

Introduction

(Beginning of introduction was removed since there was qualifying terms about the organization in question) Organization name has been changed to "Organization X" and any names have been blacked out.

To learn more about the organization, **Kelly Conneely**, the Development Director at Organization X, visited our class on January 21. As a result of this discussion, we determined that one of the biggest challenges for Organization X is lack of awareness. Many community members are unaware of the organization and its mission. To combat this problem, the client expressed wanting to determine what influences donors' decisions to donate to Organization X, and how the organization can communicate with donors more efficiently.

After identifying the client's key questions, we determined that the purpose of this study was to examine why current donors donate and what influences their decision to donate specifically to Organization X, how current donors became aware of the organization, and how Organization X can improve communications to both current and prospective donors. Furthermore, it was determined that a focus group was the most appropriate choice to yield answers to these questions and to accomplish the overall research goal. According to Popham (1993), a focus group consists of a small number of relatively similar individuals who provide information during a moderated group discussion. Focus group participants are typically chosen based on their ability to provide a diverse array of specialized knowledge or insight into the topic under study

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

(Popham, 1993). In addition, a focus group allows the moderator(s) to interact with the participants, ask follow-up questions that probe more deeply, and collect additional information from natural comments and non-verbal responses.

METHOD

Design:

To explore the community perspective on Organization X specifically the donors we conducted a qualitative research design was used. Qualitative Research provides the opportunity to explore selected topics in detail and illuminate the way individuals create meaning through discussion with other people (Patton 1990). Qualitative research concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations. Focus Groups can give insight into what the participants deem as being the most important. According to Krueger, focus groups are also especially helpful when insights, perceptions, and expectations are more important than actual numbers (1994, p. 30). They also put the control of the interaction into the hands of the participants rather than the researcher.

A successful focus group discussion relies heavily on the development of a permissive, non-threatening environment within the group where the participants can feel comfortable to discuss their opinions and experiences without fear that they will be judged or ridiculed by others in the group (Hennink 2007: 6). It is focused on a specific area of interest, which enables more in-depth discussions about any topic. It also assists people to explore and clarify their own viewpoints because it is a group setting they can help each other answer questions.

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

Participants:

Participants were contacted using a random sampling method by Conmey. Conmey called every 10th person on her list of donors until she had enough responses to attend the focus group on the given day. Once the donors responded saying they would come, they were randomly assigned to three different focus groups.

This particular focus group had five participants, all donors. Their age ranged from 47 to 75 years of age. There were two females and three male participants whom all live on the North Side of Chicago. Each participant noted that they had at least a Bachelor's degree with one having a Post Graduate degree. Only one of the participants actually had a full time job, the others don't work anymore. 80% of the participants had an income of over \$90,000; the other 20% had an income range of \$45,000 - \$60,000. All of the participants were Catholic and 80% donate \$101-\$500 on an annual average and 20% donate \$501 - \$1,000 on an annual average. All have been donors for at least five years and with 60% in the range of five to ten years.

Procedure:

The focus group started promptly at 6:25 pm on February 18th at DePaul University in the Arts and Letters Building on the Lincoln Park Campus. It was held in a classroom and took about one and a half hours to conduct. We recorded the interview using a video camera that was provided by the university. There were two moderators and three observers/note takers writing down everything that the participants had said.

As the participants arrived they were greeted and provided pizza, cookies and refreshments to thank them for their time. The discussion guide began with a warm up

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

activity in which the participants stated their name and shared something about themselves. They each then explained their connection to Organization X and why the organization is important to them. Next, they responded to a series of questions in which we learned more about Organization X and ways that they could improve. The moderators attempted to involve all participants in the discussion, including asking for individual responses to questions and prompting participants less inclined to voice their opinions. Finally, the moderators asked the participants if they had any additional comments and then they were thanked for their time and given a DePaul monogrammed pen. All of the participants were very appreciative and happy to help with the research study.

Results

Through our discussion, it became very evident that this group of individuals think very highly of Organization X and are beyond pleased with the organization. The results of our focus group interviews indicated three very predominant themes: dignity, communication and passion.

