**CONSULTING REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This consulting partnership was between Allison Rozwat, a senior Computer Science major at Carnegie Mellon University and Susan Orr, the Community Partner and Director of Marketing and Communications at the Girl Scouts Trillium Council (GSTC). GSTC is located in downtown Pittsburgh. Their forty employees act as the headquarters, for three Girl Scout chapters in the Western Pennsylvania Alliance. They manage administration, membership, and programming, and marketing. At GSTC, every employee is equipped with their own computer, and uses at least the Microsoft Office applications. They have a Microsoft Access database called Master Trak which is in the process of being upgraded by the organization’s IT Manager. GSTC also has a website that is a sub-website of the Girl Scouts of Western Pennsylvania’s Regional Alliance website. The website was originally designed and created by Pipit one, a web-development company in Pittsburgh. It is maintained by an outside volunteer. Update requests are emailed to this volunteer; no one in the organization knows how to update the website. The consulting task we chose was to teach the Community Partner how to update the Trillium Council’s website, bringing the management of the website in-house. Susan is now able to edit the content of existing webpages on the site, and she is also able to add entirely new pages. The consultant and Community Partner thought this was a worthwhile endeavor because GSTC’s members, volunteers, and donors will be able to rely on the website as an accurate source for current news and information. In the past, updates happened slowly because they had to be sent outside the organization. If the website is reliable and current, they are more likely to reach more girls to enroll in their programs, and enrich their programs by attracting more donors and volunteers to run them. The future recommendations are for GSTC to create a structured training program for technology so that employees can utilize the organization’s technology to it’s fullest potential, and write a technology plan to help the organization understand and plan for how technology can help further their mission in the future.

**I. About the Organization**

**Organization**

Girl Scouts of the USA is the world’s preeminent organization dedicated solely to girls where, in an accepting and nurturing environment, girls build character and skills for success in the real world. In partnership with committed adult volunteers, girls develop qualities that will serve them all their lives, like leadership, strong values, social conscience, and conviction about their own potential and self-worth. The Girl Scouts were founded in 1912 and their national headquarters are in New York City. Girl Scouts - Trillium Council (GSTC) is located in downtown Pittsburgh on Liberty Avenue. The (GSTC) headquarters currently is part of Girl Scouts of Western Pennsylvania Regional Alliance, which includes three councils throughout western Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia; however, a national reorganization will occur within the next year. The new western Pennsylvania council will include two more councils, and will serve girls as far north as the New York border, as far west as Bedford, west to the Ohio border, and south to the West Virginia border. Currently, Girl Scouts – Trillium Council supports about 22,000 girl members and 6,000 adult. The mission of the Girl Scouts is:

Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place.

**Facilities**

GSTC occupies the 6th and 7th floor of their building, as well as the basement for the Girl Scout merchandise store and “Resource Center.” They have a conference room on the 6th floor where meetings are held and a kitchen.

**Programs**

The Girl Scouts run service and educational programs for girls ranging from grades K-12, which vary by age group. Some examples of their programs include: daytime and overnight camps, craft projects, outdoor activities, a planetarium trip, a trip to Carnegie Mellon University to learn problem solving skills, “Winter-palooza,” chocolate cooking classes, service projects with Alpha Phi Omega, a service-oriented fraternity at Carnegie Mellon, and an entrepreneurship workshop. The troop leaders who run the programs are volunteers and usually parents of Girl Scouts. The troop leaders do not have offices or work in the Liberty Avenue building of the Trillium Council. The members are organized into community-based Girl Scout troops at five age levels:

**Staff**

There are about 40 employees working at the Girl Scouts - Trillium Council. The staff includes all age groups, and is predominantly female. The organization is consists of twelve departments, including Marketing and Communications, which is where Susan Orr works. Susan is the Community Partner with whom I am working most closely. She is the Director of Marketing and Communications. She has been with GSTC since January 2000 and was a Girl Scout herself. Their IT Manager, Rob, works with GSTC on Thursdays and Fridays of each week. He divides his time between GSTC and the other Girl Scout of Western Pennsylvania Regional Alliance councils. In addition to the leadership of the CEO, the Trillium Council has a board of directors. On the council level, there is a management team that includes directors, assistant directors, the Chief Operating Officer and the Chief Development Officer. There are committees that meet regularly, such as the finance committee, as well as various other planning committees. Depending on the structure of those committees, communication occurs via email, mailings, newsletters, phone calls and meetings.

