

COMMUNITIES SOUTH AND WEST OF LANSING
CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL FOCUS GROUP
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

October 2013

Cobalt Community Research is a nonprofit research coalition created to help governments, local schools and other nonprofit organizations measure, benchmark and manage their efforts through high-quality affordable surveys, focus groups and facilitated meetings. Cobalt is headquartered in Lansing, Michigan



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today's residents are continuously bombarded with advertising messages. With all this noise, it is hard for organizations' messages to stand out and drive behavior. This report will examine the cultural and activity interests of residents in Charlotte and the surrounding areas, paying close attention to barriers of participation. The information provided will aid local organizations in developing and promoting successful programs that attract and retain users of the organizations' programs and services.

In late August 2013, Cobalt conducted four focus groups and performed a walk through review of each facility.

The major findings indicate that while offerings are typically consistent with residents' perceived needs, the method of outreach is preventing trial or ongoing use. Other findings include the belief of non-Charlotte residents that Charlotte is too far away to visit. This is important, as many organizations in the city wish to market themselves as regional attractions in order to increase the pool of potential users.

While it is clear that organizations will need to design outreach campaigns around intended target markets' needs and wants, focus should be placed on information dissemination. To assist with this process, this research recommends the creation of a centralized, regional event outreach organization whose primary purpose would be to promote events in the region. This council would serve as an information hub in which advertising and public relations campaigns can be used to efficiently and effectively market events and activities.

Regional branding is an important component of this outreach organization, as a regional brand will draw more volunteer, sponsorship and visibility than a Charlotte brand. This branding will also aid in addressing non-Charlotte residents' preconceived notions of the time it takes to travel to Charlotte. Possible considerations would be altering venue naming to remove mentions of "Charlotte" to prevent triggering of distance barriers as well as the usage of festivals to attract new customers and induce trial. Festivals provide a "safe" way for consumers to try a product without having to make a large monetary commitment. In addition, the large crowds will not only attract new sponsors, but will aid in the development of the downtown area.

There are several additional recommendations for organizations to consider.

- Develop effective cross-promoting materials that direct interested residents to a central regional event workplace
- Develop regional passport books that include coupons, passes and advertising
- Develop "sampler" programs to expose residents to services and programs at low cost and at convenient locations
- Develop corporate membership programs to give corporate employees a "perk" discount or pass and increases visibility
- Develop the community's own billboard spaces to build visibility of the central outreach website utilizing the sides of buildings and empty store fronts and sidewalks
- Develop stronger partnership with area realtors to help spread outreach messages and provide welcome packets
- Develop clearly marked and mapped trails and paths from each venue in the region
- Develop pedestrian maps/kiosks across the region to highlight local attractions, festival schedules, upcoming events, local business directory, bike/pedestrian trails and routes, restaurants, etc. Develop versions for direct mail and email.

- Strengthen Charlotte’s curb appeal: new M50 approach looks great, but downtown business could use gentle reminders to paint window trim, replace rotted awnings, edge along sidewalks. Exit 61 approach needs sidewalk edging, fresh paint, potential appearance zoning for new businesses, streetscaping.
- Consistently cover the following topics in all communications:
 - Parking information
 - Other transportation options
 - Weather contingencies (as needed)
 - Group discount opportunities
 - Childcare
 - Clearly state the “Fun Factors”
 - List central website or event specific website
 - The who, what, when, where, why

STAGES OF ENGAGEMENT

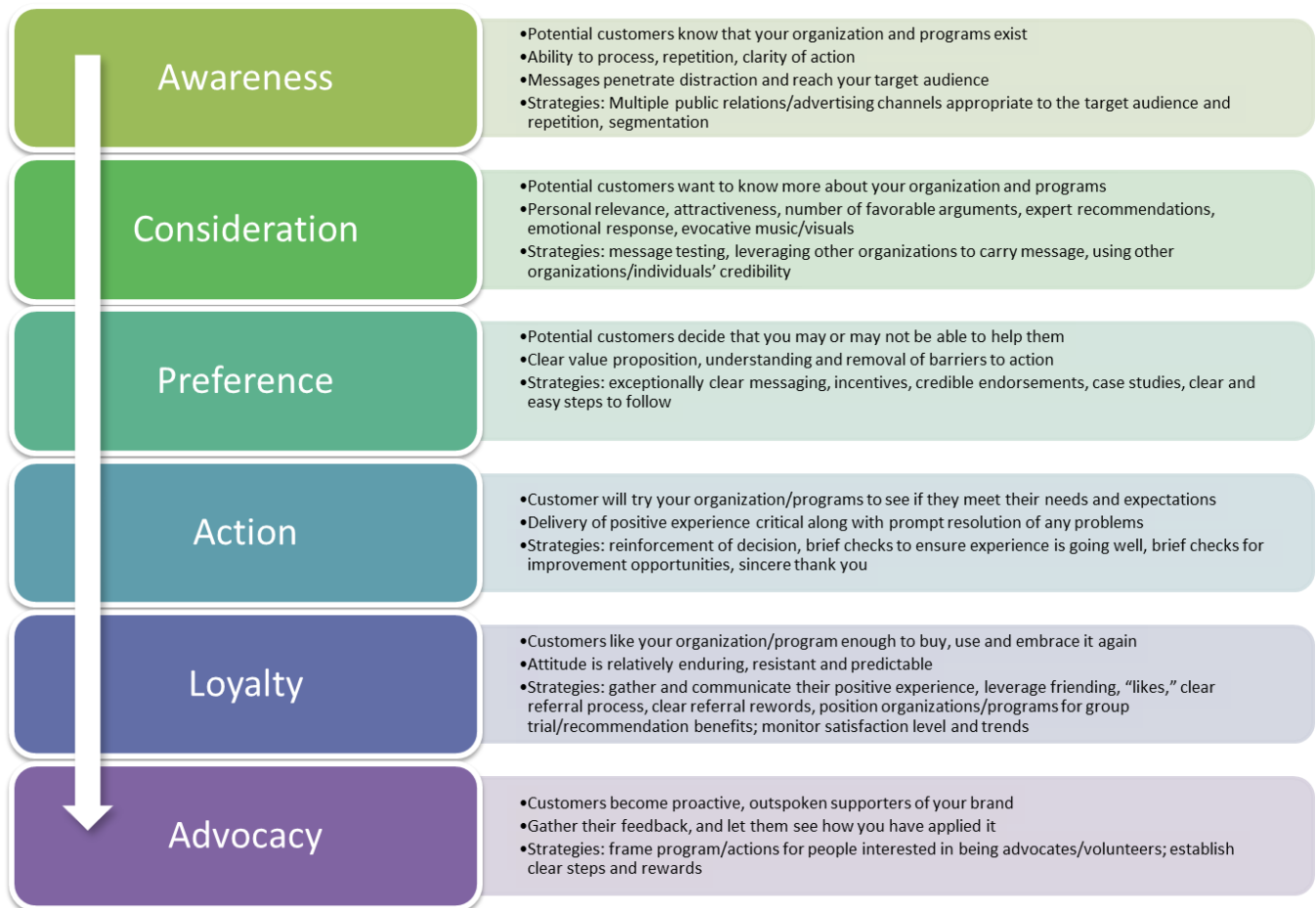
Building participation and engagement can be frustrating, and the mantra of that frustration is “We’ve tried that!” Unfortunately, building participation and engagement is more than creating a cool event and listing it on a website. There are deliberate, disciplined steps to take a cool event and turn it into a successful event. The purpose of this report is to provide actionable models to assist in this process along with specific recommendations drawn from focus group research.

In both traditional marketing and the specialized field of “social marketing,” organizations seeking to influence attitudes and behavior need to consider their strategy through four lenses: product, place, price and promotion. The Charlotte organizations need to articulate answers to each of the questions below for each of their offerings.



A helpful tool to assist in answering the questions above is the stages of engagement model. This model is especially helpful in the promotional phase of outreach.

Stages of Engagement



METHODOLOGY

A series of four focus groups were held on August 19th, 21st, 26th, and 28th at the ALIVE center in Charlotte, Michigan. The groups consisted of Charlotte and Non-Charlotte residents, between the ages of 30 and 65 with an average household income above \$45,000. Convenience sampling was utilized to determine participation and to schedule at least 15 individuals to participate each night, with a target of attendance of 6-12. Groups contained varied amounts of Eaton County residents. Two groups were Charlotte residents and two groups were non-Charlotte residents.

Questions were designed to focus on the four organizations sponsoring the research: Charlotte Performing Arts Center, Charlotte Public Schools Aquatic Center, ALIVE, and Charlotte Area Networking for Development and Opportunity (Can Do!); Specifically looking at awareness levels, barriers of engagement and interests of potential target markets. The fundamental question was how to increase regional use and attendance. Data was collected from the focus group discussions and follow-up onsite visits by staff from Cobalt Community Research.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Focus groups are designed to be exploratory, not representative. This means that the results of the focus group phase of this research help readers explore perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. The results do not necessarily represent the proportion of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes in the region.

It's also important to note that focus groups capture perceptions, which may or may not be consistent with reality. The saying "perception IS reality" is not completely true. Perception drives behavior, so better management of perception provides better management of behavior. If focus group participants believe something that is not consistent with reality, then this exposes a "perception gap" that can be closed through outreach and education. When this outreach and education does not happen effectively, then the faulty perception persists. This is why a bad experience that happened long in the past continues to have power over residents' beliefs.

If focus group participants perceive an issue that actually is reality, then this "performance gap," if it is a priority, can be filled by resource or process changes. Once performance is meeting specifications, then the "performance gap" actually becomes a "perception gap," and it must be deliberately closed through effective outreach and education.

