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Best Practices for Nonprofit Organizations to Support Remote Learning

Geoff Hogan

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Consultancy Project Executive Summary

Organization: Gardner-Webb University School of Education

Project Title: BEST PRACTICES FOR NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATIONS TO SUPPORT REMOTE
LEARNING

Candidate: Geoff Hogan

Consultancy Coach: Dr. Jeffrey Hamilton

Defense Date: June 29, 2021

Authorized by: Dr. Leroy Wray/President, Prodigal Son Foundation

Approval

This consultancy project was submitted by Geoff Hogan under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Dr. Jeffrey Hamilton, Faculty Advisor
Gardner-Webb University

Date

Dr. Leroy Wray, Site Advisor
President, Prodigal Son Foundation

Date

Acknowledgements

To my mom, Patricia Hogan, a lifelong educator and passionate supporter of the value of education. Though you are no longer here to see me achieve this goal, as the number one supporter of me and my siblings, I know you would be proud of this accomplishment.

To my wife Donna, you have been an incredible support throughout my DEOL journey. Your belief in my ability to complete this program has served as my inspiration. You spent countless hours on far too many nights and weekends acting as a single parent while I navigated my way through the DEOL program; I will be forever in your debt. Here's to Dr. and Dr. Hogan!

Abstract

BEST PRACTICES FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS TO SUPPORT REMOTE LEARNING. Hogan, Geoff, 2021: Consultancy Project, Gardner-Webb University.

Prodigal Son Foundation (PSF), an educational nonprofit organization (NPO) based in Charlotte, North Carolina sought to increase its partnerships with other local agencies and to improve fundraising efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a change in day-to-day operations and a need to reimagine the organization's methods to support the local community. The shift to remote learning and the closure of schools due to the pandemic brought the need to determine how PSF would continue to serve the community.

Customer satisfaction and feedback on programming options became the significant challenge for this consultancy project. Through the need for resources and information on effective practices for remote learning, this project involved the creation of a best practices pamphlet and presentation materials to be shared with parents and families.

Additionally, the review of literature on collaborations between nonprofits and the school community revealed themes of effective leadership, mission-driven service, COVID-19 educational partnerships, virtual learning research, and best practices for remote instruction. A brief survey was created to measure customer satisfaction and programming feedback. The survey was distributed to parents and families involved in PSF. Results of the survey indicate overall satisfaction with current programming and have also provided an opportunity for the organization to identify specific families that are currently in need of support. The Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted as part of this project was the first of its kind for PSF and will likely become a standard of practice as PSF continues to improve its impact in the community.

Keywords: education, nonprofit, mission, leadership, partnership, remote, virtual

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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Purpose

Prodigal Son Foundation (PSF) is an educational nonprofit organization (NPO) based in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was established in 2008 and founded in remembrance of Carlos Arrington. Initially, my conversations surrounding a significant challenge for consultancy were focused on fundraising and improving existing partnerships. Strategies and circumstances changed throughout my consultancy, and the organization shifted its focus to customer satisfaction and marketing. When the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools, PSF was forced to also shut down its operation of after-school programming, which serves as its primary focus as an NPO. This change led to another shift in my consultancy support as we attempted to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to support local schools, students, and families. We explored opportunities for the collection of customer satisfaction data and feedback for its programming and services and, given the circumstances surrounding the pandemic, chose to focus efforts on opportunities for assisting families as they navigated remote learning through the pandemic.

1.2 Associated Documents

Appendix A: Technology Needs Assessment

Appendix B: Customer Satisfaction Survey

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Appendix E: Technology Interview With PSF President, Dr. Leroy Wray

Appendix F: Video Release Permission Form

Appendix G: PSF Survey Flyer

Appendix H: Best Practices for Remote Learning Pamphlet

Appendix I: Professional Literature Review

1.3 Project Plan Maintenance

Due to shifts in circumstances and the unexpected changes that came because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were multiple opportunities to update the project plan. The process for updating the project plan included the exchange of texts and emails, phone conversations, and zoom meetings between myself and the president of PSF, Dr. Leroy Wray. Many of these changes came because of job-related challenges and the availability of resources due to the ongoing pandemic. I would typically reach out to Dr. Wray and make suggestions for changes, and we would spend some time ironing out details and next steps. Often, Dr. Wray would have additional suggestions to go along with my recommended changes to the plan.

2 Project Scope

2.1 Outline of Partnering Organization's Objectives

2.1.1 Objectives

Dr. Leroy Wray, serving as the president and founder of PSF, extended an opportunity to me as a DEOL candidate to provide support and insight into PSF's operations while also growing my knowledge of effective NPOs. Initially, the project was to be focused on increasing efforts to raise funds and solidify/enhance existing community partnerships. Challenges and changes to the company's focus led to a shift toward customer satisfaction, and this will likely remain a goal beyond the completion of this project. Ultimately, the project plan led to a focus on adapting PSF's daily offerings to meet the needs of the students and community during the COVID-19 pandemic. PSF took on this project as an opportunity to continue developing school-based partnerships and to receive feedback from an outside consultant. PSF had previously worked with DEOL candidates, and they were familiar with the consultancy project expectations at Gardner-Webb University.

Original SMART Goal

In collaboration with PSF, I will establish at least one new partnership and hold at least two fundraising events by the spring of 2021.

Outcomes

This SMART goal was revised around January/February of 2020. At that point, I made some initial contacts with existing partners and conducted preliminary research for fundraising efforts. The change was made due to several factors. First, the challenges facing PSF were no longer focused as heavily on gaining funding and partnerships. Second, I was about to take on a shift in a job role and was working to care for my ill mother at the same time. We discussed the possibility of shifting focus and came to a consensus on the need for some customer satisfaction data.

Revised SMART Goal (Spring 2020)

In collaboration with PSF, I will conduct surveys, interviews, and focus groups with PSF clientele to assess customer satisfaction by the spring of 2021.

2.1.2 Success Criteria

Success for PSF in relation to this project would involve the continued participation of students and families in their daily programming. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the organization to shift its focus and to change its daily offerings from an after-school programming opportunity to a during-school programming opportunity for students who were

attending school remotely, either full-time or on the A day/B day hybrid model. The shutdown of school activities led PSF to focus its efforts on assisting students and families in the community in this way.

Additionally, the NPO gained access to customer feedback through the administration of the Customer Satisfaction Survey. PSF leadership noted that this type of feedback had never been collected, and PSF looked forward to hearing from its stakeholders. Leadership would consider the survey a success if PSF was provided with feedback that could enhance its current programming.

2.1.3 Risks

Some of the risks associated with PSF's participation in this consultancy project included the loss of clientele through the shutdown of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, a major shift in its delivery model for supporting students, and an inability to fulfill the organization's mission of providing for students, families, and the community.

2.2 Outline of Student's Objectives

2.2.1 Objectives

At the outset of this consultancy project, my objective was to find an organization that would allow me to grow in skills that were necessary to become a more well-rounded leader. The opportunity to work with an educational NPO such as PSF provided me a chance to learn more about the nonprofit and social sector. My initial responsibility was focused on fundraising and partnerships. This project shifted its focus to customer satisfaction and ultimately landed on providing opportunities for families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, I worked with the organization to develop some customer satisfaction questions and feedback forms, and I also provided an opportunity for students and families in my current school to attend PSF programming.

2.2.2 Success Criteria

When presented with the task of choosing a partnering organization to complete the DEOL consultancy, we were told to focus our choice on one of two strategic decisions: choose an organization to which you, the candidate, bring some expertise; or choose an area in which you would like to grow and/or develop skills. I chose to focus on the latter in partnering with PSF. While I brought my experiences as an experienced educator to an educational NPO, I had never previously worked with or for any NPO. I was hoping to gain knowledge of how effectively to lead a successful NPO and how an NPO measures its own success.

2.2.3 Risks

Some risks for this project included the inability to access PSF clientele and stakeholders throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty we faced in collecting information when many of PSF's program offerings remained to be determined.

