ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thanks to others in the journalism school who made this project possible. Martha Pickens, Dr. Vos and Dr. Kennedy played huge roles in helping the initial proposal take form, and what I learned from Rob Weir’s Multimedia Planning and Design class proved invaluable in my work at Voluntary Action Center.

Thanks to Nick Foster, the director of VAC, and all of the others who work there. I felt so welcomed by the whole staff, and I have enjoyed my time there not only from a professional perspective but also from a personal perspective. I was just a newbie, but I felt like part of the team.

Thanks to all of the interviewees who shared not only their time but also their valuable insights and experiences. Getting to learn from those who are already working in nonprofit communication made me even more excited to pursue a career in this field after graduation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

When writing my proposal two semesters ago, I thought that if I could choose anywhere to do my professional project, I would choose to work in communication at a local nonprofit. I ended up getting to do exactly that.

During my time at Voluntary Action Center here in Columbia, I got to work on so many types of communication projects—writing, graphic design, Web design, social media, strategic planning and even videos. I not only loved this variety but also felt that I was building skills and a greater understanding of the both the way nonprofit organizations work and the unique challenges that they face.

Similarly, my research component related directly to my professional goal of working in communication at a nonprofit. I got to learn all about the experiences that others had had as they worked to build strong brands for their organizations. I heard about their successes and their struggles, and overall, gained a much clearer picture of the type of work that I would like to go into.

I want to help nonprofits develop strong, consistent brands and communicate their visions and messages effectively. What I learned at VAC and through my research will surely help me achieve this professional goal.
Chapter 2: Chronological Description

Week 1: January 14 – 19

Wow, my first week at the Voluntary Action Center has been great! I am excited to be working here this semester. As soon as I arrived on Monday, I met with the director, Nick, to talk again about expectations for the semester. The first task he gave me was to walk around the office and talk to the other employees about what they do for VAC and to explain what I’ll be doing. This was really helpful because I felt like it quickly gave me a better understanding of what VAC does and enabled me to be comfortable around my coworkers right away.

After that I made a Facebook event for the Trivia Night fundraiser that VAC is putting on in February and then started working on a promo/teaser video for a new fundraising effort that VAC will be unveiling in May. This video, which I made in iMovie, will be shown at the Trivia Night event on February 8.

On Monday afternoon I went with Nick to a meeting at the Columbia Tribune offices. VAC is partnering with the Tribune to put on the HERO Awards, which recognize people who contribute to the community in Columbia. We met with Linda Hayes to go over print advertisement dates and the timeline for preparation for the awards event, which will be on April 23. It sounds like I may get to work on a skyscraper ad to go on the Tribune Web page that explains the event. That hasn’t been set in stone yet, though.

I am already seeing both how I can learn a lot here and how I can be helpful here. Both Nick and Ron, the project director, emphasized that most people in the community don’t have a very clear picture of what exactly VAC does. Nick mentioned that
organizations want to partner with VAC and sponsor events because of VAC’s image in the community, but that employees at these sponsoring organizations often wouldn’t be able to explain what services VAC offers. (VAC works to meet the needs of low-income people in Boone County. This ranges from paying for prescriptions and job uniforms to helping with auto repair costs and providing car seats for newborns. VAC also works as a referral service, informing people about other organizations that meet needs VAC can’t meet.) Additionally, Ron stressed that people tend to associate VAC with only its biggest services, like the Christmas gift drive, and are completely unaware that VAC provides many other services all year round. Increasing community awareness of the services VAC provides is one of the primary communication needs and goals here.

On Tuesday we had a brief staff meeting and just went over everyone’s calendars for the week. I continued to work on the video for Trivia Night and then showed it to Nick, who okayed it. I made the video with filler photos that will have to be changed once final pictures are provided, but it’s mostly done.

On Wednesday I worked from home. I made an insert for the thank you notes that VAC will be sending out to people who sponsored families during the Christmas program. Nick sent me the copy, so I just worked out a layout in InDesign. The insert provides an overview of all of the services that VAC provided in 2012. It is definitely a great way to communicate the day-to-day services of VAC, which as I mentioned before, is particularly important for them.

Nick had also asked me to begin researching moving the VAC website to WordPress, so I read online about working with the WordPress platform and hosting options. The current VAC website has a lot of great info, but it’s not very easy to
update, which poses problems for keeping up-to-date info available online. I am familiar with maintaining sites through the WordPress platform, but I have not previously gotten to work with starting WordPress websites—dealing with installing the platform and setting up hosting, etc. This is something that I have wanted to learn for a long time, so I was eager to research this for VAC, and I hope that this ends up being something that I get to continue pursuing. I’m planning to keep researching it more next week if other tasks are not more pressing.

On Wednesday I also began reviewing communications materials for the communications audit. I also worked on this during much of my in-office time on Thursday and Friday. The materials, which were already compiled and available online for the strategic communications committee, include brochures, the newsletter and e-newsletter, stationary, the business cards, logo versions, and promotional and printed materials for a few of VAC’s recent events. I have been writing up comments and questions for each item. These comments have ranged from design critiques to style consistency questions. I am still working on this task, but I hope to finish it by the beginning of next week. Next Friday I’m attending my first strategic communications committee meeting, and we are going to discuss these materials and make recommendations for them. Additionally, we’re going to talk about creating a VAC style guide. I am excited for this meeting because this is the kind of thing I love to talk and think about.

I also went to two meetings on Friday. The first was with the committee that’s putting on Trivia Night. We just went over plans for the next couple of weeks, and they watched (and liked!) the video that I made to be shown during the event. The second
meeting was with a representative from Missouri Faith Voices. Nick had me attend primarily so that I could hear how he explained VAC to other people.

Thursday and Friday I also briefly worked on a plan for the white papers that will explain VAC’s services and programs. I’m going to continue working on this more next week. I’m still in the organizing and information-gathering stage of this—categorizing services by type and then looking to see what written info already explains these services. I will most likely be asking the other employees a lot of questions to gather enough info to provide an accurate and adequate overview of the various services. I’ve been working in a cubicle between the two social services specialists, so I’m actually in a position to hear a lot of what they do in interacting with clients, and this has proved helpful in enabling me to understand some of the services that I’ll be writing about. I’m excited for week 2!

Week 2: January 21 – 26

Calendar Campaign Committee: CCC

Strategic Communication Committee: SCC

Resource Development Committee: RDC

I have had another great week at VAC! VAC was closed on Monday for MLK Day, but I did work for a while at home to brainstorm and research promotional ideas for the fundraising calendar campaign. I also spent some of this time researching different text-to-donate services because this is one of ways that the CCC wants to collect funds. Though the office was closed, I did stop there briefly in order to meet with Nick to go to an out-of-office meeting about the calendar campaign.
(Side note: My proposal included the fact that I would be working on a calendar campaign committee, so you all already knew this detail, and Nick, my boss, knows that you know about the calendar campaign. That said, the calendar campaign is a secret! I thought I might need to say this before I reveal more details about the calendar campaign in these field notes as weeks go on. 😊)

On Tuesday I attended the brief staff meeting and spent most of the rest of the day going over materials for the communication audit—this time looking at every page of the website as well as at the Twitter and Facebook accounts. VAC has very little control over its own website. Content is difficult to change, and layout is completely impossible to change. It is hosted and run by a local web company that provides the service to VAC free of charge. This is great for VAC in some ways and problematic in many other ways. I mentioned in my last weekly notes that Nick wanted me to look into making the switch to WordPress. After reviewing the website more thoroughly, I really think that this would be a terrific idea. I spoke to Nick about hosting options and about my experiences and limitations when it comes to website creation and maintenance, and he said that we should talk to the board about it at the next board meeting, so I’m looking forward to seeing where that goes.

I’ve emailed my communication audit notes and style guide recommendations to the SCC chairwoman, and we’re going to discuss materials and recommendations at the SCC meeting next Friday. (I mentioned this meeting in my last weekly report as well because I had been confused and thought the meeting was 1/25 instead of 2/1.)

On Wednesday I worked to transfer the thank-you note insert that I made last week in InDesign into Word. Nick asked me to do this so that VAC can modify/update
the content but still use the layout once I am done at VAC. (None of the VAC computers run InDesign.) This, along with the website difficulties they have had, exemplified to me some of the communication challenges that small nonprofits face as a result of their limited budgets.

Thursday I finished up transferring the brochure into Word and then turned my attention back to collecting materials for the white papers. I have now compiled current written information about VAC’s seven biggest programs. I am still gathering this information for the day-to-day services, though. This is not the most glamorous of tasks, but I’m enjoying it because it feels very purposeful. Written overviews of VAC’s services could come in handy in a number of situations, particularly when communicating with the media, trying to explain what VAC does, or trying to secure sponsors.

I also attended another CCC meeting on Thursday during which we went over promotional ideas. Because the teaser video that I made last week had been well received by the committee, we are planning to do a series of short videos highlighting VAC services and also promoting the calendar campaign. I’m excited to keep working on these videos. Additionally, I suggested that VAC send out email invites (for the fundraising launch event, which is called Spring Into Action) in addition to the standard paper invites. Email invites will allow us to include a link to register online immediately. I also briefed the committee on what I had learned in researching text-to-donate services. All of the services I found were too expensive, so we’re going to continue to look for different options.

On Friday I attended the resource development committee meeting, and we discussed Trivia Night and Spring Into Action as well as a couple of fundraising
opportunities that will take place later in the year. There is much overlap in discussion topics during these committee meetings because, though I am on all three committees, most of the people on each committee are not on any of the others. It’s a bit tricky to keep the committees straight!

Because we are now looking at sending out email invites for Spring Into Action, I also spent some time researching HTML email options. It would be great if we could offer people a way to register online, add the event to their calendars, tweet about the event, or share their event on Facebook all from their email. VAC’s current email newsletter is something that’s likely to get revamped after the communication audit as well, and it would be great to see VAC take advantage of newer email capabilities.

*Week 3: January 28 – February 2*

I’m starting to feel more settled in at VAC and still really enjoying my work there. I spent most of Monday and Tuesday working on white papers. I finished gathering current information on Monday and then started writing the rough drafts. I finished drafts for the Christmas program, Lunch in the Park, Homes for Computers, the summer fan program, and Warm Up Columbia, and I started on the Youth Enrichment Fund draft. I also spent a little while learning the back-end of WordPress.

On Tuesday I returned to working on the fundraising teaser video. I had originally made it with filler photos, but Nick sent me the photos that he wants in it, so I spent the morning editing them in Photoshop and then plugging them into iMovie. In the afternoon, I finished the Youth Enrichment Fund, school supplies program, and Christmas in July white paper rough drafts. I also worked on a white paper that covers all of the health services offered by VAC. At the end of the day, we had a calendar campaign meeting.
The committee saw the updated video, and we talked about logistics for getting the calendars made. We spent most of the meeting talking about sponsorship opportunities—different levels of sponsorship, how much they should cost, and how each level should be represented in promotional materials. This is something that I have no experience with, so I don’t feel like I’m able to provide much insight, but I like being exposed to the conversation because I learn just from listening to the other committee members.

