

Forward by Jennifer Sheda:

This past summer, Second Harvest Heartland contracted with the Improve Group to hold focus group discussions with agency partners throughout the service area to gather feedback on the way Second Harvest communicates about hunger and the joint work that we all do in the hunger relief sector. These sessions were held to get input as we develop core principles for communication about the important work we do together.

We do not want to prescribe too much at this time because we want agency partners to guide this work, but we hope to create a communications guide that will influence how Second Harvest talks about the joint work we do publicly and internally. Ideally, all of us will have better, less stigmatizing language to use about hunger and the people we serve as well.

The focus groups were a first step and we hope that you will consider offering your feedback and time to this initiative. Attached please find a summary report from those focus groups. As you'll see, Second Harvest still has work to do and we want to make sure agency partners continue to be engaged in the process.

Next Steps:

1. Early in the new year, Second Harvest proposes forming a committee with interested agency partners to further develop a communications guide and common language about hunger and around the work that we do together.
2. We hope to provide multiple ways to engage from attending in-person meetings to webinars.

There will be more information to come. In the meantime, don't hesitate to reach out to me with questions, feedback or to let me know how you'd like to engage in the collaboration.

Jennifer Sheda

320-248-3006 or jsheda@2harvest.org

Second Harvest Heartland 2019 Partner Focus Groups

The Improve Group conducted five, one-hour focus groups (three in the metro, two in Greater Minnesota) with partners of Second Harvest Heartland in August 2019 to explore input on partnership with Second Harvest Heartland and how Second Harvest Heartland communicates about these partnerships to the public. The number of participants at each focus group ranged from two (at one group) to seven participants.

This document summarizes participant input in the below listed sections. The Improve Group paraphrased and summarized input into recommendations and themes (with a few direct quotes), but added no additional interpretation beyond input given by participants.

Contents

Opening question: What inspires you about working to reduce hunger?	3
Warm-up question: What is important to you about the ways Second Harvest Heartland communicates to the public about your shared work?	3
Specific recommendations from focus group participants	4
Specific comments about the two draft documents	6
Additional themes emerging from discussions.....	6
Closing question.....	8
Protocol.....	10
Core principles for communicating about hunger-Draft for feedback.....	13
Sample fundraising language- Draft for feedback.....	14

Opening question: What inspires you about working to reduce hunger?

- Making a positive difference in people's lives, helping reduce hunger and meet basic needs, and helping stabilize individuals and households. Enjoy serving people and helping the community thrive!
- Raising awareness of the food shelf, expanding food shelf offerings and making it more comfortable to use the food shelf.
- It's a way to give back for all the help I received when I used the food shelf in the past. I know what it's like to be hungry.
- Inspired day-to-day by clients, and love to see people come together for a common cause.
- To serve in a way that honors the bravery in asking for help in the first place. To make it easier for people to ask for help, and serve in a dignified way. Getting food should feel normal.
- To work for food justice, food equity, and dignity.

Warm-up question: What is important to you about the ways Second Harvest Heartland communicates to the public about your shared work?

Note: many participants answered this question as a vision for what communication they would like to see in the future.

Take a collaborative, community-partnering approach to tell a bigger picture

- Encourage communication
- Share ideas
- Honest Communication
- Provide the big, honest picture of hunger in each community in Minnesota
- Highlight efforts across the network
- Spotlight a food shelf a month
- Publicize legitimate need for our services
- Mention agency partners in communications
- Share the need of partnerships
- We relieve hunger together
- Clarify and align with mission
- Client-centered communication
- Humanizing people experiencing hunger
- Use more statistical data from partners to tell stories and clarify impact
- Include stories and statistics on smaller outstate communities

Clearly portray Second Harvest Heartland and partner organizations, ensuring integrity and accuracy in communications and relationships

- Portray yourself honestly, not as what you are not
- Don't pretend you do direct service
- Be clear in how Second Harvest Heartland works with food shelves
- Food shelves pay for food from Second Harvest Heartland
- Communicate about Second Harvest Heartland procurement and distribution – Second Harvest Heartland is a wholesaler
- “With the support of food shelves we...”
- How Second Harvest Heartland can be a better partner in food access
- Lift up food shelves work without taking credit
- Their story versus our story: Second Harvest Heartland versus partner organizations

Specific recommendations from focus group participants

Most, if not all, focus groups suggested clarifying roles in communications.