Public outreach and education is frequently a weakness in organizations that have a wide range of programs, services and stakeholders. The reason for this is that such organizations perceive a communication message as a task. Once communicated in a newsletter or a board meeting, the task can be checked off. The organization can move on to the other 1,000 tasks on its to-do list.

In reality, communication messages should be thought of as a campaign. The point at which organizational leaders feel the message has been repeated until they are sick of it is the point at which their target audience is becoming aware that there might be a message. The saying "you need to repeat a message 7 times for people to get it" also is inaccurate. If you repeat a message 7 times, then some of the audience will start to realize that you might be saying something. When it comes to communicating high-priority messages, organizations must not only "beat the dead horse," but they must beat it deliberately until it is glue -- leveraging multiple communication modes, multiple repetitions, and ideally multiple allied organizations sharing the message as well.

CHARLOTTE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Please Note: The following beliefs may not be reflective of entire Charlotte/Eaton County population. Information was gathered from focus groups and highlight areas to be tested for validation.

- Programing is high quality
- Prices high, but not out of line
- Not completely aligned with attitude/style of the region (somewhat “stuffed shirt”)
- Facility is attractive and well maintained
- Facility is under utilized
- Awareness of specific events/programs is limited, especially outside of Charlotte
- Very closely tied in with Charlotte Public Schools
- Current advertising strategy having limited success

WHAT RESIDENTS WANT

Please Note: Gaps are focus group participants' perceptions and may not reflect current practices

- More effective outreach
- Understanding of what is coming on a regular basis
- Outdoor content/performances
- Quality refreshments
- Group and pre-purchase discounts
- Affordable community use such as dance recitals, piano recitals, etc.
- Babysitting
- Programing enhancements (to be tested in survey)
 - Generally on target
 - Less country, more comedy, dance, folk (Celtic), plays, acrobats, rock, bluegrass, Motown
 - More expos, utilizing a string of experts, demos, vendors in the lobby, parking lot, and side rooms
 - Bridal, crafting/scrapbooking/knitting, fine arts, kids literature, cooking, gardening, home improvement, etc.
 - Quality refreshments
 - Integration with other events in region (tie in with festivals, what is being taught in the schools, etc.)
 - Greater involvement of districts and organizations outside of Charlotte
 - Community theater
 - Greater focus on involving clubs and area private music teachers
 - Invite other local acting groups to use the venue (Williamston Theatre)
 - Involve kids from other districts
 - Summer arts programs for the region
 - Classes/clubs such as group guitar lessons, piano, singing, stagecraft, acting, storytelling, costume design/dress up
 - More audience interaction (talk back sessions after a performance, song requests, etc.)

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Please Note: Barriers are based on comment trends from focus groups and may not be reflective of entire population.

- Awareness of programs that people find interesting
- Cost constraints for tickets and for community use
- Knowledge of how to get involved or use the Center
- Time and Day of performances (offerings)
 - Residents would prefer more evening or weekend performances
 - More than one time slot for the same show
- Perception that it is the school district's performance center only – not a regional resource

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

- Center needs regional following to be highly effective, but is branded “Charlotte” and focuses attention mainly on Charlotte students, not Eaton Rapids or Grand Ledge students. Why would the region get excited about Charlotte Public School's district auditorium?
- Website needs greater optimization, rigorous cross linking with other sites, comprehensive listing of how the center could be used and the steps/costs for doing so - from renting just one practice room to full use of theater building and cafeteria
- Lobby space, ancillary room space, and exterior space could be more fully leveraged to generate revenue/awareness/value during performance events
- Does not seem to have a clearly developed volunteer program (beyond ushers and ticket takers) or intern program to expand capacity of community outreach, vendor outreach, and sponsorship development

COBALT RECOMMENDATIONS

PRODUCT/PLACE

- Pursue partnerships with local businesses to provide childcare services
 - Evaluate partnership with ALIVE for babysitting services
 - Develop programming schedule around potential “Kids’ Night” at Aquatic Center
 - Parents would drop kids off at Aquatic center or ALIVE for event and then attend a show at the Performing Arts Center – “Date Night”
 - Promote this aggressively through area school districts
- Develop calendar of expos and establish resources to engage related clubs, teachers, associations, vendors
 - Creating conventions/expos
 - Partner with relevant groups/clubs
 - Use side rooms for displays (vendors)
 - String of speakers on main stage
 - Ex: “String Fest”
 - Concept: All musical instruments played with strings are featured
 - Private lessons in backrooms
 - Live demonstrations (lessons) on main stage

- Vendors – can include instrument dealers (product demos in lobby or main stage)
 - Other theme examples include: historical crafts, fine arts (painting, pottery, sculpting, metal work), folk dance, gardening, cooking, wood working, knitting (yarn), scrapbooking, martial arts (fencing, wrestling, multiple styles of martial arts)
 - Benefits of creating conventions/expos
 - Ability to capture contact information for email lists and marketing
 - When recording this information note the event attended
 - This information will aid in marketing efforts at a later date
 - Ex: A person attends the string fest, you now know they are interested in music they may be interested in attending concert performances at the Performing Arts Center
 - The larger the crowds the more appeal to sponsors for not only events held at the Performing Arts Center but shows/performances as well
- Convert area of lobby to Gift Shop
 - Sell apparel, memberships, snacks, hot/cold beverages, gifts
 - Business class/clubs could maintain the shop (use as a learning model)
 - ALIVE Link card scanner
 - Opportunity to partner with ALIVE to determine repeat users
 - As well as creating a rewards program for loyalty (Ex: After X amount of visits you earn free tickets to upcoming event)
- Utilize exterior space for vendors, catered dining areas, before/after show conversation
- Create Clubs such as Improv Comedy Troupe or small instrumental or acting group that can perform across county to represent Performing Arts Center at various venues
 - Could also perform at area charity events for additional exposure

PRICE

- Expand memberships to reach currently untapped markets:
 - Corporate Memberships – memberships/passes or discounted memberships
 - Benefits to Performing Art Center
 - Induce trial for employees/clients
 - Companies would promote upcoming events to employees to promote usage of passes
 - Benefit to companies
 - Able to offer membership as perks for employees/clients
 - Scarcity effect created – if pass is already checked out and family wants to go they may go anyway or look at purchasing their own seasonal tickets
 - Covering costs
 - Back of pass is a great space for advertising (selling ad space)
 - Participating creates list of companies to target for event sponsorships/rentals
 - Consider not only Business-to-Consumer advertisers but Business-to-Business advertisers as well for potential companies interested in the Ad space

- Develop promotion for seasonal tickets and group discounts/deals
 - Include information and method of purchasing seasonal tickets online
 - Suggestion:
 - Direct mail or eblast piece to repeat visitors
 - Highlight cost savings of purchasing membership vs. individual show tickets
 - Direct mail or eblast to current seasonal ticket holders
 - Thank them for their continued support
 - Remind them of renewing for upcoming years
- Develop program for local businesses to market and sell tickets for you (as the lottery does for the State of Michigan)
 - Have tickets available for sale at sponsoring businesses
 - Ex: Meijer offers tickets for upcoming events (advanced purchase discounts available)
 - Meijer in turn will promote their availability in store
 - Not only will sell additional tickets but signage with Performing Arts Center logos will enhance brand awareness
- Consider other pre-purchase options, such as punch card for repeat users, branded passes for businesses to use with clients, partial season tickets (quarterly season tickets)

PROMOTION

- Approach needs to be multimodal, with less reliance on TV advertising and greater reliance on word of mouth, email, social media, Groupon-type promotion, group alliances, and radio
 - Difficulties faced:
 - Breaking the stereotype of “Elitists”
 - Low awareness
 - Charlotte branding
 - Rebrand the center to be less Charlotte and more regional
 - Examples “Westside Regional Performing Arts Center” or “Regional Performing Arts Center”
 - Targeting (segmenting your markets) – “No two people are alike”
 - Different shows have different appeals to different audiences
 - You must get into the minds of your target audience, tailor media choices, messaging, etc. to the audience – what will appeal to them and how?
 - Marketing is not a one size fits all
 - Identify topical fan groups in the community and harness their enthusiasm to create new events and new advocates to get the word out (such as ukulele groups, master gardener groups, knitting groups, etc.). Engage such groups in the marketing strategy and implementation.
 - Target businesses as a spate market
- Advertising – traditional paid forms (or in-kind sponsors)
 - Consumers are bombarded with advertising. To truly stick out in the mind of the consumer, you must break through this “Noise.” To do so you must think outside of the box.
 - Look at traditional modes and utilize them in new exciting ways

- Media utilization suggestions – concepts based on focus group feedback and observations from onsite visits
 - Billboards
 - Utilize Adams billboard space located directly across from theater (possible sponsorship)
 - Eatran allows for bus wraps
 - Consider for potential sponsorship or usage in larger events (ex: Willie Nelson performance)
 - Utilize electronic marquee outside of school
 - Check into vacant downtown properties can utilize store fronts for displays or sides of buildings for larger billboards
 - Venue Signage/Flyers/Posters
 - Post schedule and posters of upcoming programming within lobby area
 - Posters for events
 - Distribute through friends group (drop off to locations)
 - Work with local businesses for displays (Various Chambers of Commerce across the county)
 - Place up at Venue
 - Place in central Kiosks throughout pedestrian downtown areas
 - Web Search Engines
 - Issue: when searching for “Charlotte” and “theater” Performing Arts Center is not found
 - Website enhancements
 - Using SEO principals to enhance search (page naming, updating pages frequently, and linking to outside organizations)
 - Tie social media into site (what people are saying...)
 - Google Adwords Grant: <http://www.google.com/grants/>
 - \$10,000 of Adwords a month
 - Print Media (newspapers, Lansing area - magazines)
 - Utilize in-kind media partners for placements
 - Style of ad ex: “Advertorials” (advertising that looks like an editorial)
 - Publish schedule of upcoming events
 - Whether in ad space or provided calendar
 - Direct Mail marketing
 - Potential venue renters
 - Current members
 - Send event information at beginning of each quarter
 - Renewal information
 - List of classes and rentals etc.
 - Sponsorship
 - Look to area printers for in-kind sponsors
 - Ad space on corporate pass (see below) can help fund additional printing
 - Cross promote events
 - Appeal to parents of students who attend children’s event

