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Putting Food on The Table Project Toolkit

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A resource for groups who want to improve food security and wellness among older people in their community.

Sheridan | Centre for Elder Research

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The Centre for Elder Research conducts innovative Lab to Life® research that enhances the quality of life of older adults while serving as an education and research hub for the broader community.

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Introduction

This toolkit is intended to provide resources and guidance to teams who want to address the food security and wellness needs of older adults in their communities.

This project is a partnership between Sheridan College's Centre for Elder Research, Food for Life (a food rescue organization) and Community Development Halton (a community non-profit that strives to improve the lives of residents in the community through research, planning, and community development, promoting volunteerism).

The purpose of the project was to (a) better understand the food and social needs of older Food for Life clients, (b) improve their offering based on these data, (c) measure the impact.

The information provided in this toolkit describes our approach and lessons learned. In it, we also share many of the information products that we developed, for other teams to use or borrow from.

Research Team

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Step 1

Set up your team and team structure

- Your team should be comprised of those who understand: food service delivery, community services, ageing in the community, and survey-based research and analysis.
- Having a designer on the team to facilitate idea-generation and to develop products is recommended, but not essential. Not everyone will have access to a designer.
- Our grant allowed for payment for some of the time of community partners. This was essential to allow them to support and engage in the data collection and analysis and the development and delivery of the expanded supports.
- Have full team meetings every few months (we had one every quarter) to update everyone on the project progress and provide opportunities for larger team discussions and idea generation.
- For each full team meeting, develop a project update deck to share with the group.
- The major tasks (survey development, survey analysis, package development, etc.) require planning and input from all partners, but may not require the full team. We developed "working groups" for each of those tasks and those groups met to plan and strategize each of those tasks.

We conducted all meetings virtually. Most meetings were 45-60 minutes in length, although the design meetings were 90 minutes each. Virtual meetings longer than 90 minutes can be taxing.

Step 2

Conduct baseline survey

- All communications from the project team, including study instruments, education, or other information were included in recipients' food packages.
- We wanted to make sure that those who were not comfortable communicating in English could be part of the study. So – we included basic information about the study and contact information to receive more information in the language of their choice in the six most common non-English languages.
- The baseline survey we used is here: https://source.sheridancollege.ca/centres_elder_food_surveys/3/
- Some of the questions we included were from standardized surveys. Overall, the team (and recipients) found these questions cumbersome. There is a cost-benefit to using them.
- We initially anticipated that everyone would complete the online survey, or phone the research study line to complete it over the phone. However, our initial response was very low, so we sent out full paper surveys with self-addressed stamped return envelopes. Our response rate significantly increased.
- As an incentive, we offered respondents a jar of local honey after completing both the initial and follow-up surveys.

Step 3

Summarize and analyze data

- We summarized the survey results using descriptive statistics and shared with the team. For many survey questions, we conducted gender-based and other sub-population analyses.
- We provided the survey summary results in tabular and graphical form, to help team members understand and appreciate the data in order to think through it.
- Once the team members had an opportunity to review the survey summary data, we held two data analysis sessions.
- We posed the following questions to team members in preparation for the data analysis sessions:
    Did any of the findings surprise you?
    Did any of the findings make you want to ask another question?
    What were the most important findings, from your perspective?

Step 4

Develop and deliver enhanced package
Design Process

Resources

During this project we had a team made up of researchers, community partners and designers. Instructions for all the activities used can be found online or through this toolkit but it is recommended that you have a UX designer or someone familiar with the activities present to help facilitate the process. For most activities, you will need a white boarding tool like Google Jamboard (https://jamboard.google.com/), Mural (https://www.mural.co/), or an equivalent.

Define

Overview: Once the research is gathered, it can be used in the define phase to help you understand your audience, the current situation, and needs of the users. In this phase you will understand and identify food insecurity in the community and define the problem areas to be addressed.

Tips: Understand who your user personas are and their networks so that you can better understand and empathize with your user and be aware of who your solution may be affecting. For example, the user may have food or transportation supports from friends or relatives, these can be people they rely on or trust and it's important to take them into consideration when designing. Uncover the root causes of surface issues and empathize with people to create a more effective solution to the correct problem

End point: By the end of this phase, you should have identified and clearly articulated who your user is, their pain points, and areas of opportunity.

Possible activities: There are a number of activities that you can use to define your user, their pain points, and areas of opportunity. Some are listed below, with links to the activities themselves and instructions.

- Personas: https://www.nngroup.com/articles/persona/
- Persona Network
- 5 Why's: https://www.designkit.org/methods/the-five-whys
- User journey: https://www.designkit.org/methods/journey-map
- Empathy map: https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/

Ideate

Overview: Now that the problem area is researched and defined, the team can ideate ways to address the problem through design sessions. Series of group workshops and individual activities can help teams generate and develop ideas together and leave time between sessions for individuals to step back, re-evaluate and develop higher quality concepts.

Tips: Use a range of resources from your team and community to take advantage of existing supports and extend the reach of the solution. For example, the Putting Food on The Table project team included team members from Community Development Halton with relationships with schools in the area so kids could write letters or make cards for clients of Food for Life.