- Be explicit about what each role does and how they intersect:
 - Second Harvest Heartland is a food bank wholesaler that distributes food to food shelves,
 - Partners are food shelves that serve the food to people, and
 - People who receive the food (add a de-stigmatizing story of a person)
- Use a visual representation of the above, like a flow chart. This would make it much simpler for the public to understand. Hunger Solutions had a graphic that would be a good example.
- Focus on the network using a more long-term lens: name the partners and show what each does, then market to the strength of the network, rather than taking credit for direct service: “they could get the heartstrings of people by talking about the network of partners and lifting those stories.”
- One suggestion was to list partner agencies on the Second Harvest Heartland website, with an option to click on each partner to see the location for each food shelf and the geographic areas that partners serve.

A few focus groups suggested building stronger relationships with partners to make relationships more mutually beneficial.

- Get to know partners and what they are doing because the partners and their populations vary significantly. Do this by communicating more frequently. Visit sites. See them in action. Become involved with them.
- Work to understand the additional support services offered by various partners, and how the issues related to hunger intersect (housing, health care, etc.).
- Understand that rural food shelves have different barriers than metro, such as transportation to the food shelf.

Most focus groups suggested working collaboratively with partners on fundraising.

- Groups suggested coordinating collaborative fundraising and communications between Second Harvest Heartland and partners.
 - Can be timed with partner activities such as back-to-school supply drives or holiday drives.
 - Name both Second Harvest Heartland and the food shelf partner(s) in each geographic target area. Be explicit on roles of both in fundraising language. Fundraise together. Use template fundraising documents (such as those provided by Hunger Solutions) and share logos. Then share funds raised so that funds from the community stay in the community.
 - One group stated that if a particular community is mentioned in fundraising language, all funds raised should go to that community.
 - Or, if Second Harvest Heartland fundraising is separate from partners' fundraising, coordinate timing to be sure *to not* fundraise in a partner's community at the same time the partner will be fundraising.
- In collaborative fundraising, tell the stories of food shelf partners and people they serve.
 - Stories vary by region. Tell the stories of the range of people in the geographic area targeted (different ages, situations, etc.). Be sure to include rural and metro, and differences within each. Be careful about anonymity.
 - Describe impact using quantitative data as well as qualitative stories: some readers respond to one more than the other. Include numbers served of different age ranges (talk about helping kids-people want to help kids), location areas, percent of county served, etc.
 - Contextualize hunger with other interrelated factors (rising cost of housing, transportation, etc.) This can paint a fuller story and humanize/de-stigmatize, as well as better reflect the range of intersecting services that some partners offer.
 - Use a social media platform to spotlight a different food shelf partner each month. Visit the partner and interview people (executive directors, staff, people using services) to tell the human story. Tell stories about a partner's biggest challenges, and how Second Harvest Heartland has helped the partner in their success.
- One suggestion was to message around sourcing with local farmers (similar to the company called Imperfect (<https://www.imperfectproduce.com/>)). Message more about Meal Connect and recycling food and other green practices: can say that with these practices we have the resources to solve hunger problem.

Most focus groups suggested that Second Harvest Heartland communicate more about its state-wide advocacy leadership role.

- Focus groups greatly appreciate the work Second Harvest Heartland does in public education, public policy, lobbying, and advocacy. Food shelves and partner agencies do not have the resources for this work.
- Groups suggest that Second Harvest Heartland communicate about this important work that they are doing, and show how it plays a part in the larger network of food bank→

food shelf → people being served. Participants feel Second Harvest Heartland implies that they do the direct service that partners do, which many participants find disingenuous, and they see great potential in Second Harvest instead emphasizing their vital advocacy work.

Specific comments about the two draft documents

Core principles draft

- One group described the communications drafts as “one of the most on-topic things Second Harvest Heartland has ever done.”
- Several groups liked the core principles draft, specifically the section on de-stigmatization.
- Two groups liked point #2 “one community with many stories,” as a way of saying we’re similar in some ways yet different in others. One had the perception that some in Second Harvest Heartland don’t see this point (no further detail available).
- One group noted that point 1.a “Second Harvest Heartland depends on the community of partner agencies who deliver their food,” refers to Second Harvest Heartland’s food, when in fact it is the end-user’s food. The public donates funds or food for the purpose of the end user, not Second Harvest Heartland. The group felt this is taking too much ownership.
- One group discussed that point 1.b “This closer partnership will be reflected in our communications” is not accurate. The partnerships have not changed, and are not getting closer. The only change is in the language used to describe them.
- One group felt the examples at the bottom of the core principles draft did not reflect the principles listed (no more detail available).
- One group felt the claim that hunger could be ended was unrealistic.

