

RC CLIF Final Report

Project Name : Waltham Food Delivery Infrastructure Initiative (WFDI)
Audri Bhowmick , Co-Founder, CEO

Also Crediting : Annabelle Fitch(Director of Communications), Vibhu Singh (Co-Founder, COO)

Project Background and Identified Community Needs :

The pantry food delivery systems in Waltham and surrounding areas, as per our research, runs on age-old methods. For someone to sign up to receive food, the process would involve them signing up manually through either a paper-based signup process or through manually calling the pantry to get their name into the pantry's list. From there on, the pantry would manually input them in a doc file or just have it in hand-written form which they would then give to the volunteers who would in turn have to go through the houses one by one and drop off the foods. The problems surrounding this process were manifold, as noted below :

1. A paper-based administrative process is slow and unsustainable, including much room for human error which can be disastrous for a family waiting to receive sustenance.
2. The volunteers are given a list of locations with no location-based sorting, resulting in a very inefficient delivery process. The volunteers would often have to drive to the same/nearby neighborhoods thrice or more, simply because they weren't aware that the house after the next house on the list is actually in the same neighborhood that they just delivered in.
3. Finally, the people receiving food are not given a consistent sign-up process, resulting in them often missing out on the sign-up period and subsequently not receiving their much needed sustenance.

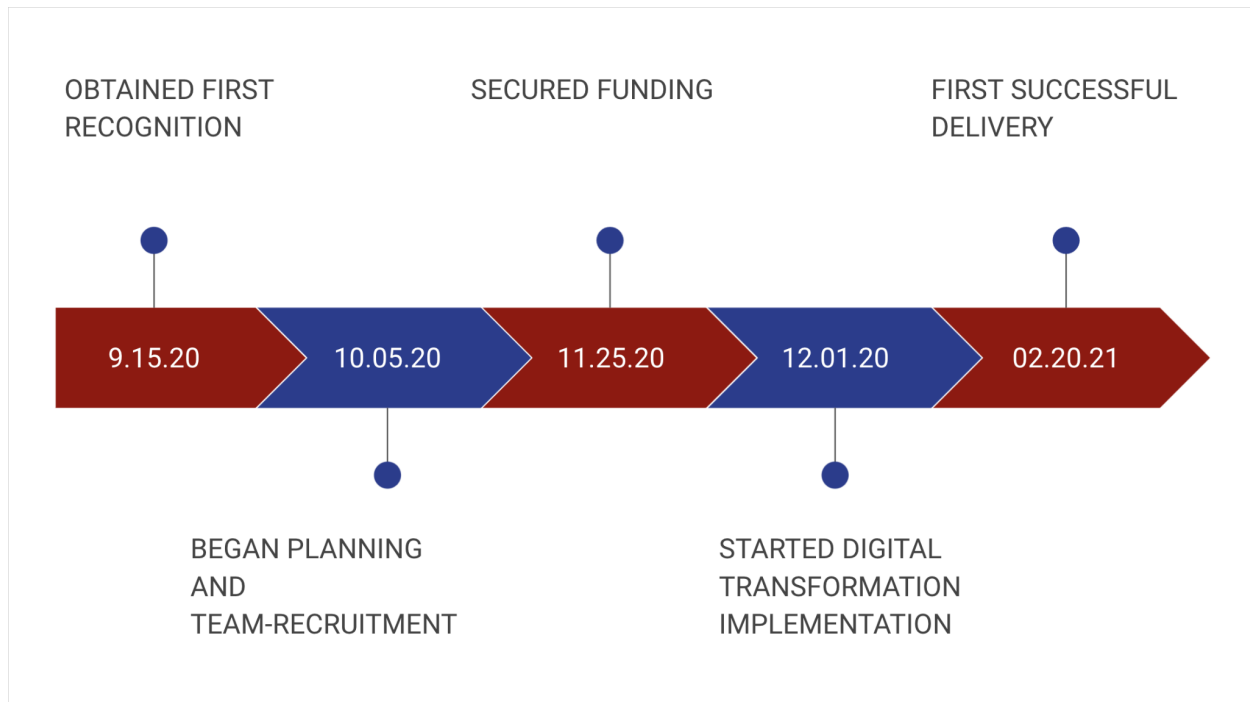
Due to Covid-19, the following complications were added to the list :

4. More people in need of food : People who lost their jobs, people who are immunocompromised or suffering from some sort of disability or people with a general lack of transportation were added to the list of people who are not able to come to the city centers to collect food.
5. The pantries lack social-distancing infrastructure : Volunteers are afraid to come to pantries alongside the above-mentioned populations.

