



## Final Consulting Report

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### I. About the Organization

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#### Organization

The mission of Heritage Health Foundation, Inc. (HHFI) is:

*to improve the capacity of the communities of the Mon River and Turtle Creek Valleys to improve the quality of life of their residents.*

This broad mission encompasses health, human services, and economic development. HHFI was created as part of the Braddock Medical Center in 1983 and is now an independent organization.

To accomplish its mission, HHFI runs programs in early education, family services, affordable housing, economic development, workforce transportation, and community organizing. Many of the programs are operated jointly with other organizations. The Tri Boro Development Forum (TBDF) is one of these organizations, and it will be the focus of the community partnership.

TBDF is a coalition of community organizations, municipal governments, businesses, and residents in the four boroughs of Braddock, North Braddock, Rankin, and Swissvale.

*The mission of the Forum is to collaborate and use the combined strengths and individual talents of its members to improve the overall quality of life in its constituent communities. It sponsors activities in these communities and serves as a neutral facilitator bringing local groups and individuals together to achieve this goal.*

Founded in 1996 by HHFI and the Braddock Carnegie Library, TBDF seeks to address social and economic issues shared by the 20,000 residents living in the four communities it represents. Among these issues are education, business development, safety, and government structure. TBDF holds monthly public meetings, and its projects range in size from planting flowers to contributing to the redevelopment plan for a former steel furnace site. The current annual funding for the Forum is less than \$5,000.

#### Facilities

The administrative offices of HHFI are located at 445 Fourth Street in Braddock. The building was formerly a funeral home, but now houses the staff that runs the foundation. Each member of the staff has their own office and desktop computer. The 4 Kids Early Learning Network, one of HHFI's programs, has four learning centers and several home-based care facilities. The learning

centers are located in Braddock, East Pittsburgh, Homestead, and Rankin. The learning centers have computers available for children to use in the classrooms.

The Tri Boro Development Forum does not have its own facilities. TBDF holds its monthly meetings in the HHFI building. The chair people work from home or their workplaces, where most have computers and internet access.

## Programs

### ***HHFI Programs [1]:***

The 4 Kids Early Learning Program provides affordable child care and education for young children. It is wholly owned and operated by HHFI and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. 4 Kids offers educational programs for infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children that prepare kids for success in school. The children that graduate from these programs have shown remarkable advancement: they are less likely to be held back in school or be placed in special education. 4 Kids also offers before and after school programs, summer camps, and free drop-in child care centers. These programs allow parents to work and attend job training, thereby increasing the economic capacity of families.

WorkLink is a program that provides free shuttle service to residents. Many low-income residents live in areas that are not served by public transportation. This limits their job opportunities and access to essential services, such as health care. WorkLink connects these people to public bus routes, thereby connecting them to more opportunities. This increases the quality of life for the residents that WorkLink serves.

The Enterprise Portal is a program under development that helps business owners, developers, and homebuyers navigate the steps involved in purchasing property and starting a business. The Portal offers education in local laws, processes, financing, and technical opportunities. It also brings together many agencies that aim to increase the economic development of the Braddock area, such as the Enterprise Zone Corporation of Braddock and Allegheny County agencies. The efforts of the Enterprise Portal aim to remove persistent barriers to economic development. This will increase the economic capacity of the community by bringing in jobs and investments.

The Hospital Park Housing Initiative helps low-income families purchase their first homes. The program has made available for sale new and newly remodeled homes at low cost. The program also provides education and counseling to potential home buyers, increasing the potential for families to purchase a home.

HHFI purchased the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Tavern, a “nuisance bar” in the community that contributed to crime and detracted from the quality of life. It plans to renovate the building to hold the Enterprise Portal, physicians’ offices, new HHFI offices, and retail space.

### ***TBDF Programs:***

TBDF holds monthly meetings, which are open to the public and act as a community forum. Residents are able to bring forward issues that affect their lives, such as education, government and safety concerns. The Forum is then able to raise these issues with the borough governments. The authority of the forum gives it more credibility and influence with the borough governments than individual residents usually have. These monthly meetings are currently poorly attended; few people beyond the chairpersons attend.

