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# Partnerships Between the Heartside Gleaning Initiative and Local Businesses in the Grand Rapids, MI Area

Kristy Bousquet

*Grand Valley State University*, bousquek@mail.gvsu.edu

Mason Jonker

*Grand Valley State University*, jonkerma@mail.gvsu.edu

Brianna Powell

*Grand Valley State University*, powelbri@mail.gvsu.edu

Noah Taylor

*Grand Valley State University*, taylorno@mail.gvsu.edu

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## **Partnerships between The Heartside Gleaning Initiative and Local Businesses in the Grand Rapids, MI Area.**

### **Authors:**

Bousquet, Kristy, *Grand Valley State University*

Jonker, Mason, *Grand Valley State University*

Powell, Brianna, *Grand Valley State University*

Taylor, Noah, *Grand Valley State University*

### ***Abstract***

Many nonprofit organizations are in need of ways to create funding opportunities to maintain the integrity of their operating systems. One way to raise funds is to invite local businesses to participate and provide ways to become involved in the inner workings of the nonprofit organization. By partnering a nonprofit organization and local businesses, ideas and funds can be spread to both partners in order to increase the viability of the overall community.

For one local nonprofit agency, The Heartside Gleaning Initiative, the possibility of partnering with local businesses in the Grand Rapids area is promising. Research regarding various fundraising opportunities was conducted in order to create four fundraising categories: (1) providing customers with donation information through the form of pamphlets, (2) use of donation boxes in the place of business, (3) donation of a certain percentage of sales for a set duration of time, and (4) participation in a fundraising event with other community partners. These options, compiled in an informational pamphlet, along with a generated contact list of local potential business partners are the result of this semester long collaboration and provided to the Heartside Gleaning Initiative to begin the process of recruiting partners.

The many challenges associated with this project included conflicting schedules among project members as well as with local community partners. By utilizing the information we have gathered, one could survey the potential partners for feedback or plan a future fundraising event involving various community partners.

## **Introduction**

Poverty and health issues are two of the biggest problems in our society today. One of the biggest contributors to these growing issues is that poverty stricken neighborhoods often reside in what are known as food deserts. A food desert can be defined as an area, whether rural or urban, where businesses with healthy food are located many miles away (Beaulic *et al.*, 2009). They form when there is a population of people who do not have financial resources or physical capabilities to access places that sell healthy whole foods (Shaw, 2006). This issue is especially prevalent in neighborhoods where there are a large number of low-income and multi-ethnic residents. The nearest places, with access to food are small convenience stores, which usually do not sell healthy whole foods, which in turn correlate with a variety of health issues as a result (Walker *et al.* 2010). People in food deserts are at risk of many diseases that could develop later in life due to prolonged malnutrition and lack of knowledge. These diseases include: coronary heart disease, adult onset diabetes, hypertension, and obesity (Adams, 2010). Despite these problems occurring in several areas, the focus here is that many of these issues are apparent in a community known as the Heartside District of Grand Rapids, MI. This area hosts a variety of ethnicities, is primarily low income, and is surrounded by restaurants and local businesses, which limit access to much needed dietary resources.

The Heartside Gleaning Initiative was created in order to give the people of Heartside district access to healthy foods in order to increase the overall well-being of the neighborhood. This initiative is a non-profit organization with a goal of “working with local businesses, non-profit groups,

farmers markets, and community members to collect and distribute fruit, vegetables, and herbs that would otherwise be wasted”. Another goal is to educate community members about nutrition and the importance of healthy eating (About the Gleaning Initiative, 2014).

In order to address the goals of the initiative certain issues must simultaneously be addressed. From what was learned, researched, and experienced regarding the availability of food for Heartside residents, the Initiative needs more assistance and support. Currently the Gleaning Initiative does not have a means of funding its efforts. Our semester long focus is to give the Initiative the tools to develop funding opportunities through working with local businesses and organizations to expand their donations, volunteers, and materials, which will help to improve the lives of neighbor residents in need.

## **Action Plan**

The initial project plan was to create a list of Heartside businesses in order to find potential collaborators. The contact information is to be collected and provided via a list to the Gleaning Initiative for future collaboration. The next course of action was to provide a pamphlet filled with information involving a list of potential benefits to the business along with a Gleaning Initiative mission statement and contact information. A second flyer will be created as an insert for the pamphlet, which will include a detailed list of fundraising ideas to potentially be put into action in the future.

There are four major categories that have been agreed upon as candidates for potential partners to choose from. These categories include: (1) providing customers with donation information through the form

of pamphlets allowed within the business, (2) allowing a donation box within the business, (3) providing a certain percentage of sales on one particular day for a set duration, and (4) participating in a fundraising event for the Gleaning Initiative. A detailed explanation of each category is provided to the business partners for them to choose from. With these tools, the Gleaning Initiative can then contact potential partners who will provide feedback on how to improve the action plan when approaching other potential partners. It is crucial to inform these businesses on exactly what the mission is, who they would be helping and exactly how they can help.

