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DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR THE GUELPH WELLINGTON FOOD ROUND TABLE

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INTRODUCTION

In establishing an effective communication strategy for an issue-based council, it is important to consider the following questions:

1. What are you trying to communicate?
2. Who is your audience and why might they be interested?
3. How will you reach them?
4. What is your plan once you have reached them?
5. How much time do you have to achieve your communication goals? (International Development Research Centre, 2011).
6. What resources are available to you? (International Development Research Centre, 2011).

These questions may serve as a guide in developing a communication strategy, ensuring that the strategy created corresponds well with the objectives of the council. Furthermore, considering these questions ensures that the strategy developed remains within the financial and physical means of the organization.

It is most effective to develop a communication strategy as a group, defining a role for all members of the organization, where applicable. One individual may be put in charge of over-seeing the project, ensuring that all components of the strategy are being effectively carried out. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to begin with a focused, small scale communication strategy that may be ameliorated along the way (International Development Research Centre, 2011). Starting off small ensures that the communication strategy developed is both feasible and manageable.

In general, the steps involved in developing a communication strategy are as follows: both the organization and potential partners generate an outline of the proposed communication strategy; the outline then undergoes numerous revisions at the group level (typically through continuous meetings) until consensus is reached on finalizing the communication strategy. Once the communication strategy has been established, it is important for the organization to meet regularly in order to review its effectiveness and discuss potential amendments (International Development Research Centre, 2011).

The following section will review literature on communication strategies used for promoting food security in various regions, identifying methods that have been found to be useful.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Providing access to information on food policy and food availability in the community is crucial to promoting food security. Research suggests that the Internet is a very useful tool for encouraging communication due to its versatility and ease of use (Gareau, 2004). For instance, in a study based out of the United States, the needs of a food insecure subpopulation were assessed. Some of the primary causes of persistent food insecurity were identified as a general lack of information on existing food accessibility groups in the region; a lack of communication and coordination within food accessibility groups; a lack of information on where to refer clients; and a lack of education among clients, particularly surrounding nutrition, food preparation, and budgeting. Researchers found that the creation of a client-based website utilizing tools such as email, multiple databases, and simple text remedied these issues in the community (Gareau, 2004). An online resource of this nature could provide: a) valuable information on existing food assistance programs in the area; b) client referral information, which includes food inventory; c) information on client history; d) information on food donations; e) potential alternative sources of food; and f) educational information surrounding food assistance. This method also served to increase cohesion within food accessibility groups because tools, such as email, provided a very convenient means of communicating (Gareau, 2004).

Munyua (2000) has also highlighted the usefulness of the Internet in promoting food security. Munyua (2000) examined the use of the Internet in developing countries and identified that it is effective in the following areas: a) providing current and accurate information on food security issues; b) transmitting information through email to areas that are otherwise difficult to reach; c) providing rural communities with the opportunity to engage in online interactions with each other and food security groups; d) providing farmers with a means of promoting their products; e) providing clients with helpful resources regarding food accessibility; and f) promoting the development of necessary skills related to food security. Furthermore, the Internet has been found to be extremely effective in increasing connections between community members. For instance, the development of online networks can facilitate sharing and retrieving of local information, as well as encourage communication and support local agricultural production, extending and strengthening collaboration and coordination of food security and accessibility programs (Munyua, 2000).



EXAMPLES IN THE COMMUNITY

METHODS

To locate examples of communication strategies used in the community, a Google search was carried out. Key terms used in the search included “Ontario + community health centre,” “Ontario + food council,” and “Ontario + food security.” Some of the websites were typed in directly, using a list of Canadian food council hyperlinks provided in *Food policy councils*. A total of 26 community organizations were identified through this search. After careful consideration, eight organizations were chosen to be examined. The inclusion criteria were as follows: a) organizations were located in Ontario and b) organizations utilized both diverse and novel communication strategies.

SUMMARY OF SEARCH RESULTS

The following chart outlines the communication strategies used by eight community organizations in Ontario. Specific focus is placed on the communication tools used and the ways in which they serve community members whilst encouraging their involvement with the organization.

ORGANIZATION	COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND WHAT THEY DO
Centre for Social Innovation Food Constellation	<p><i>Descriptions and backgrounds of members</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informs community members of the individuals who make up the CSIFC, helping to establish cohesiveness. <p><i>Dates of upcoming meetings and events</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizes involvement by providing opportunities for planned attendance, as well as by keeping members aware of upcoming events. <p><i>The Office Farmers Market Template Pilot Project (to establish a template for market stalls in buildings and offices)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages the involvement of local food producers in promoting local food sales in the community. <p><i>Youtube video promoting Office Markets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a visual demonstration of what office markets can look like, which resonates with community members, encouraging participation.