The Carrie Furnace Site is a former iron blast furnace plant on the Monongahela River in Rankin, Braddock, and Swissvale. It was recently purchased by the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development for mixed-use development. TBDF brought together the borough governments, county officials, and community organizations to execute a cooperation agreement to set the stage for creating a master plan for the site that would be beneficial for residents of the existing communities and be economically sustainable. The master plan includes residential and commercial spaces, as well as a museum dedicated to the history of the location.

The Image and Beautification Committee plans projects to improve the image and enhance the urban environment of the four boroughs. Projects range from planting trees to transforming a vacant lot into parking. These projects require the participation of many volunteers, who are found by contacting local churches and schools when they are needed. The Forum collaborates with the borough governments, the Enterprise Zone Corporation of Braddock, the Rotary Clubs of Braddock and Swissvale, and several other institutions and businesses for these projects.

## Staff

HHFI has 62.5 full time equivalent employees. 50 of these employees work in the 4 Kids centers, three are at WorkLink, and nine work for the foundation. The employees at the foundation all have computers in their offices and are proficient in word processing software and email.

TBDF does not have staff, but rather operates as a volunteer collective. It has a General Chair and a Chair for each borough. The General Chair, Bob Grom, is also the President and CEO of HHFI. The borough chairs are concerned citizens of the communities – some have been appointed by the borough government while others are self-appointed. Many have long histories in their communities and municipal governments. The community co-chairs are:

- Braddock – Evelyn Benzo
- North Braddock – Vicki Vargo
- Rankin – Gaye Velar
- Swissvale – Ann Peelor

The co-chairs range in computer proficiency. Three are comfortable with email and web browsing, while one does not use the computer.

## Technical Environment

HHFI incorporates technology into the running of the foundation and into several of their programs. The CEO embraces technology and sees it as a useful tool that can help with the running of the foundation. The employees all have desktop computers, which are connected to a local area network. The LAN is connected to the internet via a cable internet service provider. The computers run mainly Windows, with the exception of one Macintosh. The office hosts several printers and a print server for use over the network. A couple staff members and interns have laptops, which connect to the LAN via a wireless router.

The staff computers all run the standard Microsoft Office suite of Word, Excel, and Outlook. The employees are comfortable with these programs. Bob Grom and one other employee, Rosemary Sallinger, also have Adobe Illustrator installed. Bob and Rosemary edit the monthly newsletter that HHFI distributes. The newsletter is printed for physical distribution and is edited using Word.

HHFI maintains a web presence in the form of a single page that links visitors to program websites ([www.hhfi.org](http://www.hhfi.org)). The 4Kids program's website, [www.4kidsearlyed.org](http://www.4kidsearlyed.org), contains information about

the program, web forms, and search functionality. WorkLink has a website with information, online sign-up forms, and maps ([www.worklinkvan.org](http://www.worklinkvan.org)). Another program, Kards 4 Kids, sells greeting cards online ([www.kards4kids.org](http://www.kards4kids.org)).

## Technical Management

The computers at the offices are mainly managed by staff members. The CFO, Jeff Au, is “good with networks” so he deals with everyday networking issues. Small problems are diagnosed and solved in house. A computer system consultant company is brought in to solve larger problems, and install and configure HHFI’s hardware and software. The computer consultant’s services are needed about once per month.

HHFI uses consultants to design and maintain their websites. John Cosgrove from Cosgrove Communications writes and edits content for the web pages, brochures, and other publications. Jay Volk, an independent consultant, maintains the technical aspects of the websites. The web sites are hosted by Crystal Tech, where they take up about 60% of the current available disk space that HHFI subscribes for. These consultants provide a seamless and professional web presence, but they make it difficult to effect changes. When 4 Kids wishes to make edits to the website, they must send the changes to the communications consultant, who forwards them to the technical consultant, who then updates the website. This process results in delays to updates, and changes are consequently infrequent.

