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# CREATING A DATA COLLECTION TOOL FOR HABITAT FOR HUMANITY METROWEST/GREATER WORCESTER

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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# WPI



**Habitat**  
for Humanity®  
MetroWest/Greater Worcester



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# THE MOTIVATION

Prior to our project, Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester (Habitat MW/GW) has found that communication between their organization and partner families declines after families become homeowners. It became difficult to collect data on all partner families. For non-profit organizations like Habitat MW/GW, data and feedback are vital for their growth, as regular feedback from constituents can help them improve their services and operation (Morley, Vinson, & Hatry, 2001). Data collection is also critical to demonstrate success to funders.

**In the only known previous attempt to survey Habitat MW/GW homeowners and collect family data, only 2 out of the 36 partner families responded.**

This survey attempt left a lot of room for improvement. Primarily, their response rate of **5%** was deemed too low to be able to demonstrate their own success. Additionally, their survey was limited to a **mailed copy** that families had to mail back, and had questions that were **redundant and irrelevant** to the data Habitat MW/GW was looking to gain from a survey. Finally, there was **no incentive** to complete the survey. After analyzing Habitat MW/GW's first attempt at developing a homeownership survey, our group set out to not only improve upon their surveying attempt, but go above and beyond in the creation of ours by using professional survey practices.

## Best Practices of Surveys

- **Incentives** are effective because they are more likely to motivate those less compelled to complete a survey, reducing non-response bias (Peytchev, 2013).
- **Online surveys** increase response rates because there is a facilitative interaction between survey authors and respondents and because of user convenience (Smith, 1997).
- **Question Structure:** Increasing specificity of questions is important, as the more specific a question is, the more it helps respondents recall certain events and feelings (Converse and Presser, 1986).





## OUR GOAL

The goal of this project was to develop a data collection system.

Through use of our data collection system, Habitat MW/GW will be able to gather data from its partner families in the future.

## OUTREACH

Before we created any surveys, we needed to develop an idea of what types of data Habitat MW/GW should be collecting. To do this, we contacted major local philanthropists and other, larger Habitat Affiliates, both local and national.

When interviewing major local philanthropists, they indicated that they typically want to see that the organization in question is successful in their mission before donating money.

For example, Habitat for Humanity would need to display that owning a home empowers families, leaving them better off than they were before owning a home.

We contacted other Habitat for Humanity Affiliates, both local and national. Greater Boston (MA) sent their survey and a survey results document, including survey response rates and family/housing statistics; York, PA and Pinellas County, FL each gave us a homeownership survey to examine.



# THE SURVEYS

We used knowledge gained from outreach, research on best survey practices, and information from Habitat MW/GW's homeowner application to create three separate surveys:

- **Communication & Information Survey**
- **Post-Mortgage Survey**
- **The Foundations Survey**

Our team produced a hard copy version, Google Form (online) version, and PDF version of each survey to give to Habitat for Humanity MW/GW. Each survey also has an accompanying Google Sheet spreadsheet that houses all raw data gathered from responses from homeowners.



## COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SURVEY

The Communication and Information Survey will be a semi-annual questionnaire sent out to families via Google Form, other than the hard copies sent out to the families that do not use email.

This non-anonymous, optional survey will serve to:

- Proactively update family contact information (if necessary).
- Give partner families the chance to take advantage of the information resources Habitat MW/GW has to offer such as resume writing, financial education, will writing, and volunteer opportunities.

This survey will be sent out in June of this year (2019). Moving forward, the survey will be sent out twice a year in March and September. This will create a month-long gap between the Foundations Survey and receiving the Communication and Information survey, accommodating over-probing concerns (Iarossi, 2006).



# POST-MORTGAGE SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to give families a final opportunity to reflect on their time with Habitat MW/GW and ask families about future opportunities within the organization. This data will be used to improve the Habitat home-owning experience. This survey:

- Will be optional, and non-anonymous
- Will be administered after a family pays off their mortgage with Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester.
- Will be sent out via Google Form. For the partner families that do not use email, a hard copy will be sent in the mail.