2.3 Definitive Scope Statement

This project was responsible for the development of customer satisfaction feedback surveys intended to gather data for PSF marketing. This project went through several iterations, and the consultancy role changed over time. Initial goals were centered around fundraising and partnerships and then shifted to customer satisfaction. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were again forced to reimagine the scope of the project. The shutdown of schools and PSF's after-school programming put the collection of survey data, interviews, and survey data on hold. PSF shifted its day-to-day operations once businesses were allowed to reopen, and they began thinking about how they could best impact the community. The decision was made to partner with a local church and The Steve Smith Foundation to offer students and families identified as McKinney-Vento (homeless) a place to participate in their remote learning. We partnered to provide this opportunity to more students at Hidden Valley Elementary and the nearby community.

To achieve the full scope of the consultancy project, my work included the following:

1. I served as the liaison between PSF president, partner organizations, and schools.
2. I served as a thought partner in discussing next steps for the project when challenges and conditions changed.
3. I agreed to serve on the local board for university area communities, schools, and nonprofit partners.
4. I collaborated with our school's McKinney-Vento social worker to assess the needs of students and families at Hidden Valley Elementary. I collaborated with PSF in this regard to offer hybrid-school and after-school care opportunities.
5. I communicated updates to PSF regarding upcoming Camp CMS (2021 summer school) offerings, schedules, sites, etc. This will aid PSF in delivering marketing tools to schools for student enrollment.

3 Deliverables

3.1 To Partnering Organization

Deliverables provided to PSF are listed in the table below.

Deliverable	Description	Due Date
Video Permission Release Form	Permission form to allow for the use of video from interviews and focus groups in marketing materials	Spring 2020
Focus Group Questions	A set of questions to be delivered to small groups of PSF stakeholders.	Spring 2020
Interview Questions	Set of questions to be used as a follow-up to survey completion and/or participation in focus group activities.	Spring 2020
Customer Satisfaction Survey	Brief survey to be provided to parents and families of those who participate in PSF programming.	Spring 2021

3.2 From Student

Deliverables provided from me are listed in the table below.

Deliverable	Description	Due Date
Best Practices for Remote Learning (pamphlet)	Pamphlet designed for parents and families to address common challenges in remote learning	Spring 2020
Best Practices for Parents to Support Students with Virtual Learning (presentation)	Presentation and accompanying resource guide that provided parents with a list of items to consider for remote learning to be effective	Fall 2020
Customer Satisfaction Survey results	Data collected from the survey will be provided to PSF and used to determine next steps in programming and marketing.	Summer 2021

Focus group data	Data collected from focus group feedback will be summarized and delivered to PSF.	Fall 2021 (anticipated)
Interview question data	Interview question data will be summarized and delivered to PSF.	Fall 2021 (anticipated)

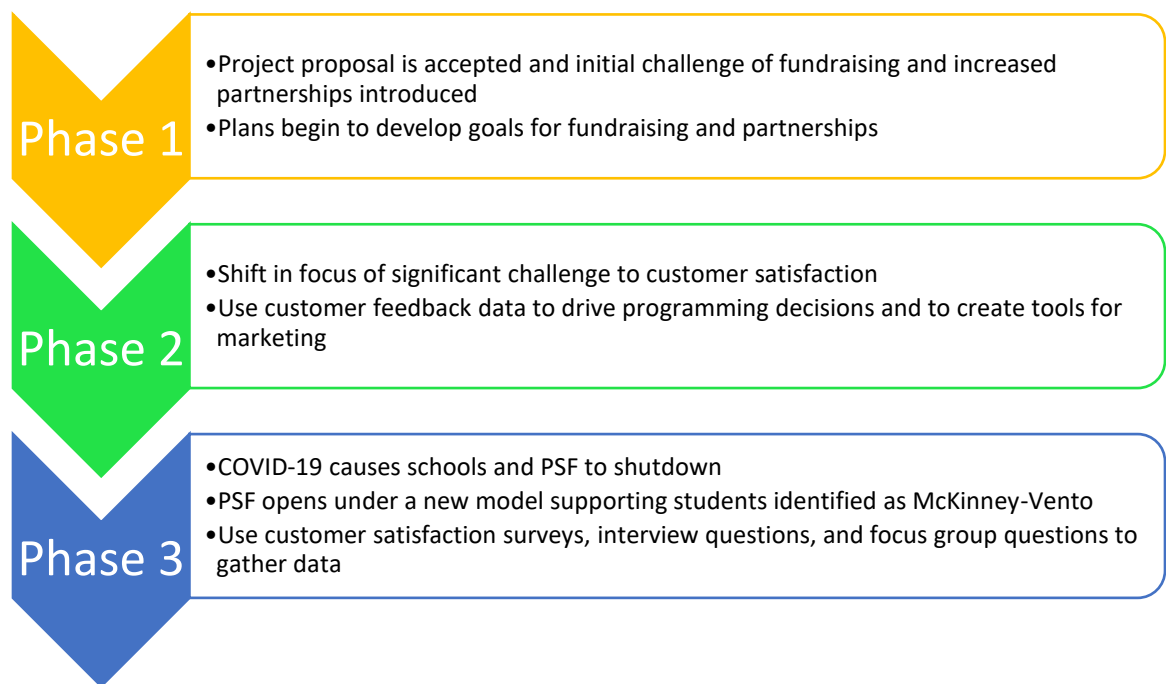
4 Project Approach

4.1 Project Lifecycle Processes

Beginning in the fall of 2018, I partnered with PSF to address significant challenges within the organization. Initially, the project proposal focused on fundraising with an aim to use revenue to purchase a structure to house the organization. In addition to fundraising, there was an expectation that I would focus on enhancing partnerships and/or increasing the number of PSF partners. This initial project proposal was shifted to address a new concern of customer satisfaction. The hope was that we would be able to determine areas of need or areas of growth for the organization based on customer satisfaction feedback. This approach was then put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown of schools and businesses.

Most of the approach to undertaking this project was a true consultant relationship between me, the DEOL candidate, and PSF president, Dr. Leroy Wray. As the DEOL milestones were completed and changes took shape within the consultancy project, there were several exchanges of information and meetings to discuss potential next steps.

4.2 Project Management Processes



4.3 Project Support Processes

I worked closely with Dr. Wray to determine the next steps throughout the consultancy project. I provided updates on the expected milestones, and we used this to guide our approach. This was especially important when schools and

businesses shut down, as it became necessary for PSF to completely alter its business model.

4.4 Organization

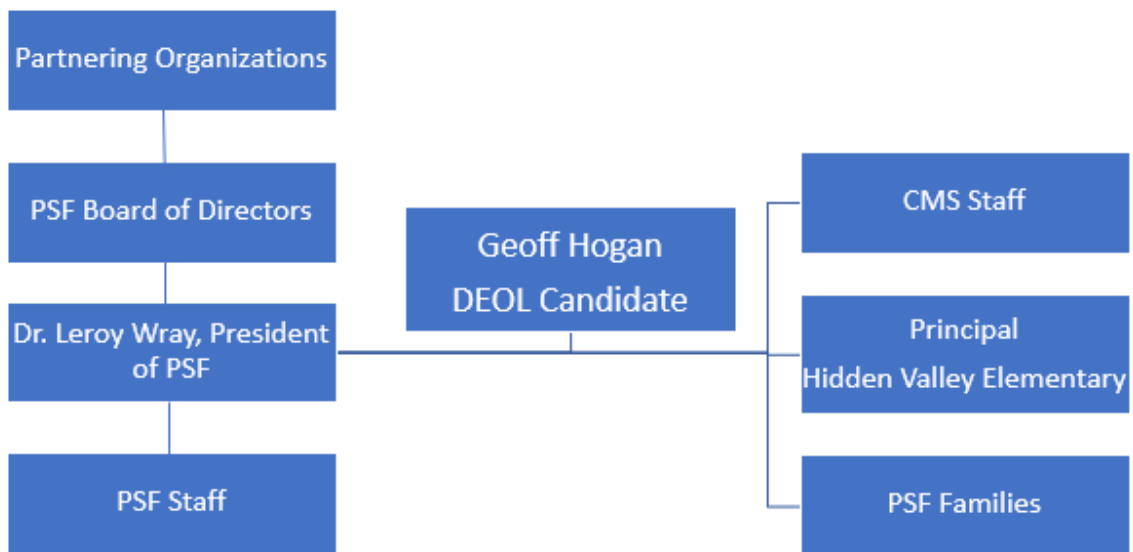
4.4.1 Project Team

There was not a formalized project team involved in the consultancy project. I communicated regularly with PSF through email, phone calls, and zoom meetings with Dr. Wray.

