East End Cooperative Ministry-Development Office
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Introduction

East End Cooperative Ministry (EECM) is a nonprofit interfaith coalition formed to join together as a racially and culturally diverse people of faith to build a loving, healthy and economically vital community in the East End of Pittsburgh. It has programs for all members of the community, primarily the frail, homebound, and elderly; the hungry and homeless; and children and youth in underprivileged areas. It is funded by the congregations, and by grants from local, state, and national agencies. It is overseen by a Board of Directors from the various congregations. It has a staff of about 35, headed by an executive director.

I worked with Petrie Holmes and Wendy Griffin at EECM, both of whom work internally at EECM, fulfilling administrative, research, and development functions.

Situational Analysis

Grant applications are requesting more detailed info about what services are being provided, and the quantity of each service, such as how many meetings were held, how many people attended. They are also asking for results, such as what percentage of people in a program were able to find housing. Recently funding cuts from certain sources have forced components of programs to be administratively separated to apply for funding, and data is required for just that piece. For instance, the assistance to those with mental health problems has been split off, and is being funded by the Coordinated Care network. The services EECM provides to these people, which must be counted, are on page 10. In addition, results pertaining to the evaluation criteria are needed. These are how many participants were able to remain in the community rather than being hospitalized, how many developed and participated in plans for income for sustainable living, and for improving their housing, and how many dealt with their substance abuse problems.

For the Drop-in Center (see description on page 11), EECM needs to report a number of things about how many people were served, what types of people were served, and how much of each service was provided. (See example report on page 14).

Pennfree is a transitional housing program for men who were homeless, and Bridge is a similar program for men who formerly had drug and alcohol problems. In both, participants deal with the problems which made them homeless. EECM needs to report how long people were there, and where they went after these programs.

Communities that Care is a program for elementary school students, and Project Impact for high school students, which deal with "at risk" youth. These programs involve in-school shadowing, work on better relationship skills, alternative recreation, tutoring, and consequences of destructive behavior. Information about grades and incidents needs to be reported, such as how

many students did better for each subject/type of behavior, and how many did worse. (see report on page 15).

EECM recently took over the administration of Project Rediscovery, a program which provides constructive after-school activities, such as anti-drug programs and tutoring, to youth in the area. They need to report to the original Project Rediscovery board of directors, which is still legally responsible until the two organizations merge. This board must report to the state, which funds them as part of its PREVENTION program, and to other funding organizations. The state requires information about each meeting, how many students were there and demographic information about each student (see page 18). The state also requires this information to be entered into their own database program, which is very difficult to use, and nearly impossible to get useful information out of.

The Drop-in Center and Bridge/Penfree could benefit from a better MIS system to provide information about participants, and to identify and track participants in multiple programs. All of these programs need to prepare grant applications, which can be done better and easier with more organized information. Required totals can be computed by computer, instead of looking through a stack of papers and doing work manually.

EECM has a main office building, with other programs in various sites around the neighborhood. Currently, the data mentioned above is transferred from the site to the main office by having someone go pick up the forms, or more rarely the disk. It is then given to the appropriate person for data entry. If the sites were collected electronically, probably by connecting all of them to the internet, the external sites could transmit data to the office much easier, and all of EECM could work off of a common database.

The main office has about 25 staff, most of whom focus on a specific program, or group of programs, with some handling general administrative tasks. Wendy Griffin handles research and grant proposals for adult services, mainly those mentioned above. Petrie Holmes handles a lot of internal office tasks, including the newsletter and the web page. Sandy Laux is the operations manager, and responsible for computer set-up. Currently, networking is not being used, so files are communicated by disk, or on paper. Also, communication with staff at other sites is mainly by phone or in person.

All employees have Windows 95/98 machines on their desks, with Microsoft Office. The machines are Pentium 166 MHz or better. The computers seem adequate, with no major problems. There is no connectivity between the machines at the various sites. EECM has an ISP, USA On Ramp, and a couple of the machines in the main office have modems. This is their only net connectivity. Outside consultants are installing a LAN in the main office. This should allow them to better communicate within the office, sharing client info and other files. Not much can be done here until this project is completed.

The newsletter is also produced by computer. They are trying to set use a digital camera to improve the quality of the photos in it. They have a web site, **http://www.usaor.net/users/eecm**. The web site has general descriptions of the programs of EECM, and has information about volunteering and donating. However, it had not been updated in at least two years, and so contains no information about new programs, or about special, short-term events.

