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Ministry with Community: Analysis of public relations issues and proposed solutions

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MINISTRY WITH COMMUNITY: ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS ISSUES AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

by

Sarah M. Piper

A thesis submitted to the Lee Honors College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the honorific completion of Bachelor of Arts Western Michigan University April 2018

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Sarah M. Piper
FORWARD

This project was developed as Sarah Piper’s Lee Honors College thesis project. This project is a result of an educational exercise and simulation and was not done directly for the client, but as a practical application of methods learned in the pursuit of a major in public relations and a minor in nonprofit leadership. The client is welcome to use the information and suggestions enclosed, but their use and implementation is up to the sole discretion of the client.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 1
Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 2
Project Background .............................................................................................................. 3
Literature Review ................................................................................................................ 5
  What is a generation? ........................................................................................................ 5
  Earlier Generations ........................................................................................................ 6
  The Millennials: An Introduction .................................................................................. 7
  Millennial Relationships with Nonprofits ...................................................................... 8
  Millennials, Social Causes and Activism ....................................................................... 10
  Communicating with Millennials: Best Social Media Practices ................................... 11
    Introduction .................................................................................................................. 11
    Facebook ..................................................................................................................... 12
    Other Social Media Platforms ..................................................................................... 13
  The Old Model of Communication and Engagement .................................................... 14
  A New Model of Communication and Engagement ....................................................... 17
    Organizations Doing It Right ....................................................................................... 19
      Toms Shoes ................................................................................................................ 20
      ALS Association ...................................................................................................... 20
Filling gaps in research ....................................................................................................... 21
Situation Analysis ................................................................................................................. 22
  Summary of Internal Factors ......................................................................................... 22
    History ......................................................................................................................... 23
    Organizational Culture ............................................................................................... 24
    Programs and Services ............................................................................................... 26
    Fundraising Efforts ..................................................................................................... 28
    Community Communications ..................................................................................... 29
    Volunteers .................................................................................................................. 30
    Facilities ..................................................................................................................... 31
    Human Resources ...................................................................................................... 31
  Summary of External Factors ......................................................................................... 31
    Competition ................................................................................................................ 31
    Homelessness and Poverty in Kalamazoo .................................................................... 32
    Demographic Considerations ...................................................................................... 32
  SWOT Analysis ............................................................................................................... 34
Primary Research ................................................................................................................. 34
  Survey Introduction ....................................................................................................... 34
  Key Survey Findings .................................................................................................... 36
  Survey Limitations ....................................................................................................... 37
Discussion ............................................................................................................................. 38
  Practical Suggestions .................................................................................................... 38
  Future Research ........................................................................................................... 46
Appendix A .......................................................................................................................... 48
Appendix B .......................................................................................................................... 52
References ......................................................................................................................... 60
ABSTRACT

Although Millennials are not yet in their primacy as nonprofit donors, forward-thinking nonprofits are changing how they conduct business to better engage millennials in anticipation of their future rise to primacy. Accommodating the desires and expectations unique to the members of this generation is challenging for many organizations because effectively engaging with millennials requires a shift in organizational communication and engagement practices. This project seeks to build a body of relevant knowledge that can be used by Ministry with Community, a local nonprofit organization, to evolve its current engagement and communication practices to better appeal to local millennials. To build this body of knowledge, a literature review of best practices for millennial-nonprofit relationship development and maintenance was developed. Original research was also conducted to collect data on the opinions and behaviors of local millennials as they relate to charity, volunteerism and local social issues. Research findings were used to develop a series of practical suggestions for how Ministry with Community could evolve its current communication practices to better appeal to millennials.
INTRODUCTION

Ministry with Community is a nonprofit in Kalamazoo, Michigan that is best known as a daytime homeless shelter. Although well-recognized by the area residents as a shelter, Ministry with Community provides a spectrum of social services, ranging from free laundry and shower facilities to domestic abuse intervention and access to specialized social workers. Ministry with Community is open 365 days a year to all members of the public, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Senior leadership believes that Ministry with Community is struggling to connect with millennials – both as donors and volunteers. The organization wants to broaden its stakeholders to include members of the millennial generation, but is uncertain how best to do this. This project sought to develop a body of knowledge that could inform and guide Ministry with Community’s efforts to develop and maintain relationships with millennial stakeholders.

The basis of this body of knowledge is a literature review of the best practices for organizations to develop and maintain relationships with millennials. An original survey was also conducted to explore how millennial students at Western Michigan University feel about local social issues, volunteerism and charity, as well as their awareness and opinion of Ministry with Community.

Survey findings support the recommendation that Ministry with Community implement the best practices for millennial-organization relationship development and maintenance identified in the literature review. Survey findings also provide unique and valuable insight into what local millennials think about Ministry with Community and local social issues.

This project concludes with a discussion of practical suggestions for how Ministry with Community could better communicate and develop relationships with millennials. This project is
intended to serve as a basis from which Ministry with Community can evolve its current communication practices to appeal to more millennials.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Co-orientation Theory provided a structure that guided and formalized this project’s research and development of practical suggestions. Co-orientation Theory is a relational mode that can be used to describe how closely aligned organizations’ and their stakeholders’ perceptions of each other are. At its core, Co-orientation Theory says that an organization communicates most effectively with its publics when it has a full and correct understanding of them. Once an organization fully understands its publics, it can use targeted communication to correct any misconceptions that publics hold about the organization.

As shown in Figure 1, both Ministry with Community and local millennials have their own perception of each other. Both Ministry with Community and local millennials also have their own estimations of the other’s perception. Ministry with Community believes that their view of local millennials is correct, while local millennials also believe that their view of Ministry with Community is correct. This study seeks to uncover the accuracy of the views of both Ministry with Community and local millennials. The value in understanding the accuracy of both Ministry with Community and local millennials’ views is that doing so can uncover roadblocks in relationship development that might otherwise be invisible.
Figure 1: Co-orientation Theory diagram of Ministry with Community and millennial donors.

Whether or not Ministry with Community and local millennials’ perceptions of each other are correct, clarifying the accuracy of those perceptions will allow Ministry with Community to build communication and engagement programs that accurately address the needs and beliefs of local millennials.

To understand how millennials tend to interact with nonprofit organizations, a literature review was conducted to understand who millennials are and what their typical behaviors are. The literature review was also conducted to compile academically recognized best practices for relationship development and maintenance between organizations and millennials.

To develop understanding of local millennials’ perception of Ministry with Community, a community survey was conducted. The survey asked questions about respondents’ opinions on and knowledge of social justice issues in Kalamazoo, as well as Ministry with Community. In anticipation of Ministry with Community’s desire to develop engagement opportunities that are attractive to millennials, the survey also asked about respondents’ volunteerism practices and preferences.
LITERATURE REVIEW
What is a generation?

In casual conversations, generations are defined by birth dates; everyone born within a particular age range is part of one generation or another. However, defining generations is not such an exact science. Instead, while birthdates might serve as a helpful reference, generations are defined by the collective experiences and historical events experienced generational members, regardless of where or how they were raised. These shared experiences and events occur when an individual is old enough to comprehend their historical significance (Deane, Duggan, & Morin, 2016) and impact generation members in their most formative years – typically before their twentieth birthday (T. Quada, personal communication, March 7, 2018). The experiences and historical events shared by a generation shape its collective values, behaviors and attitudes (Luttrell & McGrath, 2015).

Generations have three key attributes: perceived membership, that is that members of the generation identify as such; shared common beliefs and behaviors, that is that on-average, generations hold similar belief and value systems; and a common location in history, that is that individuals live in a similar span of time (Howe & Strauss, 2000). As the rate of social progress continues to accelerate, the length of time that defines a generation is expected to shorten (T. Quada, personal communication, March 7, 2018).

Not every member of a generation will exhibit all the traits and behaviors expected of their age cohort, so researchers must not overgeneralize their findings to all millennials. However, generations do serve as useful guidelines for predicting average cohort behavior (Luttrell & McGrath, 2015).
Earlier Generations

The Traditionalists, also known as the Silent Generation or the Matures, were born between 1925 and 1945. After growing up in an era marked by two world wars, Traditionalists view participating in philanthropy as the right thing to do – it is a personal duty (Miller, 2010). Today, Traditionalists are the least technologically savvy generation, but remain influential and affluent (Luttrell & McGrath, 2015; Rainer & Rainer, 2011). Eighty-eight percent of Traditionalists give to charitable organizations; this is a higher percentage than any other generation. Traditionalist donors also tend to support a greater number of causes and give larger donations to the causes they support compared to other generations (Rovner, 2013).

Baby boomers, born between 1946 to 1964, are characterized by their belief that self-worth is directly tied to work ethic (Luttrell & McGrath, 2015). Boomers tend to end relationships – regardless of how long withstanding they are – if they do not suit their current needs (Luttrell & McGrath, 2015). This generation views philanthropy as a means to express their identity; they are most likely to give to an organization because doing so fits with their personal sense of self and allows them to feel that they can individually make a difference (Miller, 2010). Forty-three percent of all donations in the United States donated come from baby boomers, who make up just over one-third of all adults who make charitable donations (Rovner, 2013).