As illustrated in the mapping diagram below, I consulted with the PSF president, Dr. Leroy Wray, and brought our discussions to my school teams and my principal at Hidden Valley Elementary School. Due to the changing nature of our focus, this included working with PSF families, Hidden Valley families, and school social workers at Hidden Valley; and communicating with partnering organizations such as Northside Baptist Church. As the needs and goals of the consultancy project shifted, the project team changed as well.

4.4.2 Mapping Between PSF and Student

Below is a mapping depiction of the communication chain and information flow from me to PSF.



5 Communications Plan

Communications with the president of PSF established a need to develop a list of potential interviewees and attendees of online focus groups. We determined that current students, former students, parents, and staff be the target audience for our interviews and surveys.

Permission was to be gained to utilize video during zoom conferences and any online interviews. The goal is to take some of this video and utilize it as a future marketing tool for the organization. These videos can be used on the organization's website and various social media platforms.

Stakeholder	Information Needed	Purpose	Timeline	Delivery Method
Project Consultant	Significant challenge	Determination of goals for the consultancy project	Fall 2018	Phone calls
	Current partnerships	Possible ways to leverage existing partnerships to increase funds or to expand their impact	January 2019	Phone calls Emails
Project Manager	Benefits analysis	Determine the perceived benefits of having partnered with a DEOL candidate	Summer 2019	Phone calls
	Risk assessment	Discussion of the potential risks involved in increasing partnerships and taking on fundraising efforts	Fall 2019	Phone Calls Emails
	Customer satisfaction change	Discussion to shift the focus of the consultancy project	Spring 2020	Phone call
	Technology interview	Assessment of the current needs related to technology for PSF	Summer 2020	Phone call
	COVID-19 challenges	Discussion of potential next steps for both the consultancy and the organization	Fall 2020	Zoom meetings
	CMS summer camps	Discussion of using marketing for PSF to bring students to its summer programming	Spring 2021	Zoom meetings Phone calls

6 Work Plan

6.1 Work Breakdown Structure

The timeline below represents the breakdown of anticipated work that was to begin in the summer of 2020. This included the anticipated rollout of interviews and focus groups in the fall of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic caused some of these activities to be modified and/or delayed.

Activities/Timeline	Spring 2019	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021
Develop questionnaires				
Assemble lists of participants				
Create survey items				
Create pamphlet for best practices in remote learning				
Deliver training for parents on support of remote learning				
Assess connectivity				
Distribute technology				
Administer Customer Satisfaction Survey				
Assist families in need				
Analyze data and trends from survey				
Plan programming for 2021-2022 school year				

6.2 Resources

The table below displays actions, timelines, and expected outcomes for the revised goal to be focused on regarding customer satisfaction. The revised goal was to gather feedback from stakeholders (students, parents, staff) through interviews and questionnaires to inform programming during the COVID-19 closure and in the future.

Goal Area	Timeline	Resources	Implementation	Outcomes
Customer satisfaction	Fall 2020	Questions (vetted by PSF president List of clients and staff to participate Access to stakeholders (surveys, zoom sessions)	Questionnaires for parents, students, staff Open-ended survey questions Zoom session focus groups	Feedback on the programming Suggestions

Outlined below are some of the steps taken to address technology-related needs as we worked together to develop customer satisfaction measures. This also included efforts to remain connected with stakeholders during the COVID-19 closure of programming.

Specific Activity	Persons Responsible	Resources Needed	Assessment	Indicator(s) of Success
Individual learning needs	PSF president PSF staff Students Parents	Time Technology (laptop, Chromebook, iPad, etc.) Lessons	Growth measures Beginning-of-year (BOY) to end-of-year (EOY) reading & math scores Time spent interacting with teachers and completing online coursework	Students meeting individual learning targets Increased scores from BOY to EOY
Increased connectivity	PSF president PSF staff Partners	Devices Wi-Fi access Platform/App	Weekly check-ins Assignments	Availability and participation of students and parents
Remote Learning Best Practices Pamphlet	Consultant	Time Research	Delivery to families	Number of pamphlets distributed Feedback

With the shift from fundraising and partnerships to customer satisfaction, the following activities were scheduled to take place:

1. Interviews with staff
2. Focus groups with students and/or former students

3. Questionnaires and open-ended survey of parents, students, and staff

The results of the questionnaires, focus groups, and surveys are intended to be used to create marketing tools for future programming and recruitment of students and families.

7 Milestones

Milestone Number	Title & Description	Forecast date
1	Project proposal: Determination of significant challenge and decision to accept the consultancy	Fall 2018
2	Consultation on benefits of increased partnerships & fundraising	Summer 2019
3	Determination to shift to customer satisfaction	Spring 2020
4	Technology interview	Spring 2020
5	Creation of Best Practices in Remote Learning Pamphlet	Spring 2020
6	Draft Customer Satisfaction Survey	Fall 2020
7	Develop interview questions	Fall 2020
8	Delivery of Best Practices Pamphlet	Spring 2020
9	Develop focus group questions	Spring 2021
10	Discussion of opportunity for McKinney-Vento students at Hidden Valley Elementary	Spring 2021
11	Consultation on survey items/creation of survey flyer	Spring 2021
12	Distribution of survey	Spring 2021
13	Analysis of survey data	Summer 2021

8 Metrics and Results

Due to the shifting nature of the consultancy project's focus and the changing challenges faced by the partnering organization, there were no established performance requirements.

Data are to be collected using the Customer Satisfaction Survey and through the facilitation of interviews and focus groups. Information collected from these measures will be used to determine next steps in programming. It will also benefit PSF to know which aspects of the organization's programming are most critical according to its most important stakeholders (students and families).

Anticipated results will include a relaunch of "normal" programming in a post-COVID-19 world. There is also the hope that data and information can be used from the interview/focus group process to create marketing materials. The goal was to create a multi-media representation of the organization and its values to be used for marketing and branding via social media platforms and the PSF website.

Data Source	Data Type	Timeline	Results/Notes
Delivery of Best Practices in Remote Learning Pamphlets	Qualitative Quantitative	Spring 2020	Provided PSF parents and families with resources to support remote learning Printed paper copies and distributed digitally through email and social media
Customer Satisfaction Survey	Qualitative	Spring 2021	Distributed survey to approximately 50 families

9 Risks, Constraints, Assumptions

9.1 Risks

Risk Description	Mitigation Plan (what to do to avoid the risk occurring)	Contingency Plan (what to do if the risk occurs)	Impact (what the impact will be to the project if the risk occurs)	Likelihood of occurrence
Partner organizations will have a desire to increase their efforts in supporting or collaborating with PSF	Share opportunities to collaborate that will benefit both organizations	Shift the focus to another collaborative partnership	This will have minimal impact on the project as there are several partner organizations with which to work	Medium
There will be stakeholders (students, parents, families) willing to participate in survey and interview sessions	Incentives can be provided to participate in the interviews and for completing the survey (e.g., raffle a gift card, etc.)	Poll the stakeholder groups to determine what will be needed to improve participation	Survey results may be limited with minimal participation	Medium
PSF programming will continue to have the same or increased enrollment after the COVID-19 pandemic	Continue marketing efforts and maintain contact with families	Marketing efforts will need to be enhanced and there may be a need to visit schools, community events, etc.	The project impact is unknown	Low

9.2 Constraints

Initial conversations with the president of PSF indicated that we would be targeting partnerships and fundraising as the key challenges. These plans were formulated in late fall of 2018 and were modified due to life changes and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new focus for my consultancy project will become centered on gathering customer satisfaction data and feedback with the intent of looking at long-term planning. In other words, getting data from current students, staff, families, and students who have moved on from the programs offered by PSF. We wanted to gain feedback around the most valuable aspects of PSF and any concerns, comments, and suggestions. The goal is to use this data collection process to create videos for marketing on the PSF website and social media.

