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Advocacy Case Studies

Developed in collaboration with the Congressional Hunger Center and Emerson Hunger Fellow Mariama Badjie.

University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Features in this Case:

- Starting Swipe Out Hunger as a committee within another student group – 2018
- Expanding Swipe Out Hunger club into a broader coalition of student groups advocating for students' basic needs – 2019

Background:

The Student Basic Needs Coalition at the University of Tennessee – Knoxville (UTK) evolved out of the university's Swipe Out Hunger chapter. Owen Flomberg founded the Swipe Out Hunger chapter as a sophomore and by his senior year, the club had grown so much that conducting Swipes Drives was only a fraction of the club's activity. That year, the group decided to restructure and re-brand as the Student Basic Needs Coalition (SBNC). SBNC's campus advocacy focuses on four areas of basic needs: food security, housing security, safety, and healthcare.

Challenge:

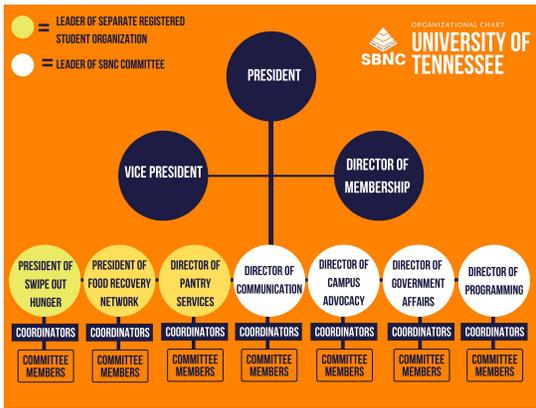
In the fall of 2017, sophomore Owen Flomberg discovered Swipe Out Hunger through an NPR article on college student food insecurity. At the time, Owen was a student senator in the Student Government Association (SGA) and a founding board member of the *Kappa Alpha Pi – Pre-Law Fraternity* at UTK. Inspired by the NPR article, Owen began investigating his own university's involvement in food security issues and discovered that there was already a meal swipe donation program in place, called the Big Orange Meal Share Program. However, it was not well-publicized.

Action:

That fall, Owen set out to increase awareness of the Big Orange Meal Share program and increase student participation. During his quest, Owen experimented with multiple avenues for change on campus from introducing a Swipe Out Hunger bill in SGA, to advertising the meal share on campus and even running for student body president on a basic needs platform.

In the fall semester of 2018, Owen started a Swipe Out Hunger chapter as a service committee within Phi Alpha Kappa. In the spring, the group spun off as its own student organization with 10 members and dedicated board roles.

By winter of 2019, the team decided a rebranding was in order: the organization’s advocacy and campus involvement had extended beyond what is typically taken on by a Swipe Out Hunger chapter. The group rebranded as the Student Basic Needs Coalition, with the Swipe Out Hunger meal donation program existing as a member of the Coalition.



There are four tenets of basic needs at the center of the Student Basic Needs Coalition: food security, housing security, safety, and healthcare.

The first campaign of the newly-formed coalition is a set of six demands to increase basic needs security on campus. The Coalition presented their demands to university administrators, who were receptive and willing to work on meeting these goals.

Outcome: Though campus closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic has put this campaign on hold, the group feels that the progress made so far is still a significant win. They continue to have meetings with administrative officials to discuss the issues of the campaign, the Dean of Students has verbally committed to supporting all of the demands, and SBNC is still raising awareness among the student body through social media. Social media engagement and comments of support from students demonstrate to the school's administration that these concerns are held by the general student populace.

Lessons & Best Practices:

- **Raising awareness is always a win.** Owen’s run for president elevated students’ consciousness of basic needs security. Though Owen didn’t win the presidency, supporters of his campaign later became involved members of Swipe Out Hunger and the Student Basic Needs Coalition.
- It can take time to build support, but starting conversations and initiatives to push for basic needs security on your campus will create ripple effects for years to come.



