceptionalism. Delegates noted an opportunity to build on that existing compassion toward animals with outreach efforts focused on changing the attitudes and behavior of younger audiences. Humane education programs, in particular, were mentioned as an opportunity to teach empathy for all animals.

## MORE & BETTER COLLABORATION

Although not quite as prominent as the opportunities described above, the Congress Delegates described an opportunity for organizations in the animal protection movement to work together more often – and more effectively. The speakers discussed the potential for collective impact for animals by establishing clearer communications between animal advocates and identifying areas for collaboration. They also mentioned opportunities for organizations and funders to share information and resources to advance specific programs or campaigns.

## ANIMAL PRODUCT ALTERNATIVES

Many of the Congress Delegates referred to the rapidly growing market for alternatives to animal products as an important opportunity for the animal protection movement. Specifically, they noted that advancing and scaling alternatives to meat, milk, and eggs is a chance to reduce animal suffering on a massive scale and potentially interrupt the increasingly animal-centric diet in growing countries. Delegates said that these new products are an opportunity to change the default option for consumers and eventually make animal-free consumption a social norm.

## INTERSECTIONAL ADVOCACY

Another key opportunity identified by the Congress Delegates is for the animal protection community to be more intersectional in our advocacy. Several speakers commented that we can expand the sphere of compassion toward animals by joining with and advocating for other marginalized individuals or groups. Specifically, they noted the opportunity to partner with other social justice organizations working to end racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, and to learn to be more sensitive to how our efforts may affect groups, such as farm workers.

## DELEGATES' OTHER KEY OPPORTUNITIES:

- While the lack of diversity in the animal protection movement was noted as a challenge, speakers noted an opportunity to intentionally grow our movement with a focus on new perspectives and voices that have been missing or marginalized in the past.
- Advocates have a chance to identify and communicate the many ways that human wellbeing and animal wellbeing are connected to each other and demonstrating that the future of both humans and other animals are closely intertwined.
- With increased academic focus on animal issues, there is an opportunity to establish closer connections between academia and animal advocacy and to put interdisciplinary, scholarly research into practice to advance animal causes.
- There is clearly potential to increase the political power of the animal protection movement, including political campaigning and holding election candidates to account, focusing more on policy, and curbing the political power of animal-based industries.

# In Conclusion

The Brooks Institute thanks all of the keynote speakers and Delegates who attended the inaugural Brooks Congress and for their feedback on the most important challenges and opportunities for the animal protection movement. Having these insights is important to the Institute's mission of pursuing a paradigm shift in human responsibility towards, and value of, nonhuman animals by advancing animal law, animal policy, and related interdisciplinary studies. We look forward to more collaboration with leading animal protection advocates. The next Brooks Congress is currently being planned for March 2022 in Scottsdale, Arizona.

**2020 Congress keynote speaker presentations (videos and transcripts), select video interviews, and overview videos can be found on the Brooks Institute's website under Resources ([thebrooksinstitute.org/resources](https://thebrooksinstitute.org/resources)).**



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## Views Expressed Disclaimer

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