Members of Generation X, or Gen X, was born between 1965 and 1980. Sometimes called latchkey kids, young Gen Xers generally experienced a lack of parenting and nurturing in their childhood (Hulbert, 2004). This led to a generation comprised of individuals who “are independent, resourceful, and enterprising by nature” (Luttrell & McGrath, 2015). More than previous generations, Gen X is comfortable with technological advances and diversity. This
generation views philanthropy with an entrepreneurial mindset; giving to an organization is less a personal decision and more about getting things done to make a change (Miller, 2010). Sixty percent of Gen X gives charitably, though on average they give less per year than both boomers and traditionalists (Rovner, 2013).

The Millennials: An Introduction

Millennials, sometimes referred to as Gen Y, were born between 1981 and 1994, although this range is often extended until 2000, and others argue that an end to this generation has yet to be defined (Deane et al., 2016). While generalizations can be made about millennials, it is important to remember that millennials make up the largest and most diverse American generation in history (Hawthorne, 2014). It is therefore an oversimplification to view the generation as a homogeneous group (Paulin et al., 2013).

According U.S. Census data, in 2013 there were 87 million millennials living in the United States. Millennials are more ethnically diverse than any previous generation; nearly 56% of millennials are white, compared to 75% of combined baby boomer and traditionalist generations (Frey, 2016).

The millennial childhood was defined by Baby on Board stickers, helicopter parents, sunscreen and bike helmets (T. Quada, personal communication, March 9, 2017); millennials were raised in more sheltered environments than their latchkey parents. Millennials have grown up being told that they can become anything in life that they want to be and that each person is uniquely talented (T. Quada, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

Millennials prefer to work on issues in teams and tend to tackle challenges with a mindset of heroism (T. Quada, personal communication, March 9, 2018). The books and films most emblematic of this generation reflect these values of teamwork and heroism: the Harry Potter
series. Not only were the Harry Potter books and films pervasive throughout the upbringing of millennials, but the message of the story – that groups of friends can tackle any challenge together – is representative of how millennials see solutions to the world’s problems (T. Quada, personal communication, March 9, 2018).

The technological boom is one of the shared experiences that shaped the qualities and traits of the millennial generation – especially in terms of communication (Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017). Millennials tend to live in the moment, are expressive and assertive and question everything (Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017).

In terms of shared historical events, millennials overwhelmingly recognize the 9/11 terrorist attacks as the most impactful event of their lives. This is followed by the election of Barack Obama, the Iraq/Afghanistan wars and the legalization of gay marriage (Deane et al 2016).

Millennial Relationships with Nonprofits

When it comes to prosocial behavior, millennials tend to prefer to share than to give (Gorczyca and Hartman, 2013) and reject traditional forms of giving, such as charities and nonprofits (Urbain, Gonzalez, & Gall-Ely, 2012). This preference toward sharing means that millennials prefer transactional prosocial engagement; millennials seek engagement opportunities through which they share a part of themselves in order to help others and be subsequently impacted by those others (Gorczyca and Hartman, 2013). As such, millennials prefer to engage in groups and with peers through work directly associated with the causes they care about, rather than work that focuses on an organization (Gorczyca and Hartman, 2013).

Millennials are most likely to give to a charitable organization when they feel that organization promotes a community dedicated to creating change (Miller, 2010). Although they are frustrated with the current state of the world (Rovner, 2017), millennials feel optimistic and
confident that “together they can correct injustices of the past and make the world a better place” (Miller, 2010).

Millennials are more likely to engage with a charitable event when they emphatically identify with the cause the event supports (Paulin et al., 2013). Empathy, defined as the desire to alleviate the suffering of another, is a strong predictor of a person’s intention to offer financial assistance (Paulti et al., 2013). However, organizations must be careful to not employ guilt as a means of garnering empathy with donors, as millennials tend to distrust organizations that do so (Urbain et al., 2012).

Millennials tend to have the highest expectations of all generations when it comes to the transparency, accountability and fairness of both private and public organizations (Rovner, 2013). Millennials demand not just that nonprofits report their outcomes, but that organizations will be forthcoming in their operations, are technologically savvy and sophisticated storytellers (Fandos, 2016). Millennials feel more confident supporting an organization when it is forthcoming with its funding choices (Gorczyca and Hartman, 2017).

In 2015 and the years since, millennials have had the largest buying power in the United States (Hawthorne, 2014). Although baby boomers are considered the wealthier of the two generations, millennials have greater buying power because they are the largest generation (Hawthorne, 2014). Despite this, millennials are still projected to be several decades away from primacy over other generations in terms of their philanthropic investments (Rovner, 2013).

According to the 2013 Millennial Impact Report, when making charitable donations, millennials tend to give small amounts to several organizations, rather than focusing their investments in one organization. However, the stronger the relationship that a millennial has with
an organization, the more likely they are to donate larger gifts. For this reason, relationships with millennial donors are long-term investments.

**Millennials, Social Causes and Activism**

According to the 2017 Millennial Impact Report, when it comes to activism, most millennials are driven to engage on a local level, rather than a national level. The report also found that of all social issues, millennials are most interested in civil rights and racial discrimination. Employment and healthcare reform are tied as the social issues of the second most interest, while the issues of poverty and homelessness are of half as much interest to millennials as employment and healthcare reform.

According to the 2016 Millennial Impact Report, while millennials may be particularly interested in civil rights and racial discrimination, they are generally more driven to participate with causes and organizations that positively impact the quality of life for others and promote equity, equality, and opportunity. While this includes racial minorities, it also includes other marginalized or disenfranchised groups.

The rise of social media usage by millennials has also been associated with the rise of Slacktivism, a term coined to describe actions that support a cause or organization, but require little effort (Miller, 2017). Slacktivism may include signing an online petition, adding an organization’s emblem to a Facebook profile picture or sharing a news article on social media. Although social media engagement on social issues is a frequent practice among their generation, millennials know that it is not the most influential tactic to generate social change (Achieve Agency, 2017).

Other low-barrier opportunities to interact with charitable organizations are also popular with millennials. These opportunities can include making small monetary donations or short-term
investments of time through volunteering activities (Achieve Agency, 2013). Involvement in these interactions tend to be impulsive and immediate, and they are often motivated by peer influence (Achieve Agency, 2013).

While sporadic involvement with nonprofit organization may be the norm with millennials, that does not mean that millennial volunteers are lazy or thoughtless with the time the contribute to organizations. Millennials value the opportunity to work hands-on with the causes that are important to them, so they are driven to share their knowledge and expertise with impactful nonprofits working on the problems they care about (Achieve Agency, 2013).

**Communicating with Millennials: Best Social Media Practices**

*Introduction*

The rise of the millennial has coincided with the rise of technology, so the majority of academic research on millennial engagement with nonprofits focuses on social media and other technology-mediated channels of communication. However, that is not to say that traditional means of communication, such as mailed newsletters or newspaper articles, are obsolete. Many Americans – especially those in older generations – still learn about causes and social issues via traditional means of communication (Dixon & Keyes, 2013). However, as Paulin et al. (2014) states: “…it is no longer a question of if [social] networks are the best format to engage millennials in supportive charitable behaviors, but rather that it is incumbent on marketers to develop the most effective strategies for capturing their power.”

According to Smith and Gallicano (2015), when millennials connect with an organization through a social media platform, they do so primarily to remain up-to-date with the organization’s activities. When millennials do this, they expect the organization to provide them with original informational content. For example, millennials do not expect the Facebook page of
an organization to be an exact clone of the organization’s website. Instead, millennials want organizations to use social media to share content that is “newsworthy, personally relevant and entertaining” (Smith & Gallicano, 2015).

Millennials also expect organizations to remain consistently engaged with them (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). Millennial donors expect more than an annual holiday card thanking them for their contribution (Hawthorne, 2014), and online millennial stakeholders expect transactional communication that builds community (Smith & Gallicano, 2015).

A challenge of harnessing the power of social media platforms is that they are pieces of technology; as such, they are constantly evolving, as are the ways that users utilize the platforms to engage with others. Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the United States (Verto Analytics, 2018) and has been a popular platform since it was made available to anyone with an email address in 2006 (Facebook, 2005). For these reasons, the majority of preexisting research on millennial-nonprofit communication centers on the use of Facebook to facilitate dialogue and engagement. There is little academic work available on how nonprofits can best use other popular social media platforms, such as Instagram or Snapchat, to engage with millennials.