Advice from SBNC Leaders Mikayla and Ashlyn:

- ***Use the three C's: collaborate, communicate, and celebrate.***

“Before meeting with student organizations or administration, we placed ourselves in the role of our partners. What is the purpose of their position? What limitations might they experience in their position? We asked ourselves how we can contribute.” -Makayla Prince

- ***Anyone can be involved in advocacy. All you need is to recognize a need and raise your voice loud enough to draw attention.***

“Prior to my role as President of [the] Swipe Out Hunger Chapter and my current role of Director of Advocacy for SBNC, I did not consider myself an advocate or an activist for the issues I am passionate about. But what I realized through my involvement in the past year is that there is no magic formula for what it looks like to be in the advocacy space. It is truly about bringing injustices to light and exposing issues that can be addressed through sustainable, equitable change. Though in the long term this can seem like a daunting task and does not happen overnight, the needs you see on your campus can and must be met.” - Ashlyn Anderson

Santa Monica College

Features of this Case:

- Community College
- Student advocate is an elected member of student government, whose advocacy approach is working within the administration, rather applying pressure from the outside

Background:

Safa Saleem was the 2019-2020 Director of Student Assistance, an elected member of the Associated Students (AS) Board of Directors at Santa Monica College. Through her role, she sits on the SMC Food Security Team and Basic Needs Workgroup. During her term, Safa set out to revamp and improve current anti-hunger programs on campus.

Challenge:

According to a Hope Center report based on survey responses from California Community College students in 2016 and 2018 only 30% of respondents were secure in their basic needs. 70% of students were either food insecure, housing insecure, or homeless.

SMC's Free Lunch Voucher program (FLVR, pronounced "flavor") provided up to 18 vouchers per semester to students facing food insecurity. Each voucher was worth \$5, to be used at any food vendor on campus. Student participants in the FLVR program expressed a need for more vouchers with higher values. At \$5 each, a voucher barely covered the cost of a meal on campus.

Action:

With the needs of her fellow students in dire circumstances, Safa and the SMC administration jumped into high gear.

In the Fall of 2019, Safa worked with the Office of Student Life to overhaul the FLVR program to better serve students' needs. Safa's goal was to help students afford a full hot meal using a single voucher. Using student feedback from a Spring 2019 Swipe Out Hunger FLVR evaluation survey, Safa argued that they must increase both the value of each voucher and the total number of vouchers a student can receive in a semester.



The Office of Student Life agreed to raise the voucher value to \$8 and the total voucher allotment to 24 per semester. Safa then took a purchase proposal to the Associated Students Board, which granted the additional funding to overhaul FLVR.

Outcome:

How FLVR works now: FLVR now provides up to 24 vouchers, eight given at three separate meetings with a counselor. Vouchers are now worth \$8 each, up from \$5 previously.

Lessons & Best Practices:

- **Including students as key stakeholders:** SMC’s administration makes space for students in the decision-making process and values them as equal contributors. SMC’s Food Security team includes spots for students to serve as co-decision makers.
- **The power of data in advancing your goals:** Safa used data from the FLVR evaluation survey to show that recipients had outstanding food needs, which could be alleviated by increasing the FLVR allotment.

Advice From Safa: *Let yourself be heard. Make space for yourself at the table.*

“It can be very hard to make progress on your goals on-campus if nobody is listening – so make yourself heard. Let it be known that you have concerns for your community, and that your voice matters just as much as faculty’s.”

University of California - Los Angeles

Features of this Case:

- Adapting communications strategy in crisis to reach the student body virtually and continue meeting student needs on campus.
- Moved Swipes Drive outreach online amidst COVID-19 school closure, and doubled the donations!

Background:

UCLA is where the Swipe Out Hunger story begins. As the first and longest-running chapter, Swipe Out Hunger at UCLA (UCLA-SOH) has been innovating and refining its methodology for the past decade. The UCLA-SOH chapter is now an organization of thirty-six members and six committees, with a yearly recruitment and application process.

Challenge:

Swipe Out Hunger at UCLA runs a Swipes Drive the week before finals every quarter, with tabling on campus as UCLA-SOH's tried and true method of garnering meal swipe donations. During the Winter 2020 quarter, the Swipes Drive fell on the week that the University sent students home early over COVID-19 concerns. SOH co-presidents Michael Zargari and Celina Lee had to get creative to hold a successful donation drive with a dwindling student body on campus.