Sample fundraising language draft

- Two groups emphasized that the word “matching” is most often understood by the public to mean a one-to-one match. Because this does not take place, participants felt the word “matching” should not be used because it was misleading.
- One group liked the feel and hopefulness portrayed in the wording “I’m inspired by friends like you.”

Additional themes emerging from discussions

Partners appreciate the work Second Harvest Heartland is doing to improve communications and relations.

- Participants appreciated being asked for feedback through focus groups, which one participant called “revolutionary,” stating that they hadn’t been asked for feedback in the past.
 - A differing opinion in one group was frustration that these conversations have been ongoing and partners feel they are not being heard.

- Participants appreciated that Second Harvest Heartland has drafted core principles, and look forward to seeing them brought into action.
- Participants appreciate that new upper management and leadership at Second Harvest Heartland are doing things in a new way – they describe this as evident.
- Participants are thankful for Second Harvest Heartland, and one person said, “They’re on the right path.”

Most, if not all, focus groups feel that Second Harvest Heartland misrepresents the roles of Second Harvest and partners, and this is seen as opportunistic.

- Communications seem to take credit for delivering food to families, but this is done by partners. Second Harvest is a wholesaler that drops the food off at the food shelf. Participants feel Second Harvest is taking credit for too much, which doesn’t acknowledge partners’ roles, and is misrepresenting the work being done.
 - Participants have the sense that Second Harvest is keeping roles confusing on purpose because a food bank can’t pull the heartstrings of donors as much as a food shelf (direct service), so Second Harvest is seen as co-opting the work and credit of the food shelves in order to get donor funds.
 - There is suspicion that creating the new food shelf at Second Harvest is a single touch-point created only to justify communications that Second Harvest does direct service. Additionally, the new food shelf is in a location without as much need as other locations, as there are already food shelves there. Another group echoed this sentiment in terms of individual visits to churches, etc.
 - Partners described feeling anonymous, being left out, confused and concerned. They feel Second Harvest is taking a short-term approach of claiming direct service (co-opting the credit due to partners) to appeal to heartstrings and gain funding, rather than truly describing and honoring the actuality of the network and the important roles each part plays (such as Second Harvest’s work in public policy as noted above).
- Groups felt that partner acknowledgement doesn’t go far enough: without the food shelves, Second Harvest Heartland wouldn’t exist, but the food shelves would exist without Second Harvest. One group suggested the historical frame that Second Harvest was created to play a role in the already existing network of food shelves.
 - Some partners emphasized that the amount of food they receive from Second Harvest is quite small: 2% of total food for one partner, 3% for another. “Second Harvest Heartland is not a big player for us.”
 - Some partners perceive that the partnership is contractual/transactional, and don’t see the work as actually shared work. They describe that they purchase food from Second Harvest like any other supplier, and that’s the extent of the shared work.
 - Partners emphasized the importance of food rescue and local, direct relationships with other food providers.
- Overall, groups discussed that Second Harvest plays a role that varies in size and importance among partners, but that communications seem to portray Second Harvest

as doing the work that food shelves themselves are doing, which they feel takes credit away from their own work in order to gain fundraising dollars.

Additional input, potentially outside scope of these focus groups

- Suggestions for improved service, which would improve partnering:
 - Improve communications about logistics.
 - Make more foods for special diets available (diabetic, Kosher, etc.).
 - When thinking about diversity, a word Second Harvest Heartland uses in their communications, they need to expand to include foods and food preferences from various communities to reflect a commitment to diversity.
 - Could partners receive a discount at locations with hot foods, such as Lund's and Byerly's, because of their perishable nature?
- One group noted that if they need to pass Second Harvest Heartland food forward to another food shelf, they can only pass it on to Second Harvest Heartland partners, which is limiting.
- One group noted that demographics and needs of people receiving food is changing, and partners are willing to help Second Harvest Heartland understand these changes.

Closing questions

What is one word, phrase, or image that describes how you're feeling right now?

- Appreciative (+1)
- I appreciate their efforts. (+6)
- Thankful that they're happy to listen
- Thankful for what we get from Second Harvest Heartland. We wouldn't be able to do all our work in the food shelf without them.
- Validated
- Encouraged
- Encouraged because it's not often that we get to be a voice in some of this stuff
- (Feeling the) collaboration
- (Feeling) possibility
- (Feeling) transparency
- (Feeling) clarity
- Empowered to hear echoes around the room
- Hopeful (+ 1)
- Hopeful, but I have to say I truly don't expect a change.
- Hopeful. I'm glad they're having this conversation because it can lead to change, but I need to manage my expectation of what can change.
- Optimistic (+ 1)
- A closet optimist in our future endeavors with Second Harvest
- Cautiously optimistic
- Frustrated (+1)

What do you hope for in your ongoing partnership in this work with Second Harvest Heartland?