## Internal and External Communication

Staff members of HHFI communicate internally via phone, email, and a monthly newsletter. External communications take place through the websites, phone, email, or in person during meetings. TBDF members have little forum-related communication outside the monthly meetings. However, they do meet informally as members of other organizations and as residents of the community.

## Information Management

Most data that HHFI staff members have is in Word and Excel documents. The ‘My Documents’ folder for each user is located on a shared file system. The documents that multiple people need to work on are shared in public folders. The shared file system also holds templates for the documents that the staff produces. This solution is adequate as staff members work on separate programs and projects, for which there is no standard format for information. All computers are backed up locally and onto the shared file system each night. The shared file system is also backed up.

TBDF information consists mainly of meeting minutes, which are stored in Word documents in the HHFI system. The Community Partner (CP) also has a list of email addresses that are stored in an Excel spreadsheet.

## II. Scope of Work

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### Task 1. Improve TBDF Communications

The monthly meetings of TBDF suffer from poor attendance by the community, mainly because the public is unaware of the organization's ongoing efforts. While there have been some high-profile projects in the past, current activities may be indistinguishable to some from municipal or institutional work. Without community involvement, TBDF's goal of acting as an intermediary between residents and borough councils cannot be met. Issues that may be important to the community are not being heard. With more involvement, TBDF would be able to better serve the needs of the people.

Prior to this consulting project, there was little information that TBDF distributed to the public. Meeting minutes were mailed out monthly, but only to those already involved in the Forum. Participants knew about TBDF through the co-chairs and the other organizations with which the co-chairs are involved. To allow TBDF to more easily advertise its presence and inform borough residents of its purpose, the CP and I planned to develop a website.

The main requirement for this website was that it be easy to maintain and update for the organization. Because of the grass-roots nature of TBDF, the content of the website should come directly from its membership. It should not be required to pass through the filters of communication consultants and web designers.

The resources for hosting a website already existed at HHFI, allowing for the site to be developed at no cost. HHFI maintains websites through Crystal Tech, which uses Windows 2003 servers for its shared hosting. Crystal Tech offers various plans based on storage capacity, bandwidth, and supported services. The plan that HHFI subscribed to allowed for the necessary storage space, bandwidth, and scripting capabilities needed for the TBDF website. In addition to utilizing the existing Crystal Tech hosting service, we used a free and open source content management system, DotNetNuke (DNN), to develop the site.

#### ***Expected Outcomes***

- The TBDF website will contain information and be publicly available.
- The CP will be able to make changes to the website including:
  - Add and remove pages
  - Modify content on page
  - Adjust DNN configuration settings
- The website will contain interactive features that allow users to add content

### Task 2. Develop an e-Newsletter

In order to expand upon the communication opportunities offered by a website, the CP and I planned to create an e-newsletter. In addition to the rather static material that websites hold, an e-newsletter would be able to convey the recent news about events held by TBDF and the issues under discussion at the meetings. This would allow TBDF to reach out to people, rather than waiting for them to view the website.

The main requirement for developing the e-newsletter was to make it easy and quick to produce each issue. The newsletter will be sent out each month, so any manual costs involved in making the

newsletter will be incurred every month. To reduce these costs, we planned to create a format for the newsletter that will facilitate both email and print editions. Another factor involved is the ease of sending the newsletter and managing the subscription list – for this we planned to use the content management system. It allows for the sending of bulk email to users who have registered on the website.

### ***Expected Outcomes***

- The CP will have a newsletter template.
- Procedures for creating the newsletter each month will exist.
- Methods for sending the newsletter and managing the email list will exist.

Improve communication with community – The number of email subscribers will gauge the level of communication. A contact list for the Forum currently contains approximately 50 email addresses and will be used as the initial subscription list. This number will increase through online subscribers and current subscribers spreading the word by forwarding the newsletter.