Wednesday I just worked in the afternoon, and I primarily did some research for Nick. He asked me to find info about local companies that will print/embroider promotional apparel, and he also wanted me to look into details about fair use of copyrighted music. (The teaser video has a copyrighted song in it.) He also wanted to know about the best free stock image websites. Photos from some of VAC’s programs can be used in promotional materials, but the recipients of the day-to-day services cannot be pictured because of confidentiality agreements. Finding photos that we can use legally is difficult, but the paid stock photo services are rather expensive.

On Thursday I finished writing white papers for VAC’s employment, housing, and volunteer information services. Woohoo! I read through all of them again, edited them some, and then sent these drafts to Nick. I think they’ll probably need some more work, but it feels good to have made significant progress on them. I’ll be interested to get his feedback. On Thursday afternoon, Nick asked me to start working on a new logo and brochure for the FISH (Faith in Service to Humanity) Fund, so I started work on logo drafts. The FISH Fund covers the costs for most of VAC’s day-to-day services, and the brochure explains this to potential donors.
On Friday morning we had the strategic communications committee meeting during which we discussed the materials from the communication audit and the creation of a style guide. We talked about the main overview brochure, the newsletter, the e-newsletter, and the website. We also made decisions about logo versions and the inclusion of ancillary organizations’ logos in promotional materials. The committee has asked me to revamp the main VAC brochure and start work on the style guide, which will include what we talked about at this meeting. I’m excited to start working on these next week. The committee also seemed enthusiastic about the possibility of making the switch to WordPress, so I’m going to continue learning as much as I can about that. That afternoon I worked on the FISH brochure again, and I hope to finish that up next week.

**Week 4: February 4 – 9**

Fourth week at VAC! Time is flying. On Monday I was at VAC only in the afternoon. I spent the whole time working on the FISH Fund brochure and got the layout almost completely done.

Tuesday I attended the brief staff meeting in the morning and then turned my attention back to the FISH brochure. I spent a bit more time tweaking the layout and then started working on the logo (which I had begun last Thursday but put on hold to design the brochure). Designing logos is normally very time-consuming for me, and it normally takes place over the course of several weeks rather than a few hours, but after showing Nick some of the options that I came up with, we ended up deciding on a logo that same day. I’m surprised it went so quickly, but it’s nice to know that maybe I’m getting faster at this process.
Nick then talked to me about beginning to brainstorm for a funding proposal. I have no past experience with this sort of thing, but it’s clearly a form of communication that must be done strategically, so I’m excited to learn more about it. I spent about an hour reading about the components of a proposal and the questions that must be answered before beginning a proposal. I need to spend more time talking to Nick about what I have learned and where to go from here. I spent the last hour of the day getting started on the style guide—making a list of the sections that will be included and starting to write it.

On Wednesday I spent a little more time working on the FISH brochure—adding the new logo to it and then sending Nick the written content. (I had used the written content from the old FISH brochure, but he wants to rework it.) I resumed work on the style guide but began hitting snags because not every item that the strategic communication committee wants in the guide had been addressed in the committee meeting. I have been making a list of questions that I need to get answered in order to continue working on that. I need to talk to Nick or Lyn, who is on the strategic communication committee, about that. I spent the last hour or so trying to save the Trivia Night teaser video in a format in which it could be played in a PowerPoint. I finally got it!

Thursday I did not go in to VAC and my only VAC-related work was sending Nick a different format of the video. They decided it would be shown separately from the PowerPoint. ☺ C’est la vie.

Friday was the day of the Trivia Night Fundraiser! I spent a few hours in the office making last-minute changes to the video (ended up transporting it on jump drive!), then working on the style guide for a while, and then getting new pictures for the FISH
brochure. (When I originally designed the layout, I used filler photos because finding fitting and free stock photos was taking so long. Since the layout was finished, I turned my attention to swapping out the pictures.) After that I headed over to the Kings of Columbus building, which is where the fundraiser took place. I spent the evening working with the other staff members to make sure that the buffet was always full, that the trivia ballots were all collected on time, and that the building was clean after the event. It was so cool to see the huge turnout. (There were 42 teams with eight members each!) It was also cool to see the teaser video that I had made be played for all of them. Additionally the inserts that I’d made during my first week at VAC had been printed and placed on all the tables to help people learn more about VAC’s services. The people who came to Trivia Night really seemed to enjoy themselves and stayed the whole time. It was a great night overall.

**Week 5: February 11 – 16**

On Monday I only went into the VAC office for a couple of hours because I had an interview that afternoon. (Side note: three of the nine interviews are done for my research, and two more are scheduled! Woohoo.) While in the office, I gave copies of the white papers that I worked on to the social service specialists for them to make sure I’d characterized the services correctly. Nick also asked me to start working on revamping the main VAC brochure, so I began that. I’m not only giving it a new look but also working on the prominence and order of the different components in order to explain more clearly what VAC does.

Tuesday I attended the brief morning staff meeting and then got to work putting the video from Trivia Night online. I made VAC a YouTube page and uploaded the
video there and to Facebook. I then made changes to the white papers based on the social service specialists’ feedback and sent that second draft to Nick. I spent a bit of time working on WordPress, where I’d begun building a sample new VAC website, and then headed with Nick to the Boone County Related Agencies Association meeting. The BCRAA is an organization for nonprofits in Boone County to provide resources for each other. The bulk of this meeting was made up of a presentation on social media for nonprofits. It really got me thinking further about VAC’s social media. I want to check out guidestar.com to see what VAC’s presence there is like. I’m also interested in setting up a LinkedIn profile for VAC and making better use of the cover photo spot on Facebook.

On the way back from the meeting, Nick and I talked about the VAC website. From our previous conversations, I had been under the impression that we needed approval from the board to fully pursue moving the website to WordPress. During this conversation, however, he clarified that we do not need the board’s approval for this. I am to charge ahead with that, so when we got back to the office, I spent a couple of hours adding content from VAC’s old website to the new WordPress site. Right now I am building it on my own hosting space because VAC doesn’t have easy access to their hosting space. Nick knows this. Once it is finished and approved, I anticipate that it will be moved to VAC’s hosting space. I’m going to cross that bridge when I come to it.

Tuesday afternoon I also attended a meeting about Spring Into Action, the May fundraiser during which the calendar campaign will be revealed. I have been asked to come up with a social media plan for that campaign.
Wednesday I worked from home for a while on the VAC WordPress site—picking a theme, adding content, fixing menus, adding images. Building this website is going to be a big undertaking, but I am really enjoying it, and I think it could potentially be one of the most practical things I will do for VAC this semester. Their communication abilities are stifled by their current website, and WordPress will offer the control they don’t have.

Wednesday afternoon I went to the Miller’s Professional Imaging building for my first board meeting. I was surprised to realize that by that point, I had already met almost every board member at committee meetings. Only a couple of the board members were new faces to me.

I’m so grateful that I got to go to the board meeting because so much of the discussion revolved around communication or issues relating to it. For example, we talked about how we best convey to funders what VAC does. We need to be thinking about how to tell the stories of people who are helped by VAC. This is tricky because of the nature of the help that VAC provides, but it is essential, and it is something that we are looking at for communication efforts. We need the social service specialists who interact directly with the clients to be on the lookout for those who have stories to share. We need to follow up with clients and find out how the help they received affected their lives. As we work to gather stories of clients, I would love to see a testimonial section added to the website.
At the staff meeting, one of the members of the calendar campaign committee also asked me to start working on short and playful service descriptions for each page of the calendar. (Each month will highlight a different service.) I have added this task to my list. 😊

On Thursday I returned to the main VAC brochure and spent most of the day working on that. I’ve made a lot of progress, but I’m not finished with it yet. I also chatted with Nick about the white papers. He gave me great feedback overall! That was very encouraging. He told me to add the various types of funding, so I will work on adding that next week.

On Saturday I worked on the website again. It is starting to shape up, but it still has a long way to go. I am so enjoying working on the website. The multimedia planning and design class that I took with Rob Weir last year was my favorite class in grad school, and I am getting to put to use some of the skills that I learned in that class. I also worked Saturday to develop a third draft of the white papers based on Nick’s feedback. Once I add funding next week, I will send the drafts to Ron, the project director, for him to check the content as well. After that, the white papers will go out to the board members to arm them with info about what VAC does so that they can convey it clearly to other people.

I told Nick this week that I have enough tasks to keep me busy for a while. I’m now working on the website, the main VAC brochure, the style guide, and the white papers. A proposal for funding, a social media plan for the calendar campaign, the calendar service descriptions, and two more brochures are also waiting in the wings. Next
week I need to touch base with Nick about some of these projects and make sure that he knows where I am on all of them. Even though I have a lot to work on, I am genuinely enjoying all of my tasks.

**Week 6: February 18 – 23**

VAC was closed Monday for President’s Day and then closed again Thursday and Friday due to snow, so I spent a lot of time just working on my own this week. On Monday I met with Matt Mazick, another j-schooler who is working at VAC this semester. He is an undergrad interning seven or eight hours a week, and he is also on the calendar campaign committee. Nick had told both of us that Matt could help me with my tasks. I asked him to start working on the playful service descriptions for the calendar pages, and I emailed him the latest draft of the white papers so that he would have the descriptions I’d already written. I’m excited to have someone teaming up with me on that project. I also spent a bit of time at home adding content to the WordPress website.

Tuesday was my only full day in the VAC office. I attended the brief staff meeting and then started gathering info about VAC funding sources to start work on the funding section of the white papers. I spent a couple of hours writing that section. After that I turned my attention back to the FISH brochure. Nick had sent me the updated content, so I added it and reworked the layout a bit to make it all fit. I gave the latest version to Ron, the project director, to see if he had any edits.

I also made a list of questions about the style guide and sent them to Lin, one of the strategic communications committee members. As I’d worked on the style guide earlier, I’d realized that not all of the necessary elements had been covered in the last SCC meeting, so I need Lin’s input before I can move forward. At Nick’s suggestion, I
also sent her a rough draft of the revamp that I’m working on for the main VAC brochure. Her input will help me know whether the brochure seems to be in line with the unfinished style guide. I spent the last couple of hours of the day working on the WordPress website by tweaking the CSS files—again putting to good use what I learned in Multimedia Planning and Design last year!

I spent Wednesday morning in the office as well. I heard back from Lin who provided a few comments about my style guide questions but said she won’t be able to send a full response until next week. I briefly finished up the first draft of the funding section of the white papers and gave it to Amy, the financial officer, for her to check my details. I also moved forward with the style guide based on Lin’s preliminary feedback. I will be able to make more progress on that once I hear from her again.

