

THE BEACON SITE

A Case Study of Communication across Non-profit Organizations in a Coordinated Effort to Build a Purpose-Built Community called Beacon Ridge in SE Raleigh, NC

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Capstone Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctor of Education in Leadership and Learning in Organizations.

April 2021

Nashville, Tennessee



Dedication

I would like to dedicate this Capstone Project to all the loved ones who worked together to make sure that I lived, learned, and thrived in my developmental years. I was raised in Hancock County, GA, the poorest county in the state. An honor student throughout high school, I graduated at 16 and enrolled at Georgia College. Sadly, I had to take remedial math and English courses. My K-12 schools didn't prepare me for college-level work. Considering this, I am proud to have made it this far in life.

My grandparents: John Henry Spikes and Gladys Trawick Spikes raised me on their 150-acre farm. My grandfather (Joe), was a 55-year-old manufacturing plant worker, farmer, and WWII veteran. Gladys (Mull), was a 50-year-old cafeteria worker when they took me in at two years old. My mother, Johnnie Mae Wright-Spain, then divorced my father and proceeded to work two jobs to provide for me while she attended college. Nonetheless, I don't remember anyone reading a book to me until I went to kindergarten. My grandparents loved me very much, but they were both working hard to provide a good life for me and their children.

I'm an only child, but I was blessed with aunts and uncles. My Aunt Rhunette is also my sorority sister. She helped me get through college by sending money for tuition and books. She was my inspiration for attending college because she graduated from Paine College in Augusta, GA with a degree in Chemistry in 1976. My Aunt Shearlene ironed my clothes for school, even after she married and moved out with her husband, UL. Shearlene loved me and cared for me like I was her child. She graduated from Georgia College later in life while working full-time. My Uncles Gus and Matthew were a source of amusement for me growing up; they also loved me. And then there's my uncle William. I'd like to thank William for keeping me on the straight and narrow. He drove me, (well, I actually drove while he shifted the gears) to 4-H camp, picked me up after football games, and taught me how to handle the maintenance on my first car.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Booker for taking me in and leading me to the completion of this project. You believed in me and I truly appreciate it. Thanks to the staff of DHIC for working with me on this very important project: Drs. Yolanda Winstead, Natalie Britt, Yvette Holmes, and LaTonya McKoy. I would especially like to thank Dr. Holmes for agreeing to sign on as my partner agency. I am eternally grateful to LaTonya for the countless hours she spent talking to me, putting me in contact with DHIC's partner agencies, and indulging my random questions on nights and weekends. I would also like to thank all the participants who sat for an interview. A special shout out to my friend of more than 15 years, Southeast Raleigh champion and former Obama Political Consultant, Courtney Crowder!

Thanks to my husband George and my daughter Torrey Maya. Torrey, you have delighted me since the day we welcomed you into the world. Having gained all of my degrees since your birth in 1993, I hope I have made you half as proud as you have made me. As you prepare to sit for the Tennessee Bar, please know that I am honored to call you 'My One and Only!' George, you are the love of my life and my best friend, I not have done this without you. I truly appreciate your willingness to read and edit the countless papers required during this three-and-a-half-year process. You have been extremely patient and supportive. You have taken care of our household while I finished this doctorate. I look forward to having more time to spend with you on nights and weekends so we can continue our never-ending slumber party!

Finally, I thank you Cohorts 2 and 3. You rock!

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Executive Summary

A year ago, I started this project with the goal of investigating how gentrification in Raleigh, North Carolina was impacting the South East Raleigh neighborhood and my nonprofit partner, the Downtown Housing Investment Corporation or DHIC. I struggled to determine how to shape a meaningful project on the topic of gentrification. After several conversations with my advisor, we both determined that the most pressing challenge for my staff contact at DHIC was her inability to reach the partners in the Beacon Site project because of communication challenges that arose as the world began to face COVID-19 in early 2020. This staff member was constantly reaching out and trying to schedule meetings, but she was getting nowhere. After much discussion, we decided to conduct research to determine if and how COVID-19 was impacting communication for each of the partners and stakeholders of the Beacon Site project.

Obrenovia et Al. (2000) developed the framework that guided this study called: “Enterprise Effectiveness and Sustainability Model (EESM) during a Pandemic.” This framework combines organizational effectiveness with elements that are critical during crisis communication events. The six components of the theoretical framework include: (a) networked structure, (b) supply chain resilience, (c) organizational culture, (d) distributed leadership, (e) digitalization and information and communication technology (ICT), and (f) financial contingency planning. The framework was used to help design the research questions that guided this study.

The research questions that were addressed are as follows:

R1. What crisis response strategies from the “Enterprise Effectiveness and Sustainability Model” framework did DHIC use or omit to communicate with Beacon Site partners and stakeholders during the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic?

R2. How did the interagency communication during COVID-19 impact DHIC's ability to serve its residents?

R3. What are the current and likely future barriers to effective communication among partners and stakeholders?

The study revealed that there were significant challenges related to communication because of some of the changes that COVID-19 ushered into the situation. For example, several partners reported that they found in-person communication was more effective than Zoom or other digital platforms. In fact, some of the partners noted that they needed to meet with people multiple times via Zoom to gain the effectiveness that they would have experienced during a face-to-face, in-person meeting. Empirical findings are laid out in detail at the end of this document.

There were several recommendations made as a result of this research. The recommendations were

1. Take partner meetings offline that adhere to changing meeting space guidelines.
2. Implement creative uses of digitized communications.
3. Implement and follow project management protocols.
4. Seek funding for a Broadband pilot project at the Beacon Site.
5. Work with Congressman David Price to submit a Community Project Funding (earmark) request.

Introduction

The first and only African American Mayor of Raleigh, North Carolina, Clarence Lightner, was instrumental in the founding of the Downtown Housing Investment Corporation (DHIC) in 1974. The organization was created to address the challenge of substandard housing in Southeast (SE) Raleigh. At that time, SE Raleigh was inhabited mostly by African-Americans; the same remains true in 2021. SE Raleigh is being challenged by the onslaught of new development being built around the community. The mission of the DHIC is to support individuals, families, and seniors by providing homes and opportunities that promote the financial, physical, and mental well-being of people and communities. Since its inception, the DHIC built or renovated more than 2,700 rental apartment homes across nine counties to provide affordable homes for seniors, families, and individuals. The DHIC purports to be the most experienced and active nonprofit housing development organization in the region.

The City of Raleigh, like many urban areas across the nation, is experiencing gentrification. SE Raleigh has historically been inhabited largely by African Americans and poor people, but the rising cost of housing is driving out long-time residents. SE Raleigh is also the only area of the city that still has large swaths of open land for development. Since 2001, high-tech industries, like Red Hat and Pendo, have located their headquarters in downtown Raleigh, which is only a few miles from the location of the Beacon Site project.

The partners in the project discussed in this capstone are all nonprofits: the SE Raleigh Promise, YMCA of the Triangle, and DHIC. Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) is also a partner in this endeavor, although they were not available to participate in this study. Together, the group decided to call the location where the school, the YMCA, and the new apartments (Beacon Ridge) would be located, “the Beacon Site.”