The COVID-19 pandemic limited the amount of access to staff and students in PSF programs. I constructed interview questions and focus group questions and crafted surveys/questionnaires to gather the data around customer satisfaction. It was communicated by the PSF president that this type of data has never been collected, and he stated that he looks forward to reviewing the feedback.

The target population for the data collection process around this project will encompass the entire organization through groups. For example, we will have data from parents, families, and students. The long-term impact of this project will be measured through future enrollment numbers and program offerings. PSF already has established relationships with several local partnering organizations and will use those partnerships to distribute its new marketing tools.

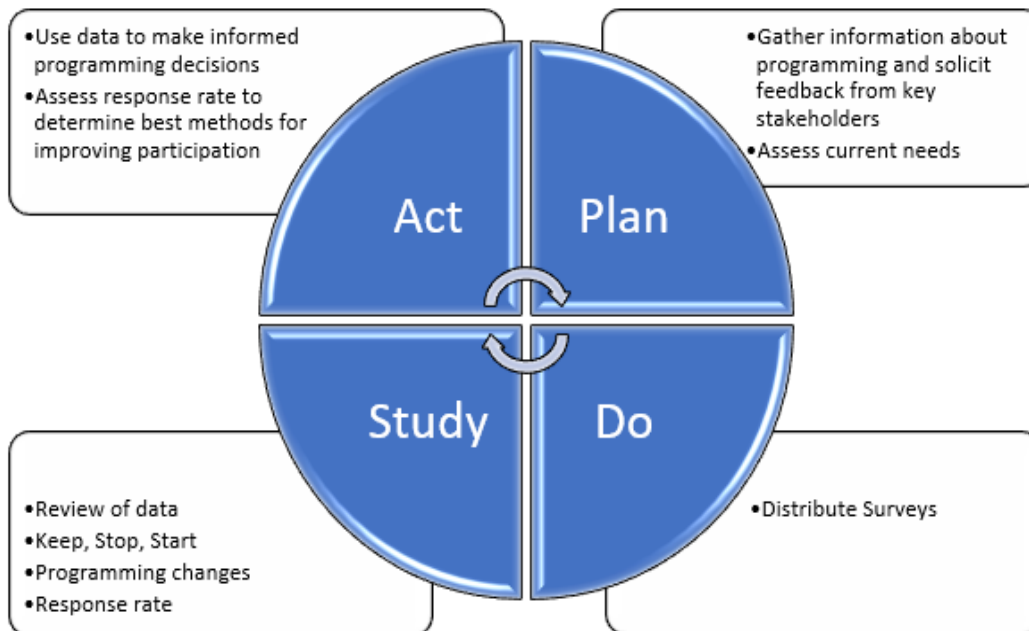
9.3 Assumptions

- There will be access to existing partnerships (under the initial challenge).
- Parents and families will be willing and able to participate in surveys and/or interview sessions.
- There is feedback relevant to program changes.
- Access to students and families will be made available during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- There will be continued interest in PSF programming throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

10 Financial Plan

Budget Item	Cost	Status	Next Steps
Creation of Best Practices in Remote Learning Pamphlet	3-4 hours of research and reading as a part of professional literature review 3 hours in the development of pamphlet content	Distributed to families and community members via physical pamphlets, email, and social media	Feedback from parents and families Updated version for 2021-2022 school year
Survey Discussion and Research	Consultation with consultant and PSF president to determine best questions Consultation to determine the best strategy for delivery Research on effective ways to improve survey response volume	Created a survey consisting of five scaled response items and three open-ended response items Added an additional open-ended response to include requests for immediate and/or summer 2021 needs Offered respondents an opportunity to win a \$50 Visa gift card by submitting contact information separate from survey responses	Data analysis Drawing for winners of three \$50 Visa gift cards
Customer Satisfaction Survey	Approximated time output of 4-6 hours (not including the vetting of questions)	Distributed to 50 families in the spring of 2021. Labeled “Customer Satisfaction Survey” and included as Appendix B in the executive summary.	Data analysis Review of programming based on responses

11 Quality Assurance Plan



PSF had not previously conducted any type of customer satisfaction or feedback survey. This process will allow the NPO to assess current programming, determine immediate needs, and review feedback from parents and families. As a method of gaining additional feedback from stakeholders, a survey will assist PSF in realizing aspects of its vision through strengthening the community, engaging families, and providing timely educational opportunities. Since families will have a familiarity with completing surveys, this could lead to an improved response rate and increased customer satisfaction. Additionally, providing incentives for completing surveys and demonstrating a commitment to responding to customer feedback may lead to increased participation in future surveys.

Appendix A

Technology Needs Assessment

Introduction

This document serves as a Comprehensive Technology Needs Assessment (CTNA) for The Prodigal Son Foundation (PSF). The purpose of this document is to review gaps, resources, and areas of strength with regard to technology for PSF. The CTNA will also be used to inform my DEOL consultancy project. This document begins with a brief overview of PSF and includes a review of internal and external factors impacting the organization. The internal factors (Figure 1) examined are people, resources, innovation, marketing, operations, and finance (PRIMO-F). The external factors (Figure 2) examined are policies/procedures, economic factors, external stakeholders, technological factors, legal factors, and environmental factors (PESTLE). The information gathered from PRIMO-F and the PESTLE are then used to inform an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). The above data collection and SWOT analysis are then used to inform technology recommendations for PSF.

Organization Overview

Established in 2008, PSF is a local non-profit that was created in remembrance of Carlos Arrington by, family members, fraternity brothers, and members of the community. Their purpose is to motivate, inspire, and reward young people. Carlos set an example by being a leader, serving the community, spending time with youth, and supporting youth programs. The organizational mission states: *We are committed to*

strengthening communities and developing productive leaders for the future by empowering, educating, and engaging students and families.

Data Collection

The data for the PRIMO-F and the PESTLE analysis was primarily collected via interviews with the president and PSF staff. A follow-up discussion was facilitated to determine the next steps as well as the accuracy of the data collected through a phone and email interview exchange.

PRIMO-F

The PRIMO-F examines internal factors impacting the organization. For the purposes of the CTNA, all the factors are viewed through a lens focused on the organization's use of technology.

People	A review of the people involved in decision-making and day-to-day operations at PSF includes a small number of volunteers and teachers. my primary contact is the president, Dr. Leroy Wray, who is the founder of PSF and ultimately serves as the primary decision-maker for the organization. He has indicated a desire to adapt to changes in technology and to allow the organization to keep moving and thrive in a virtual setting. An interview with Dr. Wray revealed that he was unsure of the availability of parents, families, and students during the COVID-19 school closure and subsequent closure of PSF programming. A request was made to facilitate interviews and/or focus groups via virtual format, and this was well-received.
Resources	Some of the issues that will present themselves regarding resources for this nonprofit include financing, access to technology, ability and/or willingness to collaborate, and adequate facilities. Financially, PSF is not able to provide the technology to its stakeholders or students. Additionally, there is little known about the day-to-day access to the Internet and technology for the organization's students and families. This will serve as an opportunity for exploration and growth. The lack, or assumed lack, of connectivity will likely result in a lessened ability for the organization and its stakeholders to collaborate during the COVID-19 closure.

Innovation	Some areas where PSF has demonstrated innovative ideas regarding technology are in the use of social media and parent outreach. The organization utilizes Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to notify students and families of current events.
Marketing	This will serve as an area of growth and opportunity for PSF, as they have indicated that they would like to shift my work in consultancy with the organization toward improved marketing efforts focused on customer satisfaction.
Operations	The day-to-day operations of PSF are currently at a bare minimum due to the COVID-19 closure. The president has shared that he would be open to some parents and family outreach efforts and virtual meetings, interviews, focus groups as a part of my consultancy effort.
Finance	While there may be an opportunity to seek grant funding or donations, much of the organization's current finances are dependent upon fundraising and partnerships.