## **Process**

Various methods of partnerships between business and nonprofit organizations were explored in order to understand the feasibility of this project. This included finding successful examples of partnerships and knowing the benefits to both sides. The Gleaning Initiative already partners with the various farmers involved in the Fulton St. Farmers' Market and Downtown Market, however, these partners provide excess food, but are not a viable source of funding. Because the major focus of this project was to create ways the Initiative could raise funds through partnering with businesses, the first bit of research included exploring ways of doing so.

The Gleaning Initiative was created to solve a local issue in the Heartside neighborhood through the distribution of excess food to the residents, which would otherwise go to waste. This type of nonprofit is known as a Resource Recycler (Foster *et al.* 2009). Nonprofits that follow this model often need donations from private sectors in order to operate successfully. A great example of a Resource Recycler nonprofit is

The Greater Boston Food Bank, the largest hunger relief organization in New England. This organization distributes nearly 30 million pounds of food annually to more than 600 local organizations and uses cash donations from individuals that make up 25 percent of revenues, which cover distribution costs (Foster *et al.* 2009). The Gleaning Initiative is a similar organization, on a smaller scale. With that being so, the major focus was put on communicating with potential local business partners who would have a common interest in helping the Heartside area.

Many partnerships between nonprofits and businesses begin with a common goal. A nonprofit can begin by connecting with other organizations in the area of concern. These connections could be with other nonprofits or local businesses, which have a common interest in helping to solve a specific issue (Garchet, 2014). This connection could bring about ways to fundraise for the nonprofit in need of funding. One way of making this connection is to contact local donors, which are in the form of private donations. These donations are a sign of community support and come with very few strings attached. The nonprofit must maintain these relationships formed in order to continue the accumulation of donations (Bray, 2013). These private donations most often come from local businesses, which also see a need to help the area of concern. With so many options for a nonprofit to partner with a local business, it became imperative to know what both sides would benefit from. If the business had no incentive to partner, the nonprofit would not gain that partnership as a means to accumulate funds.

Nonprofits most often seek a partnership as a way to gain private donations in order to maintain the integrity of their system. However, nonprofits can

also benefit from other aspects of a business partnership. A business can increase access to knowledge-based resources that would improve the effectiveness of the nonprofit. The business could allow its employees to become involved in the nonprofit which would give another perspective on the inner workings. This could greatly help the economic aspect of the nonprofit. A close relationship between the non profit and a local business could also develop into training and work opportunities for the residents of the Heartside. A business could also increase the reputation of the nonprofit by associating its brand name or logo with the organization (A Pocket Guide for Nonprofit Leaders). Not only does a business partner have benefits to the nonprofit, but the nonprofit also has many added benefits to the partner.

Potential business partners may have difficulty in finding an incentive to help a nonprofit, however a business can gain many added benefits from the partnership. A business can show responsibility to their customers by involving themselves with a nonprofit that helps a specific community. For example, a business of Heartside may appeal to customers because it is doing good for the overall community. The business may also have tax breaks due to donation of some profits for a common good (Weinstein *et al.*, 2010). A business could also grow when partnering with a nonprofit. The business employees could help the Initiative by volunteering for distribution while publicizing the company with the nonprofit. The employees of a business would be a major factor in growing the business by becoming involved and making it known that the company is willing to help. This will increase the reputation of the company, which will in turn, increase other areas of it as well (Sharrief, 2014). There are many benefits to a nonprofit and business partnership. After exploring the different

avenues the Gleaning Initiative could go down when partnering, it was decided the focus would be on using these partners as a means to increase funds while maximizing benefits to the business. As it was uncovered that the benefits may vary from partners to partners, it became evident that a variety of partnerships options should be offered.

## **Methods**

A local business partner was contacted in order to gain some insight from the business sector. Scott Schulz, owner of Two Beards Deli on Commerce Ave. is directly in the middle of the Heartside neighborhood. He was asked about the possibility of a partnership between the Heartside businesses and the Gleaning Initiative and the existing or potential issues he sees. He believes that the Heartside businesses do not suffer from the low-income reputation of the neighborhood. He also expressed an interest in helping the Initiative in the form of allowing informational pamphlets for customers at tables. At the time of the interview, the concept of the project was not well developed, but he was interested in the benefits of this partnership to his business. He also commented that other businesses in the area might be willing to help the Initiative in its mission.