# FOUNDATIONS SURVEY

The Foundations Survey serves as the main data collection survey, and is the most important survey we created. The questions within the Foundations Survey were constructed to accommodate the specific data our sponsor desired, and generate information that shows how Habitat MW/GW succeeds at improving the lives of their homeowners.

## Highlights of the Survey:

- Anonymous
- Contains both closed and open ended questions for statistics and anecdotes: 10 short response questions and 20 Likert Scale questions
- Data serves both family services and grant writing
- Piloted survey from April 3rd, 2019 to April 17th, 2019. (Information on how can be found in Appendix D.2.2)

**The pilot achieved a 33% response rate through e-mail.**

# THE INCENTIVE

One reason the pilot was successful was due to the use of a monetary incentive. The incentive was a 25% off ReStore coupon that can be used at both the Worcester and Ashland ReStores. The coupon was used because it is simple to administer and it did not pose a large cost-burden for Habitat MW/GW.

Homeowners who were asked about the ReStore incentive reported it to be useful in making them more likely to take the survey. **One such respondent even said it gave her motivation to take the time to complete the survey.**

In the future, the same monetary incentive will be used for the Foundations Survey and the Post-Mortgage Survey. The Communication and Information Survey will not use an incentive because it offers homeowners valuable resources that Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester can provide for them; the survey itself is essentially an incentive.

In implementation, the incentive will be the last visual a homeowner will see before submitting the Foundations Survey or the Post-Mortgage Survey.

Online, the homeowner can take a picture of the incentive coupon with their phone, or screen shot the coupon and print it out.

For both mailed copies of the Foundations and Post-Mortgage Surveys, the incentive will be placed at the end of the survey on a portion of paper that homeowners cut out.



Valid only at the Worcester and Ashland ReStores.

25% off ReStore Coupon

Valid from 3/29/19-5/31/19 only.

Some exclusions apply, including but not limited to ReColor paint, MaxLite and GreenLite product, and ReStore soda and other ReStore product.



# Results of the Pilot

*Gathered from implementation of the Foundations Survey from April 3rd, 2019 to April 17th, 2019.*

*"I am not constantly hearing neighbors fighting at night and needing to look out the window wondering who is leaving in an ambulance that day."*

**-Habitat for Humanity  
MW/GW Homeowner**



## 80%

OF HOMEOWNERS AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE

That their children's overall performance in school has improved since becoming a homeowner.

## 90%

OF HOMEOWNERS AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE

That their family's well-being has improved since becoming a homeowner.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure effective future use of the data collection system created in this project, the team formulated a number of recommendations.

## Foundations Survey

We recommend that the Foundations Survey is administered every 3 years moving forward (2022, 2025, etc.). It should be distributed by the Family Services Coordinator in the first week of January and be available to partner families for a month.

We believe that this time of year will be a less hectic time of year for most families partnered with Habitat MW/GW. It will also give ample opportunity to complete the survey, avoiding an over-probing of respondents (Iarossi, 2006).

The following steps should be taken when administering the survey:

- Notify families through email in the month of December of the survey's impending distribution.
- Remind families to respond during the month-long administration period. We recommend this is done on Wednesdays through e-mail and/or phone call.
- Call partner families when the survey period is over and deliver one final reminder to complete it.
- Any phone calls should be made from a Habitat MW/GW phone, rather than a personal cell phone of a volunteer.

## User Manual

We recommend at least one organization employee or volunteer is kept familiar with the data collection system and user manual at all times.

This will allow for someone to be available to guide future system users through any questions they may have that are not covered in the manual.

We also recommend that one hard copy and one e-copy of the manual be kept in Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester's possession.

This will ensure that Habitat MW/GW maintains the ability to use, change, and analyze data collected within the data collection system.



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