Gentrification is a problem that has been discussed widely throughout the country and in various ways. Building affordable housing is a challenge being faced by individuals in communities across this nation. In fact, cities throughout the country, relentlessly, have attempted to devise ways to address housing affordability and gentrification, which are often related. Community leaders tend to welcome development of previously blighted areas. Developers seek areas where they can purchase available land to develop housing projects that will be profitable. Often, those parcels are in blighted areas close to the downtown core of cities where they can revitalize struggling communities. Although community leaders tend to welcome revitalization, this type of growth and development can cause challenges for long-time residents who cannot afford to remain in their homes because of the increase in property value. Cities like Austin, TX; Washington, DC; San Francisco, CA; Nashville, TN; and others, are all communities in which Black and Brown residents have been pushed out of their communities as a result of gentrification and the lack of decent, affordable housing. This was the challenge that DHIC and its nonprofit partners were attempting to address by building the Beacon Site.

In 2011, the DHIC added a Vice President of Resource Development and Partnerships position that was charged with broadening the organization's outreach. One of the ways to increase its outreach was to partner with other community agencies. To that end, DHIC entered the Beacon Site partnership in 2016, with the above listed nonprofits in the Raleigh area to collaborate on a project with the goal of making improvements in the area negatively impacted by Urban Renewal (a federal government initiative that negatively impacted several families in SE Raleigh and cities throughout the nation).

Disinvestment is also a longstanding issue in SE Raleigh. On a webpage called, "The State of History," North Carolina State University professors outline issues in SE Raleigh and

the lack of decent and affordable housing going back to the 1960s. The webpage specifically mentioned the negative impacts that Urban Renewal created for African Americans in SE Raleigh. In his New York Times bestseller of 2007, Richard Rothstein, the highly celebrated author of “The Color of Law” spoke emphatically about how the Director of the Federal Division of Slum Clearance justified the use of federal funds to tear down black neighborhoods to replace them with housings for whites (Rothstein, 2017).

Courtney Crowder is a life-long resident of SE Raleigh. After reviewing disturbing test results from Wake County Public Schools for the SE Raleigh area, he realized that something had to be done for the children of SE Raleigh. Dexter Hebert, Executive Director of the SE Raleigh YMCA, saw the same results and was spurred into action. Hebert reached out to Courtney, who was on the YMCA of the Triangle’s Board of Directors, in the mid-2000s. The investigation that followed led to the creation of the Beacon Site effort.

As previously mentioned, DHIC’s partners for this project include YMCA of the Triangle, Wake County Public Schools, and SE Raleigh Promise. In 2019, the YMCA opened the SE Raleigh location, and WCPSS opened the SE Raleigh Elementary School at the Beacon Site. The Beacon Site partnership received \$4.6 million in support from the City of Raleigh as part of their commitment to keeping SE Raleigh affordable. At the site is Beacon Ridge, a 120-unit affordable housing apartment complex.

The project and its partners are attempting to begin the work of decreasing generational poverty in SE Raleigh. The website of SE Raleigh Promise advises that there are 29,000 residents in their Area of Impact (AOI). Almost 8,000 of the people who live in the AOI are children and 54% of those children are experiencing poverty. Additionally, the website points

Organizational Context

The DHIC provides several services to the citizens of Raleigh, the Triangle Region (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill), and the State of North Carolina as a whole. The DHIC is primarily a low-income housing provider that offers low-income citizens safe and affordable communities in which to live. The organization includes a variety of housing types such as single family homes, rental housing, supportive housing, and so forth. Supportive housing units are designed for people with disabilities or individuals who have a criminal record, have reentered the free world, and are trying to work and make a decent living. The DHIC also provides home buyer education for people who want to purchase their first homes (single family, townhouses, or condominiums).

Funding for affordable housing projects come from the North Carolina Low-Income Housing Tax Credits provided by the North Carolina Housing Finance Association. The DHIC also receives funding from Neighborworks America. According to the website, Neighborworks is a congressionally chartered and funded nonpartisan nonprofit agency that provides funding for affordable housing, training for its 240 partner agencies, and a technical assistant to make certain these agencies are making investments in their communities through grants. According to the Neighborworks website, in 2019, the Neighborworks network members reported \$9.65 billion of investment in their member communities

The DHIC is a relatively small nonprofit agency, which employs 21 people who work out of an office in downtown Raleigh. The organization once was led by a long-term president, Gregg Warren, who was employed with the agency for more than 34 years. Warren was a housing legend in the Triangle. The new President, Yolanda Winstead, has more than 20 years of experience in affordable housing and housing financing. Winstead previously was employed with DHIC in the 90s and was groomed by Warren to succeed him. There are two other female

Vice Presidents, for a total of four women in senior executive roles in the organization. Within the DHIC, there are staff members dedicated to a Homeownership Center in which they provide training for residents interested in learning how to qualify for a home loan. The other staff members serve, in the most part, within construction, accounting, community services, information technology, and asset management.

As for the Beacon Site, project stakeholders play a variety of roles in this endeavor. The YMCA purchased the land in which the Beacon Site project is located. WCPSS runs SE Raleigh Elementary School, which is located next to the YMCA. The project manager or lead agency is called SE Raleigh Promise. This organization was created for the sole purpose of supporting the Beacon Site project. SE Raleigh Promise is led by a SE Raleigh native, Kia Baker, who has many years of nonprofit experience with several agencies in the Triangle. Table 1 includes a list of nonprofit and for-profit partners and interviewees.

Table 1

List of Nonprofit and For-Profit Partners and Interviewees

List of Nonprofit and for-Profit Partners and Interviewees

- The YMCA of the Triangle
 - Wake County Public School System
 - Southeast Raleigh Promise (SERP)
 - Resources for Seniors
 - The Kaleidoscope Project – Wake County
 - Community Management Corporation
-

The project was built around three pillars(a) the SE Raleigh YMCA, (b) SE Raleigh Elementary School, and (c) the low-income, affordable housing apartments. The school and the YMCA opened before the 120 apartment units at Beacon Ridge. The late opening resulted from the lack of funding because the DHIC did not receive the tax credits needed to start the project the first time they applied. There is a tremendous amount of competition for tax credits from agencies throughout the state. To be eligible for the tax credit, development owners have to agree to keep the units in the development affordable, from 15 to 30 years. This program benefits individuals with incomes at or below 80% of the median area where the builder is developing.

The delay created some contention. At least two of the Beacon Site partners felt that DHIC was not prioritizing the Beacon Site project when they learned that the apartments would not open at the same time as the other components of the project. Yet, the partner simply did not understand how the funding for the apartments was structured. The DHIC routinely applies for NC Tax Credits. The partners thought that the DHIC had not moved the project forward because they were more interested in other projects. This confusion could have been avoided had DHIC explained tax credits and the process by which they had to be obtained at a high level. In fact, the organization should have shared its entire funding plan with the partners. Perhaps by doing so, it would have spared itself the backlash of having a major partner not understand why it had not moved forward with building the 120 units. It was not because DHIC had a different goal, nor was it that the project was not important. The challenge was literally that it did not have the funding to start construction. A meeting with the impacted stakeholders could have help with this issue. This particular communication challenge manifested well before COVID.