- At school event, have performers from upcoming show visit in costume to promote upcoming show
 - Have signage up in relevant areas to promote upcoming events
 - Include information in school programs/bag stuffers
 - Make announcements at performances
 - Send promotional materials to other businesses
 - Ex: ALIVE and Aquatic Center
 - Feature upcoming performance on small scale at ALIVE, Lansing Mall and other locations (Sampler)
 - Business sponsors (promote to employees)
 - Tie-in with area festivals
 - Ex: Booth space, mini performances, or actors in costume, thematic tie-ins (integrate with event's marketing materials)
 - Movie theater advertising
 - Similar audiences (willing to pay for entertainment)
 - Not a lot of clutter to break through
 - People arrive early with nothing to do except eat popcorn and wait for the movie to start while watching ads
 - Ads repeat until start of show
 - Explore a high quality, low cost outreach and event management tool such as Constant Contact and its new EventSpot, Save Local, and Social Marketing platforms
- Public Relations – traditionally free forms of promotion
 - Create press release template –
 - Always include the following information
 - Logos
 - Boiler plate information
 - Contact information that appear at the top of the release
 - Create head turning titles
 - Reporters receive huge amounts of releases each day, your title must stick out and catch their attention
 - Topics to include in release (as appropriate):
 - Parking information
 - Other transportation options
 - Weather contingencies (as needed)
 - Group discount opportunities
 - Childcare
 - Clearly state the “Fun Factors”
 - Develop relationships with various journalists
 - Offer a behind the stage tour to journalist and other opinion leaders (potential sponsors, corporate members, etc.)
 - Possible piece on what it takes to put on a production
 - Submit releases to sites that are indexed by Google or other search engines
 - Will enhance user search
 - Create media kits to be distributed to media contacts
 - Include bio sheets, releases, lists of upcoming events, etc.

- Create Media Hub on website, show descriptions, graphics, sample videos (link to YouTube, etc.), bios, contact information, press release etc.
- Post events on various event sites or calendars (online and print)
- Website enhancements
 - Social media
 - Further development of Facebook/twitter page
 - These pages are designed to be dialogues (not a push media). Creating this fan base will help promote the events by Word of Mouth
 - Create contests to help create Word of Mouth
- Word of Mouth (WOM) – how to create it?
 - You must give people something to talk about – be buzz worthy (not everything will be)
 - ID those key community members –
 - Look at current mailing lists, for repeat users
 - Advocates will be those people who participate across multiple categories (Schools, Pool, theater, ALIVE, engaged in their communities)
 - Target key people through loyalty or referral programs (share this post win a chance for a free ticket, refer a friend get 20% etc.)
 - IDEA: contact those key people in the community and get them to talk about the Performing Arts Center
 - Example, invite: local celebrities, TV personalities, radio personalities, business owners or leaders, religious leaders, to a performance, give them the VIP treatment with the hopes they will talk about their experience the next day
 - IDEA: Character promotion events (meet and greet)
 - Regional Kids Literature Meet and Greets
 - Ex: Elmo or Cat in the Hat – have event on weekend, invite families across district for autographs, photos, and other activities
 - IDEA: If you have an upcoming children’s program – have an art contest to create the event poster
 - Can be used as a press release (media feel good story)
 - Helps push through social media channels
 - Entries submitted electronically or scanned/posted on Center’s page to let the community vote
 - Voted on Facebook page
 - People must be fans of your page to vote
 - Those people who are your finalists will promote it to their families and friends to help their child win
 - Prize offered could be art featured on event poster, free tickets to event, behind and scenes meet and greet
- Ticket giveaways
 - Radio
 - Involve radio in ticket giveaways
 - Involvement with Radio DJs and show promotions
 - Donate tickets to area fundraisers or raffles
 - Provides exposure and will enhance awareness and relationships
 - Winners of items will then “try” the Performing Arts Center

- Special promotions
 - Develop venue information for Rentals
 - Channel (method of contacting)
 - Create direct mail piece
 - Talk about space available
 - Pricing details
 - Web
 - Enhance pages on site
 - Include more information on what is available
 - Photos
 - Size information
 - Pricing details
 - Develop virtual video tours
 - Method of contacting for more information
 - Email
 - Expand and utilize regularly but not too much
 - Caution: You must reach a balance or risk people removing themselves from your mailing list or demoting you to their SPAM folders
 - Develop messaging based on target audience and interests
 - Potential targets (research and create contact lists):
 - Music lesson teachers/associations (singing, instrument)
 - Ex: Piano teacher association
 - Dance recitals
 - Search for area studios
 - Area businesses
 - Music competitions
 - Dance competition circuit –
 - Starpower (Detroit: Kettering High School)
 - Nexstar (Kalamazoo and Lansing Center)
 - Starquest (Detroit: Walled Lake Northern High School, GR: Centerstage Theater)
 - Showstopper (Battle Creek: Kellogg Arena)
 - Headliners (does not currently come to MI)
 - Starbound (Detroit: Kettering High School)
 - Rainbow Dance Competition (Detroit: Walled Lake Western High School)
 - Cathy Row Ultimate Dance (GR: Devos Center, Fair Haven: Anchor Bay High School, Howell: Howell High School)
 - Energy National Dance Competition (Highland: Milford High School, Waterford: Waterford Mott High School)
 - Dance Force Express (Redford Township: William F. Weber Performing Arts Center, Rome: Romeo High School Auditorium)
 - Hall of Fame (Detroit: Walled Lake Northern HS, Macomb: PAC)

- Applause talent (GR: Van Sigler Fine Arts, Detroit: Milford High School, Detroit: Northern High School)
- Showbiz (Detroit)
- I love dance (Bay City, Detroit)

METRICS AND EVALUATION

- Inexpensive tracking metrics
 - Utilize the web address on all promotional pieces
 - By driving traffic to the website, you can track number of clicks, new vs. repeat visitors, you can see what pages they are looking at, effectiveness of advertisements, etc.
 - Clearly promote a “Join our listserv” link
 - Create a “How did you hear about us?” section on membership applications
 - Utilize electronic lists to check awareness levels with quick short surveys

PROCESS

- Create additional internships/volunteer positions for marketing, public relations, selling sponsorships, etc.
 - Create partnerships with area colleges and universities to develop internship program – focusing on telecommunications, advertising and public relations (PR), business departments (create multiple levels, undergrad and grad level opportunities).
 - MSU – Advertising and PR department –
 - Offers creative - young individuals who need to develop their portfolios – can produce everything from brochure work to actual Ads (print, web, etc.)
 - PR people who can assist with the development of media materials (kits and press releases)
 - Advertising capstone classes works with area small businesses and nonprofits to create full ad campaigns with creative
 - Similar program offered at the graduate level – professors constantly looking for volunteer businesses
 - Students can focus on social media presence (class called New Media Drivers)
 - MSU – Telecommunication department
 - Usability program works with companies to develop websites that conform to the principles of usability
 - MSU/LCC Business School
 - Develop and maintain relationships with donors, sponsors, etc.
 - LCC Graphic Design Program
 - Olivet College
 - Visual Arts, Business and Performing Arts
 - School groups or clubs
 - Business class/club can maintain or create stores, concessions or inventories
 - PR Clubs can help with news releases, web presence and social media, Sponsorships

- Expand current volunteer programs
 - Volunteers can be used to distribute flyers throughout the community
 - Contact and sell sponsorships
 - Put posters in business, churches, on walls etc.
- Utilize student club and organizations to distribute marketing materials
 - National Honors Society – students need to earn volunteer hours
 - Drama class/Band – students could drop materials throughout area for extra credit in class

CHARLOTTE AQUATIC CENTER

RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Please Note: The following beliefs may not be reflective of entire Charlotte/Eaton County population. Information was gathered from focus groups and highlight areas to be tested for validation.

- People who have visited the Aquatic Center find it clean and attractive
- The size of the pool is an asset
- Those who know about the two different pools find it a benefit
- People find the price about right and reasonable for a family
- Awareness of programs and classes is limited, especially outside of the Charlotte Public School market
- Residents do not think the hours are a good fit for their schedules – later on evenings and weekends
- Public pools can be dirty
- Pool is too cold
- Pool is over chlorinated
- Pool is too crowded to enjoy
- There is not adequate and comfortable seating for non-swimming attendees
- Locker rooms are too cold, especially in the winter
- Not enough private changing space
- Few programs/classes of interest

WHAT RESIDENTS WANT

Please Note: Gaps are focus group participants' perceptions and may not reflect current practices

- Awareness of programs/classes
- Chlorine levels that kill bacteria, but does not hurt their eyes
- Warmer big pool
- More leagues/intramural teams, especially for water volley ball – challenge teams representing other communities/organizations
- Paddling classes for kayak/canoe
- Master swimming classes
- SCUBA instruction and activities (especially before spring break)
- Leverage outside activities/events (Shark Week, prep for spring break, paddling season skills/safety review before the season, group SCUBA or paddling trips, etc.)
- Flick and float/dive in movies (especially during Shark Week)
- Private pool rentals for things other than birthday parties (club/church events)
- First aid/CPR/AED training
- Slides
- Lounge areas/comfortable seating/reading space
- Outdoor lounge areas in summer
- Quality food options
- Limited crowds
- Longer hours

- More age designated hours (pre-teen, teen, adult)
- Bar
- Lazy river/splash pads/zero entry

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Please Note: Barriers are based on comment trends from focus groups and may not be reflective of entire population.