On Wednesday afternoon I set up a Google doc so that Matt and I can keep the calendar service descriptions in one place and each see the progress the other has made. I have not yet worked on these because they are lower on my list of priorities at this point, but he has added one description, and knowing what he has done will be helpful when I am able to turn my attention to that project.

I also spent a few hours on Wednesday afternoon working on the website. I am experiencing the law of diminishing returns with work on this website. The majority of the site came together in a few hours, but all of the little details are taking a whole lot of time to account for. For instance, a good chunk of that website time Wednesday was spent adding local volunteer organization descriptions to the new website. (VAC keeps these descriptions on its website to inform people about volunteer opportunities.) The current VAC website has 213, so this has been pretty time consuming.
On Thursday I continued working on the website. I made a separate WordPress post template for the volunteer organization pages, and I installed a plug-in that will allow Nick or whoever manages the site once I’m gone to choose this template to use when adding volunteer organizations to the site. I was so proud of myself for figuring this out! I also added more of the organizations to the site and started building tabs onto the main volunteer page so that people can easily choose which types of volunteer organizations they want to find out about. I have now added all of the organizations that fall into the *aged* and *basic needs/low income* categories.

On Friday I worked on the social media plan for the calendar campaign. One of the calendar campaign committee members asked me last week to work on this. I will be able to share this plan at the next CCC meeting. Additionally, I started researching moving WordPress websites to new domains and servers. Nick wants to transfer the new site to the current VAC domain once the whole thing has been built, so I’m trying now to prep for this process. I also made a list of further actions for the website. I came up with 24 things that need to be done before it will be finished. These range from adjusting margins and removing filler images to creating additional banners for the rotating slider on the homepage and inserting forms so that volunteer organizations can submit information to VAC if their volunteer opportunities change.

I really enjoy working on the website even though it is time consuming. At this point getting it finished is my highest priority because it’s hard to know how long it will take to transfer it to the VAC domain. Additionally, the earlier I can hand it off to the
other staff members, the longer they will have to learn the WordPress software while I am still here to help them understand it. It is intuitive and should be a big improvement over their current website, but I think the earlier they can get started with it, the better.

**Week 7: February 25 – March 2**

On Monday I worked on the FISH fund brochure, tweaking it based on Ron’s feedback, and then updated the funding white papers based on Amy’s feedback. Knowing that VAC would probably be closed Tuesday due to snow, I caught up with Nick about my projects on Monday afternoon. I showed him where I was on the website, and he said I should keep working on that.

A couple of weeks ago he’d spoken to me about brainstorming for a funding proposal, and I’d done some research about that, but it had been low on my priority list. I wanted to catch up with him about that, so I sent him my brainstorming document, which was mostly full of questions that proposal guides said needed to be considered. (How do we know our services are needed? Are VAC’s objectives clear? How do we measure success?) He said that these are questions he has been considering lately as well and that my next step for this task should be answering these questions to the best of my ability. He did say, however, that this was a lower priority than the website, so I may not turn my attention to it until next week.

Tuesday I worked at home and spent the whole day working to prepare to transfer the website I’ve been building to the VAC host and domain. This meant emailing my hosting provider, creating a new WordPress installation, downloading the site source code and database, and trying to transfer it to local hosting. After struggling with this for several hours, I ended up calling a web designer friend of mine and getting help.
Additionally, I made plans with Timmy Huynh, another j-schooler, to have him help me with this on Friday. This bump in the road was somewhat discouraging initially, but I felt better after talking to people who knew more about this than I did. I am definitely learning a lot.

On Wednesday I dealt with the screen-size responsiveness of the WordPress site. The site, when viewed on a phone or other small screen, was not adjusting properly, and if there’s anything I learned in Multimedia Planning and Design last year, it’s that this is becoming increasingly important because so many people are accessing sites on their phones. I was not able to fix the responsiveness on Wednesday, so I left a question on the support forums for the WordPress theme that I’m using, and I worked on checking items off the list of further actions that I’d made for the website. I adjusted sizes, fixed links, and worked on the contact forms.

Thursday I created a Survey Monkey survey from a list of questions sent to me by a calendar campaign member. It will be used to gather info from those featured in the calendar and to get statements for the website or other promotional materials. After that I turned my attention back to the responsiveness of the new WordPress site. I decided to go through the code line by line and ended up finding a faulty plug-in. I removed that, and the responsiveness of the site started working perfectly. This felt like a huge victory to me! I spent the afternoon adding pictures and making more banners for the homepage. I also spent some time looking into plug-ins that will allow online donations for the calendar campaign. I made a note to talk to Nick about setting up a PayPal account, which is necessary to do this type of donation.
Friday I met with Timmy, whom I’d contacted on Tuesday, and he helped me complete the practice transfer of the WordPress site to local hosting. This was super helpful and very encouraging to me. I now know what is needed to transfer the site to the VAC domain and host when the time comes. That afternoon I also worked on getting quotes on pins from local promotional apparel places and on deleting old files and plugins from the WordPress site to make sure the code is clean when we do the final transfer.

**Week 8: March 4 – 9**

On Monday I was only in the VAC office for a few hours. I spent a while talking to Nick about plans for the website, finding out about the database used to keep track of VAC’s newsletter subscribers, and talking to him about setting up a PayPal account for VAC. I also spent some time prepping for Tuesday’s Calendar Campaign Committee meeting and revising the calendar service descriptions that Matt worked on.

Tuesday I emailed the WordPress site to the Strategic Communication Committee for them to review it and provide feedback. It was a little nerve-wracking to send them something I’ve spent so much time working on, but I really feel like it has turned out well, so I was excited for them to see it. I then turned my attentions back to the calendar service descriptions and continued revising them.

I also worked on the funding proposal brainstorming questions that I mentioned last week. I went through and started answering all the questions that didn’t require more research, and I got about halfway through.

Lin, one of the SCC committee members, emailed me back with a couple of small changes that I should make to the website—changing text color in one portion of the site, changing the slider speed, changing a couple of copy details—so I worked on that.
Nick and I also spent a while trying to track down account info for VAC’s newsletter subscription service, which is through a company called Emma. I need the account info to set up a subscription function on the new website. In the process, we learned that VAC’s Emma account is managed by an off-site marketing consultant who manages various marketing programs for nonprofits in the area. Nick and Ron, the project director, had not even known this because the consultant started handling it before they started working there. It may take us a while to get this account info.

Tuesday afternoon we also had a calendar campaign committee meeting. I’d already been looking into online voting and donation options, but during the meeting I had the idea that we might try to set up a Big Cartel account and online store and use that as a way for people to vote and donate as part of the campaign.

On Wednesday I looked into Big Cartel, and it looks like it would be a viable option. It is inexpensive, and it looks easy to implement. The plan would be to set up a “shop” through which people would “buy” votes for their favorite local celebrities to be on the cover of the VAC calendar. Big Cartel would allow us to have different pages and details for each celebrity, so I think this would be a better option than any standard voting or donation options. Additionally Big Cartel can be linked with WordPress sites and Facebook pages, so that makes it seem like a good option. That afternoon I also added a Facebook box to the new WordPress site. It will allow site visitors to “like” VAC without ever leaving the site.

Thursday morning I sent the revised calendar service descriptions back to Matt to see if he had any more feedback before we sent them to Nick and the CCC committee. I also got an encouraging email from the president of the board of directors, who said
that the new site looked “fantastic.” Woohoo! He said that he and Lin will collect
comments and suggestions from the other SCC members and then he will work with me
to decide which items are most important because he wants the site “up and running
ASAP.” I found this so affirming! Plus, the earlier the site goes up, the longer the rest of
the staff will have to get used it while I am still around to help.

I also worked on the funding brainstorming questions again Thursday. There are
questions I am not sure how to answer (even though I compiled them, ha!). How do we
know the problems VAC is trying to solve are problems at all? How do we know what
the needs in the community are? How do we know VAC’s methods will work or can
achieve the organization’s goals? I went to talk to Nick about these types of questions,
and he told me to send him what I had and he would take a look and determine next steps.

He also said he would have the Amy, the financial officer, set up the PayPal
account that we need to move forward with Big Cartel. Additionally, he said that my next
high-priority projects should be the sponsorship menu, which VAC will be able to use
when securing sponsors for its big fundraising events throughout the year, and a revamp
of the brochure for VAC’s Youth Enrichment Fund.

Thursday afternoon I met with Lin, who is on the CCC and the SCC. Catching up
with her about my projects was very helpful to me. We brainstormed about the visual
look for materials for the Spring Into Action fundraiser event in May. (She is going to
design those materials, but she wanted to bounce ideas off of me.) She also said that she
wants to move forward with the website as soon as possible and that she is still planning
to get back to me about the main VAC brochure and my style guide questions, which I sent to her a few weeks ago but haven’t dealt with much because I’ve been waiting for her feedback.

Friday morning we had a Resource Development Committee meeting and talked about the sponsorship brochure. I’ve been given sponsorship info for three events, and I’ll be getting info for at least two more events. That afternoon I started on the layout for the sponsorship brochure. This brochure will be several full pages—more like a booklet. I haven’t done layout on something like this since undergrad, but I’m excited to be working on it because I enjoy this type of stuff.

**Week 9: March 11 – 16**

Monday afternoon I made tweaks to the website based on feedback from my meeting with Lin last Thursday; I made changes to color and fonts to increase legibility. I spent most of my time that afternoon working on the sponsor brochure layout. Finding photos that are free and high quality is still a struggle.

Tuesday we had a brief staff meeting. I updated the list of board members on the website, talked to Nick and made a few more changes to the website based on his feedback. I spent most of the day working on the sponsor brochure layout.

Wednesday I turned my attention back to the sponsor brochure layout. Design is such a weird process because sometimes I can churn out a couple of pages in a few hours and other times I feel like I labor for a few hours on a single page and don’t make much progress. I feel like I made more progress Wednesday afternoon than Monday and Tuesday.
Wednesday afternoon I also attended the monthly board meeting, at which Nick and Shawn, the president, gave the board a little overview of what I’ve been working on. At the next board meeting, which will be just a week or so before I’m finishing up at VAC, I will present all that I’ve worked on. I also spent some time Wednesday evening adding volunteer organizations to the new website.

Thursday morning I added more volunteer organizations to the new website, which still isn’t live, and updated my list of all the projects I’m working on in preparation for Friday’s SCC meeting. That afternoon I went to a mobile strategies webinar with Nick, and we got to hear about how the Humane Society and World Vision are using mobile websites. They talked about the importance of responsive design for nonprofit websites, and that is exactly how the new website is built, so that was very encouraging! Again, I have Multimedia Planning and Design to thank for the fact that I’d already been taught the importance of responsive design. Thursday I also worked on tweaking the main VAC brochure based on my last meeting with Lin. I’d started on this brochure a few weeks ago and put it on hold while I waited for her feedback. I also spent some time writing out official font suggestions for the SCC meeting.