Figure 1: PRIMO-F

The PRIMO-F reveals a desire to move forward and to keep stakeholders in PSF connected despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it is evident that there are more questions than answers with regard to the organization's use of technology and its ability to connect.

PESTLE

The PESTLE examines external factors impacting PSF with a focus on how each impacts the organization's use of technology.

Policies and Procedures	PSF has the capability of running its day-to-day operations with a minimal budget. They utilize a space that is shared with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools and they rely heavily on volunteers to support most of their after-school programming. The current political climate is unlikely to have a great impact on the organization.
Economic Factors	Economically, PSF will certainly survive the COVID-19 closure and, hopefully, the closure will allow for an opportunity to recruit additional students, families, and parents to join them once their programming is back up and running. Additionally, there is an opportunity to continue collaborations and connections with their established partnerships.

External Stakeholders	PSF currently serves students in high-needs school environments and typically their clientele is families with limited income. The focus for my consultancy effort will involve expanding their outreach and marketing through a customer satisfaction initiative.
Technological Factors	A lack of technology and connectivity for the organization and its stakeholders/customers is an area of concern. The current technology that is being used is borrowed from the school system. One of the desired outcomes, or goals, for the next couple of years is to gain some momentum with fundraising efforts to procure additional technology.
Legal Factors	N/A
Environmental Factors	The COVID-19 pandemic can be viewed as an unforeseen environmental factor that could impact the organization's next steps in the use of technology. Conversations with Dr. Wray have included the view that the COVID-19 closure is a chance to reexamine how PSF connects with its stakeholders.

Figure 2: PESTLE

The PESTLE highlights the need to continue connecting with students, families, and partners during the COVID-19 closure.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The data collected through interviews and observations in the PRIMO-F and PESTLE provide the foundation to begin a SWOT analysis. The SWOT will be used to inform recommendations.

Strengths

Some of the strengths identified through the data collection for the PRIMO-F include but are not limited to the following:

1. The COVID-19 closure of schools and shut down of PSF programming presents itself as a window of opportunity for volunteers and service members to relax and recharge. Most of the PSF employees are school-based staff and this time of year allows for an opportunity to disconnect from the hours that are

committed to the organization. This time can also be used to explore options for growth and ideas for expanding technology use throughout the school year.

2. My consultancy will serve as a starting point for a new marketing initiative that will focus on customer satisfaction and results as we work to create a video message that can be shared with potential stakeholders. The hope is that this marketing push will improve enrollment and overall satisfaction with PSF programming.

Weaknesses

The COVID-19 closure presents a major weakness in the sense that there is a disconnect from the organization and its families.

Opportunities

As highlighted in the strengths category above, the COVID-19 closure, coupled with my efforts through consultancy, will present the organization with an opportunity to re-launch once school starts back up and things are back to normal.

Threats

Some of the threats that could come about as the organization moves through this unique time include:

1. Lack of face-to-face contact with students and families may result in lower enrollment once things are back up and running.
2. Most of the families that take part in PSF programming are low-income families and have a great number of needs, as such, there is a threat that the health and safety of these students and families could be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis

There is an identified need for improved connectivity across the organization for PSF. The COVID-19 closure has presented the organization with a unique challenge in that parents, students, and families are no longer in constant contact with the organization due to the shutdown of programming. The PSF president has indicated that he would very much be interested in conducting virtual interviews and focus groups to assess the needs and the next steps for the organization. Additionally, there is a desire to take some of the data collected Through virtual surveys and interviews and to use this information to promote the organization. The idea has been presented that we could use video of focus groups or student feedback to sell the success of the organization.

Appendix B

Customer Satisfaction Survey

Please take a few moments to provide Prodigal Son Foundation with some valuable feedback. Circle your response on Questions 1-5 and respond in writing to Questions 6 - 8.

1. I am pleased with the programming options offered by Prodigal Son Foundation.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

2. I would recommend Prodigal Son after-school care to a friend.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

3. I feel that my child has benefitted from the Prodigal Son Foundation.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

4. I have noticed my child displaying leadership qualities since participating in Prodigal Son Foundation programming.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

5. I staff at Prodigal Son Foundation helpful, and I feel safe leaving my child in their care.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

6. If you could change one thing about the programming at Prodigal Son Foundation, what would it be? Why?

7. What is one aspect of Prodigal Son Foundation that you hope we will never change? Why?

8. Are you interested in or do you need summer enrichment opportunities for the 2021 summer? If yes, please include your contact info below.

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

Discuss your general feelings about PSF and your experiences with PSF programs.

What do you like most about PSF programs? Least?

What could we do to improve your experience with PSF programs?

Is there anything that other programs are doing better than PSF?

Is there anything that you did not get a chance to share with us today about your experience with PSF?

Appendix D

Interview Questions

How would you describe your experience with PSF?

What, if any, service, feature, or programming is missing at PSF?

What do you like most about PSF?

Have you noticed a positive change in your child since participating in PSF programming?

What challenges or problems does PSF help you solve?

Is there anything we could do to make our services more effective?

Do you interact with our website or any of our social media outlets?

How would you describe PSF programs to a friend?

Appendix E

Technology Interview With PSF President, Dr. Leroy Wray

I spoke with the president of the nonprofit organization that I am partnering with for my consultancy project on May 22, 2020. The president and founder of the Prodigal Son Foundation (PSF), Leroy Wray, and I are former colleagues in education having worked together more than 10 years ago.

My consultancy project has gone through several iterations over the last 6 semesters. Initially, I had partnered with PSF to work at developing additional partnerships for the nonprofit and to improve and/or increase their fundraising efforts. The goal was to increase funding with the overall aim at the possibility of securing a home base for the foundation. Currently, they operate primarily out of school sites (cafeterias, media centers, etc.) and he would very much like to grow the organization by establishing its own brick and mortar space. Of course, this would require funding.

Through changes in my life and with the pandemic that we are all currently experiencing, we have been forced to rethink my primary efforts with PSF. I did not actually sign on with PSF until the spring semester of my first year and then having left my former job midway through the following year, we have had very limited time to gain any traction with the consultancy project.

Technology and Next Steps

My interview began with a recap of our previously agreed-upon goals. We both agreed that it would be necessary to shift my focus to another area given our current situation and our recent lack of communication. I proposed my idea for a new approach to the remainder of my time consulting with PSF. I asked Leroy if he had ever had anyone look

at customer satisfaction within the organization in terms of students (current and former), parents, employees. He indicated this is data that the organization did not currently have, and this topic sparked some interesting ideas that he would like for me to explore. I noted that it would be, or could be, beneficial to the organization to look at customer satisfaction from a former student perspective in the sense that you could use this information as a tool for future marketing or recruitment efforts. He loved this idea! In fact, he took this idea a step further and this is where we really got into how technology can be used to take this project to a new level. This is where I will be able to answer the questions of how technology is used currently in the organization and what we would view as the future of technology use within the organization. Below are some of the questions regarding technology that were posed, and Leroy's responses, as we worked through a new plan for my consultancy.

Have you ever used an electronic survey with students, parents, staff?

We have not tried to use an electronic survey with parents or students in the past. I would be interested to see how our families responded to such a request. We do not have any survey data other than word-of-mouth comments gathered over the years.

What kind of technology do students use currently in your after-school programming?

Some of our students have access to chrome books in the after-school program. This typically depends on the age and/or grade level of the students. Our older students in grades three and above often have access to chrome books after school. Some of our students also do have cell phones that they bring to our after-school programming. I would be interested to include in the survey some data gathering around technology access in the home.

Do you know about parent or family access to technology?

I would be interested to find out how comfortable our families would be with an electronic survey or a zoom conference session. We may need to do some initial serving of families to find out their access. Whether or not they can get on the computer and access the Internet, etc.