Facebook

Millennials are more likely to engage with smaller nonprofit organizations when they already have an already a pre-existing relationship or connection to an organization (McCorkindale, DiStaso & Sisco, 2013). Recognizing this, care should be taken to preserve the connections that an organization already has on Facebook. Organizations should not blast their online stakeholders with updates as millennials actively terminate relationships with organizations if the costs, such as excessive updates, outweigh the benefits (McCorkindale, et al., 2013).
There are three key benefits to using social media to connect with active and aware millennial stakeholders. First, social media allows for responsive updating and messaging, which allow for dynamic online relationships and conversations. Second, social media provides many interactive applications and media-sharing opportunities to engage with stakeholders. Third, social media provides easy access to formalized social networks (Saxton & Waters, 2014). Dynamic conversations mediated by social media provide organizations with the opportunity to build trusting relationships with stakeholders through honest, open conversation (Saxton & Waters, 2014).

Using the number of likes garnered by the Facebook posts as their measure of engagement, Saxton and Waters (2014) analyzed the Facebook posts the 100 largest non-educational nonprofit organizations in the United States. Their study found that posts containing calls to action and community-building messages received the most likes. Call-to-action messages contained specific solicitation of the stakeholder’s help, while community-building posts contained messages that promoted interaction and dialogue between online stakeholders. Messages from organizations that promoted upcoming events or the solicitation of donation and sales were viewed the least favorably, and stakeholders were less likely to share such messages with their own social networks. The study also found that the posts that stakeholders are most likely to share with their own social network are one-way informational updates from an organization.

Other Social Media Platforms

Although Facebook is a hugely popular social media platform, it is not the only platform used by millennials, and it maybe not the most effective means of connecting with the young generation. Quada (2018) recommends that organizations that offer volunteering opportunities
use LinkedIn to promote those opportunities. LinkedIn is a professional social media network that allows its users to learn about organizations, find individuals working in their same sector, share their professional accomplishments and development and find new jobs (LinkedIn, 2017).

Creating a profile on LinkedIn provides an additional platform for millennials to find an organization, as well as promote that organization within their own social networks. LinkedIn also allows for career-minded millennials to connect with organizations and utilize the skill endorsement function of LinkedIn. Skill endorsements are a way for people to vouch that another LinkedIn user is competent in skills listed on their LinkedIn profile (LinkedIn, 2018). For example, if a volunteer writes grants for an organization and lists grant writing a skill on their profile, a member of the organization that they worked with can endorse that volunteer’s skill and thereby add credibility to the volunteer’s profile. In this way, organizations can incentivize engagement with millennials through real-time resume and reputation building.

The Old Model of Communication and Engagement

When Traditionalists made up the bulk of donors, fundraisers needed only to make a good case for the importance of supporting their social cause; from there, the Traditionalists’ sense of philanthropic duty would obligate them to donate. The truth is, it was easier to fundraise back when Traditionalists were the prevailing members of the donor market. Back then, if you asked, you would receive.

The rise of donor-centered giving came in response to how baby boomers view philanthropy; to connect with donors, fundraisers needed to show baby boomers their own, individual role in solving a problem (Miller, 2010). Then, as Generation X gained influence, nonprofits became more entrepreneurial in their reporting standards because donors demanded to
know the outcomes of the programs and initiatives they were financially supporting (Miller, 2010).

Many current engagement and fundraising practices are rooted in the heydays of traditionalists and baby boomers. Although it may seem that the common fundraising and engagement practices of nonprofit organizations have been long-standing, the truth is that they have evolved along with the needs of previous generations. As millennials engage with nonprofit organizations, these antiquated practices fail to address the unique needs of millennials. What complicates the much-needed evolution of fundraising and engagement is that each generation has distinct expectations about how and what nonprofit organizations should communicate with them. Developing effective engagement and communication plans require that organizations address the needs of each generation of stakeholders.

Until the advent of widespread social media usage, prevailing models of donor communication and engagement were relatively simple (Dixon & Keyes, 2013). Most often, these models were linear ladders, pyramids or funnels. As seen in Figure 2, at the base of the analogous object – whether ladder, pyramid or funnel – were an organization’s least engaged donors. Corresponding to low levels of engagement were means of mass communication. Mass communication tactics, such as phone calls and direct mail, brought in large number of supporters who engaged with the organization at minimal levels (Dixon & Keyes, 2013; Rovner, 2013). As donors donated larger amounts of money, organizations considered them to be increasingly engaged and felt that their relationships required more upkeep. Therefore, the most engaged donors received communication via the most labor-intensive channels, such as personal outreach (Dixon and Keys, 2013).
According to Garecht (2012), in their simplest terms, linear donor engagement models have five steps. First, a stakeholder gets to know and organization, and the organization gets to know the stakeholder. Most often this happens through direct contact, such as an open house event. Second, donor begins to get involved in the organization, most often through volunteering activities. Third, organizations ask for a small financial contribution. Fourth, once a stakeholder has become a donor, organizations ask for access their donor’s social networks. In this stage, organizations may ask for donors to introduce them to their social their networks or may invite a well-connected donor to join the organization’s board. Finally, the model culminates in a major ask – the organization asks for a donation that will make a significant, enduring. Once a donor makes a major donation, they have reached the fixed apex of engagement.

Figure 2: Donor engagement models. (Dixon & Keyes, 2013).

Linear models of donor engagement are attractive because they are simple. The models imply that increasing engagement efforts with a stakeholder leads to their increasing levels of commitment to an organization. Those at the top of the model donate more to the organization.
and are thus considered engaged. Therefore, in the linear models, donors at the top require more
time- and labor-intensive outreach efforts such as personal outreach and interaction (Dixon &
Keyes, 2013).

The linear model is not transactional – it assumes all communication about the
organization comes from the organization and flows to the donor without donor responses. The
linear model also has a fixed apex of donor engagement and considers donors at lower levels to
be less valuable assets to the organization. The linear model also assumes that all donors enter
the cycle of engagement at the same low level. The problem is that social media and new donor
preferences have interrupted this model.

Social media is now how many people collect information. Through recommendations
from friends to online review sites, organizational stakeholders – especially millennials – are
using input from others to form their opinions about organizations. According to Paul Argenti in
McCorkindale, et al. (2013), organizations have increasingly recognized that “embracing social
media is no longer a strategic business option, but a necessity.”

A New Model of Communication and Engagement

According to Dixon and Keyes (2013), to accommodate the new necessity of
communicating via social media, many organizations have adopted social media into their linear
models of donor engagement. Most often, these organizations have slipped social media
messaging into the lowest level of automated engagement communication. This practice is
troubling for several reasons.

First, donors are no longer the only people that organizations are communicating with. As
mentioned earlier, many stakeholders seek information about organizations via social media. To
address this change, engagement and communication models need to accommodate the needs of
non-donor stakeholders. Making this shift requires that new engagement plans address the needs of stakeholders first, rather than the needs of the organization. This means that conversation can no longer serve the exclusive purpose of transforming casual stakeholders to become major donors.

Secondly, low-level communication is intended to build new relationships, but social media is far from the best way to start relationships. To be sure, common knowledge would suggest that reaching out to new donors – especially tech-savvy millennials – via social media channels would any easy way to build new relationships. After all, millennials spent one to four hours online every day (Saxton & Waters, 2014) and half of all millennials actively use Facebook (GlobalWebIndex & We Are Social, n.d.). Instead, research suggests that social media is better for maintaining or strengthen relationships between organizations and stakeholders that are already actively involved with or aware of the organization (Saxton & Waters, 2014; Paulin et al., 2014). Millennials use social media platforms to continue pre-existing relationships, not build new ones. If a millennial does not already have a personal connection to an organization, they are unlikely to like that organization’s Facebook page, unless doing so offers some kind of incentive or personal benefit (McCorkindale, DiStaso & Sisco, 2013).

Thirdly, integrating social media communication into the lowest levels of stakeholder engagement implies that stakeholders who primarily engage with organizations through social media channels are less engaged than those who use through traditional channels. According to Dixon and Keys (2013), is problematic because such models do not reflect the new reality of how stakeholders interact with organizations. If engagement is defined by the frequency and amount donated, millennials will constantly be identified as unengaged because they tend to give smaller amounts to a number of organizations (Achieve Agency, 2013). Additionally,
stakeholders no longer need to be involved in an organization before they donate money to it, nor do they need to donate money to be deeply involved with advancing the organization’s mission. Online giving allows stakeholders to give sporadically – anytime that they feel inspired to do so. Similarly, social media platforms allow stakeholders to act as online activists for a cause or organization without donating money to or physically volunteering with the organization. Millennial stakeholders have dynamic relationships with organizations – they give when they want (Hawthorne, 2014). Integrating social media communication only into undifferentiated mass communication tactics prevents organizations from developing relationships with millennials who are deeply engaged in their organization in nontraditional ways.