- Hope that there will be change toward a more mutually beneficial relationship that understands and recognizes partners, gives more representation and voice, and that gives credit to partners.
- Hope to see Second Harvest Heartland put their Core Principles in action.
- Hope that Second Harvest Heartland will take their communication to the next level by representing themselves more honestly; communicating with food shelves more effectively and more frequently, including not just communicating with food shelves on an operations level.
- Hope that Second Harvest Heartland will leverage its public presence and powerful voice to be a leader in the area of hunger reducing in terms of taking on a leadership role lobbying on behalf of partners to advance our common interests; to come up with a blanket statement to deal with our current political situation; to put on a regional conference that focuses on issues of concern to rural, non-Metro Area communities; and to reorganize and add staff in order to work with partners on state compliance issues.
- Hope to continue receiving high-quality, fresh produce and increase availability of dairy products

Protocol

Second Harvest Heartland: 2019 Communications Focus Groups

Focus group location:

Introduction (5 min)

Hello! My name is _____ and I am a [title] at The Improve Group. [Co-facilitator: my name is _____ and I am a [title] at The Improve Group.] The Improve Group is a St. Paul-based consulting firm, and we are facilitating a number of focus groups with partners of Second Harvest Heartland to hear your input.

Second Harvest Heartland is hoping to get your input and perspectives on ways of talking about your shared work in order to better represent the shared work that you are doing in your communities. Second Harvest Heartland will use the input you provide to help guide them in developing guidelines for how they communicate.

As an independent third party, we will be sure to keep your input confidential. This means that we will combine all the input gathered across five focus groups, and report back to Second Harvest Heartland the themes and shared ideas among all the information provided, without indicating who said what. That being said, if you want to offer comments that you think may identify you, please let us know and we'll work with you to find a way to incorporate that information in a way that you are comfortable with. Because we will be collecting many opinions, Second Harvest Heartland can't promise that they will make changes based on every comment collected, but they will use our analysis of all the input you provide to help guide them as they move forward.

We'll take notes as we talk, and would also like to record our discussion in case we miss anything in our notetaking. We will not share the recording, and will delete the recording once we have analyzed the information we gather. Please raise your hand if you are okay with us recording. Thank you.

Our time today will be a combination of a brief brainstorm to get our ideas flowing, and then reviewing and providing input on draft documents.

Some housekeeping items: please help yourselves to water and snacks. The restroom is located _____. Please write your name and organization on your table tent. Our business cards are on the table in case you think of something you want to add and want to reach out to us in the coming week. We'll be here for an hour and will finish by _____.

What questions do you have?

Warm-Up (5 mins)

- To get a sense of who's in the room, would you please go around and say:
 - a. your name,
 - b. your organization, and
 - c. what inspires you about working to reduce hunger

Activity to get into the topic (15 mins)

- We're going to start off by doing a brief activity simply to help us get our minds into the topic of ways of communicating about your shared work to reduce hunger.
- **The question** we have for you is **"What is important to you about the ways Second Harvest Heartland communicates to the public about your shared work?"**
- **First**, I'd like everyone to take three minutes on your own to brainstorm some ideas for this question on your half sheets. You'll be the only one who will see what you write.
- **Then**, you'll describe to the person sitting next to you what your ideas were, and you'll write summary cards to put on the wall to share with the group.
- **[facilitator time for 3 minutes:]** So go ahead and now and take 3 minutes to jot down some of your ideas.
- **[facilitator time for 3 minutes:]** Now I'd like to ask everyone to chat with the person next to them for a couple of minutes to list the highlights of what your ideas were.
- **[facilitator 3 minutes:]** Now I'd like each person to write down one or more ideas on a sticky sheet to go on the wall to share with the group. Please write BIG, and express your idea in 5-7 words, using one idea per sheet. [post the 3 post-its that say "Write BIG," "5-7 words," and "one idea per sheet."]
- **[facilitator 6 minutes:]** Now we'll collect the sheets and post them on the wall to share with the group (post and read one at a time)
- Thank you all for your ideas! Like we said, this is just a simple activity to get our thinking started.

