

# Habitat for Humanity: User Research Findings

Monday, July 16, 2018

## What We Learned From Interviews

### **Social Connections Drive Initial Engagement with an Organization**

Participants were introduced to volunteer opportunities through work colleagues, friends, family members and classmates. Their social connections provided the 'why' - the emotional connection to the cause and what was meaningful about becoming involved with the organization.

### **Online Research about Charitable Organizations is Tactical**

Participants visit websites of charitable organizations to do their own research and learn about the organization, available volunteer opportunities and dates & locations of local or international builds.

*"The site wouldn't have convinced me. It wasn't an immersive experience. It didn't feel emotional or paint a picture of what the trip was all about."*

### **Volunteering is Considered More Meaningful than Donating**

Volunteering personal time and labour/skills vs. making a financial donation online was compelling. Participants who volunteered with Habitat liked the idea of physically contributing to something that would have a lasting footprint, ie. providing housing to families in need. Other participants, whose experiences ranged from food prep at shelters to pro-bono design work for charities, shared that volunteering their time felt more valuable and impactful.

*"I wanted to find a way to give back that wasn't giving random money or food on the street."  
"I liked the idea of building something that would remain."*

### **Local Build Experiences were Universally Positive**

The local builds were well organized and participants were pleasantly surprised at how hands-on their build experiences were, even though they had no experience with construction. Participants mentioned feeling supported by Habitat, especially the professional tradespeople

who showed them how to install windows and patio doors, put up drywall, do framing, paint, etc. and would check in periodically to make sure they were doing things correctly.

## **Volunteering Has a Natural Stopping Point**

Participants no longer involved with an organization described their volunteer experience as a discrete period in their lives with a start and end point. Whether it was a one-day build, a 2 week international build, or a series of builds over a number of months/years, participants all mentioned a waning interest in the organization.

50% of participants were explicitly uninterested in further volunteer opportunities or contact with Habitat. Doing a build, whether it was local or international, was considered a one-off experience and receiving generic email newsletter blasts after volunteering was annoying. 2 participants in particular stopped volunteering with Habitat once they had children. When asked if they would volunteer again, participants expressed a desire to volunteer with different organizations than Habitat.

*"I did this and that was it. Because it was so long, that was a reason I didn't do anything after. It was my whole summer."*

## **Any Contact From an Organization must be Personalized**

50% of participants wanted Habitat to contact them in a personalized way post-build. Participants wanted:

- Help processing the impact of the build they had participated in for a short period of time. Specifically, participants mentioned wanting construction updates, especially when a build was completed and a family moved in.
- Those who did international trips wanted the opportunity to specifically donate to the family or community (vs. a generic cash donation online)

## **Transparency in Donations is Key**

All participants expressed a desire to know explicitly how a charitable organization would distribute their donation money. People were specifically concerned that donation money would be used for administrative purposes instead of going to the actual cause. To mitigate this, participants would go to third party websites that evaluate charities.

*"Charities shouldn't be a black hole. It's too easy to take advantage of people."*

Participants who make recurring donations are more likely to read email newsletters from charitable organizations to see how their money is being used. One participant who donates to the Humane Society liked reading about the specific dogs she was helping, while a participant who donates to CAMH learned about a new treatment centre being built from an email.

## **Larger vs. Smaller Organizations: Who's More Trustworthy?**

Participants were split about the trustworthiness of larger vs. smaller organizations. Some participants purposefully donated to smaller charities because they perceived them to have less administrative overhead, while others questioned their legitimacy and did extra research. Some participants perceived that larger charities didn't always give money to those in need, while others trusted larger, established charities to use the money in a valid way.

## **Long Term, Recurring \$ Donations are Personally Meaningful**

Participants make regular, recurring long-term donations to charities that have a familial connection or personal significance to them. In all the instances listed below, participants had made monthly donations for 5-7 years and had no interest in stopping. Participants mentioned donating to:

- Sick Kids, Princess Margaret & CAMH because they had family members who'd been helped by these hospitals in times of need
- The Martin Family Initiative (an education fund for indigenous kids), because his mom is a teacher in an inner city in Calgary for First Nation kids
- The Humane Society, because she is an animal lover and adopted her dog from the Toronto location
- The Red Door Shelter (an emergency shelter for women and their children fleeing situations of abuse), which she started donating to after having her son

## **One-Off \$ Donations are about Supporting Friends & Family or Emergency Disaster Relief**

All participants mentioned sponsoring friends and family who were fundraising for their birthday, charity runs, bike rides, hockey tournaments, etc. Participants also mentioned making single donations for emergencies or disaster relief, like a donation to #TorontoStrong at the Loblaws checkout.

*"That stuff tends to be more about supporting the person. If you care about it and you're doing it, then I'll support you."*

## **Donating Clothes & Furniture is About Convenience**

Participants all mentioned donating clothes to Value Village, Goodwill, Salvation Army & Diabetes Canada. They all made the decision to donate based on which charity had a location or dropbox closest to home.

75% of participants had experience donating furniture or building materials, mentioning that sustainability was important to them and it was better to donate than have the furniture end up in a landfill. 2 participants arranged a pickup from Diabetes Canada because it was so convenient. The 4 participants who donated to ReStore (kitchen cabinets, facets, sinks, etc.) heard of it through their previous involvement with Habitat and went to the location closest to their home.

## What We Learned From Usability Testing

### Navigation

- The mega-nav menu was difficult to navigate. Participants stated that the terminology was unclear and they would have to click into each link to learn what it was. *"There's a ton of options, I'm kind of overwhelmed already. I just wanted to volunteer."*
- Only 50% of participants made the connection that 'Find Your Local Build' in the mega-nav would lead them to volunteer opportunities.
- "Goods and Materials' in the Support menu was not discoverable. They eventually scrolled down the home page to the 'Should I donate to the Habitat ReStore' content block but complained that it wasn't discoverable.
- For both financial & furniture donations, participants stated that 'Support' was too generic a word and requested that it be renamed to 'Donate'.

### Participants Did Associate Furniture Donations with Local Affiliates

- Participants who were familiar with ReStore would look up the closest location in Google maps. Participants who were new to Habitat did not know what ReStore was.
- The mental model of entering a zip code to look up a ReStore was much more successful. Participants assumed they would drop their furniture or building materials off at a storefront because of the name itself 'ReStore'.
- Participants did like seeing the map with locations on the ReStore listings page, but were again frustrated at having to go to another website. They said they would call or email the ReStore directly to find out store hours, what can be donated and when to make drop-offs.

### Participants Did Not Associate Volunteer Builds with Local Affiliates

- Participants thought the site asked them to enter a zip code in order to show the Habitat builds closest to them. Once submitting the zip code, participants were surprised to see a list of local Habitat offices and contact information. This wasn't considered helpful, as participants wanted to see a list of local builds. *I thought it would be various opportunities at the various locations. More of 'we're doing a build in this area, learn how you can get involved.'*

- Participants did not make the connection that local volunteer opportunities would be listed on the affiliate websites and did not immediately click the URL for the local Habitat affiliate website. Instead, they said they would email or contact the Greater LA Habitat office directly. They were interested in stronger CTAs such as “Volunteer at Greater LA Habitat” and a direct link to the actual page with the volunteer opportunities. *“I’m on the Habitat website. And now there are myriad other websites. It’s confusing.”*
- Only after visiting the local Greater LA website did participants start to understand why there was a national website and local websites. They states that the local websites could have a specific focus on the builds and events in their community, while the national website should focus on information about Habitat, how the organization operates globally and international builds.