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Commit and Connect: VCU Goes Green

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Commit and Connect: VCU Goes Green
Executive Summary

Team Right Now!

Holly Alford, Melanie Goodman, Shelley Jordan, Margaret Kelland, Rachel Riley, John Skaritz

Team Sponsor: Jacek Ghosh

Project Description:

In alignment with Theme IV of VCU's Quest for Distinction, this university volunteer project will help to commit and connect faculty, staff, students, and alumni with a community education partner to help launch a green or sustainable project while promoting, teaching and educating participants on the value of sustainable living.

Project Goals:

- To engage the VCU community in volunteering to promote sustainable living throughout community based elementary schools, daycare centers or child-based programs.
- To provide basic guidance for project recipients to complete sustainable projects such as greenhouses, recycling, planting, harvesting, paper reduction, water conservation, etc.
- To promote the use of community service leave for employees, encourage service learning opportunities for students, and stimulate a willingness to connect with our surrounding community.

Strategies:

Our strategy was to gain sufficient knowledge from relevant university officials in order to focus on a sustainable project idea. Through research and discussions, we were able to create a visual map of our project including a mission statement, objectives, task list, and expected outcomes.

Action Steps:

- Defined sustainability and what it means to "Go Green".
 - Using VCU's definition (www.vcugoesgreen.vcu.edu) - established a list of potential projects to pilot.
 - Created parameters for developing educational component.
- Met with Division of Community Engagement and Office of Sustainability to help determine project scope, what type of similar projects were already available, and to gain insight on key individuals to collaborate with.
- Identified refurbishing the greenhouse at Carver Elementary School as pilot project.
 - Established relationship with Willnette Lightfoot, Carver Elementary Site Coordinator for Communities in Schools of Richmond, Inc.
 - Visited greenhouse several times, took photos, and measurements to estimate number and cost of repairs.
 - Received approval from Kiwana Yates, Principal and Willnette Lightfoot to proceed with project.
 - Solicited expert advice (electrician, plumber, glass repair) to build project timeline and received approval for services of technicians.
 - Received approval from Richmond City Public Schools Plant Operations to proceed with project using VCU technicians.

- Met every other week to brainstorm and create a plan for soliciting donations from local businesses (Lowe's, Home Depot, etc) for gift cards and supplies needed for refurbishing the greenhouse.

Outcomes:

Over the course of this past year, we have grown considerably as a team. Each of us brings something very unique to this experience and we have been able to rely on each other exponentially. Teamwork was never an issue for us. However, working to overcome roadblocks along the way was a challenge.

Working with our community partner has made us realize that our timeline may not be in-line with others. Due to the public school system's summer schedule, receiving approval to proceed with project work took longer than expected.

Through collaboration with our university colleagues, we were able to solicit donations of materials, find service experts willing to do the work "pro bono", and volunteers to help kick off the refurbishing of the greenhouse.

At this time, Carver Elementary School has granted us full access to the greenhouse to begin repairs. Our team began with an initial cleanup of the greenhouse. VCU Facilities personnel will be making electrical and plumbing repairs soon. New greenhouse tables have been ordered and supplies have been picked up from Lowe's. Once the greenhouse is finished, we will be participating in a celebration with the school to re-open the greenhouse.

Sustainability:

It is our goal to implement this project on a yearly basis via an application process. A sample application was created which helped us to understand what we could/could not take on within the scope of our project. Applications will be submitted by March 1st, recipient(s) will be selected by May 1st of that same year, implementation must begin by July 1st of award year, and the project must be completed by March 1st of the following year. Discussions have been to house this project under the Office of Sustainability or Community Engagement.

Resources:

Funding for this pilot project has been received from Ron Brown, Neighborhood Outreach Director for the Division of Community Engagement. Potential sources for long term implementation would be VCU Facilities Management, Office of Sustainability, or Community Engagement. The potential volunteer pool is quite vast (Carver Promise, VCU AmeriCorps Team, ASPiRE Students, Green Unity for VCU, VCU SGA, VCU GSA, faculty, staff, students, and alumni). Community Service leave hours can be used for this project as well. The recipient of the award is also required to participate in the project.

Recommendations:

The Carver Greenhouse project provides a strong foundation for the complete development of the "Commit and Connect" initiative. Team Right Now would like to complete the refurbishing of the Carver greenhouse this fall. Using the greenhouse project as a template, the University could implement the yearly award with the assistance of our team. Through our collaboration with Cathy Howard (Community Engagement), we have already identified a potential recipient for next year if our project is implemented. (Friends Association for Children - <http://www.friendsassn.org/>. The Friends Association for Children wants to teach children about recycling (paper, bottles, cans, etc). The Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority will not provide funds for a recycling service. The City of Richmond only sends a recycle truck through areas with significant participation from businesses/residents for no service fee.)

With our application timeline in place, service learning opportunities can be incorporated into the initiative. Focused Learning courses, ASPIRE, and other current programs can participate by adopting “Commit and Connect” as their class project.

Next steps involve securing a permanent sponsor and funding. A call for proposals outlining eligibility and project requirements is being developed. By creating this opportunity to commit and connect, VCU will benefit by growing future students, increasing student, faculty, staff and alumni participation, and fostering relationships within the community.

Conclusions:

“Commit and Connect” is an opportunity to promote, educate, and teach the value of sustainable living to the children of our future. By instilling these values in our community at a young age, we can help create a greener environment and preserve our natural resources. This project provides a way for the VCU community to commit to volunteering while connecting to our surrounding communities.

Process Observations:

- Summer break created a challenge (especially in August) for our team in finding time to meet. From May-July, we met every other week and covered quite a bit of ground.
- Due to the nature of our project and working with timelines other than our own, the report write-up and mock presentations in September presented a roadblock that left us feeling as if we were lagging behind after staying ahead of schedule for so many months.
- Our team worked very well together bringing varied backgrounds, expertise, and intelligence to the forefront. Each of us had a chance to lead various pieces of the project, thus providing an opportunity to view and learn from different leadership styles.
- Project scope is the most important aspect to keep in perspective from the beginning. Scope “creep” cannot be allowed.

VCU Goes Green: Commit & Connect

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Theme IV of VCU's Quest for Distinction

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Project Goals

Engage
Guide
Promote

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Strategies

Gain sufficient knowledge to focus on a sustainable project idea
Create a visual map of project
Develop mission statement, objectives, task list, and expected outcomes

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Action Steps

Define sustainability and what it means to "Go Green"
Meet with relevant university officials
Identify potential pilot project
Communicate regularly via email, meetings, shared docs

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Carver Elementary School

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