	<p><i>Speed Consulting</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matches up food entrepreneurs, community workers and business consultants, allowing them to collaborate in short sessions to develop and extend client base and networking. <p><i>Speakers and workshops</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes professional/skill development, such as cooking, while also establishing group cohesiveness and stimulating interest. <p><i>Kitchen Rental Pilot Project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extends client base by attracting community members who require the use of a commercial kitchen. <p><i>Holiday markets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides an opportunity for organization to connect personally with members over the holiday season while promoting local food sales. <p><i>Online recipes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides online cooking resources for community members while also establishing cohesiveness and interest. <p><i>Personal weblog (written and maintained by website founders)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides easy-to-read information and resources for community members in a very personal manner, thus capturing interest. <p><i>Email list serves</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitates the delivery of newsletters and resources to community members. <p><i>External links and resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides additional information and resources for clients who would like global knowledge on local food, which maintains and heightens interest.
<p>Food Security Research Network</p>	<p><i>Visually-appealing advertisements for events, such as showing of documentary on food security in Thunder Bay</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective in capturing the interest of community members who are visually-oriented. <p><i>Descriptions and backgrounds of members</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informs community members of the individuals who



	<p>make up the FSRN, helping to establish cohesiveness.</p> <p><i>FSRN Mandate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates values, activities, and goals of FSRN in order to capture interest of concerned community members. <p><i>History</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an easy and comprehensive record of what the FSRN has done in order to inform community members and promote awareness and understanding. <p><i>Food security courses, such as biology and indigenous learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes professional/skill development while also establishing group cohesiveness and stimulating interest. <p><i>Direct involvement in schools (school projects related to food security)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extends client base and promotes awareness and interest among youth. <p><i>Community Service Learning (CSL) program in direct collaboration with Lakehead University</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds long-term relationships with members of the community while simultaneously promoting knowledge about food security issues. <p><i>Photo gallery of Garden Project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrates community project in a manner that is visually-appealing, promoting understanding and interest in the community. <p><i>Gardening workshops</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes skill development while also establishing group cohesiveness and stimulating interest. <p><i>Dates of upcoming events</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizes involvement by providing opportunities for planned attendance, as well as by keeping members aware of upcoming events. <p><i>Online access to projects and research, such as the 2010 Heirloom Tomato Project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the power and effectiveness of the FSRN as well as provides resources and information to members. <p><i>Personal weblog (written and maintained by website founders)</i></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides easy-to-read information and resources for community members in a very personal manner, thus capturing interest. <p><i>Email list serves</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates the delivery of newsletters and resources to community members.
<p>Guelph Community Health Centre</p>	<p><i>Descriptions of programs related to developmental health, healthy living, and primary care</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides details as to what the GCHC does and why it is important to get involved. <p><i>Services in multiple languages</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extends client base/promotes a multicultural client base and makes information accessible to diverse groups. <p><i>Online access to projects and research, such as the Kindergarten Parent Survey</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the power and effectiveness of the GCHC as well as provide resources and information to members. <p><i>Youtube video promoting Garden Fresh Box</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a visual demonstration of what GFB program looks like, which resonates with community members, encouraging participation. <p><i>Indexes and Search engines</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows community members to find and access relevant information on the website. <p><i>Dates of upcoming events</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizes involvement by providing opportunities for planned attendance, as well as by keeping members aware of upcoming events. <p><i>Volunteer opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizes involvement by providing opportunities for unpaid work in the community. <p><i>Message indicating that helping is a gift</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes community members feel appreciated and thus encourages future participation and involvement.
<p>Guelph and Wellington</p>	<p><i>Statistics on poverty in Guelph-Wellington</i></p>



<p>Poverty Task Force</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informs community members of the gravity of poverty and captures interest. <p><i>Summaries of working groups and action groups and how to get involved</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides accessible information for community members in order to promote involvement. <p><i>Online access to projects and research, such as poverty research and publications from Guelph-Wellington</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the power and effectiveness of the GWPTF as well as provide resources and information to members. <p><i>Online surveys regarding budget calculations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides direct application of information in order to demonstrate the realness of poverty issues and promote interest/involvement. <p><i>Dates of upcoming meetings and events</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizes involvement by providing opportunities for planned attendance, as well as by keeping members aware of upcoming events. <p><i>Email updates, newsletters, and news archives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates the delivery of newsletters and resources to community members to keep them up-to-date and involved. <p><i>External links and resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides additional information and resources for clients who would like global knowledge on poverty issues, which maintains and heightens interest.
<p>Haliburton Highlands Local Food Coalition</p>	<p><i>Vision statement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates goals and underlying beliefs of HHLFC in order to capture interest of concerned community members. <p><i>Provides locations of farmer's markets, food producers (outlining the products available) and restaurants that support local food</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulates interest of community members by encouraging them to partake of services that contribute to food security in the area.