After the interview with a local business owner, it was decided that there needed to be set categories of fundraising. These categories would lay out the options that each potential business partner could choose from when looking to become involved in a partnership. These four categories include: (1) providing customers with donation information through the form of pamphlets allowed at the place of business, (2) allowing a donation box within the business for customers to provide donations, (3) provide a certain percentage of sales on one particular day for a set

duration, and (4) participate in a fundraising event for the Gleaning Initiative. These four categories were then compiled into an informational pamphlet for the potential business partners to refer to. This pamphlet was created using an existing pamphlet for the Gleaning Initiative provided by Professor Sisson, the founder of the Initiative. An informational pamphlet was given to a member at J. Gardellas, a potential partner, to review the draft and provide feedback.

The pamphlet and flyer were altered in a format that would best explain the goal of this project (see figure 2 in Appendix B) to reflect the received feedback. These tools are for the Gleaning Initiative to use when approaching different potential business partners. These partners are found on a contact list that is also provided to the Gleaning Initiative (see figure 1 in Appendix A). The contact list includes businesses within the Heartside Business Association along with other businesses in and around the Heartside community. The list includes: Essence Restaurant Group, Founders Brewing Company, Menna's Joint, Peppino's Pizzeria and Sports Grille, San Chez Bistro and Cafe, The Cottage Bar and Grill, Bar Divani, the B.O.B., J. Gardellas, Hopcat, McFaddens, and Two Beards Deli. This list, along with the pamphlet are the tools needed by the Gleaning Initiative to start creating business partners in order to raise funds for operation.

## **Results**

The transformative outcome of the project was getting in contact with two potential partners in the Heartside area and getting some feedback on the action plan. The plans were pitched to the owner of Two Beards and manager of J. Gardellas and feedback was collected and applied to the original plan in order to alter it. This would ensure that the Gleaning Initiative would

have the best tools when approaching a potential partner. The first tool provided to the Gleaning Initiative was the list of contacts that could possibly serve as partners within the Heartside area (see figure 1 in Appendix A). The second tools include the informational pamphlets containing information about the Gleaning Initiative and possible benefits to the business when considering a partnership (see figure 2 in Appendix B).

## **Challenges**

As the project progressed over time, there were some challenges and hardships along the way, which were difficult to overcome. Time constraints remained one of the biggest issues while attempting the action plan of this project. There was a small set amount of time to do all of what the group had planned to do. Due to the constraints, the focus needed to be narrowed down to just create the contact list and informational pamphlet. It also seemed difficult to accommodate the four group members' schedules. Not all members could make every meeting as they are all university students and have demanding and often inflexible schedules. Another challenge was making the partnership look attractive to the business. Every business has different ideas as to what they would like or approve of a partnership.

The idea of fundraising could take various avenues and it was difficult to narrow it to just one. Another challenge was the uncertainty of the willingness of the business to be involved with a category if any. The problem may reside in the categories to be too involved for the business or not involved enough. What seemed important was to get comments and feedback from the specific type of businesses the partnership were being marketed to. This was to show what the business would be willing to do and how far

they would like to go with the partnership. Allowing feedback would show the potential business partner that the Gleaning Initiative cares about what they think of their contribution to the community and may be willing to work around what the business would be willing to do.

### **Future Considerations**

With the time allowed, a set of tools was created for the Gleaning Initiative for them to use as a means of approaching potential business partners. To move this project forward, it would greatly benefit the Initiative to have these partners provide more feedback in terms of the fundraising categories. Businesses should be asked about how the Initiative could improve these categories and alter them to look more favorable. The business should have an equal say in what it would like to become involved in.

The Gleaning Initiative could benefit from the launch of a campaign that would distribute the gathered information of this project to local businesses. Various Initiative members and community partners involved with the nonprofit could actively advertise for the partnership process. A campaign could be conducted by utilizing the tools formulated by this project.

It may be useful to plan a fundraising event for the Gleaning Initiative. Local residents of Heartside could be involved in the fundraising process as well as including them in the planning of events and additional partnerships. They could have a huge say in what theme the event will have and make an appearance so the partners who their donations are benefitting. With these future considerations, the Gleaning Initiative could utilize the tools given to them to create a viable revenue source to maintain operations with the Heartside community.

If a community event seems to not

be an option, it is possible to expand the potential partners list for the Gleaning Initiative. This could be done simply by surveying other local businesses in the area and giving them the same information that was provided to the Gleaning Initiative. An increased amount of partners would allow for more feedback of the categories provided. Additions and alterations to the categories would be of a great benefit as they may make the partnership look more pleasing to a potential partner.

Using the tools generated by this project, the Heartside Gleaning Initiative has the opportunity to create potential partners with the businesses on the created contact list. It would only benefit this nonprofit and the residents of Heartside if local businesses become involved in the Gleaning of the local community. With the tools provided, the Heartside Gleaning Initiative can obtain partnerships with local businesses. These tools were created with hopes that their use bring funds to a much appreciated nonprofit organization. The funds provided by these partners would help to fuel the efforts of the initiative and help them to continue their efforts to advance the health of Heartside community.