Fourthly, linear models to not account for the influence of peers and social media in the formation of stakeholders’ opinions about an organization. Dixon and Key’s 2013 survey found that 39% of Americans say that they are motivated to get involved with causes that have affected someone they know, and another and 36% report that they are motivated by it being an important cause to family and friends. Organizations are no longer their most effective messengers. Organizations need to have the capacity to engage with donors where the donors are. If criticism or praise of an organization circulates on social media, organizations want to be aware of that dialogue and respond as necessary.

**Organizations Doing It Right**

When purchasing a product from a for-profit company, Millennials ask themselves is the product that they are purchasing comes from an organization that represents a future they believe in and if they are willing to help create that future (Buck, 2016). Millennials are aspirational; they believe that they can change the world, and they partner with organizations who can help them do that. To know that organizations are going to help them change the world, millennials
need to clearly understand an organizations’ missions and visions are, and how organizations are working to bring a better future to fruition.

Successful nonprofit organizations are bucking the linear model in favor of a models of donor engagement that integrate online and offline communication throughout for all levels of donor engagement. If organizations want to engage millennial donors, they need to adopt new models of communication and engagement that recognize the pervasive role that social media plays at every level of stakeholder engagement.

*Toms Shoes*

Take for example, Toms Shoes. Although not a nonprofit, Toms promotes a vision of a better world through its work and offers stakeholders ways to participate in making that vision a reality. As millennials have joined the field of donors, they have come with even higher reporting standards and expectations of organizational transparency and accountability. Organizations successful in connecting with millennials understand these expectations and meet them.

According to Hawthorne (2013), Toms Shoes is the model for how successful organizations engaging with millennials because they provide clear messaging about their philanthropic practices. When a new pair of Toms shoes is bought, another pair of shoes is donated to a child in need. There is no question in the minds of millennial consumers how Toms Shoes used their investment nor what the outcome of that investment was.

*ALS Association*

There are not many stories of social media campaigns that have converted thousands of unaware millennials to invested stakeholders of unfamiliar nonprofit organizations. However, in 2014, the ALS Association’s Ice Bucket Challenge raised tremendous awareness and $115
million dollars for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig’s disease (Rogers, 2016). The Ice Bucket Challenge involved individuals filming videos of themselves dumping a bucket of ice and water on their heads. Participants would then upload the videos online and challenge three other people to do the same.

Presumably, the Ice Bucket Challenge campaign was successful in-part for two reasons. First, the Ice Bucket Challenge tapped into and spread organically through preexisting networks of potential donors. The power of peer influence made those who had been challenged by their friend to participate in the challenge more likely to do so. The impact of this influence was then multiplied by the audience effect. The audience effect arises when individuals believe that their actions are being observed by others. When charitable donations are made in public settings, as a result of the audience effect, donors tend to make larger donations (Satow, 1975). The combination of social forces made the campaign pervasive and thus more lucrative.

The challenge was also customizable and did not require a complicated response; participants needed only to dump water on their head and challenge friends to do the same (Smith, 2014). This meant that the challenge had a low-barrier to entry and could be individualized, two elements that are key in motivating millennials to participate in social causes.

With an inherent sense of community, a watchful audience, and a simple challenge the ALS Association created a viral fundraising campaign that made it and the disease it combats into household names.

FILLING GAPS IN RESEARCH

Secondary research provides a wealth of information about what millennials expect from their relationships with organizations and how their expectations are different from past generations. Secondary research also provided information on how millennials actually use
social media platforms, how they engage with organizations on those platforms, and why the new ways millennials are engaging with organizations necessitates a reinvention of traditional communication and engagement models.

What secondary research does not offer is information on the behavior and preferences specific to millennials in Kalamazoo. Also, although secondary research also offered great insight into how best to maintain relationships with millennials, it offered little information on the best ways to initially form those relationships.

This project’s original survey research sought to fill these gaps in knowledge by collecting information on how local millennials prefer to interact with nonprofit organizations, why they engage with nonprofits on Facebook, and how they prefer to practice volunteerism and charity. Beyond general millennial-nonprofit interaction, the survey also sought to understand how local millennials view Ministry with Community and local social issues.

The importance of Ministry with Community understanding how local millennial audience view the organization is reinforced by the Co-orientation Theory. To effectively communicate with millennials, Ministry with Community needs to understand its millennial public as completely as possible. Doing so requires the investigation of not just of general millennial behaviors and beliefs, but the behaviors and beliefs of the specific millennials that Ministry with Community wants to communicate with.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Summary of Internal Factors

Developing survey questions that would inform the development of appropriate and practical suggestions for how Ministry with Community can evolve its communication practices to better appeal to millennials required three things. First, it required understanding how
millennials behave on average. Second, it required an understanding of Ministry with Community’s history and how it operates now. Third, it required an understanding of the beliefs and behaviors of local millennials. The following comprehensive situation analysis of Ministry with Community informed the development of pertinent survey questions for local millennials and subsequent suggestions for evolving the organization’s communicative practices.

History

Ministry with Community (MwC) began in 1978 in the basement of the North Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo. The organization was created by Dorothy Markusse, a psychiatric nurse, in response to the mass deinstitutionalization of Kalamazoo’s Psychiatric Hospital. In its early days, Ministry with Community provided company, community and free meals to those in the in the Northside who needed it. Many of the people that Dorothy worked with were living with poverty, homelessness, substance abuse or mental illness (J. Markusse Paget, personal communication, February 2, 2018; Ministry with Community, 2017a).

According to Markusse Paget, after several years in the church basement, Ministry with Community had reached its maximum operational capacity; there were lines out the church doors during lunchtime. Ministry with Community needed a bigger space. With the help of the Greater Kalamazoo United Way, Ministry with Community moved its operations to a building on North Church Street. In the new location, Ministry with Community was able to expand its operations to include new services, such as access to shower facilities. During this time, Ministry with Community acted as a daytime shelter, but was pressured to extend its hours and become a nighttime shelter. Ministry with Community did not cave to this pressure, and continues to act as a daytime-only shelter. In 2016, Ministry with Community moved to a brand-new building
located at 500 North Edwards Street and continued to act as a day-time only shelter (Ministry with Community, 2017d).

As Ministry with Community evolved, two partner organizations evolved alongside: Housing Resource Inc., an organization that seeks to find affordable housing solutions for people in housing crises, and Loaves & Fishes, a food bank. To this day, Ministry with Community continues to work with these two organizations; a food pantry stocked by Loaves & Fishes is housed in Ministry with Community building, and Housing Resource Inc. meets with Ministry with Community members at least twice a week.

Organizational Culture

The current mission statement of Ministry with Community is: “to empower people to make positive life changes” (Ministry with Community, 2018a).

To achieve that mission, Ministry with Community seeks to:

- Provide an environment of dignity, hope, trust and unconditional acceptance where all people are respected and valued
- Welcome all people in the Kalamazoo community struggling with homelessness, poverty, mental illness, and other challenges
- Rebuild lives by providing food, daytime shelter and other supportive services
- Work collaboratively with other community organizations (Ministry with Community, 2018a)

To maintain an environment of dignity, Ministry with Community refers to those who use its services as members. Members are welcomed at the organization’s front desk whenever they stop in to receive a meal, take a shower, do their laundry, get a haircut, seek support from social workers, or simply have a break from the outdoor elements (Ministry with Community, 2018a).
Relationship and community building is a priority of Ministry with Community, as members often take on the responsibilities such as serving meals, cleaning and organizing social events. Ministry with Community believes that "these valuable contributions often build self-esteem, positive relationships and hope for the future" (Ministry with Community, 2017a).

Although Ministry with Community is frequented by people who are hungry, lonely or homeless, all are welcome to utilize all of the organization’s space and services – regardless of their social or economic situation. All people who enter the Ministry with Community building have equal access to Ministry with Community services.

Since Ministry with Community makes its services available to all people, the staff at Ministry with Community see themselves as "stopping people from bottoming out into true homelessness" (K. Henderson, personal communication, January 4, 2018). Often, Ministry with Community members are not living on the street. Instead, members often the lack of funds necessary to have full access to essential resources, such as running water, electricity, internet access, and healthy meals. By providing a full spectrum of services to people at all levels of need, Ministry with Community is able to prevent members from making tough decisions, like whether to pay an electric bill or buy food for their family (L. Perron, personal communication, January 4, 2018).

The staff at Ministry with Community are fully invested in the individual success and well-being of every member. For example, if a member shows up after dining hours because she was working, dining hall staff will make sure she is still fed (L. Perron, personal communication, January 4, 2018).

The staff at Ministry with Community is also dedicated to investing in the education and success community members who do not utilize the organization’s services. Ministry with
Community hosts a number of social work interns and is more than willing to open its doors to college students who need access to the organization or its expertise for class projects (L. Perron, personal communication, January 4, 2018).

Programs and Services

Ministry with Community is open year-round, seven days a week, from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Ministry with Community serves breakfast and lunch daily, as well as provides daily access to laundry facilities, private shower room facilities, phone access for local calls, fax and copy machines, a computer lab and private lockers for the storage of personal goods. Personal care items are distributed to members as requested (Ministry with Community, 2017d).

