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Final Copy of Case Study

Status:

WINNER

Year:

2013

Organization Name:

Community Plates

Organization URL:

<http://communityplates.org>

Project Name:

Community Plates' Go Rescue Technology Powered by WhenToManage

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:

Human Services

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

Community Plates is a technology-fueled, volunteer-driven, non-profit organization that rescues surplus food from supermarkets, grocers, and restaurants, and distributes it directly to local receiving agencies that serve food-insecure individuals and families. Founded by WhenToManage, an innovator of cloud-based software for the restaurant, hospitality and retail industries, Community Plates' food-rescue process utilizes the Go Rescue technology and volunteers to rescue and immediately transfer food to people in need. There are an estimated 50 million food-insecure individuals in America, of which 1 in 5 are children under 5 years (according to the USDA). The traditional food rescue model has high overhead and fresh food waste caused by additional

infrastructure and food handling via fleets of trucks, drivers and warehousing. Utilizing the cloud-based Go Rescue App and volunteer model, Community Plates eliminates much of the overhead of the traditional food rescue process, while delivering fresher (and thereby healthier) food directly to the hungry. The Go Rescue web-based mobile app provides a unique "self-serve volunteer management system" through which volunteers sign up for food runs in advance or at the last minute when free time becomes available, and to track information during the run, from driving directions to instructions about who to see at the food donor. As the organization grows with more geographies and volunteers, the challenge is to maintain the Go Rescue App's simplicity while expanding its ability to make volunteers more efficient, and food donors and receiving agencies more informed and involved. There is no precedent, and Go Rescue is therefore a technology that is evolving with lessons learned. As a result, WhenToManage has been iterating the Community Plates technology on an ongoing basis to further simplify and enhance the volunteering process.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

Community Plates was founded in January of 2010, with the first food run occurring in Fairfield County, CT, in May 2010. It has since expanded to two additional markets, Albuquerque, NM, and Columbus, OH. Currently there are more than 650 Community Plates volunteers who have rescued food equivalent to more than a million meals. The Community Plates Go Rescue App 2.0 is due to launch in Q1 of this year to further meet the needs of the growing, robust volunteer base that it serves. The most significant innovation added to 2.0 is the introduction of a social feature designed to provide a greater sense of community and support. Community Plates has learned that a self-managed volunteer process enabled by technology can be lonely for some participants. Therefore, to keep Community Plates volunteers engaged, Go Rescue 2.0 will allow volunteers to communicate with each other, chat about their food runs, share ideas about new opportunities to help the food-insecure, and most importantly, swap inspirational success stories about the actual people they have helped. The upgraded app also includes gamification elements to publicly acknowledge Community Plates volunteers' achievements and encourage community interaction. Go Rescue is built on a PaaS (platform-as-a-service) which allows quick iterations and innovations to the software now and into the future.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

The mission of Community Plates is to END food insecurity in America. The organization therefore plans to expand nationally, adding a dozen or so more markets by 2014. The beauty of the Community Plates technology and volunteer-driven model is that it is extremely scalable and sustainable to support this mission. In fact, by eliminating the middleman (trucks, warehousing, etc.) and all the fresh food waste associated with the traditional food-rescue process, Go Rescue creates an economy-of-scale paradox that decreases the cost per meal rescued with each successive food transfer. In addition, together with WhenToManage, Community Plates will look at adding features to Go Rescue (or perhaps create a separate App) to allow receiving agencies to better manage their own volunteers and inventory. This will allow Community Plates to advance in its goal to end food insecurity by aiding agencies in becoming more efficient themselves; gathering additional data for more informed food rescuing, such as which foods are plentiful and which are not; and providing tools to help form and mentor new receiving agencies in underserved communities.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

Debbie Stokes, coordinator of the St. Stephen's Food Pantry of Bridgeport, CT, has seen firsthand the power of the Community Plates model, enabled by the Go Rescue App being used by hundreds of local volunteers. "Now that Community Plates food runners have been directly transferring food to St. Stephen's, we are able to provide significantly more fresh food to our clients," Debbie shares. "As a result, we are serving more than double the number of families each month," she continues. St. Stephen's is one of many receiving agencies -- which include soup kitchens, community centers and food pantries -- that benefit from being directly connected to passionate volunteers via the Go Rescue App. St. Stephen's previously received all of its food donations from organizations that use traditional, overhead-intensive food-rescue models involving trucks, drivers, warehouses, employees to sort the food and more. A food delivery to St. Stephen's transferred by a Community Plates volunteer takes up to an hour to complete as compared to up to three days by organizations utilizing the traditional, middleman model. As a result, Debbie is able to serve a significantly greater amount of fresh food to people in her community. The word has gotten out in Bridgeport that fresh food is available at St. Stephens and they have gone from serving 280 to almost 600 families a month.



Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

The Community Plates "direct-transfer" model is a best practice that reinvents how food is rescued for the benefit of America's food-insecure. Its self-managed volunteer process is also a best practice on a broader basis, and will hopefully motivate other nonprofit organizations to streamline operations and further engage and utilize volunteers through technology.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

A by-product of the Go Rescue technology is the tremendous amount of data it collects to measure and manage volunteer engagement from acquisition, to activation, to retention and referral. Mining this data can uncover trends and best practices to help improve the state of volunteerism for any non-profit.