### III. Outcomes and Recommendations

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#### Task 1. Improve TBDF Communications

A web portal site was created and can be viewed at [www.tbdfconnects.org](http://www.tbdfconnects.org). Screenshots of the website can be found in Appendix A. The site was developed using DotNetNuke, which makes it easy for the members of the Forum to update. The website contains information on TBDF itself, community resources, and the four boroughs. It also has the following features:

- Events calendar
- User registration
- Subscription to newsletter
- Search functionality

Registered users are automatically subscribed to the newsletter. They also have the ability to add events to the calendar and register for events.

Prior to the creation of the website, there was very little information about TBDF accessible to the public. Brochures with obsolete information were available at the HHFI building, but they were not in distribution. The only method of spreading information was by word of mouth from active participants in the Forum and occasional flyers for events. Now, TBDF has a web presence that informs the community of its purpose, accomplishments, and current initiatives. The site invites readers to get involved in the community by attending the many events, including the monthly Forum meetings. Furthermore, the site can be easily updated by the CP, so the information will stay current.

The website serves the mission of the Forum by increasing the awareness of the organization within the community. By knowing about the Forum, it is likely that more residents will want to participate and attend the monthly meetings. Increasing the number of people involved in the organization directly serves the mission of “bringing... individuals together.” The events calendar on the website also helps to increase the capacity of the organization, as it allows more people to learn of, and therefore attend, the activities that TBDF sponsors.

The sustainability of the website is dependent upon the motivation of the CP and the members of the Forum. Four people, one per borough, will be in charge of maintaining the borough sections of the website. Two of these editors have been identified, while two still need to be found. These volunteers will be trained at the next borough meeting (May 15) in maintaining the website in DotNetNuke, specifically in adding/deleting pages, creating and configuring modules, and adding calendar events. To sustain the knowledge gained in the training session, I recommend that the organization purchase a book or two about DNN and bookmark DNN websites. By training multiple people in the website maintenance, the knowledge is more likely to be sustained and passed on than if only one person was trained.

The CP is in charge of the administration of the website. He will maintain the user accounts and permissions, decide when upgrades are needed, and maintain the non-borough pages (About TBDF, Resources, etc). His training has occurred throughout the development process: he helped configure the website, so is well versed in creating pages and adding modules. He has not only added events to the calendar, but has changed the calendar settings and added event options. He has created user roles, modified their permissions, and adjusted user account settings.

The website has been online as of April 18<sup>th</sup>, and has not yet had many visitors. Only three people have registered with the website, and they work at HHFI. The TBDF e-newsletter sent on May 4<sup>th</sup> announced the launch of the website, which will hopefully help bring in new visitors, who will register for the site.

The biggest risk to the sustainability of the website is that the editors and administrators will neglect their maintenance duties. Because the editors are volunteers, it will be important to motivate them to update the website. The monthly e-newsletter will serve as a deadline for website updates, and policies for borough editors have been developed (see Appendix B). The newsletter deadline will require news and events to be added to the website before the newsletter is sent out.

Other risks to the sustainability of the website are of a technical nature. Web sites are always at risk of being compromised due to security vulnerabilities, which can result in the site being disabled or having unauthorized content added. One way to mitigate this risk is to keep the software on the site up to date. For this reason, I am recommending as part of a maintenance plan that the CP periodically check for DotNetNuke updates. If the website is compromised, the site can be restored to its previous state. CrystalTech creates daily backups of the database and file system, which can be restored for a small fee. Jay Volk should be contacted to request a site restoration.

The website has allowed members of the forum to see the potential for technology in their group. When introducing the website and describing what features it would have during the monthly meeting, some members thought of new uses for the website, such as putting up the minutes from the borough council meetings. They realized that the website will allow them to involve the community in many ways. Also, by using a portal website that will allow users to contribute content, the website has the potential to be an online version of the forum – by allowing users to comment on ideas, they can have input from members of the community that are not able to attend meetings.