Dignity: The donors of the Organization X stressed the importance of dignity within the organization. The sisters provide a hospitable environment for the residents and believe strongly in respecting all human beings from childbirth to death. This is not only apparent in the Organization X's actions but also by the opinions of the donors. Organization X also demonstrate their dignity while begging for donations.

- "A lot of the seniors that live there live well into their hundreds and to me that's a real strong indication of how they are treated. I mean I see the respect, I mean I've worked in media for well over 30 years and I mean I was always hearing stories about you, you know, how about seniors are treated."

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

- “The dignity and respect that is given to seniors is unbelievable and a lot of them, unfortunately, they’re oblivious, but I mean you like see them living with pearls and their nails are done and their hair is done... I’m really impressed by that and also the way **the sisters** treat them, you know just like they are their own.”
- “They have cloth napkins, tablecloths, silverware; you know that kind of stuff.”
- “It’s the sincere hospitality, where it is strictly about the dignity of the person, they will feed the elders before they feed themselves.”
- “They make them feel that they are in a home, that they are part of the family, not like this is patient A, patient B and patient C or whatever... They are just a part of the family and when any of them pass away, I mean they give them the full-blown service, you know those things are expensive and sometimes, you know, sometimes you’ll happen to be there and someone passed away and there will be two or three family members, but still they go along with it and act like it was the most important person in the world.”

Communication: Throughout the discussion, one theme that recurred quite often was that of communication. The main issue as stated in our research goal is educating the public on the workings of Organization X and acquiring new donors and volunteers.

- “I think the only thing is how they get their message out there... But I think if they were to I guess kind of promote themselves, I can honestly say that I don’t know of any other place that exists that deals with the elderly in the way that they do in this country, or in the world for that matter... I just think that we need to get their name out there.”
- “I think there is an issue with communication. I think the problem really is a result of overly centralized communication... if the communication is going to go out it’s got to be approved and the point here is that it takes time to do that. So my point is I think there is a problem here, it limits their ability to communicate because it takes time to get what they want to say out.”
- “Well I belong to Saint Josaphat Parish just up the road here and once a year a couple of the nuns come around and they’ll talk at the Sunday morning masses and also my wife and I kind of work around uh we see some results. The people at our parish give them more money than all the other collections so if you’re going to compare them to these other collectors, **the sisters** do very well, but we see them once a year for a couple hours and then they’re gone and they don’t come back again. I think somehow they could utilize parishes like us and we would help them more, but and when they do come they don’t forewarn you...

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

So they got a great product, so you think when you got such a great product you ought to be able to sell it.”

- “If there is room for communication its with the youth. If DePaul, being a Catholic university, did a rotation and was in the orientation to the freshman, to learn about respecting the elderly and how they are treated, so they have at least heard about it. That’s the part that is missing in communication to the youth, is I think what’s missing.”
- “They’re publishing a monthly calendar with daily events. It might be a good idea to get that circulated also. You basically have to go looking for that when you stop in. That’d be great to have that emailed to everybody so you know what’s going on a day-by-day basis.

Passion: It is apparent that the donors feel extremely passionate towards the organization. When asked to expand on suggestions the donors have for the organization, it was difficult for them to pinpoint any negative aspects. The way the donor’s eyes lit up while discussing Organization X exemplified their passion and love for the organization.

- “I’m _____ and my mother also lived there for about three and a half years, she passed away three years ago, but it’s just such an incredible place. I still volunteer there in the dining room um whenever I can.”
- “Like everybody else who has spoke before me, we are highly impressed with the people that are in charge of that facility, we think it’s just fabulous.”
- “All nuns take vows of poverty and chastity and obedience, but **our sisters** take an additional one and that’s hospitality, where they agree to treat anyone who comes in their door the same as they are treating Jesus himself and I thought, well you can't ask for anything more than that.”
- “I’ve never been able to encapsulate it yet even after all these years. There’s something about walking into the place that very special.”

