

# The Detroit Partnership

## Communications Assessment and Action Plan

Prepared by  
Logan Hansen

February 26, 2014

---

### Introduction

The Detroit Partnership is a student organization within the University of Michigan. It operates as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, connecting students at the university with the city of Detroit through service-learning opportunities that take place all throughout the year. The idea of service-learning, as opposed to community service, is stressed to emphasize that a reciprocal relationship is what volunteers should find through the Detroit Partnership's various programs. Such a relationship is fostered through discussion and reflection upon volunteers' efforts.

Connecting students and Detroiters has been the central mission of the Detroit Partnership since its inception in 1999 (then known as the Detroit Project). The hope of the organization is to build a lasting community between these two groups, one in which students gain an understanding of real social justice issues pertaining to the city and Detroiters benefit from the many hours of volunteer work, as well as form a stronger bond with members of the Ann Arbor community.

The organization is overseen by a board of directors who head various committees and teams tasked with the different facets and outlets that work in cohesion to see their mission through. In terms of communication, there exists an External Team, headed by the External Director, which puts out the public face of the organization. Their tasks include recruiting volunteers, maintaining relationships between the Detroit Partnership and its members, communicating the goals of the organization, coordinating with other student organizations on campus, creating a positive attitude towards service learning, and being the overall spokespersons for the organization as a whole.

The Detroit Partnership utilizes various mediums of communication. The organization has a presence on Facebook and Twitter, as well as an informational and user-friendly website that includes a blog. Email updates are sent out on a regular basis. Additionally, their annual flagship event – DP Day – garners them considerable P.R., and allows for face-to-face communication among participants and Detroit Partnership leaders.

Considerable funding for the Detroit Partnership's service-learning programs comes from corporate sponsors, including the Ford Motor Company Fund and TCF Bank. The organization is able to thrive by appealing to corporate entities such as these, and by keeping their message focused and directed on the main core of volunteers – U of M students.

Communication goals for the Detroit Partnership are as follows:

- Increasing awareness and involvement of University of Michigan students campus-wide
- Maintaining and further developing reciprocal relationships and connections with the city of Detroit
- Increasing the promotion of social justice and decreasing stereotype threat
- Increasing funding

### **Communications Analysis**

#### *Strengths*

First and foremost, the Detroit Partnership seems to gain a lot of traction through their annual DP Day event hosted in early spring each year. DP Day is promoted vigorously through all of the organization's social media outlets in the months leading up to the event. During the day of the event, Twitter is blown up by participants and staff members alike, leading to widespread exposure in both the Detroit and Ann Arbor communities. Beside the obvious impact of a massive influx of volunteers into Detroit at one time, DP Day provides the organization with a host of photographs, videos, and testimonials by volunteers that they are able to integrate into all of their methods of communication, further showcasing their efforts and garnering interest in their activities.

The message of the Detroit Partnership and its portrayal to their student audience is another strong point of the organization. College students are exceptionally familiar with the social media outlets that the Detroit Partnership employs in its communications strategy. The idea that service and learning go hand-in-hand and play off one another is a good selling point that attracts volunteers to the organization. The mantra, which is seen again and again, is that volunteers will get as much out of the experience as they are willing to put into it.

Additionally, the Detroit Partnership lays claim to a sophisticated website that is both engaging and informational. Navigation is user-friendly and social media integration, a "Donate Now" button, and the option to subscribe to email updates is readily available at the bottom of every page throughout the site. Different ways to get involved are outlined clearly.

Lastly, the overall mission of the organization is one that definitely has the potential to hit home with University of Michigan students. A strong Detroit is good for the state of Michigan, thus students who are inclined to identify strongly with the state

because they have lived here all their lives or because it has come to feel like a second home to them whether they are from out of state or overseas would also be inclined to assist in carrying out this work. Simply by working to foster relationships and promote the city of Detroit, the Detroit Partnership draws the attention through their communications of individuals such as these.