The goal of the Beacon Site project is to improve the lives of the residents that live on the Beacon Site: the children attending school at SE Raleigh Elementary, and those attending the after-school to learn about health and wellness at the SE Raleigh YMCA. In a one pager found

on the SE Raleigh Promise website called, “The Area of Impact,” the partners outlined their theory of action in this way, “We work to transform our neighborhood to support healthy families who raise healthy children, who then grown into healthy young adults. Eliminating intergenerational poverty is long-term work. It will take a least one generation (18-25 years to measure the true impact of this work.” (<https://serpromise.org/area-of-impact/#>)

The stakeholders sought this project to make a difference in the community because of the indicators that they had measured in SE Raleigh through the years. C. Crowder and D. Hebert (personal communication, December 20, 2020), along with board members from DHIC and the YMCA, traveled to Eastlake, Georgia and other cities throughout the nation to view a new type of community known as A Purpose-Built Community. The most successful Purpose-Built Community Model at the time the stakeholders were formulating plans for transforming the SE Raleigh community was in East Lake. Per the Purpose-Built Community website (n.d.), prior to being transformed, East Lake Meadows suffered very similar ills as those in SE Raleigh. The website noted,

Crime in the neighborhood was 18 times higher than the national average. Nearly 60 percent of adults were receiving public assistance, and only 13 percent were employed. A mere 5 percent of fifth graders were hitting state academic performance targets. (Add source date, and page number)

East Lake is one of the oldest of the 19 or so Purpose-Built Communities in the United States; the Beacon Site is one of those communities.

Problem of Practice

The partners in this study are seeking to build community beyond the bricks and mortar that will be constructed on the Beacon Site. Meeting this goal will require the DHIC and partners to work collaboratively with the residents of Beacon Ridge.

The DHIC developed a resident survey and administered it in October, 2020, for the 80 plus residents who had moved into the apartments. As of this writing, all of the 120 apartment units were occupied. Residents selected were called via the phone numbers listed on their leases. The DHIC offered a \$10 Food Lion gift card to encourage participation in the survey. This survey enabled the DHIC to understand the needs of the residents as they began their lives at Beacon Ridge. After the survey was processed, the staff at the DHIC looked to new and existing community partners and nonprofits to offer support to their residents.

During the pandemic, the DHIC experienced a significant challenge, which was communicating with the new residents of Beacon Ridge and its external partners. The DHIC built several affordable housing properties since the 1980. During this time, the DHIC developed a standard process for reaching out to potential residents for each of their new properties. As a result of COVID-19, DHIC was unable to conduct their normal outreach to potential lessees. \ According to LaTonya McCoy, Community Services Coordinator, potential residents were contacted to participate in information sessions, but this did not happen due to COVID-19 (L. McCoy personal communication, November, 11, 2020). McCoy explained that DHIC would have reached out also to all of the stakeholders in this partnership to seek potential residents, including the teachers and parents from the SE Raleigh Elementary School, employees of YMCA, employees of DHIC, and those employed by SE Raleigh Promise.

In this study, I investigated the latest research to help the DHIC develop ways to sustain their business operations during the time of a pandemic. The DHIC and its partners experienced difficulties moving the project along because of COVID-19 related closures. During COVID-19, most schools and gyms closed in North Carolina according to Governor Cooper's Executive order. At the time of this writing, the pandemic was still raging. In fact, the country was in the third wave and facing a major uptick in cases. In December 2020 and January 2021, reports of new mutations of the virus were circulating. Therefore, it was unlikely that the DHIC and its nonprofit partners would be able to resume standard operating procedures until COVID-19 concerns diminished and there are enough vaccines for every American. This capstone project investigated how the DHIC and the nonprofits partnering on the Beacon Site project could move forward with communication between the residents and themselves, both during and after the age of COVID.

The goal of this study was to examine how the DHIC and its partners operated during the global pandemic. I analyzed how the actions of the DHIC impacted agency function and the effect the pandemic had on the pending projects of the DHIC. Through this study, the researcher sought to help the agency determine what actions negatively impacted the organization and the Beacon Site project. There was the pandemic of 1918, but this is perhaps the first time this type of catastrophe negatively has affected business, government, and nonprofit operations on a global scale. Unlike natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, etc.), no one had an answer relative to how to react to the novel Coronavirus. The DHIC, like many organizations worldwide, did not have time to question the experts when told to shutter offices; the only choice was to close the buildings as instructed. The same went for the partners in the Beacon Site

partnership. The agencies closed, employees went home, and everyone was forced to learn new means of meeting and communicating.

The WCPSS had to make quick arrangements to move from classroom settings to online learning. The YMCA had to close because the programs and gyms effectively were threatening the lives of its patrons. The SE Raleigh Promise is a much smaller nonprofit than the DHIC that only has been in existence for less than 5 years compared to the 40-year history of the DHIC.

Finally, this research could help to inform other nonprofits of best practices that could assist with operation in this uncharted territory as the pandemic continues. As of this writing, the United States has lost almost 550,000 Americans. According to nightly news reports, the virus continues its assault on the American people with no end in sight. To that effect, research is just beginning to emerge about the possible impacts of the new variant strains.

Since President Joe Biden was elected, vaccines access improved significantly, but Americans still do not know when, or if, life in the United States will return to pre-COVID-19 normality. How do we learn from what has occurred due to COVID-19? This study was completed late April, 2021, the country has faced this challenge for more than a year at this point. What best practices can we learn from this unprecedented crisis that will help DHIC, Inc. and its partners? Findings from this study have appeal beyond the nonprofits highlighted and interviewed. Nonprofits, businesses, and governments might find recommendations that they can implement as the pandemic rages on.

Literature Review

In an effort to study the communication challenges faced by the DHIC leaders as they worked with partners and stakeholders on the Beacon Project during COVID-19, I began with a review of the research literature. In this section, I reviewed the literature on the importance of

crisis communications, internal and external communications with employees and partners, and how technology can be used to maintain communication during a crisis.

Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is well-established for the standard emergencies, but COVID-19 was different. When organizations were forced to close in early 2020, no one had the right answers relative to how to address this scourge. Ulmer et al. (2011) in their book *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity*, discussed how some organizations exit a crisis forever weakened. In fact, some lose the confidence of their employees or the public at large if the crisis is not handled properly. Ulmer et al. noted that crises are unique moments in the history of organizations. These authors defined a crisis as a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events, which create levels of uncertainty and present an organization with opportunities and threats to the organization's high-priority goals.

In the first chapter of their book, Ulmer et al. (2011) discussed how disease outbreaks are inevitable forms of crisis. They referred to both the bird flu and swine flu (H1N1) that caused alarm worldwide, yet neither had the impact that COVID-19 is having internationally. The authors explained that crisis communication researchers develop classification systems of crisis types that aid with their crisis planning and response methods. There are two categories of crisis, those that were caused intentionally and crises caused by natural, uncontrollable factors. COVID-19 is the latter.

Internal and External Communications

Communication between partners is imperative during regular times; communication is even more important during a pandemic. Ulmer et al. (2011) explained that to realize the full benefits of an alliance, the partners need to have means of communicating effectively,

efficiently, and frequently. The authors also noted that good communication builds trust between the organizations. Since SE Raleigh Promise was created in 2016 and did not have a long track record with the other agencies, keeping the lines of communication open during the pandemic was vital. During preliminary conversations with stakeholders, it was noted that there was difficulty communicating with some of the partners because of being out of office and having no established protocols for returning emails or phone calls.