Friday morning at the SCC meeting, I updated the committee about my status on all of my tasks. I need to be able to tie bows on multiple brochures, the website, the white papers, the style guide, etc., before I finish at VAC. At our meeting, we talked about more changes needed for the site, the brochures (based on color/official font considerations), and the white papers. (I need to add a section for the information and referrals VAC provides.) We talked again about making the site live; Nick is looking into switching hosting providers first.
On Saturday I worked on listing all that needs to be done for me to be able to wrap up each project, and I worked for a while on the main VAC brochure.

*Week 10: March 18 – 23 (+ March 25-26)*

Can’t believe my tenth week at VAC is already behind me and that I only have four weeks to go. As stated in my proposal, I started at VAC a week before the semester began so that I could go home over Spring Break, so I won’t be doing much VAC work this week. I’ll be working primarily on my research component instead.

Last Monday afternoon I worked on brochure design, updated VAC’s Facebook page, and tweaked the calendar service descriptions. I spent most of that afternoon updating the website based on feedback from the previous week’s SCC meeting. I also spent quite a while talking to Nick about wrapping all of my projects up. I feel like we are in crunch time. A number of things need to be wrapped up, but I’m waiting on decisions or feedback so that I can move forward with some of them. For instance, the website needs to be transferred, but the new hosting hasn’t been set up in order for me to do this. I’m finishing what I can on my own and being patient with regards to things that are in other people’s hands.

Tuesday I attended the brief staff meeting, then wrote the rough drafts for the white paper sections on VAC’s information and referral services, and then worked on adding more volunteer organizations to the VAC website. That afternoon I also brainstormed with Nick and Amy about printing new letterheads and then finished the cover for the sponsor brochure.

Wednesday afternoon we heard back from the off-site marketing consultant who had VAC’s Emma account info, so I was able to set up an e-newsletter sign-up
form on the new VAC website. That afternoon and evening I also finally finished transferring all of the volunteer organizations to the new VAC website! I still needed to work on categorizing them by type, making sure they all had their descriptions listed, and working on the index pages, but overall it felt like a success just to have them all on the new site.

Thursday I first worked on replacing the old United Way logo with the new United Way logo on various brochures. (One of their reps sent it to VAC because United Way is a funder.) I spent much of the morning working on the style guide and then turned my attention back to the white papers, which I edited based on Ron’s feedback and rearranged a little based on Nick’s feedback.

Friday I met with Nick to talk about where I was on my tasks before I headed out for spring break. I re-emphasized that the website is ready to transfer. (Many small changes could still be made, but the vast majority of the work is done, and it will be easier to make changes on a live site than to continue tweaking the site before transfer.) I’m really hoping that new hosting will be ready by the time I return from spring break.

I didn’t finish all of my hours last week, so I did work some yesterday and today. On Monday I worked on changing the website’s code so that volunteer organizations will show up in alphabetical order rather than in the chronological order of posting. This will make it easier to find organizations and to add them in the future.

Today I made what I think (and hope) are the final changes to the white papers. These changes were based on the most recent feedback that Nick gave me before I left on Friday. Now that he has okayed the info and referral sections, I can add that info to the website and to the main VAC brochure when I return next week.
**Week 11: April 1 – 6**

I felt distinctly happy to be back in my little cubicle Monday after a week away on spring break, and it made me grateful again to have had such a good experience at VAC so far. That day I met briefly with Nick to talk about the website. He’s still in the process of trying to set up new hosting, so the site can’t be transferred to the VAC URL yet. After that I worked on the main VAC brochure, FISH brochure and style guide, and then I updated the VAC Facebook and Twitter pages.

Tuesday I started work on the Youth Enrichment Fund brochure, and I was totally in the zone, so I got the three inside panels finished that morning. That afternoon I made four screen video tutorials for VAC staff to make sure that they know how to use the website once I’m gone. I still need to make several more. I was planning to write directions, but Nick and I both thought that videos would be faster and probably easier to understand. I also spoke to an employee of another local nonprofit about their use of PayPal in a voting/donation function on their website. That would work well for the calendar campaign, but it may not get implemented until after my time at VAC.

Wednesday we had a Calendar Campaign Committee meeting at the U Club on campus because it is catering the fundraiser at which the calendar campaign will be revealed. We got to see the rooms where the fundraiser will take place and talk about the set-up. After that I worked on the style guide and made changes to the VAC and FISH brochures based on feedback from Nick.

Thursday morning I had a longer meeting with Nick to go over every project in more detail. White papers: done. Style guide, main brochure, FISH brochure, and sponsor brochure: almost done. Youth Enrichment Fund brochure and style guide: in

Each time we talk about the website, I get more feedback about little changes to be made: moving things around, changing titles, adding details, etc. Nick has decided that, for now, the volunteer organizations transferred from the old website should be taken down, so I saved those as drafts that the staff can put back up later if they decide they want them again. I spent a while that day working on minor changes to the website as well as working on the sponsor brochure and starting on the outside panels of the YEF brochure.

Friday and Saturday I finished the outside three panels of the YEF brochure (or at least the first version of them), and I also finished up the first version of the sponsor brochure. On Monday in the office I will print the VAC, FISH, YEF and sponsor brochures and get more feedback. I’m hoping that VAC and FISH will be done, though I expect the YEF and sponsor brochures will get more revisions. Overall I feel that I made good progress this week towards being able to wrap everything up in the next three weeks, so that is encouraging.

Week 12: April 8 – 13

On Monday I learned from Nick that VAC has gotten approval for the free nonprofit web hosting from DreamHost. This is exciting because it’s the first step necessary for us to be able to transfer the new website to VAC’s URL. That day I worked on the style guide and the website, and I spent more time researching other online voting options for the calendar campaign. I also set up a Pagemodo account (and an e-newsletter sign-up) on the VAC Facebook page. The Pagemodo account will enable VAC to share a
little bit more info about their services right from their Facebook page. I also unlocked VAC’s domain name on GoDaddy to enable us to make the transfer when Nick gives the go-ahead.

Tuesday I worked on icons for the new Pagemodo account on Facebook, edited the style guide based on some of Nick’s feedback, and prepped for the transfer of the WordPress site to VAC’s domain name. I did a practice transfer a few weeks ago to make sure it would work properly, but it has taken longer than I expected for us to get to the point at which we are about to make the real transfer, so I have been reading about the process again. I also worked on making more screen tutorial videos for VAC staff to use the WordPress site once I’m gone.

Wednesday I looked into VAC’s email accounts to see if they’ll need to be transferred because VAC is switching hosts. (They will not, woohoo!) I also prepped for and gave a presentation to the board of directors that afternoon. I got to show them the new website and all of the brochures that I have worked on. They had already received the white papers via email. The feedback I got from them was so positive and encouraging. Though I’m not quite done at VAC yet, getting to share all of my work with them felt like a great way to finish out this experience.

Thursday I went over content on the website again and tried to edit some of the content that had originally just been copied and pasted from the old website in order to build the site structure. I feel as if my hands are tied at this point. I met with Nick to go over all of my final projects, but I’m waiting on others to be able to continue with them. I need Nick to set up a VAC PayPal account in order for me to be able to set up online voting for the calendar campaign, though I have spent a good bit of time researching
options. He is still planning to give me feedback about the Youth Enrichment Fund brochure and the sponsor menu, so I may have more edits for those. Additionally, we’re waiting until next week to transfer the domain, so that’s on hold. I also am expecting one of the calendar campaign committee members to send me details about press releases I may be working on.

Next week we’ll be having the photo shoots for the calendar, and I’ll get to be at one shoot for several hours on Tuesday. I’m excited about that, and I’m also excited about starting on some teaser videos with images from the shoot!

**Week 13: April 15-20**

This week I felt a little restless because I am waiting on people in order to be able to complete most of my tasks. Monday Nick was out of the office, but I heard back from Lin (of the calendar campaign committee) about what was to be included in the two press releases, so I wrote those. One will be used before Spring Into Action and will tease the reveal of the calendar campaign. The other will be used after SIA and will explain how people can vote online for the local celebrity to be featured on the cover.

Tuesday I spent most of the day at the photo shoot for the calendar. That was a lot of fun, and I mainly just helped out by holding things on the set or cleaning up after the shoots. That afternoon I also got started on the text that will be used on the online voting page for the calendar campaign. We had all the celebrities (who will be featured in the calendar and represent VAC services) fill out surveys with info about what they do and why they’re supporting VAC, so I used the surveys that had already been returned to write paragraphs on each celebrity for the website.
Wednesday I spent most of my time at the photo shoot again. I also got a call from the man who runs VAC’s current online hosting space, and he said that he thinks we should keep hosting with him instead of switching to Dreamhost. (We would still transfer the new site and put it on the VAC URL, but it would not be hosted through Dreamhost.) I told him this was up to Nick. Transferring the website has gotten postponed repeatedly, and this man said he would call Nick the next morning, but at the time of this writing, Nick has still be unable to get in touch with him, so I am just learning to be patient in anticipation of this transfer. I also spent some time that evening making two more screen tutorials for VAC staff to learn how to use the new website.

Thursday I read more about transferring the site. I believe I mentioned last week that I did a practice transfer several weeks ago (back when I thought we were just about to transfer the site), but the length of time that has passed since then has led me to brush up on the transferring process yet again. I also set up a voting page with the paragraphs I wrote on Tuesday, but I could not install the PayPal voting function yet because Amy, VAC’s financial officer, was still in the process of setting up PayPal. I am also supposed to make calendar teaser videos with some of the photos from the shoot this week, but I have emailed the photographer (who told me to email him) twice to get the pictures and haven’t heard back. After that I made some edits to the press releases based on Nick’s feedback.

Friday I went into the office briefly to touch base with Nick. He knows I’m being as productive as I can despite being stalled on projects for the moment. I also touched base with Ron, who has asked me to make changes to VAC’s annual report once he gets me the file, and Amy, who was still setting up the PayPal. Saturday I worked for a
while to fix the aspect ratio of the VAC logo on the masthead of the newsletter. I had not done any other work on the newsletter up to this point, but Nick asked me to address the masthead, so I cleaned that up a little and need to give him the new file.

*Week 14: April 22-27*

My last week at VAC was bittersweet. I was happy to tie a bow on my projects there, but I really did enjoy my time.

On Tuesday I attended the brief staff meeting, spoke again to the man who runs VAC’s current hosting space and set up a time to meet with him to transfer the website (!), then gathered all of the info and files that I would need for that and worked on putting Spring Into Action details on Facebook and the website. That evening I also attended and helped out at the HERO Awards, which VAC helps facilitate alongside the Tribune.