- Ask generative questions at the beginning of the process such as “what would a successful outcome look like” or “what goals do we have for this project” to be aware of and manage group expectations, biases and goals.
- Conduct separate workshops for divergent and convergent ideation to allow time for the team to change their mindset and expectations.
    - It’s Important to separate these two workshops because in divergent thinking, the team will be brainstorming many ideas and not critiquing anything, the goal is to explore a breadth of directions, while in convergent thinking, the team will be thinking critically about the proposed ideas and narrowing them down to define the scope of the project.
- Food insecurity demands systemic change, while you’re ideating, try to think of modifications and adaptations that could be made to the current system instead of only thinking of additional services
    - In this phase, it’s okay if ideas are not feasible, it can be helpful to ask questions like “If we could do anything, what would we do?” or “We won’t do [this solution] because of [this reason] so the opposite must be true”

Endpoint: By the end of the ideation phase, you should have narrowed the ideas down to the most impactful and feasible and have defined the scope of the solution.

Possible activities:

Divergent

- Stick ‘em up: https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/learn-how-to-use-the-best-ideation-methods-brainstorming-braindumping-brainwriting-and-brainwalking
- Crazy 8s: https://designsprintkit.withgoogle.com/methodology/phase3-sketch/crazy-8s

Convergent

- Importance difficulty matrix: https://designsprintkit.withgoogle.com/methodology/phase1-understand/importancedifficulty-matrix
- Value proposition canvas: https://interaction.net.au/articles/value-proposition-canvas-explained/

Develop

Overview: Once the design has been scoped, work can be divided up to be developed. In this phase it may be helpful to assign one champion to each part of the solution if it's multifaceted or use a RACI chart to divide up more specific tasks. The team should still communicate and regroup often for realignment and critique.

- A RACI chart will define who is responsible, accountable, consulted and informed for each task of the project. This helps with project management because it will ensure that at least one person is responsible for each task and nothing gets missed.

Tips:

- When dividing up work to be done, ensure that everyone is assigned appropriate tasks for their role and skill set and that they have the support that they need from the team as well as external sources.
- Keep track of progress in a shared document so that project management stays organized, and nothings gets missed or forgotten.
- Check in often for updates, critiques, and to realign work. When developing, ideas may evolve and get adjusted to better fit the needs of the project, these changes should be communicated with the rest of the team.

Endpoint: At the end of the development phase, you should have all the assets approved and ready to ship.

Lessons

Conducting research during a pandemic

- To comply with social distancing regulations, we had to adjust how we offered multi-lingual services in order to include those who don't speak English as their first language.
    - o We offered a call line where people could request service in a different language, but found that it wasn't being used. Partnering with community organizations who serve those who do not speak English as their first language may have helped us

develop more effective solutions to reach these community members.

- Our first method of data collection was an online survey, but the number of responses was too low so the team pivoted to mail-in surveys and received a much higher response rate.

Collaborating across sectors

Successes

- By creating a team of people with different backgrounds and different pockets of resources, we were able to come together to create something uniquely creative. This shows how important it is not to work in silos and the power of the collective group.
- While collaborating on a project with so many moving parts, organization and communication is a must. Regular meetings and additional meetings when needed kept everyone feeling connected and made it possible to fully leverage the skills of everyone on the team.
- Sharing knowledge on older adults and what people need beyond food was an additional outcome that all team members benefited from. By collecting information on wellbeing during covid and other topics, we we were able to identify issues in other areas.
- The data collected helped inform community partners' grants and help them obtain additional funding to address priorities (PPE, protein, social connection) identified through the survey.

Challenges: When collaborating with community partners, provide them with enough information about the project to build context and leave extra time where ever possible to account for busy schedules and any other roadblocks or delays.

Expanding possibilities & demographic overlap

Successes: Going through this process helped us expand the potential for this service, from a food delivery service to a tool to send information and other resources to people who are isolated or otherwise harder to reach.

Challenges: When expanding the package to deliver other types of information, it's important to take time to think about what people need at what time and to not overload them with information or send irrelevant resources.

Being aware of language: Throughout the process, including implementation and dissemination, it's important to always be cognizant of the language being used. Terms like "isolation" and "loneliness" have a stigma and may impact the person receiving the package.

Step 5

Conduct follow-up survey

- The follow-up survey is an opportunity to both determine the impact of the changes that you made to the package, and to measure how people are faring. There is also an opportunity to obtain one-time data on new measures.
- The follow-up survey should be considerably shorter than the original survey, because functional health and nutritional risk likely will not change in less than a year, and there is no need to gather that data. In addition, demographic data need not be collected again, if you are able to attribute the baseline and follow-up surveys to the same persons.
- Our follow-up survey, with additional questions about food support satisfaction and technology use is included in the resources package on Sheridan College's collaborative commons for scholarly output, research, and creative excellence. The follow-up survey can be found here: https://source.sheridancollege.ca/centres_elder_food/