In her dissertation, Cicchini (2020) highlighted the impermanence of communication in everyday organizational life. In this work, Cicchini listed Five Take-Away for organizational members and advised that communication is how organizations are constituted. As such, members should seek actively meaningful structures and seek dynamic equilibrium together. If communication is a challenge within organizations, how much more is it challenging to communicate externally with partners within different organizational cultures and hierarchies.

In an article entitled, “Nonprofit Service Continuity and Responses in the Pandemic: Disruptions, Ambiguity, Innovation and Challenges,” Shi et al., (2020) interviewed several nonprofit executives to seek practical knowledge related to their service delivery responses to COVID-19. In that study, Shi et al., they seek to provide explanatory models in the nonprofit literature. Similar to the framework being used for this study, these authors highlight four dimensions: disruptions, ambiguities, innovations and challenges. That study is similar to the study by Obrenovic et al. (2020) in that the authors suggested that online and social media communications are imperative for continuing operations during problematic times. Shi et al. (2020, p. 18) also noted the importance of building continual communication and fostering mutual respect amongst partners during the pandemic.

Michener et al. (2020), investigate how older methods of stakeholder and community engagement should be used during this time. In fact, these authors were the only researchers to discuss how during the SARS virus of 2003, one group of nonprofits implemented targeted communication and coordination across community partners to ensure access to supplies by those in isolation and the agencies that support them.

Literature Summarized

The literature review highlighted the importance of communication and collaboration between stakeholders and partners. Although this pandemic is much different from other crises in size and scope, some of the same practices could be used effectively to navigate a crisis and experience positive results. This study was to identify best practices for DHIC and its partners. It should be noted that COVID-19 specific research is limited because of the still unfolding nature of this crisis. As the world navigates this pandemic, more and more researchers will provide research to use as references for further studies. In addition, this study can help not only DHIC and its partners, but also other nonprofit leaders who seek to find innovative ways to weather this unprecedented storm called COVID-19.

Theoretical Framework

Obrenovia et al. (2000) developed a framework called the Enterprise Effectiveness and Sustainability Model (EESM) during a Pandemic. This framework combines organizational effectiveness with elements that are critical during crisis communications. I used this framework as a guide for my study. The framework connected to the problem the DHIC faced because it outlined ways that the organization can make changes in several areas that help build sustainability to get the DHIC through the pandemic and any other crisis or major emergency.

As shown below, Obrenovia et al.'s (2000) seven components of the theoretical framework include: (a) enterprise effectiveness and sustainability, (b) networked structure, (c) supply chain resilience, (d) organizational culture, (e) distributed leadership, (f) digitalization and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and (g) financial contingency planning. At the center of the EESM framework was the goal of maintaining enterprise effectiveness and sustaining operations. The framework integrates other well-established Crisis Management theories to provide a single framework for enterprise management during COVID-19. Two examples of Crisis Management include reactive crisis management and proactive crisis management.

Reactive crisis management (RCM): RCM is often a panic-driven or knee-jerk reaction. Emotions like fear play a leading role in decision making, and objective thinking is largely absent from the crisis response. The company faces crises defensively, and following the crisis, the business may experience problems, high turnover of senior leaders, or even business failure (Obrenovia et al., 2000).

Proactive Crisis Management (PCM): In the PC approach, organizations take initiatives early in the crisis and seek to shape how events and communication flow unfolds (Obrenovia et al., 2000). The Obrenovia et al. (2000) drew upon the Theory of Crisis Management Teams, the Stakeholder Theory, and the Distributed Cognition Theory. The authors explained the need for the development of this model as follows, "Firms generally are incapable of stopping the crisis from occurring, but can detect the crises on time and apply coping strategies to lower the risks" (Obrenovic et al., 2000, p. 2).

This EESM framework was relevant, especially to this capstone project because of its grounding in the concern for the stakeholders. The authors of the framework quoted Freeman

and Reed (1983) noting the well-being of what they referred to as critical stakeholders during a time of crisis could help organizations move toward recovery faster. The EESM framework and the literature called attention to the importance of communication both inside organizations and with their external stakeholders.

Another area of alignment concerned how organizations can use technology to conduct this communication. The framework called for organizations to integrate the Internet, social media accounts, and other online communication channels into the daily business routines. Obrenovic et al. (2000) believed that doing so builds trust and increases bonds with employees, stakeholders, and residents during the crisis that might last long after the crisis ends. This charge tied the framework back to the problem of practice, which included the difficulty of communicating during the COVID-19 crisis. The following sections detail the key strategies of the framework. Figure 2 illustrates the key concepts included in the framework.



Figure 2. Enterprise Effectiveness and Sustainability Model during Pandemic.

Networked Structure

In building the EESM framework, Obrenovic et al. (2000) examined traditional business models and determined they were ineffective in a crisis situation. In describing this piece of the model, the authors noted that to achieve sustainability and thrive in the era of uncertainty, a new system or network structure needs to be introduced to improve coordination, distribution of complex decision-making, and exploration of different resources and opportunities. With this component of the model, Obrenovic et al. (2000) are suggesting ways to help the organization with its communication to all levels of the organization and highlight the importance of speeding up decisions. A networked structure is important because decisions should not be delayed for specific people in the organizational chain. Pushing decisions down allows an organization to be nimble and responsive during a crisis.

Supply Chain Resilience

One of the most important considerations that Obrenovic et al. (2000) reviewed was the need to keep the supply chain healthy throughout a crisis. The authors noted that a pandemic disrupts preexisting supply and demand networks by causing damage to infrastructure, welfare, health, and economy. In such cases, it may be necessary to redirect preexisting supply flows, align and cooperate with competing agencies, and when possible, shift production to meet new demands, often concerning life-preserving resources.

The supply chain of the DHIC centered around the raw materials needed for building supplies. In this section, the following quote provided a description of how organizations must nimbly shift to secure their supply chains. During COVID-19, a growing number of organizations are sharing company related and general crisis information and putting together

schemes for collaborating to make sure they are adaptable, mobile, nimble – the goal here is to reduce response times to implement changes.

Organizational Culture

This section of the framework relates to the internal structure of the organization and what it values. Organizations with rigid, hieratical structures have fewer chances of success in responding to the chaos and uncertainty of a pandemic. One of the core sentiments of this framework highlights the importance of employees at all levels being able to lead during such a challenge. This mindset should be adopted into the culture of a successful pandemic response. The authors described the need for leadership flexibility by explaining that when disaster strikes, all employees should be ready to assume leadership responsibility and take on different job positions in case of obstruction. The discussion of organizational culture calls for the leaders of the organization to build resilience into the core of the organization during normal time, which can then be activated during a time of crises.