## Task 2. Develop e-Newsletter

An e-newsletter has been developed in order to expand upon the communication opportunities offered by a website. The newsletter is able to communicate the most recent happenings at TBDF to residents in a timely manner. This will allow citizens to know what is happening in the organization and community, even if they are unable to attend the meetings.

A process for creating the e-newsletter and distributing it has been developed by the CP and the consultant. The CP has a template in Word (see Appendix C) that he uses as a basis for each newsletter. The CP is well versed in using Word, so no new software needed to be learned in order to create the newsletter. After the newsletter has been created, the Word document is saved as an html webpage. The e-newsletter is sent out via the newsletter functionality of the DotNetNuke system. It automatically sends the newsletter to all subscribers of the site and any additional addresses specified. The html code created by Word is copied over to a text box on the website, where it can be previewed and edited before being sent out. In addition to sending out the e-newsletter, it will also be archived on the website and distributed in paper form for those without computers.

The CP has sent out several test newsletters during training sessions with the consultant. He also created and sent out the first e-newsletter using the website service on May 4<sup>th</sup>. This newsletter was sent to a list of e-mail addresses that the CP already had, and it contained an announcement for launch of the website.



The e-newsletter increases the capacity of the organization in the same ways that the website does: it informs the community and encourages involvement in the organization and its activities. The e-newsletter allows TBDF to reach out to people to tell them what is happening, rather than waiting for people to look at the website. Because it will be sent out on a monthly basis, it will keep people current with Forum happenings.

The e-newsletter can be sustained by making it easy to create and send out. Because it can be made in Word, the newsletter does not take long to create. The template reduces the time needed to format the document. By using the website newsletter capability, the CP can easily send the newsletter to everyone who has subscribed themselves, so he won't need to maintain a separate email list. Heritage Health Foundation, TBDF's parent organization, already sends out a monthly paper newsletter (Snapshots), so it has demonstrated the ability to sustain a monthly newsletter. The staff members who put together Snapshots can serve as a resource for the CP in formatting the newsletter for printing.

### Recommendation 1. Create and implement a maintenance plan

A well-maintained website means having current content and software. These two concerns are likely to generate interest among visitors and keep them coming back. Current content ensures that visitors will have a reason to return, while current software will make the experience of visiting the site more pleasing. Keeping the software up-to-date allows better features to be implemented and reduces security risks.

To ensure that the content of the website stays current, a policy for updating it should be developed. By keeping the content up to date, visitors will be more likely to return repeatedly: few people will return to a site that never changes. However, this will require diligence on the part of the website administrator and borough editors. Content should be updated on a monthly basis, at minimum.

To ensure that the software for the website is up-to-date, the website administrator should check for updates every three months. Updates to the DotNetNuke modules can be performed by the administrator, while updates to the DotNetNuke core should be installed by the technical web consultant.

### **Approach**

The policy for updating content should include statements such as the following:

- The monthly TBDF meetings generate ideas and issues that should be shared on the website. Prior to the meetings, the agenda should be added to the website. If visitors can see what will be discussed, they may attend to voice their opinions. This could bring new members into the Forum. After meetings, the minutes should be added to the website within a few days. This will allow people who were unable to attend to stay current with the issues discussed.
- Large initiatives taken on by TBDF, such as the Carrie Furnace redevelopment planning, should have their own web page on the site. This page can then be updated when progress is made on the project.
- Community events should be added to the calendar as soon as their details have been finalized. Additionally, posting digital versions of event flyers or creating event web pages will allow for detailed descriptions. Posting pdf's has the benefit of allowing others to print and distribute copies of the flyers.

- After events, photos should be added to the web site gallery within a few days.
- Recurring calendar events should be checked periodically (every 2-3 months) to make sure the information is current. Also, the end date for ongoing periodic events should be kept at least three months into the future.

The following procedures describe how to check for and install updates to DotNetNuke.