Draft communications (30 mins)

Now that we've had some time to settle into the topic of how you'd like to see Second Harvest Heartland communicate about your shared work, we're going to review two draft documents to get your input. **Second Harvest Heartland has prepared these drafts based on input that they've already gathered from partners, and they would like you input so that they can further refine them to better represent your shared work.**

Communication draft (30 min)

- Present draft communications: **(5 min or so depending on group needs)**
 - Talking points for drafts
 - i. The first document is a set of core principles for communicating about hunger that will guide a) what content Second Harvest Heartland's Communications Department writes about, and b) how they describe that content.
 1. These principles will be used to guide how they draft public communications, such as talking points for press conferences, newspaper articles, mass mailings, etc.

- ii. The second document is sample fundraising language. There has been some conversation over the last year providing input on fundraising communications, and Second Harvest Heartland has drafted this document in response to that input.
- iii. Both of these documents are drafts informed by partner input, and Second Harvest Heartland would like your feedback so they can continue to revise them to best communicate well about your shared work.
 - Hand out draft communications – core principles and fundraising language - *after* reading the introduction points
 - Please take 5 or so minutes right now to read and think about these drafts. There are some colored pens on your tables in case you want to mark up the copies. We'll do some reflection in a few minutes. If you like, feel free to make notes on these documents and we can pass them along to Second Harvest Heartland. Please do not write your name or organization on the drafts.

Now we'll have some discussion questions about the drafts. **We'll discuss both together, but if your comments pertain to one document or the other, please indicate which document you're talking about as you begin your comments, thanks!: (25 min or so)**

- O: What stands out to you in these drafts?
- R: What feelings come up for you as you read and think about these drafts?
- I: What are your thoughts about how you are represented here?
- D: These are only drafts, and Second Harvest Heartland wants your input that will guide how they make any needed revisions. With that in mind:
 - What do you like and think should stay the same? (if anything)
 - What would you change and how? (if anything)
 - What is missing, if anything?

Wrap-up (5 mins)

- Those are all of the questions that we have. Before we end this focus group, is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't already talked about?
- Let's end by going around the room, and stating:
 - One word, phrase, or image that describes how you're feeling right now
 - What you hope for in your ongoing partnership in this work with Second Harvest Heartland
- Thank you very much for your time and valuable input!

Core principles for communicating about hunger

DRAFT FOR FEEDBACK

We are:

1. Community led

- a. Second Harvest Heartland depends on the community of partner agencies who deliver their food.
- b. This closer partnership will be reflected in our communications.

2. One community with many stories

- a. The mighty community of organizations working to end hunger is diverse and so are their stories.
- b. We will work to honor the depth and diversity of this community when we represent our shared work.

3. Spreading the word to feed more people

- a. One powerful way to move the needle on ending hunger is to amplify our co-created successes, sharing stories and the spotlight.

4. Working to defy stigma

- a. Hunger is an experience, not a trait. Our stories will dispel the misperception that hunger is an isolated issue, experienced by others and easy to ignore.
- b. We will work to shed light on the triumphs, possibilities and lived experiences of people experiencing hunger, rather than perpetuate hunger stereotypes.

How this could look in describing our shared work:

- Second Harvest Heartland works *with community food shelves and nonprofits* to deliver meals and end hunger.
- Second Harvest Heartland delivered ___meals last year, *in close partnership with local agencies, food shelves and other nonprofits* throughout the region.

Sample fundraising language

DRAFT FOR FEEDBACK

EXAMPLE 1:

Subject line: Give hope, **give meals to Eden Prairie**. Your donation matched.

As I reflect on this season of giving I'm inspired by friends like you, whose generous gifts help ensure that **families right here in Eden Prairie are able to share in the warmth of holiday meals.**

Through your support, you make this season about giving love and hope. That's because **thanks to matching funds, every \$1 you give today can now help provide food for 6 holiday meals.** **Your gift helps us distribute food to nearly 1,000 food shelf and meal program partners that deliver the food directly to people in need.**

EXAMPLE 2:

Dear Preston,

End-of-year giving is crucial to Second Harvest Heartland's mission of ending hunger through community partnerships. We depend on your generosity during this time of year to meet our goals for the coming year; together, we'll help **ensure that our neighbors in Eden Prairie and throughout our region who are struggling have access to the food they need to thrive.**

Preston, will you consider making a MATCHED gift before the end of 2019?

Help us make 2020 an even brighter year for so many children, **seniors and families who are counting on us and our community food shelf and meal program partners for a little**