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## **End Hunger Western Washington Social Media Strategy**

### **Background**

Hunger is a daily reality for many Western Washington residents. In fact, a Hunger in America study conducted in 2010 found that more than 350,000 Western Washington residents receive food assistance every year (Malbi, Cohen, Potter & Zhao, 2010, p. 1). While food banks across the region are working to meet this need for food, they are in danger of falling short. In the Seattle area, for example, donations of food and money are 31% lower this year than in recent years while the need for food has increased 25% in the past five years, prompting Seattle mayor Mike McGinn to publicly urge residents to donate (Provenza, 2012). After learning about these donation shortfalls and the persistence of hunger in the region, we knew that this was the problem we wanted to use social media to tackle.

Initially, we reached out to Food Lifeline (one of the organizations dedicated to ending hunger in Western Washington) with suggestions for augmenting their current social media strategy and an offer to collaborate. Due to their current workload, however, they politely informed us that they would prefer not to engage our services at this time. Rather than use Food Lifeline's name without their approval, we decided to refocus our efforts to use social media tools to address the overall issue of hunger in Western Washington.

### **Focus**

While analyzing the conversations about food banks and Food Lifeline happening online, we noticed that Food Lifeline was just one of many organizations working to alleviate hunger in Western Washington. For example, the City of Seattle and King County combined have more than fifty-eight neighborhood food banks (City of Seattle Human Services Department) each serving a specific neighborhood or group (ex: AIDS victims). Despite the presence of all of these individual organizations, we noticed that region was missing a central resource for people working to end hunger. We envisioned using online tools to create spaces where people could share their stories and inspire each other to take action. Our hope was that by leveraging online tools we could inspire offline activity.

We imagined a small volunteer organization dedicated to creating connections and synergy among the hunger-relief organizations in the region by magnifying the impact of the each organization's work and by connecting supporters and volunteers. By providing an online space where information and processes are shared, our volunteer organization would amplify the message of other organizations dedicated to ending hunger and would help build a community around this cause. We wanted to focus on a specific region (Western Washington) in the hopes that our organization would become the "go-to" resource for residents to find information on how to combat hunger.

While our online presence would be visible to the whole world, we chose to target

residents of Western Washington since we are familiar with this area. In addition, our campaign will be targeting individuals who currently volunteer or donate money to charitable causes or those who are interested in doing so. According to data collected by the Bureau of Labor statistics (2012) our primary audience will be people between the ages of 35 and 54 years old as this is the demographic group with the highest rate of volunteerism. That said, the same report indicated that volunteerism is also rising among young people and given their overrepresentation among social media users (Brenner, 2012), we have chosen to target them as well.

In order to achieve our ambitious overarching goals, we knew that we would need to also develop some short-term targets. We began by creating a website using Weebly titled “End Hunger Western Washington” which includes both static information and a blog component. We then developed profiles on a variety of social media platforms. We created an editorial calendar to manage content and identified metrics that we could use to track our results. Our hope is that each of these small steps can lead to big change.

### **Grab Attention**

One proven way to grab attention is to communicate messages visually (Aaker and Smith, 2010, p. 61). To take advantage of people’s predilection for visuals we chose to leverage the power of video and photography. We have set up a YouTube account titled “End Hunger Western Washington,” and have created two example playlists. We hope that one, titled “Art to End Hunger,” which focuses on multi-sensory engagement (music, dance, and poetry), will grab attention and become a source of inspiration for those working to end hunger. The other, “Food Bank Spotlight,” gathers videos that introduce viewers to food banks in Western Washington. We hope this playlist will enable viewers to learn more about local organizations and help them establish personal connections to groups working in their neighborhoods.

We have also established a presence at #waywire with the name “endhungerwesternwa” and have started a wire. This wire will gather videos about hunger from around the Internet into one place where they can be easily viewed and shared. Further, #waywire allows users to easily upload personal video from smartphones and other sources. We hope that this will become resource for grassroots news and activists looking for real life stories. Some examples of video content could include experiences working/volunteering at food banks, interviews with food bank beneficiaries, and public hearings on hunger-related issues.

Similarly, we have established a Flickr group where we encourage locals to post relevant photos. Creating a space for activists to upload their own photos and videos also fosters longer-term engagement as users return to see whether new content has been posted.

A final tool that we plan to use to grab and hold attention is an editorial calendar. This will allow us to schedule regular website and social media updates and ensure that our content remains up-to-date. Some scheduled features will include: a monthly personal story or interview, a bi-weekly profile of a local organization, ongoing questions and games that invite participation from readers, and regular challenges to encourage donations or volunteering. The calendar will also provide a means for us and our readers to stay on top of seasonal events like food drives and hunger awareness fun runs.

### **Engage**

In *The Dragonfly Effect*, storytelling is highlighted as an important component of successful social media campaigns. Aaker and Smith (2010) write, “the vast majority of us attempt to persuade using only...logic and reason. Persuasion, though, occurs as much, if not more through emotion” (p. 82) demonstrating that stories are what make facts relatable. The blog component of the End Hunger Western Washington site allows us to post stories about the experiences of people who have benefitted from food banks and those who have volunteered or donated. The hope is that by sharing these stories, we can show the impact of food banks on individuals in our community and also demonstrate how easy it is to make a difference.

To be effective in any community, it is important to listen to what that community is saying. Since our organization’s mission is to constantly seek opportunities to create connections between groups and with potential volunteers, monitoring a variety of social media channels is particularly important. Staying on top of news and conversations and identifying influencers provide information that may be used in making these connections. End Hunger Western Washington currently uses both Google Alerts and a custom social media dashboard to track mentions of the organization and discussions about ending hunger in the region. So far we have found that food banks and hunger issues are being discussed in the news and on social media but that since these stories are rarely headliners, they often go unnoticed and undiscussed. Our Social media dashboard will also allow volunteers to join conversations happening on other social media platforms and in doing so they will both create useful connections and raise awareness about End Hunger Western Washington.