- Perception this is Charlotte Public School’s pool, not a regional or community pool
- Fear the pool is dirty, crowded, over chlorinated, and closed when they want to use it
- Programs/classes do not meet their needs/interests
- Not a comfortable place to stay for a long time, especially if you do not want to swim
- Few things for non-swimmers to do while other family members/group members swim
- No food or drinks allowed
- Limited awareness of what’s available

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

- Branding is not regional – very Charlotte specific
- Limited marketing
- Other space surrounding the pool could be better utilized to create a more attractive set of activities for non-swimmers (lounging areas, patio, outside of school hours, playground, adjoining gym, signage welcoming usage)
- Some items could be added to enhance the experience without major expense such as inflatable floating slide, residential splash pad with safety surface, furniture, etc. Could be funded through sponsorships, 50/50 prize tournaments, donations
- No events such as community pool parties, BBQ, tournaments, demonstrations, etc.
- Consideration of concession stands especially for larger groups (meets) – will need additional seating and tables

COBALT RECOMMENDATIONS

PRODUCT/PLACE

- Pursue partnerships with local businesses to provide additional services
 - Partner with ALIVE for concession stand offerings, “smoothie bars,” or portable cart stand in lobby/on patio
 - Develop programming schedule around potential “Date Night” in conjunction with Performing Arts Center of ALIVE
 - Parents would drop kids off at Aquatic Center for “Kid’s Night” event and then attend a show at the Performing Arts Center or ALIVE offerings
- Utilize competitive sports to attract families from across the region
 - Develop competitive swim teams
 - Host intramural competitions for swimming, volleyball, paddle races, etc.

- Facility enhancements
 - Create a summer patio
 - Utilize current play ground
 - Consider installation of splash pad features – even sprinklers and interlocking foam mats
 - Add a concession stand/carts/small tables in lobby and patio areas – potentially gym too
 - Aesthetics – feels like a “school pool”
 - Cover or remove rehabilitative equipment in warm pool when not in use
 - In smaller warmer pool utilize murals or other artwork to make family friendly
 - Place other artwork throughout center to represent the region
 - Within bigger pool highlight regional team’s mascots or penates
 - Smaller pool offers areas for more seating – consider placing chairs/tables around outside for non-swimmers
 - Convert lobby to swim shop/lounge
 - Develop method of monitoring membership usage – create volunteer position or utilize students from swim team (ex: By maintaining the check in station they are able to pay their swim team dues) – utilize student employees or interns
 - Consider installation of ALIVE Link card scanner
 - Offers additional partnership opportunities with ALIVE
 - Can track usage and support marketing
 - Sell food, drinks, swim diapers, swim apparel and memberships
 - Business class/clubs could maintain (use as a learning model)
 - Additional attractive pool signage needed for ease of traffic flow – ex: “check in here”, “this way to observation deck”, “this way to locker room”, etc.
 - Consider locations for sponsor signage (can offer as part of other packages or levels)
 - Create packages to be sold for these more permanent sponsors
 - Locker room issues
 - Cold locker rooms
 - Radiant heat or increase heating in those areas
 - Privacy
 - Add additional changing rooms, curtains, or stalls
- Look into increasing evening and weekend hours to expand usage
- Develop programming around seasonal themes
 - Ex: offer scuba lessons before spring break
 - Ex: small craft safety and techniques
 - Paddling classes
 - Red Cross Certifications
 - Coast Guard Programming
 - Ex: Shark-week themed Flick and n’ Float movie (time it with television series)
- Develop and publicize rental packages with price details
 - Focus beyond birthdays – team celebrations, family reunions, etc.
 - Include gyms, playgrounds, and lawn areas

PRICE

- Expand memberships to reach currently untapped markets:
 - Corporate memberships – memberships/passes or discounted memberships for employees or clients
 - Benefits to Aquatic Center
 - Induce trial for company’s employees/clients
 - Companies would promote upcoming events to employees to promote usage of passes
 - Benefit to companies
 - Able to offer membership as perks for employees/clients
 - Scarcity effect created – if pass is already checked out and family wants to go, they may go anyway or look at purchasing their own membership
 - Covering costs
 - Back of pass is a great space for advertising (selling ad space)
 - Participation creates list of companies to target for event sponsorships/rentals
 - Consider not only business-to-consumer advertisers but business-to-business advertisers as well for potential companies interested in the ad space
- Develop promotion for memberships or group discounts/deals
 - Include information and method of purchasing memberships online
 - Suggestion:
 - Direct mail or eblast piece to repeat visitors
 - Highlight cost savings of purchasing membership vs. individual day passes
 - Direct mail or eblast to current members
 - Thank them for their continued support
 - Remind them of renewing for upcoming years
- Develop program for local businesses to market and sell passes for you (as the lottery does for the State of Michigan)
 - Have passes available for sale at sponsoring businesses
 - Ex: Meijer offers passes and memberships
 - Meijer in turn will promote their availability in store
 - Not only will sell additional tickets but signage with Aquatic Center logos will enhance brand awareness
- Consider other pre-purchase tokens, punch cards, or 10 packs (ten daily passes)

PROMOTION

- Approach should be multimodal focusing on non-paid forms of promotion (word of mouth, email, social media, couponing/discounts, news media, etc.) to develop membership base before expanding into paid forms of advertising
 - Difficulties faced: Resident’s current perceptions
 - “Cold Pool” Temp perception
 - Currently dealing with residents’ perception that the pool is cold

- They came tried it and it was cold – now it will be more difficult to get them to try again
 - Take daily temp – Show ideal temp range and where pool falls in that range
 - Develop method of announcing the daily temps via web cams or other announcements – place on school electronic sign and webpage
 - “Public pools are dirty” – bacteria concerns
 - Display results from bacteria tests along with daily temperature readings
 - Emphasize cleanliness note chlorine levels (show chart that displays usage of chemical and bacteria level – include “sweet spot” where bacteria is gone and eyes do not burn)
 - Blog or Video discussion on the science behind keeping the public pool clean (we test this frequently, here is how we maintain it) - seasonal media release
 - “We have a pool at home”
 - Differentiate between personal pool usage and going to the aquatic center
 - Appeals: personal pool usage ends at summer (possible winter usage); Events; classes; value of membership vs. costs of maintaining personal pool; professionally managed pool cleaner than private pool
 - Low awareness levels
 - Begin distributing information about the pool and programs through multiple media channels (web, upcoming event flyers, local business posters that change seasonally, TV, etc.)
 - Charlotte branding
 - Rebrand the center to be less Charlotte and more regional
 - Examples “Westside Aquatic Center” or “Regional Aquatic Center”
- Public Relations – traditionally free forms of promotion
 - Creation or expansion of social media pages: Facebook, twitter, YouTube, etc.
 - Link social media to current website
 - These pages are designed to be dialogues (not a push media), creating this fan base will help promote the events by word of mouth
 - Create contests to help create word of mouth
 - Word of Mouth (WOM) – how to create it? Must give people something to talk about
 - You must give people something to talk about – be buzz worthy (not everything will be)
 - ID those key community members –
 - Look at current mailing lists to determine repeat users
 - Target those people who are high users across multiple categories (active in schools, pool, theater, ALIVE, shows they are engaged in their communities)
 - Target key people through loyalty or referral programs (share this post win a pass, refer a friend get 20% etc.)
 - IDEA: contact those key people in the community and get them to talk about the pool

- Example, target: local celebrities, TV personalities, radio personalities, business owners or leaders, religious leaders, who have families. Send them a gift pack, that contains, branded Aquatic Center gear and a bracelet that acts as a pass for a month of free membership. The person would wear the bracelet the next time they (along with their family) want to visit the Aquatic Center. At the check-in they would be identified as a VIP. This person would then receive VIP treatment, facility tour, discounts at store or concession, in the hopes they will talk about their experience to their audiences, friends and family.
- IDEA: When looking at creating the mural for the smaller warmer pool, create a contest that has area artists submitting their designs for voting. You would select top three designs and then allow your social media communities to vote to determine the winner from the top three entries
 - Can be used as a press release (media feel good story)
 - Push through social media channels
 - Entries submitted electronically
 - Voted on Facebook page
 - People must be fans of your page to vote
 - Those people who are your finalists will promote it to their families and friends to win
 - Prize offered could be art featured inside Aquatic Center, free year-long family membership and Aquatic Center gear
- Annual campaigns - to be placed on website and social media channels
 - YouTube Videos/Onsite classes
 - Start of season pool readiness
 - Series on how to get ready for pool season
 - Pool safety
 - Pool product review
 - Sponsorship opportunity
 - How to close down your pool
 - Value of membership vs. maintaining a private pool
- News piece ideas:
 - Pool safety piece
 - Partner with area TV stations (WLNS, WILX, WSYM)
 - Weekly piece on pool safety in the summer
 - “How to stay cool in the summer” piece
 - On high temp days offer extended hours or discounted admission or free ice cream
 - Get feature on news – discuss how area residents can stay cool by coming to the Aquatic Center
- Contact and partner with local groups – momseverday on WILX, Dad’s Corner WILX, mom2mom, businesses, playgroups, daycare centers, churches, 4H, scouts, dance studios, etc.
 - Coordinate volunteers or interns to visit and provide a brief program – hand out materials (passes, class list, etc.)

