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2022

Bringing Swipe Out Hunger to VCU: Identifying Best Practices and Analyzing Administrative Policies for Future Reform

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Recommended Citation

Stephens, J. & Ta, A. (2022). Bringing Swipe Out Hunger to VCU: Identifying Best Practices and Analyzing Administrative Policies for Future Reform. VCU Institute for Inclusion, Inquiry & Innovation (iCubed).

Bringing Swipe Out Hunger to VCU:
Identifying Best Practices and Analyzing Administrative Policies for Future Reform

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Introduction

Swipe Out Hunger (SOH) is a national organization that partners with universities to reduce student food insecurity by allowing those with extra dining hall meal swipes to donate them to their peers. Dr. Youngmi Kim's 2018 study at VCU found that **39.5% of the 119 students surveyed experienced food insecurity, higher than the national average.**

The goal of our study was to create a roadmap for VCU and similar urban, public universities who are looking to implement their own SOH programs.

Methods

- Semi-structured interviews with eight university administrators and students with SOH programs.
- Analysis of university, administrative, and dining services contractual policies at VCU and other institutions.
- Case study reviews of SOH programs at other universities

Research questions:
1. *How might a successful implementation of SOH look like at VCU?*
2. *What actions were most affective during the implementation of SOH at other universities?*
3. *What difficulties did those efforts face?*

Selection Criteria

Our team developed a selection matrix to evaluate all higher education institutions with existing SOH programs to determine the most appropriate universities suitable for further analysis and comparison. We bifurcated our six selection criteria into *Group A: most important* and *Group B: moderately important.*

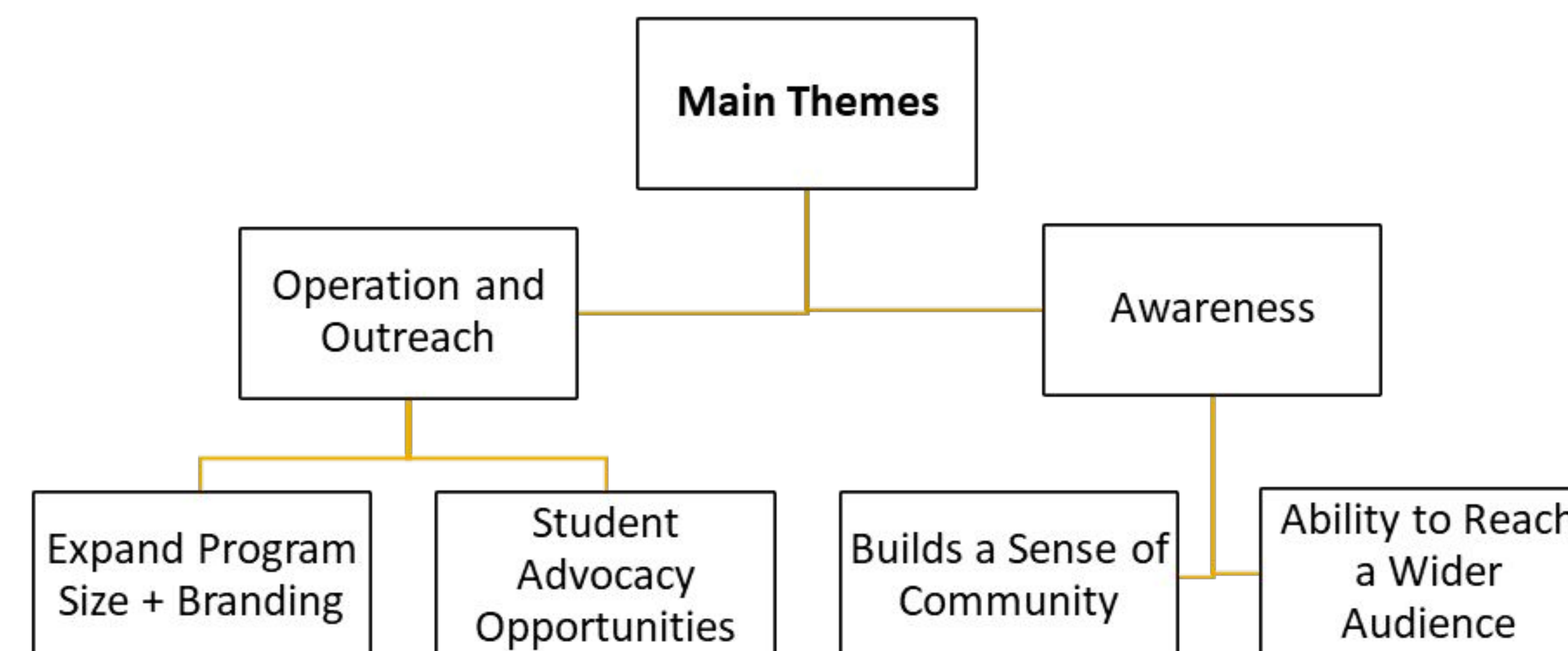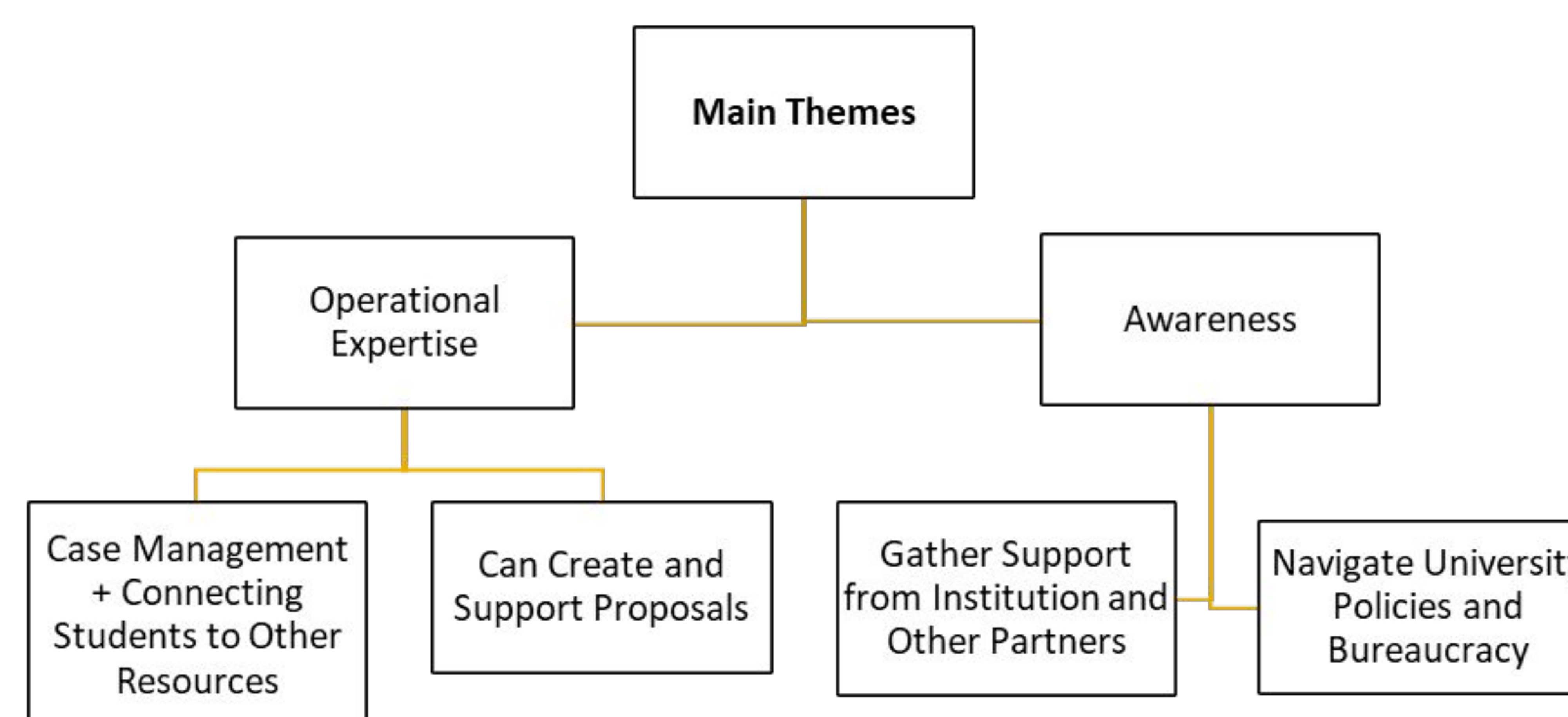| Group A Criteria	Group B Criteria
• Public Univeristy • Urban Campus • Large Undergraduate Student Population (20k+ enrolled)	• Has Current Food Insecurity Initiatives • Diverse Student Body (>0.5) • Has a Contract with Aramark