**Technical Environment**

Each staff member is equipped with a computer that runs Microsoft Windows and Microsoft Office. Most of the machines were just replaced this year. All have been replaced within the last five years. The Windows File Sharing system allows resources to be shared via the F:\ drive of any employee’s computer. They use a DSL Internet connection and every employee has a phone at their desk. Their website is actually a sub-website of their regional alliance’s website, so they have to continue to use

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Their hosting company, Apollo Servers. Their website was originally designed and created by a company in Pittsburgh called Pipit one. It is maintained by an outside volunteer who also maintains several other chapter websites belonging to the same Western Pennsylvania alliance. Macromedia Dreamweaver is used for all website maintenance. The Trillium Council owns one digital camera, six printers, one color printer, one fax, two projectors, five GPS units, and two copiers. Finally, they have a Microsoft Access database called Master Track. It is accessible as read-only to all administrative employees except the Registrar, who maintains and administers it.

**Technical Management**

Most employees are comfortable with the basic Microsoft Office applications. The IT manager is onsite 2 days a week, so his time is limited. He has been with the organization since 2000 and is currently preparing for an upgrade of the database, which will be accessible online with SQL backend from a Microsoft Access Database. This transition will begin within the next few months. He maintains the current database and also helps the employees troubleshoot their technology problems. These problems range anywhere from working on more complex database problems to setting up hardware to helping an employee troubleshoot a simple problem in Microsoft Outlook. He does not work on the website. Update requests for the website are emailed to the outside volunteer to execute. Debbie Waksmunski, the Registrar is experienced with technology and shows enthusiasm in learning new programs and applications. She is well versed with Master Track and runs the technology training for new hires. She also wrote the manual for Master Track that each employee receives when they join. The national Girl Scouts organization does not provide any technology support, guidelines, or funding, they only provide branding guidelines.

**Technology Planning**

There is no formal technology plan. The organization has short-term goals in mind for pieces of their technologies, but there is no long-term planning. There is no committee responsible for technology planning. The IT Manager directly to the CEO and also reports to Susan, and they approve all technology decisions. There is money in the budget allocated for technology; this year, there is a large technology budget that is committed to the database upgrade.

**Internal and External Communication**

Files are shared through the F:\ drive on the organization’s local area network. It has two folders, a folder meant for temporary exchanges and another folder for reports. The employees depend on email, mail, the telephone and their website for communication. They also have a monthly e-newsletter that goes out to members, volunteers and donors. Since no one within the organization knows how to update the website, it has not been the most reliable tool for external communications. They keep a master calendar in Microsoft Outlook.

**Information Management**

The Access database stores contact information for 22,000 girls. It also stores their schools, parents, troop leaders, volunteers, employers, training, insurance, locations for events, and program information, as well as an accounting system to manage the Girl Scout merchandise store, the money from the programs, as well as for the expenses of the organization. It is backed up every day. The database is setup as read-only to all employees except the Registrar, IT manager and CEO, who all have full access and administrative permissions. The data is mostly current, but not necessarily reliable because there is a delay on data input. Since many employees are not comfortable using the database, the Registrar finds it easier to print out many of her reports and keep them in binders in her office. These are referred to as “quick and dirty” reports. They are quick because it is more effective for most employees to retrieve the information they need from a hard copy rather than to find it in the database. They are dirty because the data is frequently outdated.

**Business Systems**

Accounting is done in Master Track. During the training we did not look at the accounting system, but this is because it is mostly used by the employees who work in the store.

**II. Update the Website**

The website was launched in 2000; since that time, a part-time webmaster has been hired at a minimal cost to assist with the updates several hours a month. The webmaster is also a Girl Scout volunteer, so she has charged the council an extremely nominal fee. However, due to the lack of funding and manpower, the website has become disorganized and convoluted. Volunteers, donors, and potential members are not getting the current information they need, which is not as easily accessible through other means. There is an overwhelming amount of information on the website, so it the simple task of looking up a phone number, for example, can be difficult and frustrating. By enabling GSTC to update and reorganize the website independently, they will be able to more effectively use the website as a tool for public relations. If the information is current, their public can rely on the website for news and information. They will be able to reach more girls, volunteers and donors, increasing enrollment and thus improving their programs which enables them to further their mission.