- Website Redesign
 - Regional branding – consider naming to align with regional identity
 - Less Charlotte more emphasis on region
 - Create “What’s New” (News/Events and New information pages)
 - Blogs
 - Tie in with Social Media
 - The key is to have your homepage be updated frequently with new content, it will assist with search engine optimization
 - Enable online pass and membership sales (pre-purchased discount programs or 10 pack of swim tokens)
 - Webcams
 - Showing crowd levels, temps, testing results (chart format on page to show trends)
- Email marketing
 - Utilize school email lists to distribute information on upcoming programing, memberships etc.
 - Utilize lists of other organizations above and other school districts
- Pass/Membership/Behind-the-scenes tour giveaways
 - Create special behind the scene tours – Ex: “Day in the life of a life guard”
 - Radio
 - Involve radio in pass/membership/tour giveaways
 - Involvement with Radio DJs and show promotions
 - Donate passes/memberships to area fundraisers or raffles
 - Provides exposure and will enhance awareness
 - Winners of items will then “try” the Aquatic Center
- Advertising – traditional paid forms (or in-kind sponsors)
 - Website redesign –
 - Consider partnering with university usability program for redesign or working with a web design firm
 - Give the site a regional non-school feel
 - Use actual images of residents using the pool
 - Consider hiring a professional photographer to come in and shoot an event, class or busy open swim
 - Develop waiver for people to sign when they check in that day
 - Use social media to help drive content
 - Ex: “what are people saying now” link to twitter to show tweets regarding Aquatic center
 - Using SEO principals to enhance search (page naming, updating pages frequently, linking to outside organizations)
 - Google Adwords Grant: <http://www.google.com/grants/>
 - Media – will make recommendations based on survey results
 - Print – Flyers and Direct mail marketing
 - Direct mail marketing
 - Current members
 - Send event information at beginning of each quarter

- Renewal information
 - List of classes and rentals etc.
 - Send to all regional organizations – schools, park depts., businesses, churches, clubs, studios, etc.
 - Is a potential sponsorship opportunity to help offset costs
 - Look to area printers for in-kind sponsors
 - Ad space on corporate pass (see below) can help fund additional printing
 - Flyers
 - Distribute in all schools in the region
 - Charlotte and other districts
 - Place flyer in Friday folders – upcoming events or classes
 - Radio
 - During big events (swim meets or special events) consider usage of radio remote
 - Radio would park van outside of Aquatic Center and host live on location
 - DJ's would talk about the event, the center, during breaks
- Special Events
 - Movie events
 - Consider having screen and activities in gyms too for non-swimmers
 - Flick n' Float or a Dive-in Movie
 - Offer concessions
 - Provide seating around pool for non-swimmers
 - Create sponsorship packages
 - Kid's Night Out
 - Food swim and flick
 - Potentially time it with a show at Performing Arts Center or ALIVE event
 - Concept: Parents can go out on a date to Performing Arts Center while kids can be dropped off at Aquatic center
 - Develop multiple tournaments or leagues that include other communities (water volleyball, polo, swim team, adult swim teams, etc.)

METRICS AND EVALUATION

- Inexpensive tracking metrics
 - Utilize the web address for sign in and on all promotional pieces
 - By driving traffic to the website you can track number of clicks, new vs. repeat visitors, you can see what pages they are looking at etc.
 - Create a “How did you hear about us?” section on membership applications
 - Utilize mailing lists to check awareness levels through quick electronic surveys

PROCESS

- Create additional intern and volunteer positions for marketing, public relations etc.
 - Create partnerships with area colleges and universities to develop internship program– focusing on telecommunications, advertising and PR, business departments (create multiple levels, undergrad and grad level opportunities).
 - MSU – Advertising and PR department –
 - Offers creative - young individuals who need to develop their portfolios – can produce everything from brochure work to actual Ads (print, web, etc.)
 - PR people who can assist with the development of media materials (kits and press releases)
 - Advertising capstone classes works with area small businesses and nonprofits to create full ad campaigns with creative
 - Similar program offered at the graduate level – professors constantly looking for volunteer businesses
 - Students can focus on social media presence (class called New Media Drivers)
 - MSU – Telecommunication department
 - Usability programs works with companies to develop websites that conform to the principles of usability
 - MSU/LCC Business School
 - Develop and maintain relationships with donors, sponsors, etc.
 - LCC Graphic Design Program
 - Olivet College
 - Visual Arts, Business and Performing Arts
 - School groups or clubs
 - Business class can maintain or create stores, concessions or inventories
 - PR Clubs can help with news releases, web presence and social media, Sponsorships
 - They will act as the fundraising arm to help offset costs for students of the swim team
 - Contact and sell sponsorships
 - Group members can also be utilize as volunteers at additional pool events (league meets or special events)
- Create “Friends of the Aquatic Center” or “Swim team booster”

ALIVE

RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Please Note: The following beliefs may not be reflective of entire Charlotte/Eaton County population. Information was gathered from focus groups and highlight areas to be tested for validation.

- Very limited understanding of what ALIVE is
- Many believe it is just a hospital location for physical rehabilitation and some women's services
- Upon arrival, attendees have been extremely impressed (at least 1 has begun using the facility and purchased massage for his wife)
- Nonresidents impressed, but think Charlotte is ½ hour from Lansing
- Strong praise for the colors and architecture
- Strong appreciation for the indoor walking trails
- Users were very supportive
- People in the community heard that the food at Nourish was very good and reasonably priced, but that it was a secret
- Unaware of the Nourish menu – thought it was just smoothies, bagels and quiche
- Seating limited
- Generally, awareness of the organization and its programs was very low
- Very positive reaction to onsite childcare and list of programs provided

WHAT RESIDENTS WANT

Please Note: Gaps are focus group participants' perceptions and may not reflect current practices

- Better outreach on what ALIVE really offers
- More trails, both inside and outside, potentially linking to the trail master plan
- More seating inside and outside, especially for Nourish
- Lower cost on per-day use
- More international cooking classes
- Tie in with local events
- Tennis/larger gym
- Good WiFi access
- Food/smoothie tasting and deals
- More events to draw people in
- Lounge area with ping pong/euchre tournaments
- More league/tournaments for basketball, dodgeball, baseball, etc.
- Special access/discounts through their employer
- "Master" level classes on various subjects
- Summer camps for kids
- Rental packages and details

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Please Note: Barriers are based on comment trends from focus groups and may not be reflective of entire population.

- Awareness of services and programs
- Language used on web and literature difficult to decode (hard to find comprehensive listing of what is going on each day without paper booklet)
- Confusion with the hospital
- Perceived distance from Lansing
- Web address not consistently used in all advertising
- Daily cost may be too high

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

- ALIVE's pending decision on marketing strategy reducing optimum use
- Serves diverse, distinct audiences for a diverse set of services/programs – a one-size-fits-all marketing approach may increase awareness and feel organic, but may have limited effectiveness in driving trial use. Address prospects' small problem first, and then you can expand their involvement.
- Significant reliance on passive marketing models (not pushed hard to market, but web and internal postings)
- Flow through Nourish area seems congested
 - Choke point at register
 - If original flow utilized may still cause confusion once people have paid and attempt to go back in to find seating
 - Limited seating
 - No obvious exterior seating or other nooks for people to sit and eat
 - Hidden – not obvious that it is there
 - Menu confusion – not clearly visible
 - No "smoothie bar" or push for "Smoothies-to-go"
- Walking path flow signage – additional signage needed to indicate what directions walkers are following and to stay out of the way
- Lack of information and signage in clinical area to indicate other activities in the building

COBALT RECOMMENDATIONS

PRODUCT/PLACE

- Portfolio of offerings closely align with community interests
- Increase evening hours and extending childcare
- Nourish
 - Expand seating for Nourish
 - Display menu – currently battling perception that they have a limited food offering
 - Could expand TV screens as display monitors
 - Provide copies of menu at tables and lounge areas
 - Create outside dining with shade and easy access

- Create “Smoothie Bar”
- Offer free samples outside of Nourish (clinical areas etc.)
- Blow smells of bake goods (cookies, bread, etc.) throughout building to attract people
- Remove arched wall and open up seating in area to enhance visibility and flow – push booths to the side
- Send menus out to regional businesses for lunch orders or refreshments for meetings
 - Ex: reference Qdoba menu and distribution as a case study
 - Could list upcoming events, ALIVE features, etc.
- Nourish-to-go “healthy takeout”
- Highlight gift shop items in Nourish
 - Cross sell theater tickets, Aquatic Center passes and display upcoming events in region
- Brand all of the cooking classes under the Nourish brand
- iPad app development – create online orders and deliver inside of building (can be used for external online orders as well)
- Menu for children
- Consider delivery utilizing pizza delivery model
- Seasonal Class offerings – camping (things to think about), hiking or boating (kayaking) before the season begins, Master classes on various sports before those seasons begins (Fishing, gardening, archery, etc.)
- Adjust scheduling of drop-in sessions and push more league/tournament use
 - Ping pong, kickball, volleyball, pickle ball, dodge ball, archery, basketball etc.
- Kids’ Camps – develop themed kid’s camps and run multiple sessions throughout summer – test in survey
 - Examples:
 - Ex: Pirates (how to be a pirate, history, navigation, swimming, knot tying, fencing, ropes course)
 - Ex: Geek Camp – partner with Impression 5 – computer, science experiments, video gaming, Sci-fi themes, etc.
 - Ex: Princess Camp (living like a princess) – manners, dancing, table setting, flower arranging, costuming (dressing up), animal care, etc.
 - Ex: Performing arts – partner with Performing Arts Center – acting, storytelling, costume design, set design, singing, dancing, stage combat, Shakespeare, etc.
 - Ex: Nature Lover Camp – Partner with Potter Park Zoo or Nature Centers – animal care, botany, plant identification, recycling, etc.
 - Develop evening or once a week programming based on themes above
 - Potential to tie-in with themed festivals
- Adult versions of themed evening programs (see kid’s list above)
 - Additional Classes: - test in survey
 - Ballroom
 - Tennis
 - Salsa
 - Irish dance
 - World cuisine (different regions of the world)
 - Martial arts – multiple styles
 - Performing arts (if not offered by Performing Arts Center)
 - House plants
 - Herbs
 - Survival (partner with 4H outdoor challenge program)