EECM has an operations manager who does general computer troubleshooting. They also have someone else who handles much of the networking. As mentioned above, outside contractors are installing a LAN. They don't want people to start using the LAN until protections and security are installed, even though the machines can see each other now. Other than this "security through obscurity," there seem to be no problems in this area.

Problems and Possibilities

One possibility is keeping the web page updated to provide volunteers, and other people interested in EECM with current information. As EECM already has a web page, and Petrie has a computer, all that is required is a modem for Petrie's computer, finding out how to update the web page on the site, and for Petrie to put in the time to learn html and update the site.

This would require a few sessions to teach Petrie HTML, and setting up her modem, and either contacting the previous maintainer, or otherwise figuring out how to update the web page at the site. She then would have to get current information about EECM's projects, and update the page. She would need to do these last steps on a regular basis.

This would allow EECM to better communicate with its board of directors, and with various public and private organizations which fund it. It could also recruit more volunteers, as they see what interesting and good works EECM is doing. Having a form on the site for web surfers to express interest in an easy fashion will also give EECM a wider base of potential volunteers and donators to draw from. At the end of this, Petrie would have the HTML and other knowledge necessary to update and modify the web page.

I feel this would take about 4.5 hours to do the initial setup and training, and then a few hours per month to actually update the web page. Since EECM's programs don't change all that much, the updates would not need to be too frequent.

Petrie is very enthusiastic about learning how to change the web page. She wants to learn both to increase her own skills, and because she feels it is necessary for EECM. As more and more people come online, having an up-to-date web page to advertise and communicate will become more and more important. Fulfilling this will allow EECM to have that web page, now and in the future.

EECM could to better tracking of the clients in its adult programs. This would allow prior information about a client to be more easily retrievable, leading to better decisions about how best to help the client.

Carrying this out would require Wendy to become familiar with Microsoft Access. She would then need to talk to the various people running these programs, to see what information they have about clients, and what information they could use. The next step would be to determine how the data would be collected, and who would be responsible for collecting it. She would then determine how best to set up the database, and set it up. Data would then need to be collected and input on an ongoing basis. To get maximum benefit out of this, the network at EECM would need to be fully set up, so data could be entered, and results viewed, by all people involved with the clients.

Implementing this would allow people to be tracked across multiple programs run by EECM and other social service agencies they work with. Clients could then be directed to programs that would help them the most. Results could also be tracked better, allowing more advanced evaluation of programs. This data could also be used to provide the information required by those funding the programs.

Wendy would know how to use Access, which could also be used to construct databases for other populations. Implementing the network side of this project would have benefits beyond this one program, allowing other files such as budgets and grant proposals to be shared, and more machines to access the internet while setting up fewer modems.

This would take about 6 hours for Wendy to learn the basics of Access, and 10 hours to set up the initial database. The rest of the project is incremental, taking more time as more programs are added, about 10 hours per program. Wendy is somewhat interested in this task, although she is more interested in getting the data required by the organizations providing the funding for the programs.

EECM is having difficulties reporting results for Project Rediscovery. For each group they work with, they need to enter a lot of information, and for each individual meeting, they need to report the number of students present, and demographic information for each new student. Unfortunately, the database program which the state mandates they use to submit this data is very difficult to use. However, the database can also be opened in Access. The tables can be easily imported into a new database, and any desired queries set up. The data can then be analyzed to provide the information they want, the total number of hours of programs attended by all students.

Analyzing the data in this way would start with Wendy learning Access. She would then need to learn the format the database is in (which tables are relevant, what the cryptic field names mean, etc.) Finally she would set up the tables she needs with necessary data not already in the system, and create queries and reports with the results that the state and other agencies funding this want to see. If new questions need to be answered, new queries and reports would be created.

This database would allow these programs to get the funding they need to continue, by making it possible to provide the funding organizations with the information they request. It would take about 4.5 hours for Wendy to learn the basics of Access, and another 6 hours to figure out the layout of the database, and make the necessary queries and reports. Wendy needs to do this project, as she needs to provide the data, and since it is already in an Access format, there is no other convenient way to manipulate it. This analysis could even result in increased funding in the future, if EECM can show they are providing more services than they were originally expected to do.

Scope of Work

Petrie and I updated the web page, and Wendy and I set up a database to analyze the results from Project Rediscovery. These projects were done simultaneously, working some meetings with Petrie, and others with Wendy.

Figuring out the ISP and how to update the web page took 3 hours. Setting up a system to keep track of the html files took 2 hours, and actually learning html and updating the web page took 6 hours.