Our Solution :

1. Implemented an Excel database : Collected all the information available at the pantries and from the Waltham Mutual Aid Network to construct a full database containing all information of volunteers and the people in need of food. Identified the gaps in information and manually contacted the families/volunteers to collect the data.
2. Implemented a volunteer matching system : The excel sheet matches volunteers to people in need of food based on their time and location availability.
3. Implemented a zipcar system : to attract campus volunteers and to ensure a no-contact delivery process. Volunteers pick up the zipcar from in front of public safety, the food boxes from Kutz hall and roll out for delivery. All they require to access the zipcar is a login that's sent to their email address.
4. Implemented a digital map : Live, scavenger-hunt style map auto-sorts the drop-off points by location and allows the volunteers to deliver the food boxes with a much higher efficiency.
5. Trained Volunteers : In collaboration with an attorney from Western Massachusetts Food Bank, created waiver-forms and trained volunteers to deliver efficiently and safely (no-contact deliveries) using a volunteer manual that we made from scratch.
6. Created lasting community partnerships : Partnered with Healthy Waltham and Waltham Mutual Aid Network to create a sustainable flow of

Project Timeline :



Project Evaluation and Final Data Points :

I personally do not believe in qualitative data analysis for the inherent biases that it can include. Instead, we followed a strictly quantitative approach that granted us with the following final data points :

- 30 families / week
- 32 lbs / box
- 8 weeks i.e. 8 total deliveries
- $30 \times 32 \times 8 = 7680$ lbs+ food, delivered
- 10+ volunteers trained
- 1 translator and 1 volunteer manager recruited
- Additional resources bought (refer to budget sheet below)
- All of that done with 300\$ less than initial proposed budget

Unexpected Successes and Obstacles:

In terms of obstacles, our greatest challenge was the very one we attempted to circumvent through our project: the effects of COVID-19. Due to COVID, we had some difficulties finding willing, regularly-tested volunteers to help us with food transportation and cover shifts. Luckily, as we got word out about our work, we found more community support- thus voiding our main dilemma. Our successes, on the other hand, were boundless. We created strong community partnerships with Healthy Waltham and Waltham Mutual Aid. We delivered even more food even more quickly with each delivery circuit, each weekend going more smoothly than the prior. Most importantly of all, however, we affected positive change for the underserved of Waltham. Annabelle Fitch and Leah Beltran, our communications volunteers, received an abundance of grateful feedback every week. For example, one food recipient was a recent graduate of Boston University who was unable to find employment due to the pandemic. Forced to move back to her unemployed mother's rickety old home, she broke her hip on the steps therein and needed surgery to fix it. This was a financial, emotional, and physical strain, leaving both of the family members uncertain as to where they could procure basic sustenance. Through WFDI's work, she was able to get back on her feet- both literally and metaphorically. As for another narrative, an elderly couple who only spoke Spanish both became ill and were hospitalized together. When they were released from the hospital, their medical bills put such a drain on them that they were, at that time, facing food insecurity. Through our work we were able to make sure they had the meals they needed to recoup their strength and return to their lives. Overall, this project's obstacles were few, and its successes great- fulfilling our goals and supporting the Waltham community.

The Current Status and Future Plans for the Program:

Currently, we are in discussion with the Brandeis Department of Community Service to add our Initiative to their Hunger and Homelessness Division. In the future, the Waltham Food Delivery Infrastructure Initiative will almost certainly be continued under their purview, with Annabelle,

Vibhu and I remaining on the project for some time to come. Both of our community partners have expressed strong interest in working together again through the 2021-2022 academic year, so we will collaborate with them again to serve the Waltham Community.

A Reflection on Learning and Project Experience:

The Waltham Food Delivery Infrastructure Initiative has been an excellent experience for me this past semester. As a student who has great interest in the business and corporate world, I learned about nonprofit management, budgeting, and other business strategy measures. My acquisition of these skills from this project, through trial and error, benefited both myself and our Initiative. I managed money so well that we came in much under-budget by the conclusion of our work, and we were able to return funds for future fellows. I discovered more about effective publicity, both for volunteer recruitment and for our food insecurity seminar with Dr. Miller and Dr. Donahue. Finally, I figured out how to delegate and communicate to make sure tasks were completed correctly and efficiently. Through WFDI, I feel as though I have been able to gain teamwork skills, improve my interpersonal communication, and use my strategic abilities to serve my community to the best of my ability. Our feedback has been overwhelmingly positive from our partners and our food recipients. My team and I managed to change 30+ lives for the better every week, and I couldn't be more proud. After all, everyone deserves a seat at the table.

Budgeting

Initial budget

Item/service	Description	Quantity	Cost per unit (\$)	Total Cost
Sturdy grocery bags	Reusable bags, one time purchase for the whole semester	150	\$1.37	\$205.50
Zipcar use	2 hrs/trip, 2 trips/week for 10 weeks; total hours = 40	40	\$9	\$360.00
Spreading awareness/advertisement (paper)	Printouts and Fliers	500	\$0.10	\$50.00
Monthly Raffle Draw to incentivize volunteers	25\$ gift card/ month for 3 months	3	\$25.00	\$75.00
Memorandum for guest speakers in Workshops	Bookstore Swag, Custom mugs etc.	4	\$20.00	\$80.00
		Total:		\$750.50

		Total with 15% extra(for unforeseen costs) :		\$860.00
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Actual Spending

Item/service	Description	Quantity	Cost per unit (\$)	Total Cost
Zipcar rentals	4hr/trip, 1 trip/week, for 8 weeks	32	\$9.50	\$360.59
Additional supplies	1 cart, backup cardboard boxes, extra packing tape, permanent markers			\$199.77
		Total:		\$560.36

Special Thanks to our community partners and our very own mentor, Samantha De Melim. Couldn't have done it without any of you !

Signing off,
The WFDI Team.