- Climbing/conditioning (partner with climbing clubs in Grand Ledge)
- Cooking with food allergies (peanuts, milks etc.)
- Cooking with dietary restrictions
 - Low sodium, low fat, diabetics
- Science of bread making
- Brewing and wine making
 - Sampling (wine and beer tasting)
- Wilderness/backpack cooking
- Wilderness first aid
- Obstacle race/ extreme running conditioning program
- Develop private party packages – private use and corporate
- Sunday sampler – small segments of larger classes to highlight offerings and attract additional students
- Consider programming that utilizes spaces in other buildings/facilities, such as tennis lessons at the schools across the county, wellness/nutrition sessions at large employers, radio call in show
- Development of non-paved walking trails onsite
- Develop obstacles along trail to augment ropes course and serve training needs of “Extreme” run training, pirate camp, etc.
- Develop conditioning package for teams, martial arts clubs and dance studios
- Partner with area school districts to provide tutoring/arts programs for kids after school

PRICE

- Pricing by pre-purchased hours – use link cards to track time, tie in with a credit card so if you go over charge for overages
 - Could also incentivize usage for off peak times (per hour rate is cheaper for non-popular timeframes)
- Community wellness program – incentive for reaching fitness goals (discounts or prizes)
- Prepaid punch cards –
 - Induces trial – member giveaways, existing members can pass out to family/friends, radio giveaways, or corporate giveaways
 - Creates a sense of obligation to try (“well I already paid for it...”)
- Memberships
 - Corporate memberships – memberships/passes or discounted memberships
 - Benefits to ALIVE
 - Induce trial for company’s employees
 - Company would then promote the “what’s happening” to employees to promote usage of passes
 - Benefit to companies
 - Able to offer membership as perks for employees
 - Scarcity effect created – if pass is already checked out and family wants to go they may go anyway or look at purchasing their own membership
 - Covering costs
 - Back of pass is a great space for advertising (selling ad space)
 - Also creates list of companies to utilize for event sponsorships

- Consider not only business-to-consumer markets but business-to-business markets as well for potential companies interested in the ad space
- Allow area businesses to sell day passes, massage and token 10 packs

PROMOTION

- Approach should focus on niche marketing to raise awareness and induce trial
 - Difficulties faced: Resident’s current perceptions
 - Differentiate from the hospital – confusion on how it is different
 - Low awareness
 - Induce trial – people who try product love it!
 - Greater focus on “push” distribution on specific programs and classes
 - User confusion
 - People are confused as to what AL!VE is and what it offers
 - Niche marketing – targeting by segmentation
 - Id specific needs (based on AL!VE’s offerings) and associated target markets
 - Help consumers become aware of need and educate on how AL!VE fulfills it
 - Induce trial then take residents on a journey of discovery and how AL!VE can help optimize their lives
- Promotions
 - Media
 - Website presence
 - Site confusion
 - Limited understanding of the terms used
 - Further development of social media outlets
 - Tie with established groups on Facebook/Twitter/Google Groups
 - Introduce blogging
 - Can be used to:
 - Supplement classes
 - Live blog casts/video casts/talk show formats
 - Ex: How to cook a Thanksgiving Turkey – live broadcast of class online for viewers
 - Ex: Chili cooking or Breads
 - Ex: Have employees blog/post/tweet about what they did at work today
 - Ex: Health themes – women’s health, preventive care etc.
 - Ex: Blog on best practices for companies (staff engagement)
 - Video Series
 - YouTube videos of classes (samples)
 - Training programs
 - Format ads for news/radio etc. and have available on site
 - Link to more in-depth video resources
 - Virtual tour for purpose of attending
 - Virtual tour for purpose of potential renters

- Intentionally placing web address in highly visible locations (ads, brochures, signage etc.)
 - Creates ability to track and monitor
 - Provides people with method of finding more information
 - Email marketing
 - Newsletter development for current members
 - Contain lists of classes, times and reminders
 - Weekly email to businesses on Nourish’s menu and weekly specials so they can order and pickup
 - Corporate newsletter – framed as a benefit for the company employees
 - Topics: wellness and upcoming events
 - Cross promote blogs and video series
 - Cross promote upcoming regional events
 - Other opportunities:
 - Integrate programing with regional festival offerings
 - Much greater outreach to build relationships with clubs/groups across the region, and then market through those relationships
 - Significantly expand relationships with major entities outside of Charlotte
 - Hold annual open house for new members and interested residents

METRICS AND EVALUATION

- Inexpensive tracking metrics
 - Utilize the web address on all promotional pieces
 - By driving traffic to the website you can track number of clicks, new vs. repeat visitors, you can see what pages they are looking at, impact of marketing efforts, etc.
 - Create a “How did you hear about us?” section on membership applications
 - Utilize mailing lists to check awareness levels through short online surveys
 - Have special Nourish menu “taste test” events

PROCESS

- Create additional intern and volunteer positions for marketing, public relations etc.
 - Create partnerships with area colleges and Universities to develop internship program – focusing on Telecommunications, Advertising and PR, Business Department (create multiple levels, undergrad and grad level opportunities)
 - MSU – Advertising and PR department –
 - Offers creative - young individuals who need to develop their portfolios – can produce everything from brochure work to actual Ads (print, web, etc.)
 - PR people who can assist with the development of media materials (kits and press releases)
 - Advertising capstone classes works with area small businesses and nonprofits to create full ad campaigns with creative
 - Similar program offered at the graduate level – professors constantly looking for volunteer businesses

- Students can focus on social media presence (class called New Media Drivers)
 - MSU – Telecommunication department
 - Usability program works with companies to develop websites that conform to the principles of usability
 - MSU/LCC Business School
 - Develop and maintain relationships with donors, sponsors, etc.
 - LCC Graphic Design Program
 - Olivet College
 - Visual Arts, Business and Performing Arts
- Interns can be utilized to help drive social media content and group development

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

OUTREACH SYSTEM

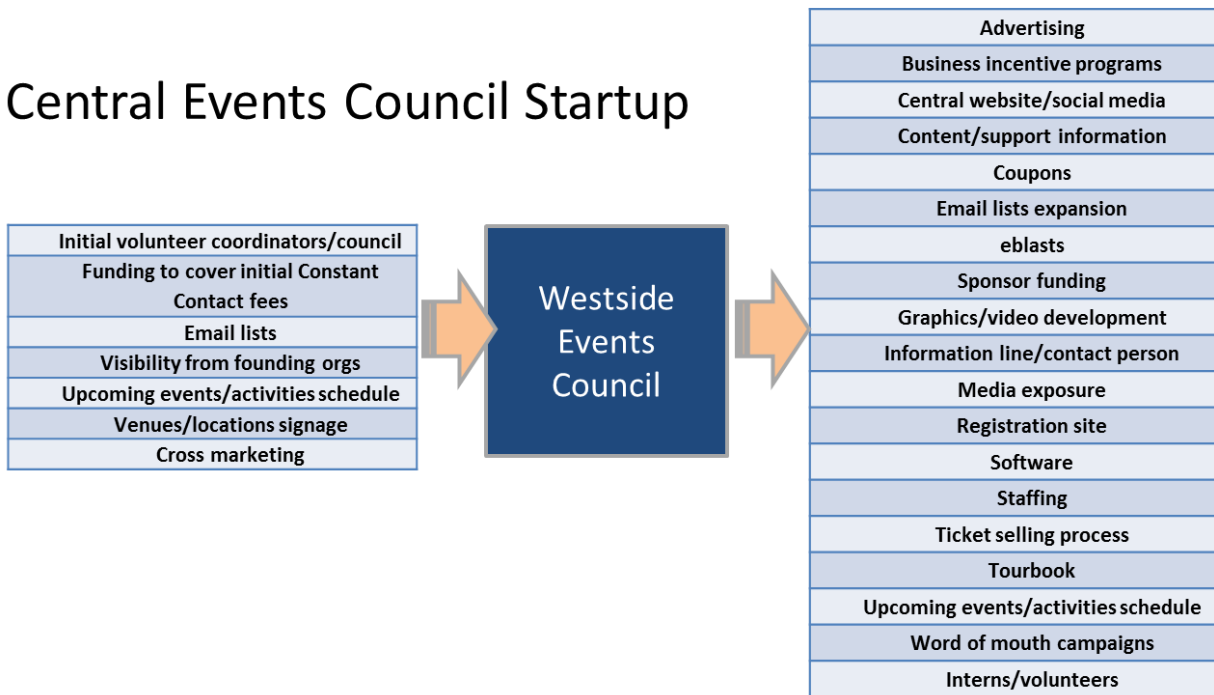
Nonprofit organizations often lack the financial and human resources to implement significant enhancements to their programs, offerings and outreach. Motivated individuals and money are key inputs to developing an effective outreach organization.

Cobalt proposes addressing this challenge through the development of a centralized, regional event outreach organization. This organization could be established as a standalone 501c3 (and be able to apply for grants and request tax-deductible donations and sponsorship opportunities), or it could be a division (separately branded) of an existing tax-exempt organization. Funding would come from a share of member fees, donations, sponsorships, vendor fees, application fees, grants, and potential revenue from festivals.

Regional branding is an important component of this outreach organization, as a regional brand will draw more volunteer, sponsorship and visibility than a Charlotte brand. Governance of this organization would be a board/council comprised of key influencers across the region representing the communities, chambers, school districts and major non-profit organizations across the county. For purposes of this recommendation, this organization will be referred to as “Westside Events Council” (Westside).

The graphic below shows the initial start-up inputs and outputs expected from “Westside.”