Sampled Universities: William & Mary (sole SOH-participating Virginian school); Texas A&M; UNC Charlotte; Temple University; Rutgers New Brunswick; Florida State University; UC Riverside; Sacramento State

Findings

Student Involvement

Main Themes
- Operation and Outreach
  - Expand Program Size + Branding
  - Student Advocacy Opportunities
- Awareness
  - Builds a Sense of Community
  - Ability to Reach a Wider Audience

Administrative Involvement

Main Themes
- Operational Expertise
  - Case Management + Connecting Students to Other Resources
  - Can Create and Support Proposals
- Awareness
  - Gather Support from Institution and Other Partners
  - Navigate University Policies and Bureaucracy

Logistics

- **Connections** with other programs and offices is essential. Additionally, conducting regular swipe drives throughout the school year rather than one-off events is most effective for its success.
- **Student privacy** is also key. Swipe vouchers should be directly placed onto student ID cards or the voucher cards should be designed to resemble them. A secure office should handle data collection related to swipe distribution. Intake surveys can be harmful and reduce accessibility for students.
- Due to VCU's profit model, persuading administrators to adopt a Swipe Out Hunger program may be arduous. **Student food insecurity data** and testimonials in negotiations and grant proposals should be utilized to strengthen arguments. Dining service providers are typically onboard because of the good PR.
- Both student and administrator champions need to be committed to the routine evaluation of the program. A **student organization** is necessary for monitoring SOH's operations and connecting with peers.

Recommendations

1. Create a student organization with administrative partners
2. Identify current infrastructure
3. Streamline the process and prioritize accessibility
4. Be data-driven and use testimonials
5. Build connections for longevity
6. Use sustainability as a selling point

A Proposed Timeline

Fall 2022
- Create a SOH student organization
- Collaborate with SGA
- Reach out to Division of Student Affairs and Office of Sustainability

Spring 2023
- Work with a VCU office to create and submit a proposal
- Begin negotiations with Aramark

Fall 2023
- Begin collecting swipe donations
- Tabling and awareness events
- Fine-tune swipe distribution process

Conclusion

This research should serve as a roadmap in guiding the entire VCU community toward a successful and impactful implementation of a meal swipe program that helps to reduce student food insecurity.

While our work does not intend to erode the structural inequalities that cause food insecurity, we believe that by creating a more food secure environment for all VCU students will create a more just campus community.

Acknowledgements