

MEJO 332 Public Relations Writing

Communications Audit – Open NC Collaborative

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APPLES Client Portfolio
Open NC Collaborative
Team 1

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Communication Audit

Background

Civic tech lies at the intersection of public service and technology. Through community-led projects, civic tech produces technology-based solutions to issues across the United States. Within North Carolina, Open NC Collaborative empowers communities with the tools and skills needed to solve community issues.

In 2017, Jennifer Miller founded Open NC Collaborative to unite citizens, coders and public servants across North Carolina to create technology-based solutions to community issues. Open NC Collaborative is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that operates under the main Code for America nonprofit. In addition to the seven brigades in North Carolina, Open NC Collaborative supports people without access to a local brigade.

Open NC Collaborative has supported initiatives such as End Durham Hunger; creating mobile apps that connect food-insecure people to food pantries and resources, and NC Covid Support to disseminate information about COVID-19 resources to communities.

In addition to projects, Open NC Collaborative coordinates with Code for America to implement state-wide events such as National Day of Civic Hacking.

As part of its mission to “change North Carolina for the better,” Open NC Collaborative offers skill-building events, technology resources, educational activities and state and local projects.

Currently, Open NC Collaborative operates virtually with Jennifer Miller as the only employee. Through the online platform Meetup, Open NC Collaborative provides updates, event information, and a social networking space for around 50 members. Open NC Collaborative also hosts biweekly virtual meetings to engage members and facilitate skill-building.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

- Transparency about the meeting schedule
- Easy to get connected with organization through MeetUp channel
- Exclusively online work/meetings is a strong appeal for volunteers during COVID
- Having no website, but using the Meetup page as a temporary placeholder.
 - Putting lots of information on said page, as well as a point of contact for more information

- Clearly stating that volunteers do not need coding or public sector experience to join
- Having a strong parent organization (Code for America, as well as Code for All)

- **Weaknesses:**

- No form of social media for outreach, despite wanting a higher member retention rate
- There is no established website for Open NC Collaborative, although they are in the process of creating one for 2022, “Code for the Carolinas.”
- The Meetup site is not interactive/engaging
- No strong theme/attention grabber throughout the Meetup site
- No logo on the site or in general for Open NC Collaborative to brand the brigade itself
- Only 51 members in the Open NC Collaborative chapter and the meetings the past 6 months average from 2-10 people.
- No updates on the event calendar for 2022

- **Opportunities:**

- A website is important when trying to clearly and effectively communicate essential information about an organization. Having a professionally built website up and running after the rebranding will help emphasize the organization’s efforts, which results in more awareness, support, volunteers, and donations from its publics.

- Include pictures and other visuals to create an aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly site to help increase the search visibility of the organization and expand its reach.
- Adding a blog with testimonials of members to the new site would help connect the organization with its users while also attracting a larger audience.
- Expand to social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter, to reach the university audience. This will provide increased visibility and also help inform users about updates within the organization.

- **Threats:**

- When searching for “Open NC Collaborative” on the internet and social media, another organization that is politically affiliated titled “Open NC” appears first.
- Slack being the organization’s only social media platform does not access any of the primary social media communities such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.
- Without social media or a website that is consistently updated, the organization can appear inactive or unable to provide communications with current or prospective members.
- Due to the target audience of the organization being university students, the lack of a physical presence or representative on college campuses reduces opportunities for students to learn and choose to engage with Open NC Collaborative.

- Providing a resource to both North and South Carolina members reduces opportunities for one-on-one interactions between members and organization/brigade leaders, specifically concerning members voicing their opinions or wanting to introduce a new project.
- Through the connection to Code for America, there are opportunities for those unfamiliar with the member roles within the organization to believe that members must have an interest and experience within computer coding or civic tech.

- **Recommendations:**

- Commit to the rebranded name “Code for the Carolinas” and a recognizable logo and color scheme so that the branding of the organization is unique and identifiable for continuity when carried throughout multiple platforms.
- Establish at least one social media account on either Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram to reach the university audience and provide quick updates on projects and event schedules.
- Promote personal anecdotes of members to demonstrate the exact actions and roles of volunteers, both within and outside of technological involvement.
- Create a website that identifies the purpose and current projects of Open NC Collaborative that catches the attention of those who are unfamiliar with the organization and prompts further investigation.

- Provide an accessible direct contact to prospective and current members as an organization representative so that anyone interested can experience engagement to answer further questions.
- Connect with Communication Officers at universities within North and South Carolina to either discuss opportunities for Open NC Collaborative to represent themselves through internship and philanthropy fairs.
- Ask University Student Marketing if there are departments, such as computer sciences, where specific professors and advisors are willing to promote the organization as a resource to their students.