Setting up the county-provided machine with the database program on it took 1.5 hours. Learning Access took 8 hours, determining how we were going to set up the database took 2 more hours, and setting up the database took 4.5 hours.

Evidence of Increased Capacity

Petrie contacted USA On Ramp, EECM's ISP, and found out how to modify the web page. In dealing with the ISP, she gained an understanding of what the ISP does, and what to look for in an ISP. Petrie set up a local copy of the web page on her computer, which she modifies and looks at before uploading it to the ISP. She modified the web page to provide information about (previously) upcoming volunteer dinner, finding images which met the Caribbean Cruise theme, and fitting the text and images into the design of several pages, and adding extra links to highlight the dinner. She also set up a backup directory on her hard drive, which had the original pages to go back to after the event.

Wendy learned how to use Microsoft Access, and designed a database into which she can import the table generated by the state-provided program, and extract the information she wants. With this database, she can show how many students are enrolled in each of the programs. Also, she can show how many service units have been provided, a service unit being one hour of programming attended by one student. Since the provided database didn't ask how long each group met per meeting, there was no way for the county or state to get this information from the raw data there.

Wendy then presented this data to several funding organizations. Since EECM could show they provided the services they had agreed to provide, they received the $25,000 from the Pittsburgh Child Guidance foundation they had been initially approved for, and were approved for another $25,000 for the current year.

Evidence of Sustainability

Petrie is extremely interested in maintaining the web page. She spent much time with USA On Ramp tech support to finally determine that a statistics page for EECM's web pages cost extra. With her knowledge of what an ISP does, she will look and see what better deals are available. Petrie has set up the directories on her hard drive to have a place to store old pages, so she can look back and see how she did it if she forgets. She has information about an upcoming program ready to feature on the web page. This is being provided to her by other people in EECM, who are also interested in seeing the web page be used to promote EECM's activities.

When the county told Wendy at noon that they needed certain information on services provided last year, and needed it by 3pm, she was able to set up a query to get the relevant information. Since she designed the queries in Access, she can do it again in the future if different information is requested. She also can create tables, if other raw data which can not be entered into the PREVENTION database is needed.

Resources

Since Access is a confusing program, Wendy needs resources which can help her understand it better, and help with actually implementing what she wants to do. The book EZ-Access explains some of the concepts of relational databases, what they can do, and how to do them in Microsoft Access. It is simple enough to actually be understood without already knowing the material. For quick help about a particular point in Access, ("How do I increase the field length?"), the help feature within Access is useful. It is quick to use, and searchable by keywords to help you find what you are looking for. Other people in the PREVENTION program are likely to need to do the same types of analysis that Wendy is doing. Sharing ideas with them can lead to avoiding duplication of effort, and new ways to look at the data.

Petrie needs resources to let her take advantage of more features of html, for more flexibility in designing the web page, to better organize the data on it, and draw readers attention to it. Webmonkey **http://www.hotwired.com/webmonkey** has clear explanations of the features of html, and how and why to use them. It also has sections on graphics, and more advanced features such as dynamic html and style sheets, when she is ready to increase her knowledge further. **http://home.cnet.com** has freeware and shareware to help develop the web page, such as image manipulators and WYSIWYG editors. Petrie also needs to investigate ISPs, to see if she can get better services, and better prices. The Three Rivers Free-Net, **http://trfn.clpgh.org**, provides Pittsburgh-area nonprofit organizations with website hosting services. Information Renaissance **http://www.info-ren.org** also provides connectivity and internet services to neighborhood organizations.

Recommendations

In order to make sure the web page stays current, Petrie should keep to a regular schedule for updating the web page, probably once per month. At this time, she should talk to the people who run the various programs within EECM, to make sure the information she has is still current. She should use the resources listed above to help her do what she wants to with the web page, and show her new things she may not have thought of.

To get the most use out of the web site, it needs to be publicized in search engines and web directories. Three Rivers Free-Net has a good page on doing this. The web site should also be promoted to those who deal with EECM, member congregations, volunteers, and clients.

Petrie should look into other ISPs, seeing where she can get services to help EECM get the most use out of the web page. The above resources, plus talking to organizations similar to EECM, are good places to look.

Wendy should read EZ-Access, thinking about how to apply the concepts to the database she has and other databases she might build. One such database was mentioned above, that of tracking the clients in EECM's adult programs. While this is an ambitious project, I feel that the benefits in increased quality and customization of service would make it worth the effort. Getting use out of this database also requires the LAN to be fully set up, so multiple people can input data and look at results.