Do you have a database or any kind of historical record of former students?

Such a thing does not exist for PSF. I would be very interested in beginning to collect that information and figure out the best way to track some of that data from year to year.

Do you think students, families, staff would be open to participating in focus groups? Virtually?

As I mentioned earlier, I think it will be interesting to see what kind of access to technology our families have at home. If it were possible to provide them with a device and maybe even give them a tutorial and how to operate and connect the device, then I think we would be in good shape to hold some interviews and/or focus groups online.

I followed up with Leroy through email and asked him a few of the suggested technology questions.

Does the organization have a certain amount of money allocated for technology?

We do not currently have a specific budget for technology, but we could likely use some shared resources for the survey and video conferencing that we have discussed.

Who are the gatekeepers of the technology/website at the organization?

I have a few employees/volunteers that work to keep the website updated. It is not really something that we spend money on, beyond the initial setup. I am looking forward to the

inclusion of some technology proficiency questions when we survey the staff. This information could help us in future planning.

Interview Reflection

I am excited about the interest that was shown in connecting with students, parents, staff at PSS. I look forward to beginning to work out some preliminary questions and survey items that I can share with Leroy soon. One of the other items that really has us both excited, is the opportunity to take what we can gather from surveying families, students, and former students and then using this footage to create a marketing tool for future use within the nonprofit. Leroy was really interested in the idea of putting together some sort of a video that would highlight the offerings at PSF, give some insight into the experience from the perspective of a student, and could be a valuable tool for marketing the program to potential clients.

Appendix F

Video Release Permission Form



Prodigal Son Foundation PHOTO & VIDEO RELEASE FORM

Participant's Name: _____

I hereby authorize Prodigal Son Foundation to publish the photographs taken of me and for use in Prodigal Son Foundation printed publications, audio/visual media, and website.

I acknowledge that since my participation in publications, video, and websites produced by Prodigal Son Foundation is voluntary, will receive no financial compensation. I further agree that my participation in any publication and website produced by Prodigal Son Foundation confers upon me no rights of ownership whatsoever.

I release Prodigal Son Foundation, its contractors, and its employees from any liability for any claims by me or any third party in connection with my participation until such time as I release in writing and submit it to the Prodigal Son Foundation.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Street Address:

City, State, Zip:

*It is the policy of Prodigal Son Foundation to not publicize or identify minors (under the age of 18) in any of its published media without the express written permission of their parent or legal guardian.

Appendix G

PSF Survey Flyer



5 MINUTES!  **WIN CASH!**

We need your feedback

Prodigal Son Foundation is looking forward to returning to "normal" next year.

We'd love to hear your thoughts on how we can make 2021-2022 the best year yet!

Completed Surveys will add \$\$ to raffles to be held at an upcoming PSF event!!



THE PRODIGAL SON
— FOUNDATION —
EMPOWER EDUCATE ENGAGE

[CLICK HERE TO BEGIN SURVEY](#)

Appendix H

Best Practices for Remote Learning Pamphlet

OUR MISSION:

We are committed to strengthening communities and developing productive leaders for the future by empowering, educating and engaging students and families.



Best Practices & Tips for Parents



Strategies for:

- Remote Learning
- Anxiety
- Independence
- Lack of Motivation
- High Energy
- and MORE!

Contact Us

Phone: (704) 996-4447
Email: prodigalsonfoundation@gmail.com
<https://www.psfnow.org/>

The Prodigal Son Foundation is committed to ensure that students fulfill their full potential to become productive leaders.

Lack of Motivation/ Overwhelmed

- Take frequent breaks during classes and in-between classes and schoolwork
- Accountability check-ins with someone other than a parent, such as another student or another adult/responsible person in household
- Build schedule and revisit, as needed

High Energy

- Get creative with space in household and yard
- Play music
- Have movement breaks
- Stand up while working

Student Schedules


- Create schedule with student(s)
- Begin with breakfast and lunch time, then fill in the rest
- Try to have the schedule mirror the school schedule
- Might include pictures
- Could be a paper copy or digital copy with links

Distracted / Unfocused Work Completion

- Use timers to help set-up work schedule - have them go off like a regular school bell
- Find a set place to work that is away from distractions
- If many students at home, stagger check-ins and provide separate work locations
- Lots of feedback, mostly positive

Anxiety

- Try to build some normalcy in day with routines and expectations
- What worked for your child when anxious before COVID-19?
- Find fun ways (through exercise, dancing, etc.) to keep healthy
- Creative activities (puzzles, board games, video games, etc.)
- If challenges continues, consider school support, online support groups, and teletherapy



Rushing to Finish/ Carelessness

- Take breaks during schoolwork (once every 15-20 minutes)
- Prioritize what to do first, then next, etc.
- Celebrate what **IS** being done
- Accountability check-ins with someone other than a parent

Technology

- Read & Write for Google Chrome
- Links to Zoom meetings easily accessible
- Teach how to navigate computer, provide "cheat sheets" or step-by-step guides
- Celebrate successes!

Appendix I

Professional Literature Review

Introduction

School partnerships with local organizations can be a critical component to the success of the school and the surrounding community. My consultancy partnership with the Prodigal Son Foundation (PSF) has taken on several approaches to effectively partnering with schools and other organizations within the community. PSF typically serves the community through the provision of after-school programming with an emphasis on providing students with mentorship, building leadership qualities, and supporting the needs of students/families. Initially, my consultancy focused on the possibility of raising funds for PSF. This initial goal was put aside; as my role within the consultancy shifted, we began to focus on customer satisfaction. Ultimately, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift in education to a remote and/or hybrid approach, our goals changed once again. As an educational nonprofit organization (NPO), PSF is focused on engaging the community; building leaders within the students it serves; and supporting families through after-school care, tutoring, and athletics. While the conditions changed, PSF's mission to serve the community remained the same.

My focus for this review of literature settled on the changing dynamics of an NPO amid a global pandemic. Prior to COVID-19, I had already witnessed the shift in focus of PSF, as the needs of its clientele or its resources changed over time. PSF provided after-school care and would often change its delivery based on the needs of the schools or students it was supporting and the availability of a physical space to provide its programming. These changes led me to explore the idea of NPOs that remain focused on

their mission and vision through changing times and significant challenges.

Educational Nonprofit Serves the Community

To prepare this professional literature review, I collected and reviewed 35 research articles and professional publications related to educational NPOs. I was particularly interested in researching educational NPOs with a mission aligned to community involvement and/or community improvement. Additionally, I was researching characteristics of leadership for educational NPOs. Having witnessed the changes in the delivery of services and the provision of support to students and families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I was also interested in how educational NPOs were partnering with school systems in this unprecedented time.

I was able to identify some common themes through reading the articles and publications about educational NPOs. The first theme focused on the leadership characteristics needed for an effective educational NPO and the leadership's ability to remain mission-focused. The second theme focused on NPOs whose mission and vision sought to serve the community. The last theme, and the timeliest, was focused on COVID-19, its impact on education, and how organizations and school systems have partnered to support students and families.

Nonprofit Leadership

Leadership in an NPO is tasked with delivering a service to people and/or the community while also serving its mission. It is of the utmost importance that nonprofit leaders solidify a mission and bring in staff members who believe in the mission. It becomes critical that everyone within the organization strives not only to deliver on the services and supports offered by the organization but also to exemplify the mission.

Community members, clientele, stakeholders, and board members all view the NPO's success through a mission-focused lens.

Collins (2005) provided the example of the CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA looking at her role and describing it to others as being at the center of a diffuse power structure. This example is certainly on a much larger scale than my partner organization, PSF; however, the principle remains that leaders of the NPO serve the mission and the community first. So, while the director or president of an NPO has the power to make executive decisions, it is far more important to involve others in decision-making as much as possible to ensure the organization's mission is everyone's driving force.