**Expected Outcomes**

Together we will design a new layout with Susan on paper. A simple, usable, and attractive design is essential to any successful website. This will be a major portion of the work, and probably also the biggest area of controversy and oversight. The staff members have varying opinions about how the website should look and what information it should contain, which could be a sign of enthusiasm and a source of feedback. It will be helpful to have a goal product in mind before we start coding. We can measure the new design’s appeal through user testing. The first step would be to research web development programs and select a product to use. This might be difficult because of cost and product support. Finding an affordable program that is usable to Susan will be the test of whether or not we are successful here.

Then finally we will actually use the application we choose to update and edit the website. This is nontrivial, but hopefully we will have planned well enough that Susan is mostly learning the software and actually implementing what we envisioned rather than designing as we go. She will keep a journal as she learns to reference in the future when necessary.

The success of the website can be measured by overall hits. Through effective communication online, the number of girls enrolled in programs and the number of volunteers will hopefully increase, and this can easily be counted.

**Additional Impacts**

Teaching Susan how to create and update the website will improve her web development and overall computing skills. I also want to make sure that Susan can teach other employees within the organization to update the website for small changes such as editing a date or a phone number. This will impact their programs because information will be current and reliable on the website, improving their external communication.

**Feasibility**

The main concerns I have are the expense of a web development application, as well as the time it will take to successfully teach Susan to use our selected web development tool. If we cannot afford the proper software, the feasibility of the project is significantly lower because programming a website is tedious and can also be very intimidating with no prior experience. Regardless of whether or not we are able to find such an application, I have used Macromedia Dreamweaver before, and I have also done HTML coding without a web development application, so I am fairly confident that we can at least make a website that can be updated by the employees there. I am hopeful that it will be at the level of sophistication that they want. Susan seems very committed and eager to get started on the project, but the website should be sustainable after I leave, so Susan is going to have to be very proactive about learning to use the web development application. She will be keeping notes as she is learning so she will be able to easily refer back to them if she has a problem. She can also use the IT Manager as a resource because he is very knowledgeable, but simply only has time to handle the database. It is important that Susan spreads her new knowledge across the organization so the staff is not dependent on her, and also teaching is a successful method of reinforcing new knowledge.

1. **Outcomes and Recommendations**

**Outcomes**

The CP now uses Macromedia Dreamweaver with confidence to edit the content of existing pages of the website. By sitting together with Susan to make changes to the website, she has learned the basic functions of Dreamweaver. She has updated pages that are currently part of the existing website by:

* Editing textual content
* Changing the font and formatting of text
* Inserting and manipulating pictures
* Inserting and manipulating tables
* Inserting links to other pages
* Inserting links to documents

She also has uploaded the changes to the server twice with the consultant present. The home page of the website has a direct link to a “Newsroom” page, which will need regular textual updates. Together, the CP and consultant practiced updating the content of the “Newsroom” page and the CP added three press releases to it on her own. She has also begun to restructure the website’s hierarchy. The “Newsroom” page had an extra link that went to another page called “Press Releases.” The “Press Releases” page was empty. Susan decided to put all of her content on the “Newsroom” page, so she removed the link to “Press Releases” from the “Newsroom” page and redirected the other links that were affected by this change. This new data hierarchy makes it easier and faster to find information on the website. There is one fewer level to the hierarchy now, so is one fewer page to navigate through to get to any press releases. This is also a more intuitive interface because all of the news information is on one page. The CP did this with help from the Consultant. The CP has not yet had the opportunity to experiment with changing links on her own. This outcome that the CP can edit the webpage’s content, even on a simple, textual level is critical to the organization because now the public can rely on the website for current news and information. The CP and consultant have been adding to an instruction manual all throughout the teaching process for each new procedure the CP has learned. The CP refers back to this manual when she cannot remember how to do something. She looks up the steps she used to complete the same process when she and the consultant did it together, which has made it easier to practice what she has learned on her own. The CP has used her manual to instruct another employee in the Programs department how to make a simple textual edit to a page of the website. That employee was able to successfully edit a program title on the “Activities” page, with help from the CP.

