Greater Washington County Food Bank

Executive Summary

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Background

Food Helpers, formerly known as the Greater Washington County Food Bank, is an organization aiming to combat food insecurity in Washington County and surrounding areas. Their mission centers around combating food insecurity and promoting sustainability. The organization is made up of four divisions: Greater Washington County Food Bank, Healthy Habits Training Center, County Thrift Market, and The Farm. Established in 1981, Food Helpers is headquartered in Brownsville, PA, and has food distribution locations in 13 locations in the county. It is a nonprofit organization that operates as a distribution center, sourcing and distributing food to various programs. The food bank relies on donations from the community, including food donations from local grocery stores and financial donations from individuals, businesses, and foundations. It also receives support from the government, including grants and other funding sources. Volunteers can get involved through donations, hosting virtual food drives, or volunteering in any of the four divisions of Food Helpers. Of the food bank's clients, 30% are children under 18 and 20% are senior citizens. In 2020, the organization distributed over 7.5 million pounds of food, tripling the amount they distributed in 2019.

Project Description

Project Opportunity

Food Helpers, a non-state funded food bank, faces challenges in serving the food insecure population in Washington County. Unlike publicly funded food banks, Food Helpers does not require income or residency data for eligibility, leaving a significant portion of the food insecure population without adequate support. The organization uses a "truck to trunk" model to distribute food directly to individuals at rotation of distribution locations, causing challenges in informing clients of correct locations and last-minute changes. Registration and data collection for food insecure individuals is also complicated, as it is optional and differs from state-funded food bank processes. Additionally, the technical nature of tools used by Food Helpers poses challenges to the mainly volunteer staff. Addressing these challenges can expedite the food distribution process, improve data collection, increase funding access, and reduce confusion and travel costs for food insecure clients.

Project Vision

Our project vision includes a few components to address the problems Food Helpers is facing. These problems mainly include issues with registration and accessibility of distribution site information for clients. While we continue to learn more about Food Helpers and the specific pain points of the organization and its clients, we anticipate that the details and prioritization of our solutions will evolve over time. We have presented a series of suggested solutions based on our current knowledge that include QR codes, automated phone and texting systems, and an interactive map.

Project Outcomes

We were able to improve the current process of the organization by creating documentation for their softwares, which will be included in their new training process. Cherise and other staff looking to train new staff members are able to carry out onboarding and training more efficiently with the help of the documentation guide. The redesigned pamphlet will improve the data collection process and ensures that their clients have the most up to date information.

Project Deliverables

The final deliverables include documentations for the PantrySoft software and Maptive widget, mass texting and emailing feature for PantrySoft, and a redesigned pamphlet that can be handed out to clients.

Recommendations

Our first recommendation is to incorporate the PantrySoft documentation into the volunteers onboarding process. This will allow multiple volunteers to be trained at the same time and will save the organization's time. Our second recommendation is to leverage the accessible technology solutions we developed to improve communication methods with food drive clients and thus increase turnout. Food Helpers would be able to help more people and thus use that information to secure more funding in the future to continue with efforts by the organization.

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Student Consulting Team

Emma Kwan was the minute officer. She is a senior majoring in Information Systems. She will be traveling this summer and will be an APM at Visa.

Ricky Lee was the client relationship manager. He is a senior majoring in Information Systems. He will be traveling this summer and going into digital marketing at IBM.

Yize Shen was the project manager. He is a third-year student majoring in Information Systems with an HCI additional major. He will be a PM intern this summer and is looking toward a career in product management.

Meghana Tera was the quality assurance manager. She is a third-year student majoring in Information Systems with a minor in Machine Learning. She will be a data science intern at Uber this summer and is looking toward a career in data science.