### *Weaknesses*

Large nonprofits can get away with posting only content about themselves, but the case is not quite so for smaller organizations, and yet the Detroit Partnership, which is a smaller nonprofit, focuses mainly on themselves when it comes to their social media communications. Most, if not all, of the Facebook posts and the tweets put out by the Detroit Partnership promote only their specific cause, only their events – only things that pertain directly to them. In this way, the organization is not effective in cultivating social capital. Karma banking, or sending good things out about other organizations or individuals without expecting an immediate return, is not being taken into account whatsoever. This could be something that deters or causes the loss of “likers” and “followers.”

Along the same lines, the organization does not necessarily participate in discussions with the public through their social media outlets. This is most likely brought about because the way they tweet and the way they post to Facebook does not encourage their fans and supporters to reply or comment. Beyond just reiterating information that only concerns their own organization, it might be said that a certain air of authenticity is lacking from the activity on social media. This is not to say that the Detroit Partnership’s social media presence seems completely automated, but they certainly could use improvement in this realm.

While the Detroit Partnership’s website as a whole is appealing, the blog contained within is not necessarily utilized to its full potential. Most blog posts are simply announcements about events, or tiny snippets encouraging people to get involved with one of the weekly service-learning programs. Of course these are fine topics to blog about, but much more could be done to enhance a visitor’s experience. The blog is not at all used in a personal manner, and therefore feels like another channel of broadcasted information from the organization. It lacks a variety of content and fails to give the behind-the-scenes look that it is certainly capable of delivering.

On a final, more specific note, the Detroit Partnership’s Twitter account fails to include “hashtags” in its tweets. Hashtags provide key words for Twitter users to search and thus find accounts such as the Detroit Partnership’s. Without this type of SEO, the organization is more or less invisible for those who don’t already know about it.

## *Opportunities*

Currently, the Detroit Partnership maintains connections with the Brightmoor and Southwest neighborhoods of Detroit, as well as the recently added Eastside neighborhood. The large size of the city means there will always be more ways to expand involvement. In the future, the organization could expand its programs into additional neighborhoods and districts, further developing relationships with Detroiters in those areas and opening new avenues of communication. The addition of three programs on the Eastside this year was a step in this direction. More steps like this would undoubtedly reap benefits for the organization, especially by showing their supporters their commitment to advancing their mission.

Beyond this, the current state of the city of Detroit is far from ideal in terms of financial security and overall infrastructure. What this means is that organizations like the Detroit Partnership only have more opportunities to help out, as areas all over the city are hurting. The need of outside intervention and assistance is certainly something the Detroit Partnership could use to their advantage as far as gaining support and volunteers are concerned.

## *Threats*

Just as the dismal state of affairs in Detroit can be seen as an opportunity, it is equally a threat to any organization pouring their efforts into the city. With scarcity of funds, institutions that the Detroit Partnership has relationships with cannot feel safe. The financial strain is something that has the capability of inadvertently burning bridges between the Detroit Partnership and its community partners, not because of rifts but because of lack of resources.

This is not something that is overly concerning, seeing as how the Detroit Partnership has been able to maintain relationships over the number of years with many community partners, but is nonetheless something to keep in the back of the mind.

## **Communications Action Plan**

### *Objectives*

- Increase awareness and involvement of University of Michigan students across campus
  - Keep track of what types of posts on Facebook and what types of tweets on Twitter generate the most buzz – categorize
    - Track Facebook “likes” and comments
    - Track Twitter mentions, favorites, and “retweets”
  - Integrate hashtags into Twitter communications to increase SEO
  - Personalize blog, track what visitors respond to

- Further develop relationships between students and Detroiters, while promoting social justice and decreasing stereotype threat
  - Measure DP Day volunteer numbers from year to year
  - Measure volunteer numbers for weekly service-learning programs on semester-to-semester intervals
  - Monitor types of posts/tweets/whatever that are sent out, finding a balance that works most effectively
- Increasing donations
  - Track number of contributions via mail and via website