Central Events Council Startup



Key Roles/Functions:

Council:

- Developing strategic initiatives and monitoring metrics
- Overseeing key coordinator performance
- Providing leads for sponsors, volunteer sources, grants
- Providing information on upcoming events
- Regularly building relationships and expand the network of organizations participating in the central events council

Central publicity coordinator responsibilities:

- Begin as part-time contract position and grow it as the organization grows
- Developing sponsorship packages
- Managing media outreach and list development
- Managing eblasts and development/enhancement of central email outreach system
- Distributing weekly schedule of upcoming events to all mailing list members, schools, employers and businesses in the region
- Distributing major event support materials (posters at businesses, school backpack stuffers, etc.)
- Advertising
- Maintaining website and Constant Contact eblast and event system
- Coordinating development of volunteer/intern educational information/recruiting packet
- Overseeing event-harvesting volunteers/interns
- Overseeing content development volunteers/interns
- Overseeing graphics/video development volunteers/interns
- Evaluating post-event satisfaction of residents, sponsors, and volunteers
- Collecting and reporting key metrics based on activities above
- Signing checks generated by the financial coordinator's accounts payable process

Central sponsorship coordinator responsibilities:

- Developing email/call/mail lists of potential sponsors across the region
- Participating in development of sponsorship packages
- Selling to sponsors
- Reenrolling sponsors
- Invoicing
- Reconciling invoicing from reports generated by the financial coordinator's accounts payable process
- Overseeing business interns to increase sales/marketing efforts
- Following up on leads provided by others
- Maintaining Salesforce CRM system
- Sending thank you card and follow up call to every sponsor after every event

Central financial coordinator responsibilities:

- Managing accounts payable and receivable
- Compiling financial reports
- Maintaining financial and legal records pursuant to record retention policy
- Maintaining appropriate insurance
- Managing liability waivers
- Managing relationships with vendors
- Overseeing finance/business interns assisting in financial responsibilities
- Collecting and reporting key financial metrics

Central volunteer/intern coordinator

- Assisting in development of volunteer/intern educational information/recruiting packet
- Developing email/call/mail lists of potential volunteer sources across the region
- Providing volunteer/intern orientation
- Coordinating volunteer training/event communication
- Scheduling volunteer deployment at events
- Managing volunteer paperwork/waivers
- Managing volunteer incentives
- Coordinating sending of thank you card and follow up call to every volunteer after every event
- Overseeing interns/volunteers to assist with the responsibilities above

Volunteer/intern responsibilities (varies depending on what they are doing)

- Regular harvesting of events and activities based on their “beat” of organizations/geography
- Producing content for event promotion and supporting materials, including blog comments and word of mouth campaigns
- Supporting website and marketing systems
- Assisting with developing media relations and contact lists
- Producing graphics and video for event promotion and supporting materials
- Providing sales/calling assistance
- Providing financial activities assistance
- Assisting in the recruitment and coordination of other volunteers
- Serving as staff during major events/activities

Notes on internships

- Create partnerships with area colleges and Universities – focusing on Telecommunications, Advertising and PR specialties, as well as on business, teaching, and recreation (create undergrad and grad level opportunities)
 - MSU – Advertising and PR department –
 - Offers creative individuals who need to develop their portfolios – can produce everything from brochure work to actual Ads print, web, etc.
 - Can assist with the development of media materials (kits and press releases)
 - Offers advertising capstone classes that works with area small businesses and nonprofits to create full ad campaigns with creative content
 - Similar program offered at the graduate level – professors constantly looking for volunteer businesses
 - MSU – Telecommunication department-
 - Usability program works with companies to develop websites that conform to the principles of usability.
- Other opportunities are available through other departments at MSU, at LCC, and at Olivet College (which uses the centralized “collecentral.com” site to match opportunities with intern candidates.

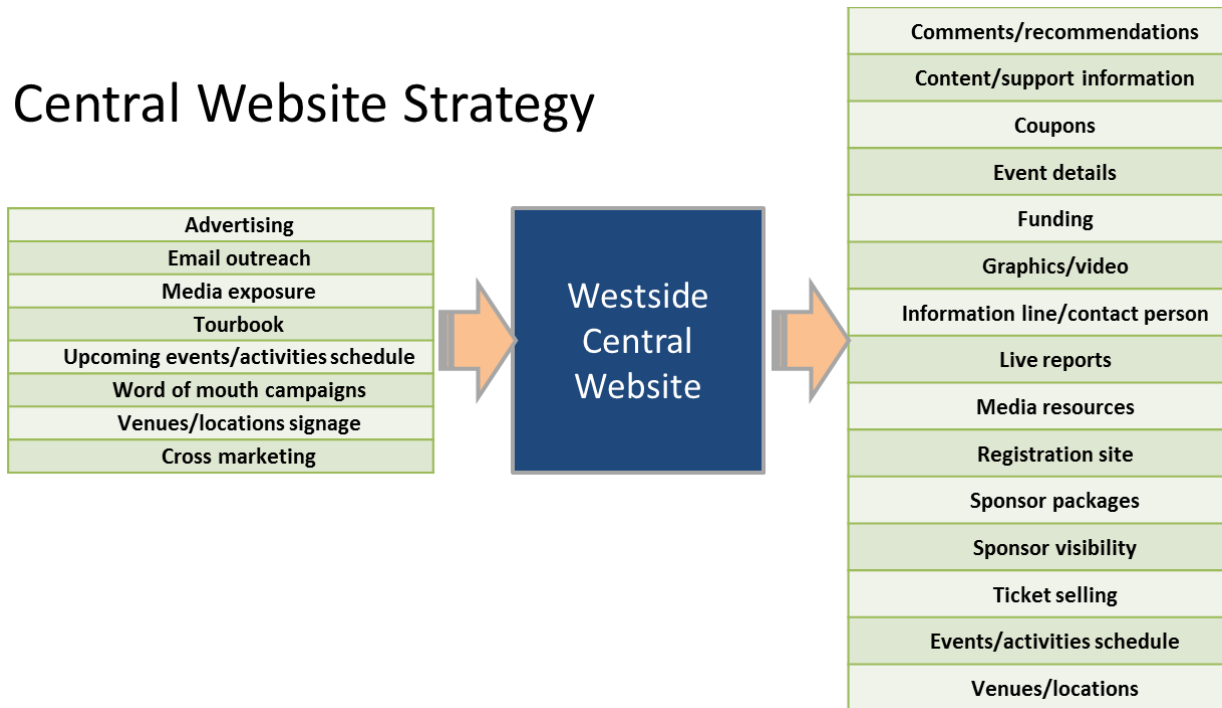
Notes on student volunteer opportunities

- Create PR and business clubs through school districts
- Hire club coordinators as if they were coaches

PROCESSES

A key element of the Westside strategy is the creation and maintenance of a central website, which would perform a number of functions to amplify the outreach efforts of member organizations to potential attendees, sponsors and volunteers. The graphic below shows the key inputs and outputs of the central website.

Central Website Strategy



FESTIVAL EVENTS

- Commit to several festival events per year
 - Events allow for partnerships with local talent and businesses
 - Potentially host additional smaller sub events
 - Concepts to be tested in survey
 - Benefits:
 - Generate significant PR and visibility for each participating organizations' programs (especially those with thematic ties)
 - Create significant sponsorship opportunities to self-fund outreach and engagement
 - Draw visitors from across the region to experience offerings of ALIVE, Performing Arts Center and Aquatic Center
 - Create a method to induce trail – low risk for attendees
 - Will significantly increase interest in volunteering or being an intern
 - Good for area businesses
 - Assist with filling empty store fronts
 - Drive new business
 - Attract a younger more active demographic

- Integrate festival events with charity - Cause Related Marketing (CRM)
 - Provide PR
 - Ability to do good for community
 - Appeal for attendees

REGIONAL FESTIVAL EVENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Event Ideas
 - Ice/winter theme (February) – potential names: Frost Fest, Ice Fest, Freezingman, Snoggetog
 - Idea suggestion: Vikings, Nordic, How to train a Dragon
 - Attractions
 - Ice sculpting
 - Contest
 - Classes on How-to
 - Night 5k
 - Uses torches and glow sticks to run trails
 - Possible tie in with a cause (proceeds go toward helping...)
 - Winter themed prize competitions (50/50 for charity)
 - Ultimate snowball fight
 - Cross country ski race
 - Snow shoe race
 - Human dog sled race
 - Encourage organizations, businesses, schools and clubs to setup and sponsor teams
 - Soup/bread cook-off
 - Cardboard long-ship sled building competition
 - Contests for: craziest design, longest run, biggest mast, etc.
 - Frost Fest Twilight Parade
 - Ships from build-off competition on display
 - Electric parade
 - Mead Hall pub crawl
 - Possible scavenger hunt (stamps as people visit various locations)
 - Directing traffic through regional bars/clubs
 - Organizational Tie-ins
 - Aquatic Center
 - Blizzard Beach
 - Host “Kid’s Night” – pizza, pool and movie
 - Allows parents to experience event without worrying about kids
 - ALIVE - offer classes related to competitions and activities
 - Indoor 5K
 - Indoor tournaments (dodgeball etc)
 - Host “Kid’s Night” – activities and meal
 - Allows parents to experience event without worrying about kids