Before the consulting partnership began, the website was primarily maintained by an outside volunteer, Theresa Miller. Terri receives $300 per month – a minimal fee – for updating the website. Although she diligently works on the site, it is not her primary and only responsibility; therefore

updates occur when her schedule allows. No one within the organization has been capable to make the extensive changes themselves. Now, the employees at the Girl Scout -Trillium Council have the tools to update the website on their own. Fortunately, Terri is still available and willing to help with larger changes that GSTC does not have the time or expertise for. The advantage of enabling the employees to update the website in-house is that they can keep the content up to date at their own volition. This makes the website a much better tool to reach their public. Members, volunteers, and donors will be able to rely on the website as an accurate source for news and information about GSTC. An important outcome not yet observed is good troubleshooting. Susan has been able to ask me for help so far, so when she spends more time experimenting on her own, she will have to get used to utilizing other troubleshooting resources. The CP will be able to continue making website updates after the partnership is over because she has practiced updating the “Newsroom” page and has been able to upload them to the server on her own. She has expressed enthusiasm about the addition of this page and its potential to expand her capacity and effectiveness as Communication Director. The “Newsroom” page will require weekly or even daily changes, so she will have plenty of opportunities to practice and keep her skills fresh. The CP also has the manual in case she forgets how to do something. If she makes a mistake and cannot fix it, the IT Manager is onsite two days a week, and he has enough knowledge and experience in web development that he will be able to help. In addition to the IT Manager, Theresa has extensive knowledge about the website since she created it. She will still be available to the organization in case the IT Manager and CP encounter a problem they cannot solve. The risk that the CP and consultant were most worried about before the training began was that the CP could fall behind in updating the “Newsroom” page. In order to prevent this, the CP and consultant redesigned the “Newsroom” page to be a template that has the same format as the CP’s press releases. This way, all the CP has to do is copy and paste the text of the press release right into the webpage and then upload it to the server. In practice, the CP has been able to complete this in less than fifteen minutes; this it is a quick and simple edit. The other risk is that the employees at the Girl Scouts will now send their website updates to the CP instead of Theresa rather than learning how to make updates themselves. If employees are passing their updates on to the CP, the speed at which

changes are made will probably not really improve. There is no policy in place to tell employees what to do here, but this is why the CP has begun teaching others how to make simple, textual changes to the website while the consultant is still working there. Our goal is for employees to be able to make changes themselves. The consultant has made make sure that the CP is teaching other employees correctly, and is facilitating these sessions so that at least some other employees know how to update the website before the partnership is over. Finally, the last significant risk would be if Susan were to leave the organization before teaching very many people how to update the website. The most likely outcome of this is the Trillium Council would just return to their previous process of website updating.

**Consulting Task 1 Outcome: Webpage Development**

The CP is now able to use Macromedia Dreamweaver at a more sophisticated level to create additional pages for the website. She has created two new pages by:

* Creating a menu and properly linking it to pages they are meant to map to
* Creating a new page by copying the structure of old pages and editing the body content
* Inserting and manipulating tables for structure
* Inserting and manipulating a template for a consistent structure throughout

The CP created two new pages for the website with assistance from the consultant. Later, on her own time, the CP created another new page, but she did not upload it to the server. Since the CP has not had the opportunity to practice creating a new page more than once, I anticipate that she will continue to decrease her time to create each page without assistance as she practices and becomes more comfortable with Dreamweaver. Exploring other, more advanced features of Dreamweaver, the CP came up with the idea to add a web-album to the website. She has begun researching web-albums but has not yet had the opportunity to incorporate one into the website. However, as the CP practices using Dreamweaver, she is gaining experience and familiarity with the application, as well as its tutorials. In learning how to create entirely new pages, the CP has the increased her capacity to learn new features of the application to make much more drastic changes.

Until now, the website’s design had not been updated since the year 2000.