Distributed Leadership

In a crisis, no one knows who is going to be impacted. This one factor makes distributed leadership necessary for organizational viability throughout a pandemic or other catastrophe. Living through COVID-19, one of the things that became clear was that anyone could be infected and there was no way of predicting who the virus would strike. In this section, the authors advocated for the creation of crisis management teams that have the authority to act should the crisis take out those traditionally in leadership roles. Much like local governments that regularly operate in this manner, the authors suggested that leadership should be distributed among those individuals that normally may not be considered in the chain of command. The authors noted the dangers of depending on traditional hierarchical structures during a crisis by

explaining that one of the most significant vulnerabilities amid unexpected events comes from the old-fashioned hierarchical view of organizational structure, with centralized decision-making. Using traditional structures serves to frustrate the ability of the agency to implement urgent initiatives. For instance, if an organization has to wait for its President/CEO to move an effort forward, and that person was infected with COVID-19, the organization might remain in a stalemate until the chief executive recuperates. This response is unacceptable.

This topic area connects to the problem of practice because communication channels should remain be opened during a time of crisis. The Reuters case study entitled, *The Heart of Reuters*, highlighted the importance of having leaders throughout the organization. The Reuters' case specifically recounts how miraculous feats were accomplished because ordinary employees stepped up to lead when the crises presented them with a challenge. One such feat was rebuilding the data center in 48 hours; the building project had taken eight months the first time it was built. Leadership and communications matters.

Digitalization and ICT

Organizations throughout the world were able to respond to COVID-19 quickly by using the internet. Multiple industries rapidly moved in-person operations online. The ability for DHIC and other agencies to close the doors and retreat to online platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams would not have been possible without *Digitization and ICT*. Related to this phenomenon, the authors noted that the exploitation of ICT-related possibilities depends on the technological attributes, human factors, organizational culture, structure, and institutional factors. The authors also stated that each staff member must be technologically efficient. These staff members could help with resource sharing and coordination with stakeholder groups. This issue is central to the problem of practice because it was noted that some partner staff members did not return calls or

were unavailable during the early days of the pandemic. Finding modes of communication that work for staff and community members is important to keep projects moving.

Financial Contingency Planning

As of this writing, there are many organizations across multiple sectors that might not survive this crisis. One example of this was announced in early October 2020: the closure of 500 plus Regal Cinemas across the country. Regal Cinemas was a large, multinational corporation that was unable to maintain all of its business units because of the nature of its business and inability to adapt. This is a very relevant example of why organizations need to have financial contingency plans in place. In fact, the authors stated that successful organizations have to put contingency plans in place ahead of an onset, and there should be no room for ambiguity with regards to who is in charge for risk finance preparation and financing arrangements.

Study Questions

The questions in the table below were devised to tie together the areas of inquiry and highlight the key factors outlined in the EESM framework. The answers derived from the questions that examined whether the areas suggested in the framework were truly impacted during the pandemic. Table 2 is a tool that helps determine if there are, in fact, connections between what has been experienced at DHIC and what the authors suggested as success factors within the framework. The table is used as a tool to code the data during the data analysis phase of this research.

Table 2

Questions Connected to the Problem of Practice

Question	Connection to Problem of Practice	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<p>What crisis response strategies as identified in the “Enterprise Effectiveness and Sustainability Model” did and didn’t DHIC, Inc. use to communication to Beacon Site partners and stakeholders during the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>	<p>Determining more effective means of communication during the pandemic may have improved DHIC, Inc.’s ability to communicate with its partner agencies and may have allowed them to find alternative means of communicating such as those outlined in the framework being used to direct this study. (Communications tools: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, in-person, socially distanced meetings outdoors).</p>	<p>The data will be collected via interviews to be held with DHIC, Inc. staff members along with members of the partner agencies. I will also be allowed to observe meetings with the partner agencies.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will familiarize myself with the data. 2. Assign codes to the data to describe the content. 3. Search for patterns and themes in my codes across the various interviews. 4. Review themes. 5. Define and name themes. 6. Relay my findings in the data analysis section of the paper.
<p>How did the interagency communication during COVID-19 impact DHIC, Inc.’s ability to serve residents?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What was missed because of the communications struggles? b. How often did the organizational partners speak during the shutdown? c. Could regularly scheduled check-in have helped to improve communications during the first nine months of the shut-down? 	<p>This question is at the core of the issue of communication.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Will illustrate missed opportunities that occurred due to the shutdown and the lack of communications protocols. b. Gets to the timeliness of conversations during the shutdown or lack thereof. c. Offers an alternative to how communications were handled at the beginning of the pandemic. 	<p>The data will be collected via interviews to be held with DHIC, Inc. staff members along with members of the partner agencies. I will also be allowed to observe</p>	<p>Same as question one above.</p>
<p>What are the current and likely future barriers to effective communication among partners and stakeholders?</p>	<p>This will help highlight the current challenges and offer ways to improve upon the areas that are still challenges after seven months of the pandemic. This</p>	<p>The data will be collected via interviews to be held with DHIC, Inc. staff members along with members of the partner</p>	<p>Same as question one above.</p>

Study Design

This study followed an instrumental case study methodology as defined by Robert Stake (2010). An instrumental case study is the study of one case and its ability to shed understanding and conceptual and empirical patterns that can be used in other settings with similar context and conditions (Stake 2010, p. 18). This study will implement a qualitative method of data collection and analysis. In the following sections, I described the data collection and analysis methods used to answer the study questions.

Data Collection

Survey Analysis. DHIC collected resident surveys that contained a few questions related to resident communication preferences. There was also a question related to whether the resident had access to the internet. Responses for these questions will be shared to help inform this study.

Structured Interviews. Ten stakeholders associated with DHIC and the Beacon Site project were interviewed over the course of one month. The interviewees were suggested by LaTonya McKoy. McKoy provided their emails in order to schedule Zoom interview sessions. Each session lasted at least 35 minutes (with some interviews lasting well over an hour).

Table 3

Interviewees

Nonprofits and For-profit Partners:
1. Four staff members from DHIC
2. One staff member from the YMCA of the Triangle
3. One staff member from SE Raleigh Promise
4. One staff member from Resources for Seniors
5. One staff member from The Kaleidoscope Project – Wake County
6. One staff member from the Community Management Corporation

I also attended an hour-long partner meeting where leaders of the organizations discussed the Beacon Site project in detail. The interviews and partnership meeting were recorded on Zoom. These recordings were then used to create transcripts that were used to code the data via NVivo. The questions centered around the stakeholder’s experiences regarding the impact COVID-19 had on the Beacon Site project. The final interview questionnaire is included in the APPENDIX of this document.

Observations. DHIC has allowed the researcher to attend meetings with stakeholders via Zoom. Attending these meetings will allow the researcher to have a firsthand view of how the agencies interact during COVID-19. Data from these interactions was digested and coded to determine if there are underlying themes in the data that inform the study.

Data Analysis

As mentioned briefly above, the interviews were transcribed and then subjected to coding using the research questions as a guide. Below is a sampling of the codebook that was used to make connections with the EESM framework used for this study.

Table 4

Components and Definitions for the EESM during Pandemic

Enterprise Effectiveness and Sustainability Model during Pandemic
Networked Structure – developing ways to improve decision making via a networked structure. Quick communications with all levels of the organization.
Supply Chain Resilience – seeking ways to firm up the supplies needed to do business.
Organizational Culture – the internal structure and values of the organization.
Distributed Leadership – creating crisis management teams with the ability to act as necessary.
Digitalization and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) – finding modes of communications that work for staff and stakeholders.
Financial Contingency Planning – firming up financial contingency plans before a crisis.