### *Audiences*

- The primary audience of the Detroit Partnership is the student body at the University of Michigan. For the organization to accomplish any of their goals, student involvement is absolutely crucial. The optimal way to reach these young adults is through social media. Facebook and Twitter, avenues of online communication that the Detroit Partnership employs, are effective means of instilling interest in this audience. It is important that this audience understand the magnitude of the impact their efforts have upon the city of Detroit.
- The supporters of the organization make up an equally important audience. This group includes U of M faculty and staff members, former students involved with the Detroit Partnership during their time at U of M, organizations, institutions, and businesses that stake a claim to Detroit, as well as older generations that care about the wellbeing of the city. Social media is important for connecting to these audiences as well, but so too is the impact that the Detroit Partnership has upon the Ann Arbor and Detroit communities. When students get involved and make a good name for the university and the organization amongst community partners, a ROI becomes evident from supporters. Keeping in line with the organizations message and mission, and outwardly showing this, keep donations coming in.

### *Social Media Integration with Other Functions*

- Facebook and Twitter are already integrated into the Detroit Partnership's website, however, their icons remain at the bottom of the site. It could be advantageous to make the social media buttons more prominent by placing them in the top right corner of each page.
- An Instagram account could prove useful. The organization compiles many photographs and videos during their annual DP Day event and every now and then from their weekly programs. Having a place where the main focus is on visual presentation of what the Detroit Partnership does and who they are could garner more interest. Of course, a social media button would need to be added alongside the Facebook and Twitter buttons already on their site.

### *Culture Change*

- The suggestions here, while they would take time and effort, do not call for a total overhaul of the way the organization handles their communication. Talking over and negotiating these possible enhancements would need to take place at the weekly Board meetings, with everyone clearly understanding what would be expected of them to make the implementation of this plan successful.
- Specifically laying out the amount of time and attention to be given to the different tasks would be vital, as well as everyone's cooperation with these expectations. Responsibilities would need to be spread out to avoid anyone becoming overwhelmed.
- Significant changes to the website's blog would be in order. Instead of using the blog mainly as a calendar of events, including testimonials of members within the organization about their experiences would be a good way of giving the organization a more personal facet. Also, knowing whom blog posts are coming from would be a good move to make. At present, all posts are authored "By The Detroit Partnership." Putting an individual's name and listing their place within the organization adds to authenticity.

### *Capacity for Implementation*

- Ideally, the External Board, which is the committee within the organization whose main purpose is to handle P.R., would head these communication strategies. This team would take charge of the changes and delegate work to others in the organization as they see fit, under the supervision of the executive director. They are in charge of the social media fronts already, and thus would know how to effectively implement this plan.

### *Tactics and Tools*

- Continue to focus on the social media outlets already being used. For Facebook and Twitter both, begin to integrate news, photos, events, etc. from sources outside of the organization. For Facebook specifically, mix up the type of posts that the organization generates – avoid predictability.
- Increase SEO by utilizing hashtags on Twitter and key words on other communication platforms, thereby opening up more doors to the organization.
- Keep karma banking and social capital top priorities by interacting and forming relationships with organizations that have presences on the same social media sites and share similar missions. Share, like, retweet, reblog, and otherwise promote their causes so that they might be more inclined to do the same for the organization.
- Divvy up tasks for social media to multiple persons. Have at least two people (probably more) in charge of any social media account, so no one becomes burnt out.

- If time and resources allow, and if all other bases are covered, expand social media presence into the realm of Instagram. Be careful, however, not to automate posts across social media platforms. Each platform deserves its own specific care and attention, as each has a slightly different purpose for the organization.

### *Measurement*

- Measuring the success of all these changes would be in the form of keeping statistics across social media platforms and monitoring donation increases or stagnancy over selected intervals.
- Facebook can be monitored through Facebook Insights (after the accrument of 30 “likes”). It would serve the Detroit Partnership well to see which types of posts on Facebook receive the most attention in the forms of likes, shares, and comments.
- For Twitter, and the possible adoption of Instagram in the future, the organization could choose to manually track statistics or go about this through a third party method. In parallel with Facebook, monitoring the amount of mentions, retweets and favorites for Twitter (similarly, favorites and regrams for Instagram), the organization could see what was working and what could be improved upon further still.
- Keeping track of these statistics would give the Detroit Partnership a good idea of how much ROI they are receiving from the changes put forth in this document.