In an effort to keep record of who is utilizing Ministry with Community’s services, Ministry with Community has implemented the Member Engagement Program (MEP). With the implementation of MEP, accessing some of Ministry with Community’s services, such as storage lockers, requires a member card. Members can receive cards through a five-minute meeting with an on-site social worker. Members must provide the social worker with basic identifying information, but members may then opt out of providing more personal information, such as their housing situation (K. Henderson, personal communication, January 4, 2018).

Intensive services through social workers are also available to clients five days a week on a schedule that varies daily (Ministry with Community, 2017e). These services include:

- Assisting members acquire co-pay assistance for glasses and contact lenses
- Assisting members obtain official identification, such as birth certificates
- Domestic violence intervention
- Assisting with locating emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing
• Employment assistance through partner agencies (Michigan Works, Goodwill, MRC Industries, and local temp agencies)
• Financial assistance for medical co-pays for clients of Family Health Center
• Financial management support
• Lawyer service referrals to Legal Aid of South West Michigan and private disability lawyers
• Medical equipment is provided through a partnership with Lending Hands
• Notary services
• Tax preparation services
• Vision, dental, mental, emotional, and general healthcare providers referrals
• Voter registration
• When available, bikes are provided to members in need of transportation to their places of employment
• When available, bus tokens are distributed to get members to verifiable appointments
• When available, long distance transportation to verifiable appointments

Ministry with Community hosts a variety of activities on its own and through partnerships with local partner organizations (Ministry with Community, 2017b), including:

• Healthy Expressions: A support group that meets once a week to focus on positive and healthy emotional management
• Women's and Men's Groups: Support groups that each meet once a week
• Other group activities: Groups participate in events including: bingo, crochet, chess, Dungeons and Dragons, and movie nights
• Social Security/Supplemental Security Income Legal Clinics: Clinics offered monthly and hosted by local attorneys

In 2015, Ministry with Community distributed 102,089 personal hygiene items and served 121,194 meals, and helped to issue 439 birth certificates and state IDs. Ministry with Community also provided 1,457 members with access to storage lockers, 10,011 members with access to showers and 2,068 members with meetings with social workers. On a daily basis, as many as 500 members may receive services from Ministry with Community (Ministry with Community, 2015). Every day, at least 40 members will take showers and 60 members will use laundry services.

Many of the services provided by Ministry with Community are unique. For example, Ministry with Community is the only daytime drop-in shelter in Kalamazoo, the only organization that provides free laundry services to all members of the community, and Ministry with Community operates the only laundromat facility on the Northside (L. Perron, personal communication, January 4, 2018).

Fundraising Efforts

Specific meals are sometimes sponsored by individuals or organizations through the Sponsor-a-Meal program; for $250 a breakfast can be sponsored (K. Henderson, personal communication, January 4, 2018), or for $300 a lunch can be sponsored (Ministry with Community, 2017f). Each sponsored meal serves 200 to 300 people. Sponsored meals are listed in organizational newsletters and posted about on Ministry with Community's Facebook page.

The two main fundraising events hosted by Ministry with Community are the Chefs Against Hunger competition and the annual Underwear Party (K. Henderson, personal communication, January 4, 2018). Chefs Against Hunger is a competition in which celebrity sous
chefs and local "chefs to create dishes solely with ingredients taken from the Ministry with Community pantry." The Underwear party is an "event supports Ministry with Community’s efforts to collect warm clothing items for our members" (Ministry with Community, 2018) An annual appeal letter is also mailed out to past donors and volunteers to raise money (L. Henderson, personal communication, January 4, 2018).

A smaller fundraising effort brings in little revenue, but was initially born of an effort to increase awareness of Ministry with Community, is the Soap for Hope fundraiser. Bars of locally made artisan soap is available for five dollars per bar at retail locations throughout Kalamazoo. Originally, the fundraising effort sold tapered candles and switched to soap when it became clear that soap would sell better than candles (L. Perron, personal communication, January 4, 2018).

*Community Communications*

To keep volunteers and past donors engaged with Ministry with Community, three newsletters and an annual appeal are mailed out every year. News coverage of Ministry with Community is minimal: half of the most recent articles are on Ministry with Community's new building and the other half mention Ministry with Community in passing as having benefited from a fundraiser or having spoken out after community disaster.

Ministry with Community has a Facebook page and does not post on a regular schedule. Most Facebook posts feature food that was served at Ministry with Community along with thanks to meal sponsors.

Ministry with Community also has a Twitter. Most tweets and Facebook posts are shared on the same day, and both contain the same photos and language. When tweeted about, Ministry
with Community retweets those tweets; most of those tweets come from schools tweeting about their students’ time volunteering.

Ministry with Community has a LinkedIn page, but the page contains little information about the organization. Thirteen people have listed themselves as employees of Ministry with Community, and the page has 21 followers. The page does not identify Ministry with Community as a nonprofit organization, although it does provide an accurate link to Ministry with Community’s website. Ministry with Community has not posted any content on its LinkedIn page.

**Volunteers**

There are numerous volunteer opportunities offers at Ministry with Community to support the organization’s mission and services. All volunteers must attend a volunteer orientation session, and most volunteer opportunities require advanced scheduling. Volunteer orientation sessions are held on the third Wednesday of every month at 3:00 p.m. (Ministry with Community, 2017g).

Ministry with Community also requires that volunteers "must be able to interact with others with compassion, flexibility, and sensitivity” (Ministry with Community, 2017g). Volunteers must also have the ability to serve adults experiencing homelessness, poverty, mental illness, and/or substance abuse.

There is a volunteer lounge located in the back half of the Ministry with Community building where volunteers can store their coats, have access to storage lockers with keys, and tables and chairs where volunteers can socialize. Volunteers are able to park in the building’s main parking lot.
Typical volunteer opportunities include: serving meals to members, working in the kitchen, assisting at the building service desk to welcome and direct members, working in the phone room to direct incoming calls, working in the computer lab to teach basic computer skills and picking up food donations from local businesses (Ministry with Community, 2017g).

Facilities

The new Ministry with Community building was opened in 2016. Entering the front doors leads to the commons area, which includes the service counter, commons area, public phone bank, a barber shop, a game room, a quiet room, and doors to both public restrooms and an outdoor patio. The dining room and kitchen are off the commons area. The Loaves & Fishes food pantry is located within the kitchen. Behind the service desk are storage lockers, public showers and laundry facilities. Other amenities include: a computer lab, classrooms, administrative offices, social work offices, a volunteer lounge, and storage. Ample parking is available in the building's main parking lot.

Human Resources

Ministry with Community consistently has a staff of 25 to 30 people and a board of 17. The C Suite is small, and communication flows casually through emails and in-person conversations. The following department divisions are made within organizational structure: administrative staff, programs staff, kitchen staff, service desk staff, security staff, and maintenance staff.

Summary of External Factors

Competition

There are a variety of other organizations in Kalamazoo that provide shelter for those living with homelessness. The Kalamazoo Gospel Mission is physically the closet of these
organizations to Ministry with Community, but does not offer daytime shelter. Due to its proximity, the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission is sometimes misidentified as Ministry with Community.

The Kalamazoo Gospel Mission also serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner to the general population. Unlike the meals at Ministry with Community, meals at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission begin with Christian devotionals and prayers (Kalamazoo Gospel Mission, 2018).

With the exception of meal provision, the in-house services that Ministry with Community provides, are fairly unique to the organization. No other organization provides fee laundry service or private showers to all people, no other organization offers locker storage to all people, and no other organization offers daytime shelter open to all people, all year long.

Homelessness and Poverty in Kalamazoo

According to the Kalamazoo County Community Action Committee, 30.9% of Kalamazoo residents live below the poverty line (Census Reporter, 2016). Additionally, the number of poor, renter households with severe housing cost burden in Michigan increased 20.8% from 2007 to 2017 (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2017). Both of these factors put Kalamazoo residents at higher risk for experiencing homelessness. Thirty-six percent of children in Kalamazoo live in poverty; only 15 percent of cities in the United States have a higher rate of children living in poverty than Kalamazoo (Barrett, 2017). Despite the elevated risk of homelessness experienced by Kalamazoo residents, there is a stigma surrounding those who fall victim to it.

Demographic Considerations

The median age in the city of Kalamazoo is just over 26, and nearly half of all Kalamazoo residents are members of the millennial generation (Census Reporter, 2016). This is
of significance because the millennial generation has turned the world of charitable fundraising on its head, as will be discussed later in this paper.