Table 5

Table 5

Codes Used for Data Analysis

RQ1 crisis response strategies- DHIC used to communicate to Beacon Site partners and stakeholders

RQ1 crisis response strategies- DHIC used to communicate to Beacon Site partners and stakeholders \Communications are digitized through videoconference, email, and file-sharing applications

RQ1 crisis response strategies- DHIC used to communicate to Beacon Site partners and stakeholders \Distributed leadership was implemented to invest decision-making authority in a larger number of partners

RQ1 crisis response strategies- DHIC used to communicate to Beacon Site partners and stakeholders \Networked structure was not used

RQ1 crisis response strategies- DHIC used to communicate to Beacon Site partners and stakeholders \Organizational culture was made nimble and resilient

RQ1 crisis response strategies- DHIC used to communicate to Beacon Site partners and stakeholders \Supply chain resilience involved ongoing, versatile, and adaptive identification of new supply sources

RQ2 interagency communication during COVID impact DHIC's ability to serve residents

RQ2 interagency communication during COVID impact DHIC's ability to serve residents\SQ1

RQ2 interagency communication during COVID impact DHIC's ability to serve residents\SQ1\Consequences of reliance on remote communications included reduced ability to build rapport with clients

RQ2 interagency communication during COVID impact DHIC's ability to serve residents\SQ1\Consequences of reliance on remote communications included reduced community building

RQ2 interagency communication during COVID impact DHIC's ability to serve residents\SQ1\Consequences of reliance on remote communications included reduced partnership cohesiveness

RQ2 interagency communication during COVID impact DHIC's ability to serve residents\SQ2 and SQ3

RQ2 interagency communication during COVID impact DHIC's ability to serve residents\SQ2 and SQ3\Communication frequency increased

RQ2 interagency communication during COVID impact DHIC's ability to serve residents\SQ2 and SQ3\Communication quality decreased

RQ3 managing future communication barriers between stakeholders

Table 5

Codes Used for Data Analysis (Continued)

RQ3 managing future communication barriers between stakeholders\Inability to engage in in-person communication may weaken collaborations with partners

RQ3 managing future communication barriers between stakeholders\reduction in informal internal communication opportunities

RQ3 managing future communication barriers between stakeholders\Some residents' lack of access to technology is a barrier to communicating with them

Findings

In this section, the six strategic questions from the EESM framework are used to help frame the questions used for the analysis. The names of the interviewees have been changed to aide in confidentiality.

RQ1. What crisis response strategies as identified in the Enterprise Effectiveness and Sustainability Model (EESM) did and didn't DHIC, Inc. use in communication to Beacon Site partners and stakeholders during the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Findings indicated that DHIC used four of the six EESM strategies in communicating with Beacon Site partners and stakeholders. Table 6 provides the findings to address this research question and the number of participants who attested to them.

Table 6

Research Question 1 Findings

Finding	<i>n</i> of participants contributing (N=10)	<i>n</i> of references to finding across all participants
Communications are digitized through videoconference, email, and file-sharing applications	7	15
Distributed leadership was implemented to invest decision-making authority in a larger number of partners	6	9
Organizational culture was made “nimble and resilient”	9	15
Supply chain resilience involved ongoing, versatile, and adaptive identification of new supply sources	9	11
Networked structure was not used	9	11

Note. Participants did not reference the sixth EESM strategy: financial contingency planning.

The data reveals that DHIC used four of the six EESM strategies in communicating with Beacon Site partners and stakeholders. The other two strategies were not used. The following subsections address each of the six strategies.

1. Networked Structure

Six out of 10 participants reported that networked structure was not used, and that instead, the communication followed a traditional ‘funnel’ (Mary) model. So, in practice, the same small team of upper managers made all of the decisions and leadership authority was not distributed. A major area in which distributed leadership and networked structure were not applied was adherence to guidelines associated with COVID-19 mitigation. Participants stated that leadership, in relation to guideline adherence, was not distributed and that communications were funneled upward rather than networked, with Noah describing the situation as:

All control was really taken away from branches and it was all at the executive level, where they were just telling us what we needed to do [for COVID-19 mitigation] . . . We understand, okay, the executive team is making all of these decisions . . . For us, in our work over in Southeast Raleigh, we were challenged by that because we don't have a mainstream suburban community.

2. Supply Chain Resilience

DHIC's use of supply chain resilience involved ongoing, versatile, and adaptive identification of new supply sources. Ninety-percent of participants indicated that a specific concern during the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic was obtaining an adequate amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies, both as a preventative precaution and for mitigation in case of an outbreak. Ava described the versatile sourcing of the needed items as scavenging:

There were a lot of conversations and weekly meetings with property management just to make sure we were covering all our bases if there happened to be a COVID-19 case, a breakout of sorts . . . I think we were just all scavenging for those items [PPE and cleaning supplies] that most of our seniors would not have had the wherewithal to go stand in line to get PPE.

3. Organizational Culture

Nine out of 10 participants referred to implementing an organizational culture that was “nimble and resilient,” (Noah) as a means of fluidly addressing emerging concerns during the pandemic. Ava spoke of developing a, “nimble and flexible and adaptive,” organizational culture in order to be able to pivot at need:

COVID-19 is a good example. We had to figure out how to pivot so that we could meet the needs, while also, in the case of Beacon Ridge, continuing to advance our program there. We could not afford not to do anything . . . we were and have been and typically are adaptive and nimble.

4. Distributed Leadership

Ninety-percent of participants reported that distributed leadership was implemented to invest decision-making authority in a larger number of partners instead of routinely referring decisions to high-level managers. Lori provided an example of an increasingly distributed leadership model in stating:

During COVID-19, our property management companies have just taken on a whole new list of problems, issues, and matters to address on a daily basis because of COVID. Maybe two months ago we decided that just not by standard will I send it to the division director. I'll just send it to the regional director, and in some cases I may work it out directly with the property manager without involving other folks at all.

5. Digitization and ICT

Seven out of 10 participants reported that they digitized communication by using videoconference applications, including Microsoft Teams and Zoom. They used applications such as Google Docs and Gmail for written communication and file sharing. For example, Charlotte stated, “In our organization, [we] switched over to G[oogle] Suite. Now we do everything through G Suite, Google Messenger, Gmail, Calendar, Google Docs, sharing documents . . . That has been incredibly helpful for us, for streamlining communication.” Jaime specified that internal communication occurred via Microsoft Teams, “Our internal communication is through the Teams platform, so we do our chat through that as well, and then

we meet through that.” Jaime added that Zoom was used for communicating with partners, “Our consulting partners like to use Zoom.”

6. Financial Contingency Planning

Participants did not reference financial contingency planning strategies. Other forms of contingency planning, such as preparation for a COVID-19 outbreak, were addressed through supply chain resilience.

RQ2. How did the interagency communication during COVID-19 impact DHIC’s ability to serve residents?

Table 7

Research Question 2 Findings

Finding	<i>n</i> of participants contributing (<i>N</i> =10)	<i>n</i> of references to finding across all participants
Sub-question 1: The consequences of reliance on remote communications included reduced community building	6	10
Sub-question 1: The consequences of reliance on remote communications included reduced partnership cohesiveness	6	9
Sub-question 1: The consequences of reliance on remote communications included reduced ability to build rapport with clients	7	13
Sub-questions 2 and 3: Communication frequency increased	7	33
Sub-questions 2 and 3: Communication quality decreased	6	8

*Additional focus was provided for the second research question by developing three subquestion to indicate key areas of inquiry.