On Wednesday I attended my last strategic communication committee, at which we primarily talked about how I had wrapped things up and how I would pass off files. One of the key members of that committee (who does a lot of VAC’s design work) had a death in the family, so I will actually meet with her after I’ve wrapped up to pass off files specifically to her. Wednesday afternoon I met with the guy who runs VAC’s hosting space, and we spent a couple of hours transferring the website, so it is now on VAC’s own URL (www.vacmo.org)! What a great thing to complete during my last week!

Thursday and Friday I spent most of my time working on the teaser videos for the calendar campaign. There is one for each celebrity, and they will be shown at Spring Into Action in May when the calendar campaign and each month’s celebrity are revealed.
After that I also finished the content and look of the online voting page (which won’t be published until after the reveal). I also packaged up all my files in editable versions and left them on VAC’s public folders.
Chapter Three: Evaluation

Working at Voluntary Action Center this semester taught me not only about nonprofit communication and the challenges that nonprofits face but also about my own skills and interest areas. Though I had read a good deal about nonprofit communication when writing my literature review, this experience allowed me to see firsthand what I previously only had read about. Additionally, so much of what I learned while conducting interviews for the research component of this project mirrored what I was learning through hands-on work at VAC. The most important thing that I learned was how much organizations need to communicate not only who they are and what they stand for but also what they do.

This is particularly difficult and important for an organization like VAC simply because the organization does so many things. It provides dozens of services related to the areas of health, housing, employment and education, and it also serves as an information and referral hub for the community and puts on a number of seasonal programs throughout the year.

The white papers, which were one of my largest projects at VAC, detail all of the programs and services that VAC provides. I went through all of the content I could find that had already been written about programs and services, and I compiled and cut and rearranged and rewrote and checked details until every service or program was covered in a way that shared all of the important information but also remained concise. I am quite pleased with the finished white papers because I think they will be useful for the future of VAC. Nick Foster, my supervisor and VAC’s director, told me that he wished such a
file had been available when he joined VAC so that he could get a quick overview of everything.

The white papers have been shared with the board of directors so that they will be able to understand and articulate more clearly what VAC does. One of the things that came up repeatedly during my research was how important it is for nonprofit brand representatives to understand what their organizations do. These white papers will allow board members to be more informed brand representatives. Additionally, Nick says individual white paper descriptions will also be used in future communication with the media.

The design projects that I got to work on were among my favorite projects at VAC. My primary design projects were the main VAC brochure, the FISH Fund brochure, the Youth Enrichment Fund brochure and the sponsorship menu. Most of the pieces I had designed before working at VAC were posters or invitations of some sort. I had done very little brochure design, so I loved getting the opportunity to work on this type of project. The VAC, FISH and YEF brochures used much of the content from old VAC brochures, but the design and layout were entirely new. I got to think strategically about which elements to keep in the same location and which to move, what to add and what to leave out in order to emphasize the most important things and create a clear hierarchy. For the FISH brochure in particular, I got to design an entirely new logo on top of designing the layout. The previous FISH logo looked distinctly Christian, but the FISH funds come from all sorts of faith organizations, so the new logo is a better representation of that and should be better for use in conversations with organizations that are approached for funding opportunities.
The sponsor menu was another project that I really enjoyed working on. (Much of the sponsor menu is filled with lorem ipsum, or filler text, at this point because the resource development committee has not settled on the sponsorship levels for all of the events, but I am passing off the file to VAC, so VAC will be able to add those details when they are decided upon.) Until this point, VAC just had a Word document with sponsorship details, so I hope that this will provide a better overview of all the sponsorship opportunities, making them look appealing and letting potential sponsors see just how many different ways they can support VAC.

The new VAC website that I built on WordPress was, hands down, the most time-consuming, educational and fun project that I got to work on. VAC had been in great need of a new website. Their old site was difficult to update and customize. WordPress sites are easy to update, so this site should take VAC’s web capabilities to a new level.

Prior to working at VAC, I had limited experience with WordPress sites—mostly moving updating and moving content. I had never built a WordPress site from the bottom up, though I had wanted the opportunity to do so. Getting to work on this taught me so much about WordPress that I know I will use in the future. (This is encouraging because so many of the job postings that catch my eye have WordPress listed under the competencies needed!) I built the website with a free WordPress template and put to use all of the coding knowledge that I learned in Rob Weir’s Multimedia Planning and Design class to make the site meet VAC’s needs.

The website will be an ongoing project for VAC. In order to set up the structure of the site, I used much of the old written content from the current site. Though much of the content has now been updated, the staff at VAC will still need to make changes
to it after I am gone. The ease of using WordPress sites should make this simple, though.

I also had the opportunity to work on some of VAC’s social media outlets. I added a background to the Twitter page, set up a YouTube account and updated the Facebook page with a better-fitting profile image of the VAC logo and a cover photo that promotes VAC’s calendar campaign and May fundraiser, Spring Into Action. Additionally, I set up a Pagemodo page on VAC’s Facebook. This enables VAC to share more about what it does on its Facebook. I also used the iFrame app to add an e-newsletter sign-up right on VAC’s Facebook page. I had no previous experience with these Facebook add-ons, so I loved getting the opportunity to learn how to use these. I wish I had gotten the opportunity to focus on VAC’s social media even more.

The “Who Are We” video that I made in iMovie is also on VAC’s Facebook and YouTube pages. This video was shown at Trivia Night in February as a teaser for the calendar campaign that will be revealed at Spring Into Action in May. The photo shoots for the calendar took place during my second-to-last week, so in my final week at VAC, I got to work on some short videos with images from those as well.

The style guide is one project that I wish I had gotten to spend more time working on. I created the guide in Word so that it can be easily used and updated from VAC computers. I think it hits all of the major issues when it comes to maintaining consistency throughout all VAC materials—from logo use and colors to fonts and ancillary logos. It also includes a section on writing style that includes a few entries from Strunk & White and AP Style. I would have loved the opportunity to make the guide more comprehensive and professional looking, especially because the importance of style guides was reiterated time and again during my interviews for the research component. Still I am
pleased with it overall and know that my experience working on this guide will better prepare me to work on that type of project in the future.

My work on the style guide and other materials was informed by discussions that took place among the strategic communication committee. As a committee, we worked to review and discuss all of VAC’s communication materials—brochures, correspondence, event promotions, social media profiles, the website, etc. We identified things that needed to be changed, updated or emphasized, and the materials I worked on were developed accordingly.

Getting to work with committees—the strategic communication committee, calendar campaign committee and resource development committees—also served as a great opportunity for me to learn more about all that VAC does and the way that nonprofits function. I loved getting the chance to interact with the board members on these committees as well as getting to talk about VAC’s more long-term strategies and projects that will go on even after I am gone.

I wish I could be at VAC to see the rest of the calendar campaign plans through. The short service descriptions blurbs that I worked on will be used in the calendar, and I have done a good bit of research into online voting options for the campaign, so that should prepare them to collect funds online more effectively. In my final couple of weeks at VAC, I got the opportunity to set up some of that functionality. Additionally, one of the calendar committee members asked me at the final board meeting to work on a couple of press releases that can be used for the campaign once I am gone, so I did that and got to squeeze a bit more writing experience out of my time at VAC.
At the final board meeting, I had the opportunity to show the entire board the projects that I have worked on this semester. I showed them the website, the brochures and the Facebook updates, and I talked about the white papers, which they had received by email, as well as the other projects I had worked on. Being able to present my work enabled me to see it as a whole rather than as many components. I look back on this semester, and I feel a mixture of amazement and gratefulness. I am amazed that I got to work on so many different projects, and I am grateful that I got to use my skills and interests not only in a way that greatly stretched and taught me but also in a way that will continue to benefit this organization in the future. The board members were all so kind and encouraging. One told me, “You’re doing what you’re supposed to do.” Working at VAC, I did have the sense that I was doing what I was supposed to do, and that makes me even more excited for a career in this field in the future.
Chapter Four: Physical Evidence

I have included the physical evidence for this project in digital format on the corresponding CD, which includes the following folders and items:

**Design**

Did You Know insert

(These were inserted into the thank you notes sent to those who participated in VAC’s adopt-a-family Christmas program in 2012.)

FISH brochure

FISH logo

Sponsorship menu

VAC brochure

Youth Enrichment brochure

**Writing**

White papers

Calendar Service blurbs

(These will be used on the pages of the calendar. Each page features a different local celebrity representing one of VAC’s services.)

Style guide (some material from Strunk & White and AP Style)

**Web Design**

Website homepage screenshot (available at www.vacmo.org)

**Social Media**

Facebook screenshot

Pagemodo screenshot
E-Newsletter sign-up screenshot

Twitter screenshot
Chapter Five: Analysis Component

More than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations operate in the United States today. They promote ideals, raise awareness and funds, and provide important services. Many nonprofits, however, struggle to keep their services running. Decreased government funding, declines in giving and increased numbers of nonprofits account for this problem and result in greater competition for funds among nonprofits (Griffiths, 2005).

In a competitive charitable market, nonprofits must pay increased attention to their brand identities (Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert, 2005). Brands differentiate organizations, and they are particularly important for service organizations because of “the inherent difficulty in differentiating products that lack physical differences” (Berry, 2000, p. 128-29). Though research has shown the competitive advantage strong nonprofit brands provide, little research is available about the actual brand-building efforts nonprofits make (Venable et al.). This study’s purpose is to reveal more about ways in which nonprofits are working to develop strong and consistent brand identities.

This study both draws from and builds on current communication research. Current research has addressed the brand identities and personalities of nonprofits, the influence of brands on donor support, the way organizations’ communication with the public builds trust and the branding of service organizations (Berry, 2000; Bryce, 2007; Faircloth, 2005; O’Neil, 2008; Sargeant & Lee, 2002; Venable et al., 2005). There is a gap in the research regarding how nonprofits are actively working to build their brand identities.

This study addresses this gap, providing more data about real brand-building efforts of nonprofits, by focusing on the following research questions:
• RQ1: How do nonprofit organizations work—through actions, standards or language—to develop their brand identities?
• RQ2: How do nonprofit organization employees (paid or non-paid) articulate their brand identities, brand positions, brand images and brand value propositions?
• RQ3A: How do nonprofit organizations—through their employees, values and customs—support and emphasize the development of those organizations’ brand identities?
• RQ3B: How do nonprofit organizations—through their employees, values and customs—oppose and hinder the development of those organizations’ brand identities?

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on Aaker’s (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model as its theoretical framework and starting point. This model was originally designed for brand strategists, but it has also been useful to researchers who study branding because it identifies several elements of brand identity and differentiates among them. This study focuses on the concept of brand identity, which Aaker defines as “a unique set of brand associations that … represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers,” as well as related concepts including brand image, brand awareness and brand position (p. 68).

Aaker’s Brand Identity Planning Model was first presented in his book *Building Strong Brands*. The model was chosen as a starting point for the research at hand because of its use in brand development and because it breaks the concept of brand
identity into many elements organized around four perspectives: brand-as-product, brand-as-organization, brand-as-person and brand-as-symbol.