Action:

With their target population out of physical reach during their most important week of the quarter, the Swipe Out Hunger team had to branch outside of their successful in-person strategies and venture into online outreach.

The SOH-UCLA employed a number of strategies to make their digital Swipes Drive successful:

- Social media marketing: UCLA-SOH members vehemently marketed the Swipes Drive to their networks through their own social media accounts, tagging friends and resharing posts from UCLA-SOH's official platforms. To donate, all students have to do is visit a bit.ly link that redirects to their MyUCLA portal, where they can donate their leftover meal swipes.

- Michael and Celina sent emails to leaders of other service-related clubs on campus, asking them to share the donation link with their members and social media followers.
- They also reached out to Head Resident Assistants, asking that all their RAs share the donation link with their residents.

Outcome:

Through the online Swipe Drive, UCLA-SOH received donations from 1,508 individual donors, who contributed a total of 31,893 meal swipes, **almost 3x** the expected yield. A normal quarter averages ~13,000 donated swipes.

Lessons & Best Practices:

- The UCLA-SOH team made use of a range of online marketing techniques to make their Swipes Drive so successful: social media marketing, emails to like-minded student organizations, and personal outreach to head RAs.
- After discovering the impact social media marketing can have on their efforts, the team is working on building out their social media presence for future endeavors.

Advice from Celina and Michael:

- In order to be successful it is important to identify campus specific needs and then modify existing infrastructure through establishing relationships in order to address those needs. – *Michael*
- Each campus needs to diagnose their unique issues and come up with campus-specific solutions Understand the campus infrastructure, where needs aren't being met, and solutions that will solve your issues – *Celina*

University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Features in this Case:

- Introducing a bill in the Tennessee State Legislature

Background:

SBNC's sights are not limited to promoting basic needs only on campus. The SBNC Government Affairs team has authored legislation that is currently in committee at the Tennessee General Assembly.

Challenge:

In 2018, the Government Affairs Team brought the bill to the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature (TISL), a mock legislature for Tennessee college students. After the bill passed at TISL, the team decided to reach out to state representatives with hopes of taking the bill to the State Legislature.

Action: *Introducing Senate Bill 2660*

In February 2020, they secured representatives in the state senate and house to sponsor the bill.

Senate Bill 2660 (also House Bill 2823) would require:

- Public 4-year institutions of higher education to submit data on their efforts to combat food insecurity on campus every two years.
- Public 4-year institutions to maintain a food pantry or other meal assistance program. Program details must be posted on the school's website.
- Public 2-year and 4-year institutions to electronically notify all students with estimated family contributions (EFCs) of \$0 of their potential eligibility for SNAP benefits, and share contact information for the Department of Human Services.

Outcome:

Progress: SNBC has secured a Senate sponsor and a House sponsor for the bill, in accordance with Assembly rules. The bill is currently in committee in the House and Senate of the Tennessee State Assembly, respectively. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislative session ended before the Assembly could vote on the bill. It will likely be reintroduced in the upcoming session

Lessons & Best Practices:

- **Don't be afraid to make cold calls.** Students at SBNC did not have connections at the State Legislature. They simply reached out to lawmakers and pitched their bill until they found sponsors in the House and Senate.
- **Bipartisan support on student food security legislation in the State Assembly:** Student hunger is a bipartisan issue. However, you may need to tailor your messaging to appeal to each political orientation.

Advice from Owen: *Speak to legislators using arguments that appeal to their politics.*

“Every state in the union has different forces in its politics. Arguments and policy proposals that may be popular with state legislators in California might not be appealing or make any sense to the legislatures of Tennessee, Georgia, or Alabama. However, I think you would be hard pressed to find a state in the union that does not want to increase the graduation rates of its colleges and universities. Data clearly indicates that financial insecurity prevents students from completing their degrees. However, states of different political orientations might understand this issue differently. You need to play to those political beliefs to get policy makers to understand the issue and pass solutions even though those solutions may not be exactly the same from state to state.”