- To check for module updates, log in to the Host account on the website. In the administrator toolbox at the top of the page, click on the “Install New Features” link. This will open the “Module Definitions” page, which lists the current module versions. A green check mark located next to the module name indicates that an update is available.
- To install a module update, download the install version of the selected module from the Downloads section on the DotNetNuke website ([www.dotnetnuke.com](http://www.dotnetnuke.com)) and save it to your computer. After that, follow the procedure in the previous item to get to the Module Definitions page. At the bottom of this page, click on the “Install New Module” link. This will bring you to a File Upload page, where you will add the zip file you just downloaded from the website. After locating the file, press “Add,” and then “Save File.” A log of the installation process will appear, and it should end with “Installation Successful.” Click on the return link. An error page may appear at this point, don’t be alarmed. It is a bug in DotNetNuke; reload the page and it will load normally.
- To check for updates to the DotNetNuke portal software, look at the Downloads section of the DotNetNuke website. Determine the most recent version of DotNetNuke in the 3.x branch. (4.x versions require ASP.NET 2.0, which is not supported on the current web hosting plan). To check for the installed version, log in to the Host account. Go to the Portals page, located in the Host menu. This page shows the current version of the DNN core software (3.3.7 as of this writing).
- Jay Volk should be contacted to assist with updating the DNN core software. The process will involve manually backing up the database and files, which only Jay has the ability to do.

## Recommendation 2 • Introduce new features

In order for the website to reach its full potential as an interactive online version of the Forum, new features should be added. These should be rolled out as interest in the site grows, rather than implemented suddenly. If too many features are added before the site has a solid user base, they run the risk of laying dormant. Possible features include an online forum, blog, and surveys. In addition to these features, the possibility of local sponsors should be explored.

### **Approach**

Before adding new features, monitor the site usage. This can be done in from the Site Log page in the Admin menu. A variety of report options are available. A detailed site log contains information on each visitor, including name, browser used, referring link, and pages visited. A page popularity report details the number of times each page has been requested. The Page Views by *time\_unit* report will show how many pages were viewed on each hour, day, or month during the specified time period. Lastly, the Site Referrals report states each link that referred visitors to the site (and how many times). These reports will give a good indication of how much the site is being used and which pages are the most popular.

Adding new features that are already included as modules in DotNetNuke is fairly straightforward. Create a new page and add the module to the content pane. I recommend keeping the visibility of the new page to the administrator only during the setup. This will prevent people from seeing the page before the module is configured. In addition to those modules included with DotNetNuke, many independently developed modules are available for sale on [www.snowcovered.com](http://www.snowcovered.com).

When considering new features, look for information on how to make them successful. For instance, “The ABC of building a successful forum” has several good tips on how to manage an online forum [2]. One such tip is to not start out “with too many sub forums... you'll get much more activity and participation if you have five interesting threads next to each other in one forum, rather than five threads in five different forums.” For a blog, the key is to post updates frequently. Sharon Housley [3] warns “that blogging requires time and effort, don't create unrealistic expectations and be unable to deliver.” She also recommends including the blog content in an RSS feed to increase readership.

An additional feature to pursue would be to get local businesses to sponsor the website. Having information about the number of site visitors and page views will help when approaching businesses. A simple text/html module containing a logo, link, and/or blurb about the sponsor can be added globally to the side panel of every page. Local sponsors will help defray the hosting cost of the website, as well as encourage the economic development of the area by promoting local businesses.

## References

- [1] Heritage Health Foundation Inc. Organization Overview & Activities. 2007-2008.
  - [2] “The ABC of building a successful forum” in the Community Building and Social Networks forum of WebmasterWorld.com. Found on April 13, 2007 at <http://www.webmasterworld.com/forum103/587.htm>
  - [3] Housley, Sharon. “How To Write A Successful Blog: Top Ten Tips” Found on May 2, 2007 at [http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2005/04/26/how\\_to\\_write\\_a\\_successful.htm](http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2005/04/26/how_to_write_a_successful.htm)
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## About the Consultant

Sonya Wierman is a first year Ph.D. student in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department at Carnegie Mellon. She received her B.S. in Computer Systems Engineering from Boston University in 2003 and her M.S. from Carnegie Mellon in 2006.