The brand-as-product perspective is built on the idea that a brand’s products are central to its identity. According to Aaker’s model, the scope, attributes, quality and value, uses, users and country of origin of a product can all affect the brand identity. Many nonprofits provide services rather than products (and some provide neither), but the model is still applicable considering Aaker’s acknowledgment that not all perspectives fit all brands.

The brand-as-organization perspective posits that basing brand identity in part on the organization itself can help a brand differentiate itself from competitors. This perspective focuses primarily on organization attributes and associations. These include an organization’s community orientation, level of innovation and global or local orientation. These associations benefit a brand by adding credibility, clarifying its culture and values and influencing its value proposition.

The brand-as-person perspective focuses on brand personality, the “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 141). This perspective suggests people perceive brands as having both human-like characteristics such as age and socioeconomic class and personality traits such as competence and trustworthiness. Strong, positive brand personalities can act as the basis of supporters’ relationships with a brand. They can also add to a brand’s self-expressive benefits, “by providing a way for a person to communicate his … self-image” through support of the brand (p. 84, 99).

The brand-as-symbol perspective focuses on three types of symbols: visual imagery, metaphors and brand heritage, all of which can add cohesion and structure to
a brand identity. Such symbols can represent brand benefits, act as cornerstone for brand strategy and represent the essence of a brand.

These four perspectives are not the only components of the Brand Identity Planning Model, which also includes secondary components related to value proposition, credibility and brand-customer relationship as well as initial brand analysis and eventual brand identity implementation. The four perspectives do, however, serve as the core of the model and provide guidance for developing and evaluating brand identities.

The Brand Identity Planning Model was used in Hill and Vincent’s (2006) study on the branding of English football club Manchester United. Hill and Vincent used the model to “delineate the distinctive features of the Manchester United Brand” (p. 218). Like this study does, they focused on the portion of the model composed of the four perspectives of brand identity. Though Manchester United is a for-profit organization, it is similar to many nonprofit organizations in that it does not offer a traditional product. Nevertheless, the researchers managed to study the brand from the brand-as-product perspective. They considered its product scope to be the game of soccer; its product attributes to be its fan base, team-orientation and strategies; and its quality to be the excellence of the players. Though the topic of their study is largely unrelated to the research at hand, their study exemplifies how Aaker’s model can be applied to a brand that does not offer traditional products.

Wallström, Karlsson and Salehi-sangari (2008) also drew on the Brand Identity Planning Model in their study of the internal brand-building process in Swedish service firms. These researchers focused on the brand-building efforts of a financial services supplier, a commercial bank and a chain of real estate agents. All three firms were
chosen because they had recently undertaken internal brand-building processes, which included brand audits, brand identity planning and brand position statement development. Their study, like this one, focused on brand building from the organization’s perspective rather than customers’, and the researchers relied on Aaker’s brand component definitions and four-perspective approach in their analysis.

Mohan and Sequeira (2009) evaluated Aaker’s model by using case studies to analyze whether brand-building initiatives undertaken by Fevicol, Nokia, Kingfisher and Airtel could be classified under Aaker’s four brand perspectives. The researchers found these cases to be in line with Aaker’s model. Fevicol’s brand image had been built primarily around the quality of its product; Nokia’s, around the organization’s attributes; Kingfisher’s, around a personality; and Airtel’s, around a symbol.

Moorthi (2002), too, drew from Aaker’s brand identity framework in a study proposing a comprehensive approach for branding services. Moorthi integrated Aaker’s model with Booms and Bitner’s Extended Marketing Mix, categorizing the aspects of marketing under Aaker’s four brand perspectives and then relating this modified Aaker model to the three-fold economic classification of goods as search goods, experience goods and credence goods. In addition to using Aaker’s model, Moorthi relied on Aaker’s brand component definitions throughout his study.

As exemplified by the studies mentioned, Aaker’s model has a history of use within communication and marketing research in addition to its use as a tool for brand strategists. The four-perspective approach Aaker proposes and the brand concept
definitions his model provides, in particular, have aided researchers to analyze brand identities and brand-building efforts. The model also served as a strong starting point from which to research the brand-building efforts of nonprofit organizations.

**Literature Review**

In looking at the research questions at hand, it is important to review what current research reveals about nonprofit brands. Though the majority of studies about brand building have focused on for-profit organizations and companies, a number of studies have shown the importance of brand identities for nonprofit organizations as well (Venable et al., 2005; Faircloth, 2005). In a broader but closely related vein, studies have also shown the importance of nonprofits’ promotional and communication efforts as a whole, which contribute to what Aaker (1996) calls “brand image,” or the public’s perceptions of a brand (Berry, 2000).

In her study on the relationship between nonprofits’ communications and donor trust, O’Neil (2008) states that “communicating the mission and work in promotional efforts is one way nonprofit organizations can foster a strong relationship with donors” (p. 266). This relates to Aaker’s (1996) brand-as-product and brand-as-organization perspectives of brand identity. Through surveys sent to nonprofit donors, O’Neil found that the types of communications that most influence donors’ trust, commitment and satisfaction are those that show how donations are used. This type of information sheds light on a nonprofit’s organizational attributes, e.g., community orientation, which according to Aaker’s model, leads to increased credibility.

Bennett and Barkensjo (2005) consider donors’ perception that an organization is credible to be evidence of trust, which Berry (1995) calls perhaps the single most
powerful marketing tool available to an organization. Bryce (2007) also emphasizes the importance of trust, defining it as the expectation that the other will act in accordance with a shared interest, and stating that nonprofits need public trust for legitimacy, effectiveness and financial support. In their study on public trust in the nonprofit sector, Sargeant and Lee (2002) used focus groups to determine the factors that affect donor trust, which they define more narrowly as the “the belief that an organisation/sector … will never take advantage of stakeholder vulnerabilities, by being fair, reliable, competent and ethical in all dealings” (p. 70).

The concept of trust is particularly relevant to a study of brand-building efforts because, according to Bryce (2007), “the public’s trust in an organization reflects the organization’s projection of itself,” (p. 114) or what Aaker (1996) calls brand position. Bryce also notes that public perceptions of an organization’s goodwill play an important role in restoring and maintaining trust. Goodwill arises from the organization’s identification with the public, the history of the organization, the social significance of past performance, the reputation of the organization’s leadership and the degree to which the public participates in the organization’s decision-making process.

Building on research about brand identity in for-profits, Venable et al. (2005) used a six-study multi-method design to address whether nonprofits have personalities, what the dimensions of these personalities are and whether these brand personalities can affect the intent to donate. Their focus relates clearly to Aaker’s brand-as-person perspective. Through focus groups and depth interviews, Venable et al. found that participants not only easily ascribed personality traits to nonprofit organizations but also differentiated among organizations on the basis of personality and showed
particular concern for organizations’ efficiency and effectiveness. The researchers found the overarching dimensions of nonprofit brand personality to be integrity, sophistication, ruggedness and nurturance and that these did correlate to participants’ likelihood to contribute to an organization.

In her study on the values dimensions of branding charities, Stride (2006) explains that some practitioners and researchers have expressed concern that using branding techniques associated with for-profit organizations to develop the brands of charities can lead to their over-commercialization. Grounds (2005) also addresses this concern, stating that “there are those in the not-for-profit sector who believe that the world of branding and corporate identity is something for the ‘dirty’ world of business and consumer products to worry about” (p. 65). He points out, however, that charities—and this could be said of other nonprofits as well—have long sought to communicate clearly about what they do and why they need support and that this is the basis of brand strategy.

Faircloth (2005), also recognizing nonprofits’ need for support, conducted a study focused on how the factors antecedent to brand equity influence donors’ support of nonprofit organizations. Faircloth draws from Aaker’s (1991) earlier work on “brand equity,” which Aaker defines as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” (p. 15). The antecedent factors that Faircloth addresses are brand personality, brand image and brand awareness, or the consumer’s knowledge, recall and recognition of a brand. Like Venable et al. (2005), Faircloth used focus groups and depth interviews. He found that respondents were more
interested in providing resources to those nonprofits they respected and saw as different from other nonprofits. He did not, however, find level of brand awareness to influence responders’ interest in donating to specific nonprofits.

In his study Faircloth (2005) pointed out that clear brand identities are particularly critical for nonprofit organizations because consumers are more likely to contribute and support nonprofits whose goals and values they identify with. Venable et al. (2005) also emphasize the unique importance of brands for nonprofits, stating that “because the characteristics and benefits of becoming involved with a nonprofit organization are largely intangible, branding can facilitate a donor’s understanding and support of a charity” (p. 298). Similarly, Berry (2000) notes that because service organizations lack tangible products, the company itself is the brand. Service companies with the strongest brands, he posits, are those that consciously differentiate themselves from competitors.

One problem posed by current research on brands is the lack of consistency in the use of related terms. Venable et al. (2005) used the terms “corporate identity” and “corporate image” (p. 298) when describing brand identity and brand image. The terms “brand personality” (Faircloth, 2005, p. 2) and “brand meaning” (Berry, 2000, p. 129) have also been used in lieu of “brand image.” The branding definitions included in this proposal thus far—for brand identity, brand personality, brand awareness, brand image, brand position and brand equity—have all been provided by Aaker or are congruent with
his definitions. These definitions have been chosen for this study because Aaker’s model will be used as the starting point for the research.¹

This study builds on the research mentioned by providing more data about the real brand-building efforts of functioning nonprofit organizations. As detailed, current research has addressed branding in service organizations, the importance of brand identities and personalities of nonprofits, the influence of brands on donor support and the ways in which organizations build trust through their communication with the public (Berry, 2000; Bryce, 2007; Faircloth, 2005; O’Neil, 2008; Sargeant & Lee, 2002; Venable et al., 2005). There is little information available about the actual steps and actions nonprofit organizations take as they work to build their brands, and that gap is what this research addresses.

Additionally, the information gathered through this research provides insights to practitioners or other researchers about ways in which other nonprofits can build and evaluate their brands. Nonprofits often face unique challenges as a result of limited budgets and work forces. They could benefit from strong brand identities and the resulting increase in credibility, contributions, public trust and differentiation. By including insights from those who work to develop a number of nonprofit brands, this research provides information about ways in which many types of nonprofits can develop their brands as well. Overall, this study sheds light on what makes a brand strong and successful and how organizations can work most effectively to build their own brands.

¹ The only definitions included thus far that were not derived from Aaker’s writings were the definitions for “trust,” which were provided by Bryce and Sargeant and Lee.
Method

To answer the research questions I posed for this study, I conducted nine semi-structured phone interviews with nonprofit organization employees, and I used the grounded theory method to analyze the data. I used a set of pre-established questions but also improvised as the interview progressed, adding new questions based on interviewees’ responses.