Volunteerism trends by demographic categorization are worth considering in the context of increasing the community’s involvement with Ministry with Community. Figure 1 indicates the percentage of various demographic groups that report volunteering. College graduates volunteer more than any other demographic, but only 33.4% of the population of city of Kalamazoo holds a Bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

![Figure 1: Demographics of Voluntarism. This figure illustrates the percentage of individuals in different population segments who report volunteering. (Philanthropy Roundtable, 2016)](image)

That said, many college and university programs require students to volunteer. Between Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College and Kalamazoo Valley Community College, there are an estimated 36,000 enrolled students. This means there are a potential 36,000 student
volunteers in the Kalamazoo area (Western Michigan University, 2016; Kalamazoo College; 2017; Kalamazoo Valley Community College, 2017).

SWOT Analysis

The following is an analytical summary of the above situation analysis of Ministry with Community’s internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats to the organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Core mission and values are clear; staff is dedicated to betterment of lives of members</td>
<td>• Provision of some services dependent of available available resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offers unique, high quality services</td>
<td>• Minimal social media presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regular donors/volunteers are highly dedicated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New, efficient, beautiful building</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Many ways to engage with organization (volunteering, special events, internships, activism for issues addressed by Ministry with Community)</td>
<td>• Ministry with Community’s name has religious connotations even through the organization is not religiously associated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognized as leader for social service triage</td>
<td>• Ministry with Community is struggling to connect to millennials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: SWOT analysis of Ministry with Community.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

Survey Introduction

The survey developed for this project sought to confirm secondary research indicating that millennials are concerned with disenfranchised populations and that millennials are often influenced to engage with nonprofit organizations through peer influence.
The survey also sought to develop data on the specific behaviors and beliefs of local millennials. To address the fact that Ministry with Community’s name has religious connotations despite the organization not being associated with organized religion, the survey asked respondents what words or phrases they first think of when they hear Ministry with Community. The survey also asked respondents what factors lead them to like an organization on Facebook, as a means to begin to understand how Ministry with Community can attract more millennials to engage with the organization online. Other survey questions sought to better understand what tasks millennials prefer to perform while volunteering, how many millennials are aware of Ministry with Community’s existence and where millennials have learned about Ministry with Community prior to the survey.

The survey was titled “Community Survey: Ministry with Community” and is comprised of 18 questions. A full text version of the survey is available in Appendix A. The survey was distributed via Facebook, email, a disseminated QR code, and paper copies that were distributed at various meetings of Western Michigan University students. The survey was taken by a total of 77 respondents. The results of 58 surveys were used in the computation of the following data. These 58 surveys were selected because they had been fully completed by traditional college-age or university-associated millennials who have lived in Kalamazoo at least eight months in the last year. The requirement that participants had lived in Kalamazoo for the last eight months was meant to ensure that respondents had the opportunity to become familiar with Kalamazoo and were therefore aware of local organizations and social issues.
Key Survey Findings

The following findings were used to develop practical suggestions for future Ministry with Community engagement and communication tactics targeting millennials. Full survey results can be found in Appendix B.

The most common reasons that respondents said they like the Facebook pages of nonprofit organizations are that the issue(s) the organization address are important (69.0%) and that they have volunteered with the organization in the past (60.3%).

When presented a list of nine locally significant social issues, millennials identified homelessness as the first most significant social issue in Kalamazoo. Just over three-fourths (75.4%) of survey respondents identified homelessness as the first most significant social issue in Kalamazoo, followed by drug abuse (70.2%) and crime (61.4%). No survey respondents reported that homelessness was not an issue in Kalamazoo, while 1.8% said they had no opinion about the significance of homelessness in Kalamazoo.

Homelessness is not just recognized as a significant social issue; it was also identified as the most pressing social issue to address in Kalamazoo. Over half of respondents (57.7%) identified homelessness as the most pressing social issue, followed by drug abuse (38.5%), crime (32.7%) and poverty (32.7%).

Most survey respondents (62.1%) had not heard of Ministry with Community prior to completing the survey, while 27.6% had heard of Ministry with Community prior to the survey, and 10.3% were unsure.

Of those who had heard of Ministry with Community prior to the survey, most had heard of the organization by word-of-mouth (87.5%), followed by social media (68.8%) and a volunteering opportunity (50.0%).
When asked what three words or phrases respondents first thought of when they heard the name Ministry with Community, the three most common responses were: church, religion, and help. Overall, 34.5% of all words or phrases provided by respondents were associated with organized religion, such as Christian, church, faith, religious and God.

Most respondents said that they are most likely to give their time to an organization (60.3%), followed by physical items such as canned food or clothing (22.4%).

Most respondents reported that they participate in volunteering activities (87.9%).

Most millennials report that they find volunteering opportunities through word-of-mouth (72.5%) or through their college/university (70.6%).

Millennials most prefer to volunteer in positions that allow them to support the day-to-day operations of organizations, such as working at the organization’s front desk (43.1%), followed by positions that support special organizational events, such as a silent auctions or galas (35.3%).

Survey Limitations

Survey respondents were disproportionately female. Of the 58 completed surveys used in data computation, 36 were completed by females. This lack of diversity means that men may have preferences that are not reflected in survey results.

This survey was primarily completed by traditional college-aged millennials; the results should not be generalized to millennials of all ages. Additionally, the majority of all survey respondents attended Western Michigan University; it is possible that there would be differences between Western Michigan University students and students who attend other academic institutions or do not attend secondary education at all. Again, for these reasons, survey findings should not be generalized to all local millennials in post-secondary education.
Overall, this data set is not an accurate representation of the preferences, beliefs, and knowledge of college-age millennials in the Kalamazoo area. The sample size is too small and lacking in diversity to be generalized to all local millennials. However, this data may be a helpful starting point to beginning to understand local millennials.

DISCUSSION

Practical Suggestions

As mentioned earlier, Co-orientation Theory provided a structure that guided and formalized this project’s research and development of practical suggestions for Ministry with Community. Co-orientation Theory teaches that an organization best communicates with its publics when the organization has a full understanding of them. Further development of the Co-orientation Theory teaches that once a public’s misconceptions about an organization have been identified, the organization can use communication to correct those misconceptions. The following discussion provides practical suggestions that Ministry with Community could implement to increase its appeal to millennials and address public misconceptions about the organization.

Survey results indicate that the greatest barrier in Ministry with Community’s pursuit to connect with Kalamazoo millennials is that millennials are largely unaware of the organization. Lack of awareness prevents millennials from engaging with Ministry with Community and therefore makes it impossible for Ministry with Community to build relationships with them. An added challenge in Ministry with Community’s efforts to develop relationships with millennials is that there is a large body of research that describes how relationships between organizations and millennials can best be maintained, but research on starting those relationships is lacking.
What little available research on the topic of creating relationships between organizations and millennials indicates that peer influence can be a strong force in converting unaware millennial publics into invested stakeholders. However, harnessing the power of peer influence requires that Ministry with Community already has invested millennial stakeholders and would be willing to convince their friends to become invested as well. If Ministry with Community lacks a strong base of invested millennial stakeholders as it perceives that it does and research indicates, it will be a long process to grow a large base of millennial stakeholders through peer influence.

Although growth via peer influence will be a long process, more than 90% of survey respondents said that they volunteer, and close to three-quarters of respondents said they learn about volunteer opportunities by word-of-mouth. It is therefore possible that local millennials are most likely to be engage in volunteer opportunities that they learn about from their peers. The simplest avenue by which Ministry with Community might add millennials to its group of stakeholders may be through volunteer engagement.

However, secondary research that indicates millennials value short-term commitment volunteer opportunities that have low barriers to access, allow for group or team engagement. Secondary research also indicates that millennials value opportunities that allow for volunteers to share themselves with an organization and be impacted by that organization in return. Ministry with Community currently offers a variety of volunteer opportunities that allow for short-term commitments, such as working at the front desk, and some volunteer opportunities that allow groups to volunteer together, such as serving meals. However, Ministry with Community does not offer volunteer opportunities that align with all of the values of millennials volunteers. Therefore, to increase the likelihood that millennials influence their peers to volunteer with
Ministry with Community, the organization should consider developing new volunteer opportunities that align to millennials’ priorities.

Currently, Ministry with Community requires that volunteers attend an orientation meeting before they can participate in volunteer work within the organization. This requirement is a barrier for millennials looking for ways to easily engage with Ministry with Community. Although orienting new volunteers to Ministry with Community, the organization’s mission and its facilities is important, finding a way to condense and integrate the orientation information into a ten-minute introduction at the beginning of volunteer opportunities would decrease the barrier to volunteering. This would make Ministry with Community’s current volunteer opportunities more millennial-friendly.

Ministry with Community might also consider developing volunteering opportunities that allow millennials to share their skills with the organization, which would allow both Ministry with Community and millennials to be impacted by each other. If Ministry with Community has projects that require special skills, such as Photoshop or grant writing, millennials with those skills could be called upon to participate. Millennials, especially those working to build their portfolios and professional experience, would be attracted to the idea of sharing their skills with an organization. Sharing their skills with the organization would also be incentivized by the promise of a professional, skill-building experience.