To understand the principles that define effective NPO leadership, researchers have spent a good deal of time examining the components, or the profile, of successful NPO leadership. In 2015, Sanders et al. conducted and reviewed in-depth interviews of NPO leaders to find out if they view themselves and their leadership as "business-like." The question Sanders et al. asked was, "Were NPO leaders truly considering the mission of the organization first, or were they thinking about the bottom line?" Service-oriented organizations that operate in the social sector have an obligation to the public and the community to hold true to their values and mission. Effective leadership will always ask questions like, "Is this decision aligned with the organization's overall mission?" This type of decision-making allows NPO leaders to market its services in a way that is aligned with the organization's beliefs. Partnerships and collaborations can be more effective, and other for-profit organizations will feel like their monetary donations and/or time are being honored if they see the NPO is staying true to its mission.

Researchers found that NPO leaders view their organizations separately from a

business due to their mission-driven focus. Sanders et al. (2015) noted that one of the interviewees stated,

There is not a bottom line you can always point to a nonprofit. In our world, the bottom line may be the fact that we balance our budget at the end of the year, but there is still a reach beyond that, that you cannot put a dollar number on. We have 50,000 kids who have been affected by (our program) that all now have higher self-esteem, but you can't put a dollar on that. (p. 5)

Many others who were interviewed took a similar stance in viewing themselves and their organizations as separate from the cold, cruel, business world.

Many research participants viewed the work that was conducted on behalf of their NPO as a critical service to their constituents, and its alignment to their overall mission was what made their nonprofit effective. Several interviewees also noted there does tend to be a business side of running a successful nonprofit. For instance, many would say they would have to shift their language when working with the clientele they served and then turning around to work with partner organizations. In other words, in their daily provision of services, NPO leaders were guided by the mission; but since their organization relies so heavily on the support of others to fund programming, they do have to call upon their business acumen when working with other companies.

Another area of leadership I explored was the provision of opportunities for developing youth leaders. PSF, as part of its mission, focuses its efforts on building leadership skills in the youth they serve. There is a good amount of research around effective models for youth leadership programs and evaluating those programs for effectiveness. A conceptual model was examined by Redmond and Dolan (2016) as they

explored the components of a national youth organization in Ireland (Foroige). This organization developed what it is billing as a leadership for life program that will serve as a longitudinal study of youth in the Foroige program. The study, begun in 2009, proposed to examine leadership, skill development, emotional intelligence, collaboration, communication, and knowledge that were gained through youth leadership programming.

Mission-Driven Service

Many organizations celebrate and put forth to the public a mission statement that speaks to the purpose of their work. This is especially important in NPOs as they will often use their mission as a symbol to define their values and guide their work.

Brown and Yoshioka (2003) sought to explore the NPO mission and its relation to employee satisfaction and employee retention. Brown and Yoshioka found that many employees in NPOs were attracted to the work by the NPO's mission and that their attitudes towards their work were positive; however, it was noted that many employees in mission-driven organizations and NPOs were satisfied with the organization and the work yet dissatisfied with their reward in terms of pay. Therefore, Brown and Yoshioka found that many may decide to leave the organization because of the low pay typically found in NPOs.

Minkoff and Powell (2006) described the mission as a "clarion call for nonprofit organizations" (p. 591) as it served to motivate and guide employees while also alerting the public of the NPO's intent. Minkoff and Powell reported that through a series of interviews, they also found that smaller and younger NPOs would remain focused on their original intent and mission until it became necessary to follow the money and look for additional sources of revenue. Several of the interviewees noted that when the NPO

became focused more on revenue, the NPO's mission became a secondary focus to the overall survival of the organization.

Around the turn of the century, Frumkin and Andre-Clark (2000) explored the nonprofit sector through welfare-to-work transition programs and their ability to remain value and mission driven in a competitive market with many organizations seeking government contracts. Frumkin and Andre-Clark found that while the political and governmental arena of welfare was competitive, there were some keys to thriving as an NPO. Successful nonprofits will bring a clear and fully developed strategy for competing against the for-profit organizations and leverage the mission-driven focus of their organization as it will ultimately be what is valued most by funders, volunteers, and employees. Another interesting note from this bit of research was that Frumkin and Andre-Clark found a potential avenue for NPOs in this politically centered area was to attempt to attract high profile and/or experienced leaders from larger organizations or government jobs.

There is also a good deal of research that can be found focused on the interplay between nonprofit business strategies and for-profit business strategies. Suykens et al. (2017) focused on what they described as hybrid and NPOs. These are organizations that are founded in the nonprofit tradition of being driven by a mission, yet they lean on for-profit strategies to sustain their organization. Suykens et al. found some key dynamics that would determine whether they categorized an organization as being hybrid. Those were their drive toward moneymaking objectives or social objectives, their business practices and values, their managerial tactics, and the idea of entrepreneurship. The final concept of entrepreneurship applies to organizations focused on bringing to market a

particular product; and while the NPO may have a socially focused mission, they are also driven to make money and must focus on profit margin as well.

COVID-19 Educational Partnerships

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced educational leaders and NPO leaders who support education to reimagine almost every aspect of what they do. PSF was known for its after-school offerings before the COVID-19 pandemic; when the schools shut down, this forced PSF to change its business model. The organization's mission is focused on providing support to students, families, and the community through volunteer and free programming. These programs are offered based on partnership donations and collaborations with the local school system. Since PSF does not have a home base or its own brick and mortar structure, it was operating in Charlotte Mecklenburg (CMS) school buildings. The pandemic caused PSF to shift not only the type of support it was providing but also its location, as it was no longer provided access to CMS school buildings.

School systems across the country were also put in the position of rethinking the delivery of instruction and the provision of services with the shutdown of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital instruction and online learning were already positioned to become more prevalent in schools; however, the pandemic forced school systems to utilize strategies and tools through remote learning models on a much quicker timeline and a much larger scale.

Research around the provision of school during the COVID-19 pandemic centers on a variety of challenges. Issues such as connectivity and access to technology are central to the effective rollout of remote instructional plans. These issues are especially problematic and more prevalent in schools and communities that are not as affluent. Title

I schools and high needs schools that serve communities with high concentrations of poverty struggled to connect all our students through technology. CMS, like districts across the country, undertook a massive effort to provide portable technologies such as Chromebooks (laptops) and iPads to students, in addition to supporting families through the provision of Wi-Fi hotspots.

Before the pandemic, Collins and Halverson (2009) described the shift toward a technology-centered approach to education in our modern digital world. Collins and Halverson noted the following as a guide to educators and parents:

The emergence of technology-based learning environments requires parents and teachers to pay attention to how (and what) children learn outside of school and the home. Beyond raising awareness of the new technologies, parents and teachers can begin to appreciate the range of new skills that children develop when immersed in these technologies. (p. 122)

Recent events of the COVID-19 pandemic have sparked a worldwide debate on the effects of closing schools and shutting down communities of education. There are articles focused on how students will suffer a great amount of learning loss and the potential effects on a child's social development along with research focused on the best methods and practices for educating in a remote learning environment.

Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) sought to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools, the potential for learning loss, and the depletion of skills in students who were no longer able to attend school in person. Burgess and Sievertsen's work essentially amounted to a call-to-action for schools to implement effective remote learning strategies; for parents and families to supplement a child's learning in the home;

and for decision makers to consider changes in assessment requirements and other educational policies.

Morgan (2020) wrote an article that focused on best practices for remote instruction and online learning. The guidance provided was driven by sources such as the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), and it was also focused on the overwhelming concern of equitable home access to online learning. Morgan urged educators to focus on ISTE's standards of practice when delivering online instruction, and she encouraged schools to focus their early efforts on guaranteeing equal access to remote learning tools for all students. There is a great need, especially in low-income areas, to provide access to education; and often, the need is more than just a Wi-Fi connection, as Morgan stated,

Although school closings can save lives, they also lead to challenges, which impact low-income students more than others. One challenge involves how to provide meals to children eligible for free or reduced lunch at school. Another relates to unequal access to technology. Children from low-income families are less likely to have access to computers and the internet at home. (p. 139)

Pre-COVID-19 Pandemic Virtual Learning Research

A research study conducted years before the current COVID-19 pandemic, by Boulton (2008), looked at students in a secondary school in the United Kingdom who enrolled in what was then called an e-learning course. Boulton followed students over a 2-year period who were taking courses to earn a certificate equivalent to a communication technology degree. Boulton noted that much research had been conducted at the university and/or college level surrounding e-learning, but there had yet

to be a focus on the K-12 e-learning experience. This study looked at two different groups, one group of students who took the courses at home and another who participated in school-based e-learning activities during after-school hours. The study revealed that the completion rate was higher for the after-school group, yet there was a high level of satisfaction reported for both groups involved. Boulton concluded that “e-learning certainly has a place in the future curriculum of secondary schools, but there needs to be an awareness that younger students of full-time compulsory school age do need training in using e-learning materials and developing independent learning skills” (p. 17).