**Recommendations**

**1. Create Structured Training Program**

Currently, the organization has a Master Trak database that stores information about the members and volunteers of the GSTC and is also used as the accounting system for their Girl Scouts store. Master Trak has a lot of capabilities that most of the employees either do not use or are unaware of. The IT Manager for GSTC spent his time researching which database would fit best with the needs of the organization. Master Trak was also expensive to purchase. If the employees are not using the features that the database was purchased for, it was a waste of both time and money. Structured training sessions held regularly would encourage the employees to learn to use this technology to its fullest potential.

**Rationale**

The current technology-training program at GSTC occurs only when an employee is a new hire. Their orientation into the organization is usually about three days long, which is also when the new hires receive their technology training. The content of the orientation varies depending on which department and position the employee is entering, but the technology training, however, is the same for any employee.

The employee attends a session taught by Debbie, the organization’s Registrar. During this session Debbie opens their database on her laptop, which is connected to a projector. She runs through a series of examples, showing the new hire how to retrieve different records.

**Suggestions**

The training sessions should be regularly blocked off periods of time during work hours, available to anyone who wants to come. Some of the sessions may have a specific lesson planned, but it is important that one regular session is just for question-and-answer. Debbie does not need to take on the sole responsibility of teaching these sessions. Since Debbie now is the current person to ask technology questions, she is often distracted from her responsibilities to help others. Training sessions would provide a forum just for these types of questions.

Anyone who feels comfortable in the subject matter should also be able to volunteer to teach. If other people occasionally taught a session, this would identify them as a knowledgeable member in a particular area, so the technology questions would gradually diffuse to other members of the organization.

**Risks**

The risk of implementing this teaching program is that the demand will not be high enough, and that people will still go to Debbie for their quick technology questions because it is more convenient for them. Another risk is that Debbie might be the only one able to teach these training sessions, so it would add to her responsibilities, not cut them back.

**2. Create a Technology Plan**

I recommend that the CP work with Rob, the Technology Manager, the CEO, and Debbie to create a technology plan. A technology plan will strengthen and improve the use of technology in the organization.

**Rationale**

A technology plan is a particularly important document to circulate in an organization that is large because without one, the other employees are excluded from technology planning and thus cannot make potentially valuable contributions. The employees who are excluded from technology decisions are the ones who actually use the technology the most. They would certainly have useful and practical input about how technology could help them with their jobs, if they were included. This would consequently further the mission of the organization if employees are able to do their jobs better and more efficiently. The organization is much more likely to attract donors if they have a document outlining how they plan on spending their technology money and why it is needed for that particular purpose. Technology planning will increase general technology awareness and involvement in the organization, as well as help to use staff time efficiently and avoid wasting money on equipment or software that is not needed. Right now, GSTC has no formal technology plan. They have a technology manager, who works on projects for the organization that have been assigned to him by the CEO and the Marketing and Communications Director. Presently, he is working on an upgrade of their database. Few other people in the organization are aware of or involved in what he does. There is no formalized process for employees to give input to the technology changes and often they find out about changes after they have already been made.

TechSoup.org breaks the technology planning process down into seven steps:

1. Establish leadership and support.
2. Assess your resources.
3. Define your needs.
4. Explore solutions.
5. Write the plan.
6. Get funding.
7. Implement the plan.

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It would also be helpful for GSTC if the formalized technology plan includes a job description for each person who plays a role in technology in the organization. This way, employees will know who to approach if they have a problem or want to buy some new software or make some change to the technology at the Girl Scouts.

It should also be circulated to every employee of the Girl Scouts as well as the board of Directors, and possibly even potential donors. The board of directors and donors are much more likely to allocate money for technology if there is an official document outlining what they plan to do with the technology. If money for technology is not needed now, the Trillium Council would still benefit from technology planning. Their technology plan should target the next five to ten years, and in this time period, so even if money is not needed now, the will be able to anticipate when more money will be needed and can begin requesting technology money beforehand.

**Resources**

TechSoup is an excellent resource for technology planning. Some other resources for are included.

**About the Consultant**

Allison Rozwat is a senior Computer Science major at Carnegie Mellon University, with a minor in Business Administration, and serves as the Public Relations Chair and Computer Chair of Kappa Kappa Gamma. She is currently searching for a job in the business management consulting field.

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Allison Rozwat, Student Consultant