<p>Sudbury Food Connections Network</p>	<p><i>News archives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides easy-to-read information and resources to community members to keep them up-to-date and interested. <p><i>Vision statement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates goals and underlying beliefs of SFCN in order to capture interest of concerned community members. <p><i>Past initiatives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an easy and comprehensive history of the SFCN in order to inform community members and promote awareness of what it does. <p><i>Board of directors and background information on members</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informs community members of the individuals who make up the SFCN, helping to establish relatedness. <p><i>Online access to projects and research, such as the Farmyard Gardens Program</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the power and effectiveness of the SFCN as well as provides resources and information to members. <p><i>Photo gallery containing photos of Sudbury, markets, and gardens</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects community members to both the region and the food system through visual representations. <p><i>Information on local food organizations and services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulates interest of community members by encouraging them to partake of services that contribute to food security in the area. <p><i>Factsheets, manuals, and descriptions of local food</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generates interest while providing valuable information on food and promoting skill and knowledge development. <p><i>Youtube video series, containing demonstrations of gardening, educational speakers, action plans, and interviews</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides visual demonstrations, which resonate with community members who are visually-oriented, sharing knowledge and encouraging involvement.
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<p>Toronto Food Policy Council</p>	<p><i>Mission statement and objectives of the TFPC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates goals and underlying beliefs of TFPC in order to capture interest of concerned community members. <p><i>Email list serves</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates the delivery of newsletters and resources to community members. <p><i>Food-related weblog and Discussion Forum</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows community members to ask questions, express concerns, and share information, creating a cohesive online community. <p><i>Profile on social network websites (Facebook and Twitter)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extends client base. <p><i>Indexes and Search engines</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows community members to find and access relevant information on the website. <p><i>Online access to projects and research, such as the Toronto Food Strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the power and effectiveness of the TFPC as well as provides resources and information to members. <p><i>Summaries of successful endeavours, such as the City of Toronto Declaration on Food and Nutrition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an easy and comprehensive history of the TFPC in order to inform community members and promote awareness and understanding. <p><i>Descriptions and backgrounds of members as well as access to electronic profiles of community members</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informs community members of the individuals who make up the TFPC and helps to establish a cohesive online community. <p><i>Dates of upcoming meetings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizes involvement by providing opportunities for planned attendance, as well as by keeping members aware of upcoming events. <p><i>External links and resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides additional information and resources for clients
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	<p>who would like global knowledge of the issues addressed by the TFPC, which maintains and heightens interest.</p>
<p>Waterloo Region Food System Roundtable</p>	<p><i>Terms of Reference of the WRFSR</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates mission statement, values, activities, and key sectors of WRFSR in order to capture interest of concerned community members. <p><i>Priorities of the WRFSR, highlighting 6 key issues that the organization addresses (including food policy, access to healthy food, and farm viability)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specifies the underlying goals of the WRFSR in order to capture the interest of concerned community members. <p><i>WRFoodNews</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates the delivery of newsletters and resources to community members to keep them up-to-date and interested. <p><i>Food-related weblog and Discussion Forum</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows community members to ask questions, express concerns, and share information, creating a cohesive online community. <p><i>Profile on social network websites (Facebook and Twitter)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extends client base. <p><i>Indexes and Search engines</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows community members to find and access relevant information on the website. <p><i>Online access to projects and research, such as the Ontario Small Abbatoirs Project</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the power and effectiveness of the WRFSR as well as provides resources and information to members. <p><i>Summaries of recent endeavours, such as the Waterloo Region Food Summit</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an easy and comprehensive history of the WRFSR in order to inform community members and promote awareness and understanding. <p><i>Work Opportunities in Food</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracts community members who may be interested in food issues and may also be looking for employment.



	<p><i>Descriptions and backgrounds of members as well as access to electronic profiles of community members</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informs community members of the individuals who make up the WRFSR, helping to establish a cohesive online community. <p><i>Dates of upcoming meetings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizes involvement by providing opportunities for planned attendance, as well as by keeping members aware of upcoming events. <p><i>External links and resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides additional information and resources for clients who would like global knowledge of the issues addressed by the WRFSR, which maintains and heightens interest.
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In summary, the communication strategies that appear to be the most innovative and widely used are:

- Email list serves and newsletters
- Event calendars and online registration
- Access to research projects and past community endeavours
- Member profiles
- Weblogs and discussion forums
- Face-to-face contact with community members
- Visual representations in picture and video form
- Skill development and sharing of knowledge, both online and in person
- Opportunities for real life application or experience
- Vision statements
- Information that is accessible and easy to read
- Explicit messages of appreciation and gratitude