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## Appendix A

Formal contact list of all potential business partners

Name of Business	Contacts /Who to ask for	Contact Information	Email (if available)
Essence Restaurant Group	Partner Advisor Jeff Gietzen	(616) 570-8911	
Founders Brewing Company	For Inquiries contact Sarah	(616) 776-1195	<a href="mailto:sarah@foundersbrewing.com">sarah@foundersbrewing.com</a>
Menna's Joint		(616) 895-3827	
Peppino's Pizzeria and Sports Grille	General Manager Melissa Bitterman	(616) 453-7686	
San Chez Bistro and Café	General Manager Cindy Schneider	(616) 774-8272	<a href="mailto:cindys@sanchezbistro.com">cindys@sanchezbistro.com</a>
The Cottage Bar and Grill		(616) 454-9088	<a href="mailto:sales@cottagebar.biz">sales@cottagebar.biz</a>
Bar Divani	Event Coordinator Wendy Alexander	(616) 774-9463	<a href="mailto:wendy@bardivani.com">wendy@bardivani.com</a>
The B.O.B.	Director of Operations Marcy McMahan	(616) 356-2627 ext. 48	
J. Gardellas	General Manager Ellen Lenhart		
Hopcat		(616) 451-4677	<a href="mailto:info@hopcat.com">info@hopcat.com</a>
McFaddens	Private Events Coordinator Erin Lindsay	(616) 454-9105	<a href="mailto:erin@mcfaddensgrandrapids.com">erin@mcfaddensgrandrapids.com</a>
Two Beards Deli	Owner Scott Schulz	(616) 789-3802	

**Appendix B**

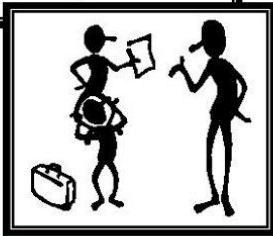
Figure 2: Informational packet including the flyer insert and pamphlet



# Help US Help YOU

Many nonprofits have successfully partnered with local businesses for a common goal of helping the local community while receiving benefits

As a potential business partner, YOU could benefit the Heartside community by providing a source of funds.



This partnership would not be time consuming or demanding and the Gleaning Initiative would be responsible for collection of any accumulated funds.



## Potential Benefits for

- ❖ Enhance business image in the community
- ❖ Expand creativity and empathy
- ❖ Access to tax breaks for donation of profits for a common good
- ❖ Increased exposure from advertising
- ❖ Having new sources of skilled job applicants
- ❖ Build up of customer loyalty
- ❖ Having access to more favorable media

## Options for Partnership



- ✚ Allowing donation informational pamphlets in your business for customers
- ✚ Having a donation box present in your business
- ✚ Giving a certain percent of sales on a set date go as a donation to the Gleaning Initiative
- ✚ Hosting/catering/donating to a fundraising event put on by local business partners



## Find out why

Some estimates indicate that up to **40 percent** of America's entire food supply goes to waste.

Each year, well over **100 billion** pounds of food are thrown away in this country.

At the same time there are over **49 million** people who are at risk of going hungry.

### In Heartside...

Approximately **80 percent** of the population is food insecure.

**45 percent** of the population lives below the poverty line with 76 percent of 18-64 year olds living in poverty.

## Contact us

[heartsidegleaning.weebly.com](http://heartsidegleaning.weebly.com)

[heartsidegleaning@gmail.com](mailto:heartsidegleaning@gmail.com)

### Supported by...

Fulton Street Farmers Market

Grand Rapids  
Downtown Market

Arena District



**DOWNTOWN  
MARKET  
GRAND  
RAPIDS**

# HEARTSIDE CLEANING INITIATIVE

For a healthier  
Heartside community

## Our mission

We find that there is limited access to healthy food in the Heartside neighborhood. Members of the HGI came together to **empower** the community to develop food systems that can redirect, or **clean**, unused healthy food to residents in need.

### Our goals...

- We will work **local** farmers markets, businesses, nonprofits and community members to collect and distribute produce that would otherwise be wasted.
- We will **educate** community members on the importance of healthy eating and show them the tools to prepare their own **nutritious** meals.

## Locate us

The Heartside neighborhood community encompasses one of the central districts in the downtown Grand Rapids area. Stretching east for several blocks along the Grand River from Wealthy St. to Fulton.

Heartside contains a diverse collection of homes, parks, businesses, buildings and commercial/ industrial space. Many community members are in need of social services such as access to and knowledge of healthier foods.

## Get involved

We are seeking volunteers, food donations and materials that will help the initiative improve the lives of our neighbors.

### Our needs...

- **Fund development:**  
Assist with raising funds and grant applications
- **Outreach:**  
Contact local businesses and markets to establish a network of donors
- **Collect and distribute:**  
Help the food collection and distribution process

