Best Practices: Communication

Subcommittee of the Emergency Aid Network

Best Practices: Communication Subcommittee Members

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We have programs, now what?

- After the university has made the decision to invest financial or human capital to set up an emergency aid program, the university will need to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the programs.
- Challenge: Marketing the programs so that individuals who need them are aware of them and use them wisely

- Charge to the Communication Subcommittee: Determine Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why

Communicating about Emergency Aid

Basic message the emergency aid committee or administrator must communicate:

Communicating the definition of emergency aid and needs of students

- College students have emergency situations that occur which are unexpected and beyond their control.
- Although these emergency situations may seem inconsequential to employees who have consistent incomes and other benefits such as insurance, they can be devastating to students and may cause a student to stop out or drop out.

Basic Program Information to Communicate

Which aid programs have been established and the purposes of each aid program,

How to access aid programs (hours of availability, location, etc.),

Eligibility requirements for utilizing aid programs,

Stories of need and positive impact due to using the program, and

Outcomes of the program

Marketing the program

Strategic Marketing/Informational Communication Methods

Brochures and fliers

Branding the programs in memorable way,

Websites

Signage (door signs, posters, etc.)

Student newspaper articles or advertisement

Inclusion in other program materials/co-ads

Text messages

Phone calls

Videos
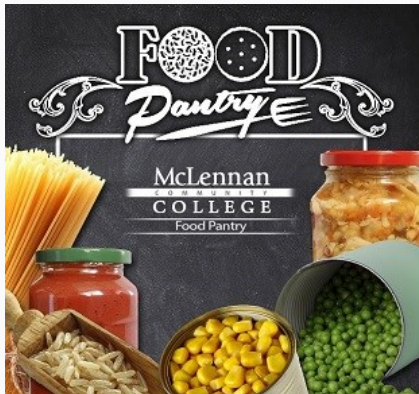
Promotional items

Displays

Personal letters/post cards

Social media

Branding Your Program

- Most of the participating EA Net institutions have branded their emergency aid programs so that they are easily recognizable by all constituents.

Strategic Marketing: Timing

Strategic timing of messages: CRM message at times when students are most likely to encounter emergencies (toward end of semester when refund money has run out),

Adding link to emergency aid program websites to electronic bills which may be viewed by student and/or proxy, and

Add link to the financial aid resources information on student information system so student sees that option when reviewing financial aid package.

Communicating with Students

Individual Communication: Students

- Campus student emails
- Peer Mentoring
- Personal connection via calls/texts
- Discussions with Financial Aid Advisor, Success Coach, Academic Advisor, etc.

Mass Communication: Students

- Inclusion of emergency aid program materials in First Year Seminar course
- Link to resources on financial aid section of the Student Information System portal
- Student engagement/student organization software
- Student Government Association (and other organizations) presentation
- Student newspaper articles or advertisements, and
- Radio or television station interviews/advertisements
- Social Media

Communications to Target Student Groups

- Athletes during recruitment and compliance meetings
- Disability Resource Services/Counseling Centers
- Distance Learners via distance learning technology
- Veterans
- Students who may be dropped for non-payment
- Students with large gap between financial aid package and overall bill (unmet need)
- Foster Care Waiver recipients

Fun Ways of Communicating with Students

- First Year Experience Seminar Courses conduct resource scavenger hunts that includes the food/hygiene product pantry,
- Student organizations host competition to see which organization makes the "best" decoration, building, etc. out of canned food. Judges rate on theme, # of cans, etc. and organizations win prizes while food is donated to campus food pantry (replicate with unopened hygiene products), and
- Use campus mascot in videos to highlight programs available without showing an actual student.

Communicating with Employees

Communication w/Employees: Why and What

Faculty, staff, and administrators are important audiences for the following reasons:
- They teach, advise, or supervise students who have emergencies
- These employees must be aware that programs exist in order to make referrals into the programs, and
- The employees are more likely to donate funds, clothing, food, or even temporary shelter if they are aware of the needs of the students and some success stories.

Tools to Communicate to Employees

Email announcements,

Discussion or training provided at department meetings,

Brochures which they can keep in their offices and distribute,

Information in employee handbooks or provided during orientation or "back to school" programs, and

Websites.

Communication to Faculty & Staff Members

- Presentation at Faculty Senate
- Academic Deans and Council of Department Chairs meetings
- Brochures
- Open Faculty Forum—Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration
- Presentation to Staff Council
- Staff training workshop in conjunction with other training or stand-alone

Fun Ways of Communicating with Employees

- Host competition by departments for who can donate the most food and hygiene product pantry items per FTE employee (winner receives special recognition from president),
- Host a donation night for free admission to an athletic event for employees,
- Give the score: Encourage employees to give an amount of money equal to the final score of an athletic game, and
- Ask President to film his/her weekly campus message from inside the food and hygiene product pantry at a time when it is not open.

Communicating with External Stakeholders

Communicating with Parents

Websites that outline programs and which are linked to obvious other websites such as Office of Financial Aid, Dean of Students, Business Office/Cashier, etc.

Brochures which are distributed at new student orientation and/or family events such as family weekend, and

Letters or emails to family members outlining the programs available along with contact information and website addresses.

Communicating with Alumni

Alumni frequently remember how emergencies effected their ability to complete school and may be willing to support a variety of efforts, but they must be aware of the programs and opportunities:

- Presentation to Alumni Board of Directors,
- Article in the university alumni newsletter or magazine,
- On-line messages about the program goals and outcomes along with success stories.
- Include link to a fundraising website in all publications to alumni!

Communicating with Donors/Foundation

Donors and members of the university or college foundation are typically philanthropists who may have the ability to give, but they must be aware of the programs and opportunities:

- Presentation to Foundation Board of Directors/Trustees,
- Article in the university alumni newsletter or magazine which is sent to donors who are not alumni,
- On-line messages about the program goals and outcomes along with success stories.
- Include link to a fundraising website in all publications to alumni!

Communicating with Donors/Foundation

- College or discipline specific advisory board presentations,
- Donor-Scholar Dinner (if one is hosted) can highlight an emergency grant aid story (if student is comfortable sharing), and
- Individual presentations or discussions with specific donors who may have interest.

- Include link to a fundraising website in all publications to donors/Foundation Board members!

Communicating with Feeder School Districts

High school counselors and administrators often know your students as well as or better than you do. They may encourage their students to attend certain schools based on student support programs such as emergency aid.

- Materials to include at college fairs hosted at high schools,
- Partner with Admissions to provide a briefing about the programs at high school counselor update sessions, if offered, and
- Letter/brochure mailed to superintendents and principals which outlines your programs and ways you care for their graduates.

Communicating with Community Agencies

Communicating about emergency aid programs can lead to a host of other types of program collaborations as long as community agencies and organizations are aware of what you offer and your goals.

- Collaborate with the agency director/head to discuss the services
- Include community agency on website and ask to be included on their sites
- Secure support from community college tech programs (i.e. dental hygienist who will "practice" on patients for free to get their required hours completed, automotive repair, etc.
- Make local non-profits aware so they consider ways to donate

Communicating with City and County Officials

Communicating about emergency aid programs with city and county officials can lead to referrals or "welfare coordination" as well as encouraging timely donations.

- Marketing materials (brochures, flyers)
- Meeting with local law enforcement officials so that they are aware of resources for students who live off campus and can share their resources
- Schedule open discussion time during a regularly scheduled commissioners' meeting to make brief presentation

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