Discussion

Our group learned a great deal from the focus group discussion with the donors of Organization X. The focus group allowed us to ask the donors about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards the organization. The donors gave us a great deal of insight on things the organization was doing well, along with different areas of

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

improvement. The following paragraphs summarize our key findings from the focus group, provide recommendations for how Organization X can use the information, and outline potential limitations associated with the study.

Our group not only learned a lot about Organization X through the focus group, but also a lot about who donates to it. Our background questionnaire helped us to identify common traits that the donors possess. For example, we found that most of the donors have a bachelor's degree, some with a post-graduate degree. Their household incomes totaled \$90,001 or more, they were either retired or were employed full-time.

A shared characteristic by all of the donors was that they all practice Catholicism. This made perfect sense to our team as Organization X is a Catholic organization. Additionally, they all had been giving back to the organization for a long period of time, and donate a significant amount of money each year. Overall, the donors were very similar in their backgrounds. We also learned a lot about the donor's reasons for wanting to volunteer their time and money with the organization. For example, two of the donors in our group had family members that were once at Organization X. Although their family members have passed away, the individuals still donate to the organization and speak very highly of their time there. Most of the donors in our group had found out about Organization X by accident. Two of the participants in our group found out about the organization by walking past it or they visited the parish when their original place of worship was under construction.

During our time spent with the donor group, we found out a lot about what the organization was doing well. All of the donors that the Organization X organization were

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

doing a lot of things well, most important how they treat the people who live there. The donors commented on how clean, loving and attentive the **Little Sisters** are to those that call the organization home. They beg for everything and depend on their faith constantly. It was interesting to hear the donors talk about how they treat someone who has passed away. Funeral services are performed and the resident is treated like family. It was amazing for our group to see the donors light up when talking about the organization and everything it was doing right.

However, our focus group did touch on things that Organization X could be doing better. Most importantly, an area for improvement discussed was communication. The donor group agreed that Organization X could do a much better job communicating to the donors. They compared the organization to other charities that they currently donate to, noting that they don't get letters in the mail or phone call reminders asking for donations. Our focus group participants noted that reaching out for donations in this way isn't something that the organization stands for, and they understand it is hard to ask them to change. However, they all felt if they were better notified about events then Organization X would get a lot more donations.

Additionally, the focus group pointed out that the Organization X could improve on connecting with people at different parishes and getting the word out about their work. For instance, one of the focus group participants informed us that the **Little Sisters** come to his parish once a year and everyone always gives a huge number of donations. However, the parish then forgets about the **Little Sisters** since their visits are so infrequent. A last factor our focus group mentioned was reaching out to young people.

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

Given that the organization is so close to DePaul University, a Catholic institute, the donors were shocked at how many young people do not know about **the Sisters**.

Through this focus group, we were able to come up with recommendations on how the Organization X can improve upon the areas mentioned above. First, we recommend that the organization make a better effort to keep the donors informed of upcoming activities. The donors mentioned how the Organization X have different activities each month that most people don't know about unless they visit in person. We suggested that the **Little Sisters** email out a monthly calendar of activities so donors can participate and encourage others to do the same. Also, having the Organization X place flyers around the neighborhood or in other parishes to let people know what they were doing would help bring people to the events. Additionally, the donor group mentioned that the **Little Sisters** should connect with DePaul to encourage students to volunteer.

Given that the organization is so close to the campus, we would recommend DePaul exploring ways for students to become involved. We would suggest DePaul using the organization when they can for volunteer opportunities for nursing students, or those in the educational path of helping the elderly. This would also help the youth in the area become more involved. Overall, the Organization X is a unique and loved organization. People just are not properly informed about the work they do, which makes it tough for them to get funding. If they were able to educate and inform the public of their organization and keep the donors in the loop on activities, we think their funding would greatly increase.

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

To sum up the discussion section of this focus group, we wanted to discuss the limitations we encountered through this study. First, the group we met with all had similar backgrounds and were of a similar demographic. In the future, we would recommend pulling donors of all different types of ages and economic standings. We felt it was tough to get a big picture look at the organization because the donors were so similar. Additionally, we felt that the focus group needed more people. We only had a group of five people who participated in the group, and we would have been able to draw better results from a larger group. We felt that the size of the group limited our outcome from the discussion.