Sub-question 1

The first sub-question was: What was missed because of the communication struggles?

Participants consistently reported that they missed in-person communication. Mia explained why she considered in-person communication more effective than remote or digitized communication in a response consistent with those provided by other participants:

I feel like we miss a lot of the interpersonal communication, the unspoken. And so sometimes it's like we have these conversations and these meetings, and we walk away thinking, “Did we reach an agreement or not?” Or, “Was there something else we were supposed to talk about?” I feel like we have to have multiple meetings to resolve things

now when we would have, if we were doing it in person, we could have sat down and had a face-to-face meeting and hammered it all out in one meeting, as opposed to two or three

The consequences of reliance on remote communications that were viewed as less effective than in-person included inefficiency, as Mia indicated, as well as reduced community building (six participants), reduced partnership cohesiveness (six participants), and reduced ability to build rapport with clients (eight participants). Lori spoke about the challenges of building rapport with clients and the community while traditional methods of relationship-building were no longer safe:

I think the biggest challenge for me is just identifying ways to begin connecting with the residents . . . The first quarter of this year should be dedicated to what I refer to as seating activities. Those are just small little one-off events and activities that you can begin building a relationship and meeting and greeting and such. I don't know what those need to look like in light of COVID-19.

Charlotte spoke of how losing the intimacy and immediacy of in-person communication weakened the sense of teamwork and common cause needed for effective collaboration, “That person-to-person communication, and the energy that you get, to really go forth with solving a problem, when you're in the same room with people? That's missing, and that's a little harder.” Jaime also spoke of remote communications as less effective than in-person communication for building excitement and momentum in collaborative efforts, “When you are going and meeting regularly, and you're seeing people regularly, it's so much easier to keep things rocking and rolling.” Jaime said that the primary challenge in using platforms like Zoom was, “Keeping people engaged.”

Subquestion 2

The second subquestion under RQ2 was: How often did the organizational partners speak during the shutdown? Participants indicated that with most partners, communication became more frequent but was perceived less effective when conducted virtually. Ava stated, “Related to COVID-19, we're still able to have those partnership meetings, thankfully, because we are doing them via Zoom . . . I think we communicate a lot more.” Ava added, however, that in-person meetings were more effective and efficient, stating that if they had a choice, “We would probably have had those meetings in person at someone's office. That would've been our first inclination because it's all about proximity. One of the tenets that undergirds the work we do is about staying close and connected.”

Olivia agreed with other participants in stating, “We still have productive and helpful meetings when we get together to give updates,” but Olivia added of her own experience, “All the screen time gets old.” She also said of colleagues and partners, “People's patience is stretched,” in relation to digitized communications. Mia also touched on the frequency of remote communications by saying, “That first 60 days, I literally had Zoom meetings all day long every day, to meet people because I wasn't meeting people in person.” Lori spoke of having, “A lot more meetings, a lot of very what feels like to me disjointed meetings,” on videoconference platforms during COVID-19.

Subquestion 3

The third subquestion was: Could regularly schedule check-ins have helped to improve communication during the first nine months of the shut-down? Findings indicated that regularly scheduled check-ins would not have improved communication with most partners because communication was already so frequent to compensate for their reduced efficacy and address

emerging concerns. However, participants indicated that a small percentage of partners might have been engaged more effectively through regular check-ins. Jaime offered one such example by stating, “One of our partners, we almost went the entire summer without communication. And I think a lot of it just has to do with they were so wrapped up in their COVID-19 stuff that communication has f[allen]off.” Lori provided a response suggesting that even when remote communication with partners was frequent, regularly scheduled check-ins with specific individuals involved in decision-making may have been beneficial for ensuring those individuals’ availability for synchronous communications, “You are really trying to get somebody, anybody, and not telling where those folks are. You could tell that people were working at odd times, based on how quickly they responded or didn't respond to you.”

RQ3. What are the current and likely future barriers to effective communication among partners and stakeholders?

Participants indicated three major barriers to effective communication among partners and stakeholders, one of which was only significant at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. When talking about this barrier, participants indicated that becoming proficient in using the necessary technology had been a challenge that made communication with some partners less effective. The other two barriers were described as present and likely to be ongoing. Participants expressed concerns about the challenge remote communication presented to community and rapport building, and about the issue that lack of access to technology might present to engaging some clients in virtual communication.

Four out of ten participants expressed concern that both presently and in the future, the inability to participate in in-person communication would weaken collaboration and relationships with partners. Charlotte discussed this barrier in a representative response, saying:

I'm trying to recreate that environment where authentic relationship-building can take place. That is critical for this model of partnership and collaboration to work . . . In order to do the type of work that we are doing, in the type of community that we are doing it in, we have to love each other. Creating that element in a virtual environment is definitely a challenge, especially as new players, new people come on board, making sure that we are giving equal attention to that relationship-building, as we did before. And that'll continue to be an issue.

Noah expressed concern that lack of in-person connection would remain a barrier to relationship building by saying, "If people feel like things are not getting better, then our communication will stay the way it is with all of this virtual connection, instead of this face-to-face, which I feel is critically important to sustainability of most organizations."

Most participants expressed concern that some residents' lack of access to technology was and would continue to be a barrier to engaging with those residents. Mary expressed this perception by stating, "It's really been more the seniors, the residents in our complexes where they don't have access to some of the technology that we do. And so that's probably the area that's been the hardest, the most challenging." Charlotte referred to the challenge of some residents' lack of access to or comfort with technology as the digital divide and said that the challenge was significant enough to be an area of focus for remediation, "We are working a lot on the digital divide, what that means for our community, making sure that folks are connected, that they have adequate Internet provider service, that they have adequate technology to actually be able to engage."

One of the findings from the resident survey was that 24.3% of the residents at Beacon Ridge did not have access to the Internet. This data point will help DHIC inform the ways by

which they communicate with residents. It would be my recommendation that they take this data point under advisement to help them design their resident communication plans. In fact, there is some evidence that the survey designed by this researcher and LaTonya McCoy from DHIC informed the organization's recent purchase of a communication tool called, Callmax Automated Communications. The MRI Software website noted the following product highlights:

- Automated call management
 - Improve resident communication and provide superior customer service
- Package management
 - Let residents know when their packages arrive with automatic notifications and reminders.
- Office management and maintenance
 - Process emergency maintenance and courtesy calls for residents using Callmax and record the conversations to ensure accountability.

This section also highlights the application of another strategy from the EESM framework: Digitization and ICT.

Recommendations

This study was undertaken to determine impacts the pandemic had on communication during the Beacon Site project undertaken by DHIC and its partner nonprofits. The findings of this research produced several themes that informed the recommendations for DHIC on the Beacon Site project now and in any projects that are developed in future. Several interviewees were concerned with the negative impact that the pandemic had on their abilities to communicate with potential residents, project stakeholders, and the permanent residents of Beacon Ridge. Each of these challenges were identified as significant issues of concern based on qualitative

interviews conducted virtually. One of the most memorable concerns related to a comment by one of the stakeholders discussing how she felt that the work that they do at DHIC requires that the people working on the project love each other. She was very concerned that such fundamental partnership cohesiveness would suffer as a result of COVID-19.