Once developed, special-skills volunteering opportunities could be publicized in the places where millennials most often find volunteer opportunities; according this project’s survey, just over 70% of respondents reported that they learn about volunteer opportunities from their college and university. To capitalize on college student volunteers, Ministry with Community could share its volunteer opportunities on Handshake, a website used by Western Michigan
University and Kalamazoo College students to find volunteering, job and internship opportunities, or with course instructors who run classes that develop the relevant skills needed by Ministry with Community projects. Ministry with Community volunteer opportunities could also be publicized through on-campus programs like Kalamazoo Valley Community College’s volunteer opportunities page or the Lee Honors College newsletter and blog. Volunteer opportunities could also be promoted though Ministry with Community’s LinkedIn page, as research indicated this platform to be an effective means of promoting volunteer opportunities to millennials.

Beyond local millennial’s lack of awareness of Ministry with Community, the process of building relationships between Ministry with Community and millennials is hindered the organization’s external identity. While Ministry with Community has a strong internal culture and identity, that identity is not clearly communicated to external publics.

For example, research confirmed that although Ministry with Community is not religiously affiliated, its name leads many millennials to think that it is. More than a third of the words that surveyed Millennials reported associating with Ministry with Community were words that are explicitly associated with organized religion. Ministry with Community has expressed concern with this incorrect association and has previously discussed measures that could be taken to align the organization’s name with its true identity. If Ministry with Community is concerned with representing itself as an organization that is not religiously affiliated, it might consider changing to a more neutral name like MwC. This name change could preserve the organization’s historical initials while also distancing the organization from organized religion.

Additionally, while Ministry with Community’s organizational culture is clearly communicated on its website, its presence on social media does not clearly reinforce the
organization’s commitment to empowering individuals to make positive life changes. Ministry with Community is fairly active on both Facebook and Twitter, although most of its posts are used to publicly thank the organizations that sponsor meals for or provide donations to Ministry with Community members. While these types of posts are important, research indicates that the posts do not contain the content or information that millennials are looking for, nor do they communicate key elements of Ministry with Community’s identity. For example, few posts discuss the social issues that Ministry with Community is addressing, its vision for a better future or how it is working to bring that vision to fruition. Posts may sporadically include this information, but the post do not work together to build a cohesive narrative of Ministry with Community’s identity.

While Ministry with Community’s social media posts are not intentionally opaque, they also do not meet the demands of millennials for a transparency. Ministry with Community’s posts also prevent the organization from appearing tech-savvy organization, a sophisticated storyteller and a producer of original, newsworthy, entertaining content. This is because Ministry with Community’s posts offer little insight into the organization’s internal operations, do not often feature stories of members’ success or progress, are highly repetitive and are near identical between Facebook and Twitter. Although Ministry with Community’s social media presence does not currently meet the needs of millennials, simple changes in the content that the organization shares can make the organization’s social media pages more millennial-friendly.

To increase Ministry with Community’s transparency on social media, it does not have to publicize its financial dealings or hiring processes. More simply, Ministry with Community can build trust with millennials and reinforce its identity though posts with photographs and short biographies or quotes from Ministry with Community staff or members. Some years ago,
Ministry with Community shared internal stories through a series of “Member of the Month” posts, which celebrated the accomplishments of Ministry with Community members. Beginning to again share such insight into the people who benefit from Ministry with Community’s services would not only generate original, engaging content, but it would also be an easy way to tell compelling stories about the issues that Ministry with Community is addressing and build the narrative of the work that Ministry with Community is doing to bring its vision of a better world to fruition.

Social media posts detailing stories of how volunteers shared themselves with Ministry with Community and have been impacted in return could also be a valuable tool in enticing millennials to engage with Ministry with Community. Research indicates that peer influence is an important factor in motivating millennials to engage with nonprofit organizations and that millennials are most likely to engage with nonprofit that they believe promote a culture dedicated to creating change. Sharing stories of how millennial volunteers have made a difference by working with Ministry with Community would increase the likelihood that other millennials would be inclined to engage with Ministry with Community.

An additional opportunity for sophisticated storytelling on social media could be facilitated through a partnership with students in Kalamazoo Valley Community College’s Art and New Media programs. Kalamazoo Valley Community College’s Art and New Media programs teach students how to develop graphic design, illustrations, and multi-media/video projects (Kalamazoo Valley Community College, 2018) and require students to develop a portfolio prior to graduation (T. Quada, March 7, 2018). These students attend classes less than a half mile away from Ministry with Community and are encouraged by their college to get involved in charitable work in their local community (T. Quada, March 7, 2018). Ministry with
Community has played with the idea of creating a series of portraits and stories in the style of Humans of New York, which is a photography project that shares the lives of everyday people through intimate portraits and interviews (Stanton, 2018). A partnership with the Art and New Media programs could potentially provide an avenue through which Ministry with Community could have the stories of its members captured in engaging ways and then shared on its social media pages.

Beyond creating Humans of New York-style content, Ministry with Community and students in the Art and New Media programs could also create Story Corps-style videos. Story Corps is a nonprofit that records conversations between people and sometimes brings those stories to life through animated shorts. Story Corps-style videos could be shared across Ministry with Community’s social media platforms and humanize the organization’s work.

Humanization of the work of Ministry with Community would have the added benefit of generating millennials’ empathy for the disenfranchised served by the organization. Millennials are most likely to give when they empathically identify with a cause, so appeals that clearly articulate the need and the proximity of those in need can bridge the emotional gap between millennials and those Ministry with Community serves. That said, although an effective bridge between stakeholder and organization, Ministry with Community should be careful that their use of empathy does not come across as an effort to guilt stakeholders into giving to the organization. This is because millennials tend to be resentful of such tactics and distrust the organization that employ them.

Whatever the content Ministry with Community shares on its social media pages, it must be polished in order for the organization to appear tech-savvy. Developing regular, original and quality content for one social media platform is difficult, let alone the multiple platforms that
Ministry with Community currently operates. In pursuing a strong social media presence, Ministry with Community must be careful not to commit to a number of platforms that exceeds its content development capabilities. If the development capabilities of Ministry with Community are exceeded, it will be evident in the quality of its social media posts. This is problematic because sloppy, poorly edited content can be an indicator that content has not been developed by a professional. While millennials may recognize that small nonprofits may not have the budget for a professional communications department, it does not mean that millennials will consider poorly crafted content as engaging. Unpolished content is likely to fall by the wayside as competition for millennials’ attention in online spaces continually increases and their tolerance for unengaging media decreases.

A solution to potential limitations in content development capabilities might be to develop a permanent internship position within Ministry with Community that allows local students to build their resumes while creating engaging online content for Ministry with Community. Students for this position could be found at college and university job fairs, such as Western Michigan University’s Nonprofit and Government Career Fair. If Ministry with Community were to develop this position, it would be important for the organization to ensure that it hired individuals who understood the importance of using social media to maintain strong stakeholder relationships, not simply market fundraisers or share organizational updates. This intern would need to have a well-developed understanding of using each social media post to build a cohesive story of Ministry with Community’s identity and work in the community.

In its use of social media, Ministry with Community should be also conscientious of how often their social media posts – on Facebook in particular – include event promotion or solicit donations or sales. Facebook is a platform designed and used to maintain relationships, and an
organization’s posts should reflect that. Conversational posts that engage stakeholders in dialogues are not only the Facebook posts that garner the most public attention, but they are also the posts that will keep stakeholders feeling that they have a relationship with an organization.

While there are a variety of steps that Ministry with Community can take to progress toward its goal of engaging more millennial stakeholders, the most important thing for Ministry with Community to remember is that communication is hugely influential in the development of relationships between millennials and organizations. From what Ministry with Community’s name says about the organization to the type of content Ministry with Community shares on social media, communication between Ministry with Community and millennial stakeholders needs to be clear, transparent and compelling. If Ministry with Community wants to successfully develop and maintain relationships with millennial stakeholders, it needs to assess its current communication practices and assure that they are aligned to the unique expectations of the millennial generation.

**Future Research**

Current research on millennial-nonprofit communication focuses on communication mediated by Facebook. As the popularity of Facebook declines and other platforms, such as Snapchat and Instagram, become more popular, the focus of future research projects should reflect this shift in popularity. Research relating to millennial engagement could also be expanded to include how organizations can best reach out to millennials to begin to form new relationships. While there is a wealth of research on how relationships between millennials and organizations can best be maintained, there is little data available on how those initial connections are best forged.
Considerations should also be given to Gen Z as the first members of the generation, born between 2000 and now, come of age. The oldest members of Gen Z will behave similarly to young millennials, but the traits associated with Gen Z will continue to evolve for the next 15 to 20 years. Gen Z is likely to be an even greater departure in behavior and preferences from the generations that informed classic models of donor engagement than millennials. Researchers should be forward-thinking and seek to understand Gen Z in order to inform the transitions nonprofits will need to make to appropriately engage the generation before it comes to donor primacy.
APPENDIX A
Community Survey: Ministry with Community

Survey Text
**Directions:** Select only ONE answer per question, unless otherwise instructed.