- Performing Arts Center – host expo related to event theme (ex: knitting)
 - Have actors in period costumes across region invading capital like a Capital One commercial, flash mobs, handout flyers, coupons, etc.
 - Performances based on event theme
 - Ex: Beowulf, various Nordic performing arts music, visual arts, photography
 - Miniature versions of performances –Teasers of upcoming events at locations throughout the region
- Early November – potential names: Highland Fling, Celtic Celebration
 - Idea suggestion: Highland/Celtic theme
 - Attractions
 - Pumpkin-chunkin’
 - Dance performances
 - Local studios
 - Focusing on Irish and Celtic forms of music and dance
 - Great Lakes Microbrew tasting contest
 - Partner with microbrew associations
 - Competitions (50/50 prize toward charity)
 - Hammer throw
 - Themed 5k (running in a kilt) – obstacle course “I Might Be Kilt!”
 - Bag pipe play off
 - Fencing tournament
 - Quarter staff tournament
 - Archery tournament
 - Bake-off competition
 - Organizational Tie-ins
 - Performing Arts
 - “Spontaneous” sample performances across the regions, flash mobs of players or dancers or musicians, hand out flyers, etc.
 - Use local actors to dress in period costumes
 - Celtic dance competition
 - Celtic music competition
 - Stage performances at festival
 - Teaser performances through the region
 - Old world craft demonstration/expo
 - Aquatic Center – run seasonal programming
 - Winter fineness, tropical scuba, big swim meet, paddle prize competition, (time through obstacle course with center providing paddle boats)
 - Host “Kid’s Night” – pizza, pool and movie
 - Allows parents to experience event without worrying about kids
 - ALIVE
 - Old world crafts
 - Beer making

- Irish dance lessons
 - Build your own boat
 - Host “Kid’s Night” – activities and meal
 - Allows parents to experience event without worrying about kids
- Late July – potential names: Buccaneer Bash, Swashbuckler Sworee, Pirate Invasion
 - Idea suggestion:
 - Attractions
 - Caribbean themed performances
 - Steel drums etc.
 - Pirate skill seminars
 - Black powder demonstrations
 - Competitions
 - Dance competition “Shake Your Booty”
 - Paddle races
 - Fencing or Mixed Sword Arts tournament
 - Martial arts (demonstration)
 - Fishing tournament
 - Pirate triathlon – paddle, swim, run
 - Tie with a charity
 - Including a section on low ropes obstacle course, water hazards, etc.
 - Great Lakes Beer and Brat
 - Wine tasting
 - Barbeque cook-off (fundraiser)
 - Organizational Tie-ins
 - Performing Arts Center
 - Historical lectures
 - Musical performances
 - Western martial arts demos
 - Caribbean art
 - Percussion groups
 - Steel drum bands
 - Aquatic Center
 - Pirate themed swim meet/ prize tournament
 - Involvement in 5k or triathlon event
 - Host “Kid’s Night” – pizza, pool and movie
 - Allows parents to experience event without worrying about kids
 - ALIVE
 - Involvement in the pirate skills seminars
 - Caribbean cooking class
 - Master barbeque seminars
 - Beer and wine making
 - Host “Kid’s Night” – activities and meal

- Allows parents to experience event without worrying about kids
 - Performances across the county along with pirate invasion
 - PR media release – “pirates sacking capitol-area communities today”
 - Have costume promoters with sacks handing out flyers, coupons at hospitals, major intersections, etc.
 - Place pirate posters and flags up throughout downtown areas
- Fall - Frontier Days
- Other festival ideas for testing in follow-up survey
 - Polka-palooza – (central European, lederhosen)
 - Taste of Italy (Mediterranean theme)
 - Arabian nights (middle eastern theme)
 - Safari Fest -- (African drumming, zoos, etc)
 - Orient Adventure – Asian theme
 - Cinco-de-mayo fiesta (Latin America)
 - Music Festival – musical instrument expo, choir competitions, charity 50/50 talent show
 - Pizza wars (this is a great idea, especially combining with Michigan brews)
 - Casino Royale – cards and gaming experts – sell chips/tokens to avoid gambling legal issues

CROSS PROMOTIONS

- Difficulties to overcome
 - Belief that Charlotte is too far away
 - Emphasize how close everything is – in terms of travel time (10 minutes form Oneida or Olivet!)
 - Rebranding for regional appeal
 - Include regional representatives in planning
 - Regional Branding –
 - Name of Regional group should express idea of regional and not just Charlotte
 - Helps to break preconceived notions that “Charlotte is so far away”
 - Current ads’ limitations
 - Residents’ responses upon viewing:
 - “Nauseatingly wholesome”
 - “Left me feeling like there is a lot to do in Charlotte but I couldn’t tell you what was in it” – not memorable
 - “Doesn’t make me want to move to Charlotte”
 - Other observations
 - Local residents more positive about the ads
 - No clear call to action
 - Should push central event websites
 - Results:
 - More Ad/Copy testing
 - Create targeted messages with clear value propositions and “Fun Factors”
 - Ads designed to communicate to people considering moving to Charlotte or to promote visitor

- Ads designed to communicate to current residents
 - Ads designed to draw new residents or businesses
- Opportunities:
 - Cross promote area venues at each organization's location
 - Display marketing materials for area attractions/events/businesses
 - Develop prepaid entertainment books or punch cards – “Be a tourist in your own hometown”
 - Induces trial
 - Creates a sense of obligation to try (“well I already paid for it...”)
 - Enhances familiarity with area businesses
 - Builds word of mouth
 - Is a potential sponsorship opportunity
 - Create Sunday sampler
 - Showcase a variety of programs, allow residents to sample and then sign up for full class or other classes
 - Memberships
 - Corporate memberships – memberships/passes or discounted memberships
 - Benefits to organizations
 - Induce trial for company's employees/clients
 - Companies would promote upcoming events to employees to promote usage of passes
 - Benefit to companies
 - Able to offer membership as perks for employees/clients
 - Scarcity effect created – if pass is already checked out and family wants to go they may go anyway or look at purchasing their own membership
 - Covering costs
 - Back of pass is a great space for advertising (selling ad space)
 - Participation creates list of companies to target for event sponsorships
 - Consider not only business-to-consumer advertisers but business-to-business advertisers as well for potential companies interested in the ad space
 - Consider partnership with Adams Outdoor (or other Billboard) for develop of electronic billboard
 - Would guarantee Charlotte “Ad Space” in exchange for permission to build
 - Utilize as a message board of “Upcoming Events”
 - Consider regional/event branding billboards on surrounding expressway pushing central website
 - Create your own billboard spaces for regional event promotions
 - Ex: sides of buildings, empty storefronts, sidewalks, etc – partner across the county
 - Develop relationships with potential in-kind sponsors
 - Citadel Radio
 - Consider partnerships with area realtors
 - Educate them on the offerings of Charlotte
 - Realtors can then use information when showing clients housing within Charlotte
 - Topics that should be covered in all communications
 - Parking information
 - Other transportation options

- Weather contingencies (as needed)
- Group discount opportunities
- Childcare
- Clearly state the “Fun Factors”
- List central website or event specific website

OTHER POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- Difficulty getting to each venue or community (without having to drive to get there)
 - Develop clearly marked and mapped trails and paths from each location
 - Bond opportunity for development
 - Ensure bus routes have stops at various venues
 - Event transportation
 - Shuttles, taxis, rickshaws, carriages, etc.
 - Revenue – opportunity for advertising, fees for usage, licensing fees, etc.
 - Provide event parking details and map
- Knowing what is going on and where
 - Venue signage – indicating where ALIVE, pool, theater are located
 - Pedestrian maps/kiosk – located across the region
 - Highlights local attractions, Festival schedules, Upcoming events, local business directory, trails, restrooms, etc.
 - Location signs/numbers that correspond with maps
 - Potential for sponsorship
 - Direct mail version of pedestrian map
 - Consider sidewalk with stripes similar to Boston’s Freedom Trail to guide pedestrians
- Charlotte curb appeal
 - New M50 approach looks great
 - Downtown business could use gentle reminders to paint window trim, replace rotted awnings, edge along sidewalks.
 - Exit 61 approach needs sidewalk edging, fresh paint, potential appearance zoning for new businesses, street scaping
- Entertaining children
 - Regularly communicating childcare opportunities
 - Include age appropriate activities for children at events
- Not having someone to go with/new to town
 - Provide regular “Meet your neighbor” events
 - Method of allowing new residents to meet people
 - Develop “New Resident” or “Welcome” packages
 - Send materials to new residents on what is available in the area, upcoming events (such as “meet our neighbor” or festivals etc.)
 - Obtain mailing list from Post Office
 - Sponsorship opportunity (major corporate sponsors: Lowes, Home Depot, John Deere, etc.)

- Scheduling Conflicts
 - Upcoming events needs to be promoted early to allow potential attendees to arrange their schedules
 - Methods of contacts
 - Eblasts
 - Weekly distribution of events on Wednesdays
 - Flyers/posters
 - Bag stuffers
 - Distribute at local stores
 - Chance to sell ads to cover costs
 - Provide activities across multiple days and at different times of the day
- Cost Barriers
 - Blend free activities with paid activities
 - Ex: expo would include area to explore vendors for free but attendance for larger “speaker” would be paid
 - Early purchase discounts
 - Group or volume discounts (punch card or special group passes)
 - Groupon style offering
 - Couponing
 - Food donations toward cost of ticket
 - Create website tokens for redemption of swim, day at ALIVE, local business discounts etc. themed for events for collectability

NEXT STEPS

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Items to be included in post focus group follow-up survey
 - Communication channels (communication module)
 - How far are residents willing to travel for entertainment
 - Which type of incentive is most appealing
 - Test event ideas
 - Test specific program recommendations for each of the three organizations
 - Ask if respondents are interested in volunteering or helping to organize (and what kinds of things are they interested in helping with)
 - Ask if interested in focus groups and reviewing materials
 - Demographic questions

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Broaden conversations with other regional organizations such as:
 - Eaton County Parks
 - Other school districts
 - Area chambers of commerce
 - Other municipal governments
 - Applicable non-profits

- Future county wide survey
 - Community Engagement and Priority Study
 - Provide quantifiable results not found in focus groups
 - Grant funding to offset some survey costs
 - Community Reinvestment Fund
 - Up to \$5,000
 - Consider matching funds