To better foster conversations about hunger in Western Washington as well as to engage with potential volunteers and donors in real-time, we have set-up both a Twitter handle and a Facebook page. We have also started a group on LinkedIn targeted toward facilitating networking between food bank staff and volunteers. By leveraging the strengths of multiple social media tools, we hope to encourage participation and engage users where they are.

## **Take Action**

The “Get Involved” page on our website provides simple suggestions on how readers can contribute and take action. In addition, the stories and content on our blog aim to transform the overwhelming concept of “fighting hunger” into something that anyone can help achieve. By providing centralized access to information about a variety of organizations, End Hunger Western Washington makes finding ways to take action convenient and easy.

We have also created a Pinterest presence titled “End Hunger Western Washington.” As with our “Get Involved” page the goal of our Pinterest boards are to make the barriers to taking action as low as possible. All of our pins will quickly link a user to the exact page on the website with the information they need. This way a user can easily learn about local food banks in our “Local Food Banks” board and then find ways to volunteer or donate in our “Donate Time to Local Food Banks” and “Donate Food or Money” boards. All the pins are tagged with “#endhungerwesternwa” and are organized into the Food & Drink category, a very large and active Pinterest community. We hope as our pins get re-pinned, the hashtag #endhungerwesternwa will spread across Pinterest and help us to reach a wider audience.

By providing information about how to get involved with all Western Washington food banks in one location we hope to make it easier for people to take action. While we highlight

the rewards of volunteering and emphasize the importance of financial contributions for local food banks, we also recognize the power of spreading awareness. Social media sites like Pinterest allow people to get involved by sharing content with their friends and in doing so, amplifying End Hunger Western Washington's message.

## **Launch**

As with any new campaign, our efforts to use social media tools to raise awareness about hunger in Western Washington have had their ups and downs. We faced a major setback when we realized we could not work with Food Lifeline, but it forced us to tackle the challenge of working to end hunger more creatively. Since we have witnessed hunger in Western Washington first-hand, we knew the importance of this campaign and felt compelled to stick with it. We began immediately collaborating offline and via email to develop a new strategy. And we decided to repurpose the work we had done into a more general project to support anti-hunger efforts.

We have scaled the End Hunger Western Washington at a rapid pace and we are still in the initial prototyping phase of the campaign. Nevertheless, we have already experienced some failures and corrected them. When developing the End Hunger Western Washington website, for example, we originally used a Wordpress template to organize our content. After much time spent struggling with the site, it became clear that the template was unable to provide the professional look and easy navigation we needed. We abandoned the template and sought out a new one that would meet our needs. By using this iteration strategy, we plan to work continuously to test new platforms and improve our content and presentation.

The Pinterest page is also still in the prototype phase. We first translated our focus on Western Washington food banks into developing one board per organization, but soon ran into difficulty since several food banks did not have enough different materials to pin. Recognizing the problem we quickly changed our the way we organized the boards into the configuration mentioned above, in the taking action section. More changes will be made if this categorization of pins does not seem easy to navigate for our users.

To be sure we covered all the various platforms and ideas we had put into our plan, we divided the work of researching our tools and setting them up. We worked together on our design decisions, then worked separately so that the team could multitask and get more done in a short time. Because of our late refocus, we had to set up many of our tools and sites later than we had hoped. This means we have reached the end of our test period with less feedback than we'd like, but we have taken what we have into account when planning our next steps.

## **Measure results**

Each platform we are utilizing will have separate metrics parameters but will be combined to provide an overall picture of our impact on the issue of hunger in Western Washington.

On Weebly, we will be able to measure our blog's page views, unique visitors, top pages, search terms, and referring sites. Keeping track of these stats will allow us to see whether we are able to increase our viewership over time. We will also be able to measure which blog posts are generating the most views and use this feedback to improve our content. We will also reach out to the organizations that we link on our site to see if they willing or able to

provide stats on whether publicity on End Hunger Western Washington is leading to referrals. Using the “referring sites” metric, we can quantify the number of visits that are generated from links on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Each of these social media sites also has their own ways of tracking user participation. On Pinterest, we will track the number of followers, repins, and likes. We will set a concrete goal each month for the increases we would like to see in all three categories. While on Facebook, we can measure the monthly fans, likes, and posts. For Twitter, it will be beneficial to monitor the number of new followers, mentions, and retweets to see if we are permeating the hunger conversation landscape. Similarly, we will monitor followers, rewires, and other interaction activity at #waywire and the YouTube Insights statistics on the video clips and playlists we post there.

Measuring concrete results offline will be more difficult, since our ability to determine the impact (ROI) of social media activity on donations or number of volunteers is complicated by our role as an intermediary. However, we would hope that as we continue working with hunger relief organizations and community members, we will receive feedback about the impact of our efforts, what we’re doing that works, what could be improved, and what new features they would find helpful.

### **Conclusion and Next Thoughts**

Going forward, the success and viability of the social media plan we crafted will depend on the collaborations and relationships fostered throughout the process. We will need to develop a central team to handle content management and monitoring metrics. Ideally, the metrics would be reported monthly to help evaluate which tools are effective and which can be eliminated. As the influence of End Hunger Western Washington increases, we will have more opportunities to collaborate with users to generate content. This will allow the central team to transition to curating and quality control roles. Even though it is in its infancy, we believe that our plan exemplifies exciting new uses of social media platforms to generate participation in combating hunger in Western Washington.

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