**Q1.** Are you at least 18 years old?

- A. Yes
- B. No

**Q2.** Have you lived or worked in Kalamazoo County for at least eight months in the last year?

- A. Yes
- B. No

**Q3.** Thinking of the nonprofit organizations that you have *liked* on Facebook, what factors lead you to *like* an nonprofit organization’s Facebook page? (Check *ALL* that apply)

- [ ] I have volunteered with the organization in the past
- [ ] The issue(s) that the organization addresses is important to me
- [ ] The organization posts interesting content
- [ ] I have not liked any nonprofit organizations on Facebook
- [ ] I do not have a Facebook account
- [ ] Other (please specify) ________________________________

**Q4.** How great an issue do you consider the following social issues to be in the city of Kalamazoo?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Not at all an issue</th>
<th>Somewhat an issue</th>
<th>Significant issue</th>
<th>I have no opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduation rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q5. In your opinion, what are the three most critical social issues in the city of Kalamazoo?

First most critical issue: ____________________________________________________
Second most critical issue: ________________________________________________
Third most critical issue: _________________________________________________

Q6. I consider myself to be:

A. Very aware of social issues in Kalamazoo
B. Somewhat aware of social issues in Kalamazoo
C. Not very aware of social issues in Kalamazoo
D. Not at all aware of social issues in Kalamazoo

Q7. Prior to this survey, had you heard of the organization Ministry with Community?

A. Yes
B. No
C. Unsure
If NO or UNSURE → skip to Q9
If NO → skip to Q14

Q8. Prior to this survey, where had you heard of Ministry with Community? (Check ALL that apply)

[ ] Local news
[ ] Organizational website
[ ] Social media
[ ] Volunteering opportunity
[ ] Word-of-mouth
[ ] Unsure
[ ] Other (please specify) __________________________________________________

Q9. What are the first three short words/phrases that come to mind when you hear the organizational name Ministry with Community?

Word/Phrase 1: ______________________________________________________
Word/Phrase 2: ______________________________________________________
Word/Phrase 3: ______________________________________________________

Q10. When you give to a charitable organization, which are you most likely to give?

A. I am most likely to give my time to an organization
B. I am most likely give money to an organization
C. I am most likely to give physical items (such as canned food or clothing) to an organization
D. I do not give to charitable organizations

Q11. Do you ever volunteer for charitable organizations?

A. Yes
B. No
If NO → skip to Q14

50
Q12. Where do you find volunteering opportunities? (Check ALL that apply)

[ ] Bulletin boards
[ ] I volunteer through my place of worship
[ ] I volunteer through my college/university
[ ] Online volunteer opportunity aggregators, such as Volunteer Kalamazoo
[ ] Word-of-mouth
[ ] Other (please specify) ________________________________________________________________

Q13. What is your preferred way of volunteering for a charitable organization?

A. Increasing awareness of/advocating for the issue addressed by the organization
B. Leading a fundraising effort on behalf of the organization, such as organizing a pop can drive
C. Volunteering to support the day-to-day operations of the organization, such as working at an organization’s help desk
D. Volunteering to work a special event of the organization, such as a silent auction or fundraising gala
E. Other (please specify) ________________________________________________________________

Q14. Are you currently a college/university student? (Check ALL that apply)

[ ] Yes, I am a student at Western Michigan University
[ ] Yes, I am a student at Kalamazoo College
[ ] Yes, I am a student at Kalamazoo Valley Community College
[ ] Yes, I am a student at another college/university
[ ] No, I am not a college/university student
[ ] Prefer not to respond

Q15. What is your age?

A. 18-24 years old
B. 25-34 years old
C. 35-44 years old
D. 45-54 years old
E. 55-64 years old
F. 65-74 years old
G. 75 years or older

Q16. What is your gender?

A. Male
B. Female
C. Other (please specify) ________________________________________________________________
D. Prefer not to respond

Q17. Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns that you would like to share about this survey or Ministry with Community? If so, please share them below or on the back of this paper.
APPENDIX B
Community Survey: Ministry with Community
Survey results
Q3. Thinking of the nonprofit organizations that you have *liked* on Facebook, what factors lead you to *like* a nonprofit organization’s Facebook page? (Check *ALL* that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The issue(s) that the organization addresses is important to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have volunteered with the organization in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization posts interesting content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have not liked any nonprofit organizations on Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have a Facebook account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The percent total of respondents is greater than 100% because respondents could select multiple answers.*

Respondents who selected ‘Other’ provided the following responses:

*My friends work for the organization*

Q4. How great an issue do you consider the following social issues to be in the city of Kalamazoo?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Significant Issue</th>
<th>Somewhat an Issue</th>
<th>Not at all an Issue</th>
<th>I have no opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rate</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q5. In your opinion, what are the three most critical social issues in the city of Kalamazoo?

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the response was provided.

- Homelessness (31)
- Poverty (21)
- Drug abuse (20)
- Crime (19)
- Hunger (13)
- Unemployment (9)
- Affordable housing (6)
- Infant mortality rate (6)
- High school graduation rate (5)
- Drugs (3)
- Education (3)
- Graduation rate (2)
- Abortion (1)
- Abuse (1)
- Alcoholism (1)

Q6. I consider myself to be:

| Somewhat aware of social issues in Kalamazoo | 69.0% |
| Not very aware of social issues in Kalamazoo | 19.0% |
| Very aware of social issues in Kalamazoo | 10.3% |
| Not at all aware of social issues in Kalamazoo | 1.7% |

Q7. Prior to this survey, had you heard of the organization Ministry with Community?

| Yes | 27.6% |
| No | 62.1% |
| Unsure | 10.3% |
Q8. Prior to this survey, where had you heard of Ministry with Community? (Check ALL that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering opportunity</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local news</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational website</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The percent total of respondents is greater than 100% because respondents could select multiple answers.

Respondents who selected ‘Other’ provided the following responses:

- Handshake
- I've volunteered there
- My work at United Way
- WMU

Q9. What are the first three short words/phrases that come to mind when you hear the organizational name Ministry with Community?

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times the response was provided.

- Church (13)
- Charity (2)
- Religion (11)
- Christianity (2)
- Help (7)
- Giving back (2)
- Religious (7)
- Homeless (2)
- Volunteer (7)
- Ministry (2)
- Christian (5)
- Nonprofit (2)
- Community (4)
- People (2)
- Helpful (4)
- Service (2)
- Nonprofit (4)
- Together (2)
- Volunteering (4)
- Altruism (1)
- Faith (3)
- Active (1)
- Helping (3)
- Beneficial (1)
- Homelessness (3)
- Bringing together (1)
- Kalamazoo (3)
- Caring (1)
- Outreach (3)
- Christian (1)
- Care (2)
- Christians (1)
Q10. When you give to a charitable organization, which are you most likely to give?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely to give my time to an organization</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely to give physical items, such as canned food or clothing</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to an organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am most likely give money to an organization</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not give to charitable organizations</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q11. Do you ever volunteer for charitable organizations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q12. Where do you find volunteering opportunities? (Check ALL that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I volunteer through my college/university</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I volunteer through my place of worship</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online volunteer opportunity aggregators</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin boards</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The percent total of respondents is greater than 100% because respondents could select multiple answers.

Respondents who selected ‘Other’ provided the following responses:

- Email/Contact with organizations
- I am already familiar with
- Greek life
- Loy Norrix
- My place of work
- Programs through work
- Social media
Q13. What is your preferred way of volunteering for a charitable organization?

| Volunteering to support the day-to-day operations of the organization, such as working at an organization's help desk | 43.1% |
| Volunteering to work a special event of the organization, such as a silent auction or fundraising gala | 35.3% |
| Increasing awareness of/advocating for the issue addressed by the organization | 17.6% |
| Leading a fundraising effort on behalf of the organization, such as organizing a pop can drive | 2.0% |
| Other | 2.0% |

Q14. Are you currently a college/university student? (Check ALL that apply)

| Yes, I am a student at Western Michigan University | 92.3% |
| No, I am not a college/university student | 15.4% |
| Yes, I am a student at Kalamazoo Valley Community | 3.8% |
| Yes, I am a student at another college/university | 1.9% |
| Yes, I am a student at Kalamazoo College | 1.9% |

*The percent total of respondents is greater than 100% because respondents could select multiple answers.*

Q15. What is your age?

| 18 - 24 years old | 94.8% |
| 25-34 years old | 1.7% |
| 35-44 years old | 3.4% |
**Q16.** What is your gender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Total Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents who selected ‘Other’ provided the following responses:

*Nonbinary*

**Q17.** Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns that you would like to share about this survey or Ministry with Community? If so, please share them below or on the back of this paper.

*Respondents did not have any questions, comments, or concerns to share.*
REFERENCES