The pre-established questions were written specifically to answer the primary three research questions at hand, and many of them were adapted from Aaker’s *Building Strong Brands* so they specifically related to the Brand Identity Planning Model. A few sample questions include:

- Related to RQ1: How does your organization show that it is different from other nonprofit organizations? How are those who work in your organization made aware of the organizations’ values and vision?
- Related to RQ2: What is the desired image of your organization? What do supporters of your organization say about themselves through their support?
- Related to RQ3: What internal organizational pressures work against brand building? What internal organizational pressures work toward brand building?

Additionally, because this study relies on Aaker’s (1996) model and writing on brands, his definitions for brand terms informed the interview questions and are used throughout the results and discussion. These include:
• Brand identity: “a unique set of brand associations that … represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers” (p. 68).

• Brand image: “how the brand is now perceived” (p. 71).

• Brand position: “the part of the brand identity and value proposition to be actively communicated to a target audience” (p. 71).

• Brand value proposition: “a statement of the functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits delivered by the brand that provide value to the customer” (p. 95).

I recorded interviews with a digital audio recorder and transcribed them.\(^2\) I used the grounded theory method to analyze interviewees’ responses and the information they provided. Though Aaker’s model served as a starting point for the research, using the grounded theory method once data had been gathered helped me avoid forcing the gathered data back into a specific model.

I coded the interview content into categories of analysis, such as mission, reason for support, brand development and public misunderstanding. While coding, I constantly compared new incidents with others in existing categories and wrote memos of theoretical notions and category properties and relationships throughout the process. As a result of constant comparison, the resultant theory corresponds closely to data gathered in the interviews.

Sample

This study relied on purposive sampling. I used my existing knowledge of nonprofits and the Internet to develop a list of organizations that corresponded loosely

\(^2\) Full transcripts will be made available upon request.
with the eight types of nonprofit organizations recognized by the IRS: charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering amateur sports competition and preventing cruelty to children or animals. I sought nine nonprofits, however, because I wanted to include both types of cruelty prevention organizations.

I then contacted these organizations to secure interviews with nonprofit employees who were familiar with the organizations’ brands. In total, I contacted 26 organizations to secure nine interviews. The nine interviews, which lasted between 40 and 60 minutes each, were conducted over the phone between February 7 and March 29, 2013. Once transcribed in their entirety, the transcripts ranged from 11 to 21 pages.

Those interviewed include:


The American Heart Association works in a variety of ways to fight heart disease and stroke. It funds research, advocates for public health policies and provides information and education related to healthcare and healthy living (e.g. CPR training). This organization was founded in 1924 and has nearly 2,700 employees and more than 22.5 million volunteers.


Best Friends is an animal welfare organization that operates a no-kill animal sanctuary in Utah and partners with local governments and other organizations across

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3 See Appendix B for more information on the IRS’s categorization of organizations.
the country to end the killing of homeless pets in shelters. Best Friends, which was founded in 1984 and has roughly 450 employees on staff, started the No More Homeless Pets Network, which includes 1,000 animal organizations.

**Jeff Cronin: Director of Communications, Center for Science in the Public Interest, March 14, 2013.**

CSPI is a health advocacy organization focused on food safety and nutrition. This organization is known for publishing studies on nutritional quality in its Nutrition Action Healthletter and for advocating for government policies that promote food safety. This organization was founded in 1971 and has around 60 employees on staff.

**Daniel Li: Director of Interactive & Creative Services, International Justice Mission, February 20, 2013.**

IJM is a human rights organization that works to rescue and restore victims of slavery, trafficking, sexual exploitation and other forms of oppression around the world. It does this through victim relief, aftercare, prosecuting perpetrators and transforming justice systems. IJM was founded in 1997 and has more than 500 employees on staff worldwide, roughly 100 of whom work at the U.S. headquarters and roughly 90% of whom are nationals of the countries in which they work.

**Emily Martin: Director of Communication, iGo Global, February 7, 2013.**

iGo Global is a Christian missions organization that trains and sends high school and college students on mission trips to areas with unreached people groups. This organization was founded in 2011 and has a staff of 12.

The Pittsburgh Foundation is a community foundation that enables individuals or organizations to set up funds that, in turn, finance grants for nonprofits that work in the Pittsburgh community. This organization was founded in 1945, has over 1,700 individual funds and total assets of $900 million.

Jay Brown: Director of Integrated Marketing, Reading is Fundamental, February 15, 2013.

Reading is Fundamental is a children’s literacy organization that gives books and literacy resources to underserved children. This organization was founded in 1966 and has 26 employees and more than 400,000 volunteers.


WINGS provides social and emotional education in an after-school program for elementary school kids in Title I schools. This organization operates these programs at four schools in North Charleston, South Carolina, and two schools in Atlanta. It was founded in 1996 and has 18 full-time employees.

Jan Walther: Senior Director of Brand Development & Marketing, YMCA of the USA, March 15, 2013.

YUSA is the national resource office of the 2,700 YMCAs in the United States. These local Y’s provide programs related to youth development, healthy living and social responsibility for more than 10,000 communities across the country.
Results

RQ1 asked how nonprofit organizations work to develop their brand identities through actions, standards or language. All of the organizations represented in this study had undertaken specific brand development efforts within the last several years. Though the scale of these efforts differed, their prevalence demonstrated a sample-wide recognition of the importance of strong brands.

Actions

The most basic brand development undertakings were efforts to streamline an organization’s look and language. Emily Martin of iGo Global stated, “We have worked really hard over the last four years or so to try to unify the things we put out.” Their efforts included using the color green in their promotional materials, setting a standard font and size and emphasizing that they do not just send students on mission trips but “mobilize and train” them.

Efforts to streamline a brand’s look and language suggest that organizations recognized that inconsistencies could cause confusion, send the wrong messages or damage their brand equity. A number of organizations had worked or were currently working with outside design, branding and advertising agencies to streamline the looks of their brands. Jeff Cronin of Center for Science in the Public Interest said that the organization hired a graphic design agency in 2006 for a logo redesign, and Jon Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation said the organization was currently working with an advertising agency to choose a new typeface, put a brand standards guide into place and develop a new tagline. Ellis stated:
What we want is this brand to tie everything together because it’s very disparate right now, so I mean right down to letterhead and business cards and the way the look is maintained throughout the organization.

Ellis’s notion that the brand should tie everything together is in line with Aaker’s (1996) broader statement that “a brand identity … provides direction, purpose, and meaning for a brand” (p. 69).

WINGS for Kids worked with an outside graphic design agency when it was founded in 1996, but brand development work has been ongoing. Liz Mester said:

The founder of WINGS came from a design firm … and she worked with that firm to create the visual identity of Wings … picking fonts, picking the blue colors that we wanted for the Pantones … also having a slew of words that we use when we talk about Wings, so innovative, fresh, fun, effective…. The logo was created with them as well…. I've been here for 5 years, and we've had three websites, so we're constantly updating our look. It wasn't until maybe three to four years ago that we incorporated new colors…. We’ve incorporated a new font, and that's been shared with the whole staff.

Though WINGS staff members had been intentional with the brand’s look from the organization’s founding, they have continued updating it over time. This suggests that they saw the potential for their brand look to grow stagnant if it did not adapt and evolve.
Language

Whereas these organizations focused largely on the visual side of their brand identities, others partnered with advertising, design and branding agencies for broader brand development that placed additional emphasis on language. Daniel Li of International Justice Mission stated:

We’re actually going through a brand refresh…. A lot of changes to some visual elements, from the logo to maybe our font choices, color palette. Some of the language we’re going to try to make more accessible, try to wipe out the … very verbose or very academic sounding mission statement to something that’s a little more digestible. We don’t want people going, ‘Oh, this is a completely new organization,’ but to address the accessibility to a global audience.

Like the WINGS brand, the IJM brand has had to adapt over time. For IJM, the adaptation was the result of changing needs and audiences. Li stated:

Fifteen years ago when Gary Haugen first started the organization…. the brand itself, the feel and our original logo, the way in which we talk[ed] about ourselves, the way in which we told stories … it was all being geared toward us being able to successfully conduct our casework, so it intentionally looked professional. It intentionally looked like a law firm…. That worked for the beginning of the organization back in the day. But you can imagine that time has evolved, and …. For students or say … a stay-at-home mom…. You can see how that brand didn't necessarily translate, so for us it's been an evolution of keeping
the things that we feel like are non-negotiable [and] rediscovering how we can make our brand work for this entirely new side that … the original brand wasn't created on the backend of napkins to try to actually address.

Jay Brown of Reading is Fundamental, which recently partnered with an advertising agency to develop a new font, new logo, illustrations for collateral material and a style guide, explained how RIF’s messages also had to be adapted to better suit the organization’s audiences. He stated:

We've just gone through this whole brand refresh…. In the last few years or so [we] have been more academic than I think is necessary. I think it speaks to the practitioners and our allies in the nonprofit field, but it doesn't speak to the parents, so we're working to align a lot of our messaging … with that.

**Organization and Brand Architecture**

Best Friends Animal Society, which readdressed its brand strategy in 2009 in preparation for the organization’s 25th anniversary, focused its brand development efforts less on the visuals or language and more on the organization itself. In this regard, Best Friends’ approach lined up with Aaker’s brand-as-organization perspective, which focuses on attributes of the organization itself. Kelly Morton stated:

We did go through a formal brand strategy process…. We really just did a lot of discovery work, looking [at] the current communications of the organization, the current philosophy of the organization, really solidified “No More Homeless Pets” as the mission of the organization, and then identified kind of the three basic brand strategy categories—which are business description … personality traits [and] our positioning and how we wanted to differentiate from our competition.
The brand development efforts of the American Heart Association and the YMCA were the most comprehensive of all the organizations studied, spanning years and involving more preliminary research and greater changes to the overall architecture of the brands. Jan Walther of YUSA stated:

[We] did what we called a “brand revitalization” that was launched in July of 2010…. We worked with an agency called Siegel and Gale out of New York City, and they helped us go through all the things that would happen in a Y, so we made lists of programs, services, everything we could think of, and kind of threw those all on the table and then kind of organized that in our brand architecture…. [We] wanted to position ourselves as the Y for youth development, the Y for healthy living and the Y for social responsibility. And then under each of those, there are four subcategories that grouped our programs and services.

After addressing the brand architecture, the brand revitalization team from the YMCA determined the values behind the brand, defined their organization’s voice, chose a new logo and developed standards for elements such as photographs, headlines and color schemes. The initial categorization of offerings under youth development, healthy living or social responsibility not only guided the rest of the brand revitalization but also enabled YMCA employees to articulate what the organization does more clearly. This will be further addressed in the results section devoted to RQ3A.