There was also significant concern regarding the decrease of the quality of communications due to the inability to host in-person meetings. Several interviewees discussed the degradation of their ability to make connections with other people on the project due to the challenges related to meeting in a virtual space or simply having no contact at all. The recommendations listed below seek to help diminish some of the challenges related to project communications.

Suggestions for Improving Communication Quality

- ***Take Partner Meetings Offline*** - find venues large enough to host in-person meetings for the project team. This will allow team members to practice social distancing and continue to do the work of building rapport. The CDC recently released its recommendations for how groups of people can safely function in some settings. In North Carolina, Governor Cooper provided guidance for larger venues and has increased capacity. The City of Raleigh and WCPSS have several locations that should be able to accommodate such a request.
- ***Creative Use of Digitized Communication (ICT)*** – Use software platforms like Kahootz to build rapport and team solidarity amongst stakeholders. During the pandemic, I have personally experienced at least three different organizations using this digital game platform to facilitate team building and allow participants to have a fun experience online. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. used it during a Sisterhood Retreat for its

sorority sisters to answer questions about the Fayetteville Chapter's history. Vanderbilt University's Organization of Black Graduate and Professional Students (OBGAPgroup) used Kahootz to host a student activity that allowed participants to name that tune using Kahootz. Lastly, the City of Fayetteville's System of Transit used Kahoot to play a game of trivia during their employee appreciation event in December 2020. Another suggestion would be hosting a mixer or a virtual party with an online DJ. My husband and I attended a birthday party via Zoom and it was the most fun we have had in over a year.

- ***Follow Project Management Protocols*** – DHIC and its partners should implement the project management framework. There is no doubt that the construction arm of DHIC is using project management for its projects. However, there was no evidence of project management protocols during my time observing the stakeholder meeting. They can hire a consultant to help them design the protocols using Project Management Institute best practices. Find more information here: [PMI.org](https://www.pmi.org)
 - Each project should have a project kickoff meeting here the project charter would be reviewed.
 - Create a project plan for each project. The plan should include a communication plan that would layout communication expectations for project team organizations and members. The communication plan should be updated in the case of a major emergency.
 - Agendas should be jointly created by stakeholders for each meeting. Agendas should be followed during the meeting.
 - Meeting notes should be recorded during the meeting that outline who is doing what task. After each meeting, attendees should get meeting notes that include

task items. These notes and task items should be reviewed at subsequent meetings to hold partners accountable for their tasks.

- ***Seek Funding for a Pilot Broadband Project at Beacon Ridge*** – one of the data points collected via the resident survey found that 24.3% of the residents of did not have access to a computer. My recommendation is that DHIC, needs to work with its for-profit supporters to find a way to help people get access to computers and broadband connectivity. There are many private sector firms that would be happy to provide broadband connectivity for the residents of Beacon Ridge. If there are no volunteers related to free broadband, the federal government is preparing to release Notices of Funding Availability (NOFAs) that contains application for those who are having challenges paying for a computer and Internet access. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently announced an [Emergency Broadband Benefit program](#). The program will provide a discount of up to \$50 per month toward broadband service for eligible households. Such households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute \$10-\$50 toward the purchase price.

Seek Community Project Funding (formerly called earmarks) - work with DHIC friend and Congressman David Price to seek funding for a broadband pilot project that could provide full access to broadband and other benefits. Schedule a meeting to speak with Congressman Price and his staff about the types of projects that will be funded. There are a couple of accounts that can be accessed.

Conclusion

This study is an effort to determine how COVID-19 has impacted DHIC and its partners with the implementation of their project at the Beacon Site. The original research for this study was conducted over the several months and will end with a capstone defense in April 2021. Conducting this study will help DHIC learn from this major upheaval in the life of the organization and its employees. It is hoped that the results of this work can be used to inform DHIC's practices and decrease the likelihood of having projects negatively impacted by communication challenges in the future.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

Preamble:

Introduce myself.

Thank the participant for participating in the study.

Describe the study.

Discuss how I came to work on this project.

Do you consent to being recorded? If yes, start the recording.

Tell them a bit about my project and how their input will help shape this study.

Discuss how the goal of the project is to improve communications protocols now and in the future.

You are being asked to participate in a quality improvement study. Participation in this study is voluntary. Parameters related to how the information is used in this study will be dictated by Vanderbilt University. By agreeing to go forward, you are consenting to participate in this study.

The research procedures involve an audio-recorded interview. The interview will last 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be audio-recorded on Zoom with the permission of the participant.

If the participant does not want to be audio-recorded, the researcher will note using a legal pad and pen.

There are no possible risks/discomforts associated with the study. All information will remain anonymous at all times.

All research data collected will be stored securely and confidentially on a password protected laptop. After the interview data has been transcribed, all audio-recordings will be destroyed.

1. Tell me about yourself and your role at the agency and on the Beacon Site project.
 - a. How long have you worked for your organization?
 - b. How long have you worked on the Beacon Site project?

2. What did project communication look like before COVID-19?
 - a. Communication internally?
 - b. Communication with other non-profits?
 - c. Communication with residents?

3. What did it look like immediately after COVID-19 shutdowns in March?
 - a. Communication internally?
 - b. Communication with other non-profits? How often did you speak with the other organizational partners during the shutdown?
 - c. Communication with residents?

4. How is communication functioning now?
 - a. Communication internally?
 - b. Communication with other non-profits?
 - c. Communication with residents?

5. What internal communication challenges occurred as a result of the COVID-19 shutdown?
 - a. What components of the project were impacted or missed due to communication struggles?
 - b. Were there things that you didn't accomplish that you would have accomplished if not for COVID? For example, meetings with potential residents?
 - c. Did your nonprofit shut down completely at any time during the crisis? If your organization didn't shut down, were you allowed to go into the office? If so, was this a challenge?

6. Realizing that this period has caused some communications challenges, what has helped you and/or your organization to overcoming those challenges?

7. Let's discuss your supply chain. Were there any negative impacts to your ability to get the things your organization needed to continue doing business?

8. What are the current, and likely future, barriers to communication among partners and stakeholders as the virus continues?

9. Did your organization use any of the following platforms during COVID?
 - a. Microsoft Teams
 - b. Zoom
 - c. Skype
 - d. If you didn't used any of the above platforms, how then did you use tools to communicate with stakeholders?
 - i. For example, did you use text messages, intranet/internet sites?
 - ii. If so, for what purpose did you use them?

10. Have there been any changes to decision making amongst the staff? For instance: has there been any effort to push decisions down to lower levels due to the impacts of the virus?
 - a. What would happen if members of your leadership team were quarantined or they contracted the virus and had to be out of the office for several weeks – how would this impact your agency's ability to make decisions?
 - b. Does your agency have crisis teams empowered with decision making? If not, have there been any discussions related to this issue?

11. Would you describe your organization as nimble and resilient? Why or why not?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience related to the Beacon Site project and the varying ways it might have been positively or negatively impacted by COVID.

13. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that I should have asked related to the project, communications, or any other impacts to the partnership related to this difficult time.

Thank the participant for their time and their dedication to this project.