Another pre-pandemic study by DiPietro et al. (2008) focused on virtual schools in the state of Michigan, in which the authors interviewed 16 virtual school teachers to gain some insight into best practices for virtual schooling. DiPietro et al. conducted interviews using a set of probing questions and then set out to analyze their data by coding the data, using a constant comparative method, theoretical sampling, and then finally by conducting some data synthesis with the participant responses. DiPietro et al. found that some of the general characteristics of strong virtual teaching included teachers with increased access and availability to assist struggling students, teachers who possessed basic technology skills, teachers interested in exploring new technologies, teachers who were able to flex their time, teachers with a deep understanding of the way their students learn, teachers with strong organizational skills, and teachers with a high level of content-area knowledge for the subject area in which they taught. DiPietro et al. also attempted to find trend data for classroom management strategies, pedagogical strategies, student engagement strategies, strategies for making the course content more meaningful to students, providing student support to struggling students, various uses of

technology, and communication strategies. The figure shows some of the overarching trends that were identified for successful virtual teaching by DiPietro et al. The research team did note that some of the limitations from their research could include the fact that they focused their interviews on exemplary virtual teachers, the lack of research that currently existed in the area of technological pedagogical strategies, and a lack of clear definitions for success within the field of virtual teaching.

Figure*Virtual Teaching Strategies*

Teaching Strategy	Description What does it look like?	Implication(s) for Teachers
Student Support / Teacher Availability	Successful virtual teachers found creative ways to provide additional support to struggling students	<p>Teachers must have a strong sense of what their students can and cannot do</p> <p>Ability to analyze student data and identify areas of support and/or trends</p> <p>Additional time spent reaching out to students based on the student's availability</p> <p>Motivate students through consistent communication and availability</p>
Technology Skills & Development	Virtual teachers must possess a basic understanding of the technology used for teaching and a desire to grow their own knowledge of technological best practices	<p>Training in technology platforms and tools</p> <p>Research of technology-based approaches to instruction</p>
Varied Approaches to Content Delivery	Virtual teachers must be able to present material in a variety of ways to meet the individual needs and/or learning strategies of each student	<p>Teachers need a strong sense of each student's strengths and weaknesses</p> <p>Teachers must be flexible in their approaches to delivering virtual content</p>
Strong Organizational Skills	Teachers must possess strategies and/or structures for maintaining class records, logging student activity, and monitoring student progress	<p>Teachers must provide virtual learners with quick and meaningful feedback</p> <p>Teachers must maintain up-to-date assignments and grades to ensure student progress</p>

Content Area Expertise	Virtual teachers must have a strong understanding of the content they are teaching	Ability to effectively communicate with students in a variety of ways (video, email, messages, etc.) Understanding of common misconceptions when new content is being taught – to assist in student questioning and provide support strategies for struggling learners
Build Relationships with Students	Virtual teachers must find creative ways to get to know their students as they are often not given the opportunity of face-to-face interactions	Spend time interacting with students virtually (messages, emails, phone calls, chats, etc.)

DiPietro et al. (2008).

A meta-analysis conducted by Cavanaugh et al. (2004) looked at over 100 effect sizes for 14 different K-12 distance education programs. Cavanaugh et al. found that “distance education can have the same effect on measures of student academic achievement when compared to traditional instruction” (p. 4). Cavanaugh et al. also noted that though there was evidence to support the comparable success rate of distance education, there was still a great need for further research in the area of virtual schooling. Recommendations included gaining consensus around the goals of virtual education, in terms of whether virtual schooling was to serve as a replacement for in-person learning or as something that is offered in addition to school-based instruction. Cavanaugh et al. noted a need for additional data around programmatic outcomes for distance learning opportunities as well as a need to increase the amount of research taking place to determine best practices for distance learning (and teaching).

Best Practices for Remote Instruction

The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close their doors and asked teachers to reexamine their practices for delivery of instruction. This was an especially difficult task for K-12 educators as they were asked to embark on a journey to determine how to best meet their student's educational needs through remote instruction. While there exists a good amount of research and resources for successful strategies to teach online in higher education settings (colleges, universities, and some high school programs), the pandemic presented a new challenge to most K-12 teachers.

Daniel (2020) wrote recommendations to school leaders, school boards, and teachers for preparing to educate during the COVID-19 pandemic in his Viewpoint article. The article includes guidance for school system preparations, needs for students across the K-12 continuum, messaging to parents, approaches to remote learning, recommendations for curricula and assessment, resources, and next steps. Daniel recommended teachers take advantage of the asynchronous approaches to learning and teaching. In other words, it can be beneficial for both students and teachers to work out their own best schedule. Teachers can post content and/or create lessons that are delivered asynchronously, and students have the opportunity to complete work on their own time and at their desired pace.

Grandits and Wagle (2021) set out to examine best practices for remote instruction and student engagement across all levels of education. Grandits and Wagle focused on one exemplary teacher and her experience with transitioning from in-person instruction to remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Grandits and Wagle noted some of the unique challenges that were presented as teachers

made the transition to teaching online. These included a knowledge of privacy laws, strategies for engaging students online, responses to excessive absenteeism, legal considerations like copyright or accessibility, and the importance of developing digital citizenship skills in students. Some of the primary considerations Grandits and Wagle identified included the development of a consistent remote instructional routine for students, the reinforcement and understanding of online etiquette/expectations for remote learning, the ability of the teacher to adapt to technology-based tools, and the availability/accessibility of technology and connectivity for students. Additionally, Grandits and Wagle noted that one of the major challenges teachers faced through the transition to remote learning was finding effective ways to engage all students in an online lesson while also measuring student learning and providing students feedback. The use of a Google extension, Peardeck, allowed this English/language arts teacher an opportunity to assess students learning while also providing private feedback to students throughout the lesson. In the interviews reported by Grandits and Wagle, the teacher provided the following description of how Peardeck enhanced her online lessons:

As was usually the case when Peardeck was used, students were extremely engaged and motivated to participate in the lesson. Besides being “fun,” Peardeck was an outstanding way to gauge student understanding of a concept. Every student responded to every question. Student responses could be kept private or could be shared with the entire class. Students were excited to share their work. It was common for students to learn something from each other’s interpretations. (p. 120)

Garbe et al. (2020) conducted a review of parent experiences during the COVID-

19 pandemic as it relates to their children's difficulties in managing remote learning. Garbe et al. found that while most of the parents they spoke to were satisfied with the level of teaching and support that was being provided, many reported they had difficulties in the areas of balancing responsibilities, motivating their child, developing independence, and accessibility. Parents reported difficulty in managing their own work responsibilities while also supporting their children in accessing online learning opportunities. Garbe et al. provided some key next steps for the effective implementation of remote teaching and learning at the K-12 level. These include the need for effective home-to-school communication, quality internet access and/or technology hardware, a consistent method or location for the presentation of lessons/materials, and increased feedback regarding student progress.

Summary

As research continues to be conducted on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, NPOs will play a critical role. The efforts of NPOs that can maintain focus on their missions to better the community will likely shine brightly. Partnerships between NPOs and schools can help to alleviate any lingering issues as we return to normalcy from the COVID-19 pandemic. Research indicates that effective nonprofit leadership, an unending focus on mission and values, and strong partnerships will best serve the educational community.

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