References

- Hennink, M.M. (2007). *International focus group research: A handbook for the health and social sciences*. Cambridge university Press: Cambridge.
- Kitzinger, J. (1994a). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 16(1), 103–121.
- Patton, Michael Quinn (1990), *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Popham, W. J. (1993). *Educational evaluation*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Organization X Interview Guide

Topic:

Why do these donators pick Organization X vs. other nonprofits?

What can the organization do to encourage its donor participation?

Arrival of participants

Have participants write first name on name card with black marker, then complete a background questionnaire.

Welcome Remarks

Good evening. My name is [REDACTED] and this is my partner [REDACTED]. We will be your moderators for the focus group this evening. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to share your opinions. You were asked to participate in this evening's discussion because you are all current donors to the nonprofit group, Organization X.

Participant Introduction

While you're enjoying your pizza, we would like to go over some introductions so that we can get to know you better. We'd like you to go around the room and tell us your name and one of your favorite hobbies.

Purpose and Ground Rules

Now – the real fun begins. We have a series of questions to ask you about your reasons for donating to Organization X and how we can further engage future donors. There are no right or wrong answers to our questions. We are simply interested in your honest opinions, whether positive or negative. Please speak up whether you agree or disagree. We want to hear a wide range of opinions. Everything you say will remain confidential and will not be associated with you as an individual.

We will be videotaping and audiotaping our discussion so that we have a record of your comments to refer to later. Also, some of our classmates will be observing the discussion. Feel free to ask questions relevant to our discussion. We will save time at the end of our discussion for any questions.

Questions

- 1.) How did you first learn about or get involved with Organization X?
- 2.) How did you decide to donate to a particular organization?

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

- a. Do you donate to other organizations?
 - b. Do you donate to them more or less than Organization X? If so, why?
 - c. Is there a reason you prefer to donate locally compared to nationally or worldwide organizations?
- 3.) Why do you donate?
Probing Question: Can you identify a feeling with that response?
- 4.) How long have you been a donor?
Probing Question: How would you best describe the feeling of being a donor?
- 5.) What drove you to become a donor?
Probing Question: Can you give specific examples of what influenced you to donate?
- 6.) What is your favorite aspect of Organization X?
Probing Question: What words do you think are linked to the organization?
- 7.) What is something the organization can improve on?
Probing Question: Do you have an example you can elaborate on?
- 8.) How do Organization X communicate information with you?
Probing Question: How effective are the promotional materials?
- 9.) Do you have any suggestions for how Organization X should contact you?
Probing Question: How are you contacted by other organizations?
- 10.) If you could change one thing about Organization X, what would it be?
Probing Question: Can you elaborate on that?
- 11.) What would you share with potential donors about the organization?
Probing Question: What feelings come about when you talk about Organization X?
- 12.) How do you receive updates or information on the organization?
- a. How often?
 - b. How would you prefer (website, social media, phone call, thank you card) to receive updates or information?
- 13.) Do you receive the newsletter?
- a. Do you read it and find it effective?
 - b. What do you like about the newsletter?
 - c. What could the organization do to make the newsletter more effective?
 - d. What features would you like to see or that you see are missing?

Organization X : Organization name have been changed for privacy reasons.

- 14.) What method do you use to submit your donations to the organization?
- a. Would you prefer to donate through other means, such as the website?
 - b. Would you be open to the idea of donating online?
 - c. Probing Question: Can you let us know what your reservations are (if any) with donating online?
- 15.) What do you think Organization X should do in order to get other people, such as your friends, family, or colleagues, to donate to the organization?
- a. Why do you think more people do not donate to the organization?
 - b. Are there things that other charitable organizations do to encourage more donations that you feel would be beneficial for Organization X to adopt?
- 16.) Do you think they do a sufficient job of thanking donors?

Questions from Participants

Does anyone have any additional comments or feedback? Is there anything we didn't cover that you wish to discuss? Please share your thoughts now.

Closing

Thank you very much for your time. Your comments have been extremely helpful. That concludes our evening. Please feel free to contact us with any further questions or concerns.