The American Heart Association launched what Miriam Hansen called its “rebranding” in 2010. The rebranding included an updated logo and new guidelines, but, like the YMCA’s efforts, started with the brand architecture. Hansen said of their efforts:
We did a three-year branding study to look at the trends of our brands in the marketplace…. We came to realize that we had created a lot of small brands—sub-brands outside of our brand…. It was actually causing consumers confusion …. We cleaned up our brand architecture, and we started to align all of our cause marketing efforts and sub-brands and realign it back to the major brand, and we have a lot stricter guidelines now about just going off and creating a brand new logo or a program name just because it's a new initiative.

Aaker (1996), too, has noted the confusion that can be caused by secondary brands. “In many organizations today there is a proliferation of brands and brand extensions and a bewildering set of overlapping and often inconsistent brand roles” (p. 266). He stated that organizations must have a clear brand system or architecture, like the one the American Heart Association created, to avoid “creating confusion or using an inconsistent identity” (p. 266).

**Standards**

The prevalence of brand development efforts—and the interviewees’ own comments—suggest that these organizations’ portrayals of their brands have not always have been as consistent and intentional as possible. Many of their brand development efforts involved the creation of style guides or brand standards to ensure consistent portrayal in the future.

The American Heart Association’s rebranding involved launching a website complete with branding guidelines, logo files, images and templates for marketing purposes and a document that details the association’s brand promise, story, voice, message and personality.
Best Friends Animal Society, WINGS for Kids—and, as mentioned earlier, Reading is Fundamental and The Pittsburgh Foundation—also had style guides in place or were in the process of developing them. International Justice Mission and Best Friends both had photography standards in place that not only designated the types of images that could be used but also exemplified the overall brand position and values. Li said:

You never see IJM use photography where there's the proverbial child with a fly on the face. We're very intentional about using images that preserve the dignity of the person because, at the end of the day, that's what we're trying to do.

Morton of Best Friends said:

We're not an organization that's going to show tragic pictures of dying animals or injured animals. We definitely focus on the happy ending—certainly talking about the hard struggles that the animal has but focusing really on the happy ending and showing the true personality of the animal in our photography and other promotions.

The YMCA’s brand revitalization—because it extended to 2,700 YMCAs nationwide—involved not only a brand standards guide but also the creation of a brand resource center and the formation of a brand compliance team. This team coaches local Y’s through the transition process to see that all will be fully compliant with the new standards by the end of 2015. The existence of such a team suggests that those within the YMCA understood both the difficulty and the importance of maintaining consistency in brand portrayal.

Another way that organizations worked to standardize their brand portrayal was through frequent internal communication about the brand and periodic evaluations of
whether employees exemplified the brand values. This will be further discussed in the section devoted to RQ3A.

RQ2 asked how nonprofit organization employees articulate their brand identities, brand positions, brand images and brand value propositions.

**Brand identities**

Aaker (1996) defines brand identity as “a unique set of brand associations that … represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers,” (p. 68). Interviewees tended to articulate their brand identities in terms of their organizations’ missions. Though Aaker does not include mission as part of his Brand Identity Planning Model, mission has been discussed in other literature, which often addresses it as part of an organization’s mission statement. Falsey (as cited in Williams, 2008), speaking of for-profit organizations, said that an organization’s mission statement, “‘tells two things about a company: who it is and what it does’” (p. 3)

Williams (2008) pointed out that “In addition to conveying a corporation’s nature and reason for being, this statement may also outline where a firm is headed; how it plans to get there; what its priorities, values, and beliefs are; and how it is distinctive” (p. 3). Along with what the organization does, these were the types of details interviewees were likely to articulate when explaining their brand identities.

Martin defined iGo’s brand identity in terms of what the organization does:

We’re a mission organization, and we focus primarily on training and mobilizing high school and college students to go overseas and to work with missionaries.
who are on the field…. Mobilizing and training have become a greater focus rather than just sending…. so that has obviously played a huge role in our brand identity.

Brown of Reading is Fundamental, too, defined the brand identity in terms of both what the organization does and its reason for being:

We have three components. We’re electric, empowering and innovative. And when you talk about an organization, what we do is we give books to kids in need in underserved communities.

When explaining IJM’s brand identity, Li even used the word “mission,” explaining what IJM does, its reason for being and its goals. His explanation also shed light on the organization’s priorities, values and beliefs:

With us at IJM the brand itself starts from the work that we do. So if you want to boil it down to like a mission statement, it would be: the mission of IJM is being a leading global human rights organization dedicated to rescuing and restoring victims of slavery, trafficking, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression around the world and energizing a global movement to resolve these issues.

Hansen of the American Heart Association also articulated the brand identity in terms of goals, which related both to the organization’s reason for being and to where it is headed:

We have a 2020 goal to reach by the year 2020, and I think that puts into perspective where we are today with our brand. It’s to reduce risk and death from both cardiovascular disease and stroke by 20% of all Americans by 2020.
**Brand images**

When asked about their organizations’ brand images, which Aaker (2006) defines as the public’s perceptions of a brand, many interviewees explained that members of the public, despite being aware of their organizations, do not understand what their organizations do. This suggests that people may grasp some portion of these organizations’ missions but not the whole of them.

Hansen of the American Heart Association revealed that members of the public know what the organization is but not what it does or its reason for being:

We have really high awareness for our brand by the name, so the name’s what carries our weight; it's the American Heart Association. People know our name, and our awareness is between 94 and 96 percent, which is extremely high. The problem is they know our name, but they don't know what we do. They can't really articulate what we do, and there's a lot of confusion like “American Heart Association are the ones we give blood to.” No, that's the wrong nonprofit.

Brown of Reading is Fundamental articulated the similar problem:

A lot of what I hear from people when I work with them through RIF is that, you know, “I remember RIF from my childhood. Wow, you guys are still around.” So it's sort of this memory of old PSAs…. People remember those and remember that we are involved in reading, obviously because of our name, but not necessarily clear on what it is we are doing, that we actually get books to underserved children, and they're not as clear on the real issues that RIF is fighting for.
Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation stated that members of the public tend to know only part of what his organization does. Speaking of the organization’s brand image, he said:

It's an interesting thing because it depends on the audience you’re talking to…. I did some rough calculation, and I numbered 18 different components that feed into who we are. So someone out in the public could pick one of 18 things, and in their mind, that's what The Pittsburgh Foundation is.

Cronin of Center for Science in the Public Interest, too, revealed that some people do not know what CSPI does or its reason for being:

Some people see CSPI and think “Oh, that's the Consumer Product Safety Commission.” It's this big jumble of words, right? And every once in a while, as communications director, I will get a call from someone saying, “What do you guys think about the new Mars rover vehicle?” or “What do you think of this particle accelerator in Switzerland?” So I think our name misleads people into thinking that we're concerned with basic science, and our name doesn't really communicate our more narrow focus on nutrition and food safety and food.

Walther of the YCMA also stated that members of the public know what the Y is but do not know all of what it does or its reason for being:

One of the things that most people recognize the Y for is either as a place to work out, place to swim—we call that “gym and swim”—a place for kids, for camp and childcare and swimming lessons and so forth. But the majority of the other things that we do, very few people recognize that, and so we know that people are very familiar with the Y, but they have a very narrow setting.
Mester of WINGS for Kids also articulated that brand image problems arise when member of the public misunderstand what the organization does:

What's hard is that people think they know what we do when really they don't. They hear WINGS for Kids, teaching social and emotional learning after school. They think that we're teaching self-esteem to kids… It’s difficult because sometimes you have to tell them, tell the general public, you don’t know what you think you know, and let me tell you what we really do.

Misunderstanding can be detrimental to brands because it hinders people from seeing effectiveness and differentiating among organizations, which have been found to increase donations. The public’s misunderstanding of what organizations do will be addressed further in the discussion section, where it is considered in light of the concept of mission, and ways to communicate mission and work are provided.

**Brand positions and brand value propositions**

Whereas brand image is the public’s perception of a brand, brand position, according to Aaker (1996), is “the part of the brand identity and value proposition to be actively communicated to the target audience” (p. 71). Most interviewees stated that relevance and impact—or the difference made—were the aspects of the brand that they were most concerned with projecting to the public. Some articulated their brand positions in terms of what they wanted the public to know or feel about them.

Explaining what the American Heart Association strove to project to the public, Hansen stated:

Through many years of research, we do know—and I think this is probably for most industries—you want to be relevant. Consumers aren't going to pay
attention unless they understand how you're relevant, so the part for us is that we help you and your loved ones live longer…. One of the things research told us that is truly relevant is … that we can help you live longer so that you can spend more time with those you love.…

One of our differentiators and one thing that we are able to say is that we do save lives, and that's, you know, not all nonprofits are able to say that, so saving lives and impact [on] the lives of your loved ones is really key.

This relates to the idea of mission because it touches on what the organization does, its reason for being and its distinctiveness. Brown of Reading of Fundamental also addressed mission when articulating what the organization projects and how it aims to be perceived:

We want to be the organization that people think of when they’re thinking of an organization that really delivers on its mission in a very compelling, energetic way, [that] we're going to do a lot with whatever support you give us.

Li, too, stated that International Justice Mission focuses on both impact and what differentiates IJM from other organizations concerned with similar issues:

Overall what IJM wants to be known for doing is, with the high degree of excellence and integrity, we want to show that this change is possible…. There are a lot of really great organizations that bring a lot of resources and tools to bring awareness and to educate the global audience on the issues…. What sets IJM apart is the fact that we are doing something to end it, end modern day slavery as the crucial source, and it is not just building awareness … but to say we have a very unique model in that we're saying we're addressing rule of law.
He was explaining that, unlike organizations that work only to bring awareness to human trafficking and other injustices, IJM combats the problems by addressing rule of law—identifying brokenness and corruption within justice systems, working to correct them and having perpetrators prosecuted through them. In discussing IJM’s brand position, Li was also describing aspects of the mission: what the organization does, its reason for being and its distinctiveness.

Interviewees also noted impact—or the difference made—as a way in which organizations demonstrated value to supporters and a reason why people chose to support their organizations. Martin of iGo stated:

Our financial supporters … obviously to want to back what we’re doing, so they see themselves as making a difference and part of a team that’s doing this work, and I think they see themselves as helpful, contributing to the ministry.

Hansen of the American Heart Association said:

So some of the drivers [for supporters] in some of the research we've done … it’s usually the impact. What's the impact that I have by giving to this organization? And some of the messages that really have resonated with our target audience have been around childhood obesity or children’s health in general. There is a desire to make a difference in the lives of children.

It is logical that these organizations articulate the value they provide supporters in terms of their impact and what they do because most do not have products with which to provide value. Center for Science in the Public Interest was the exception to this, exemplifying Aaker’s brand-as-product perspective as a result, because it did sell a product. Cronin said of CSPI’s supporters:
Unlike a group like the Sierra Club [which] is asking people to join an organization, an advocacy organization, for advocacy's sake, and maybe … get a newsletter or a magazine in return, for us it's different…. A higher percentage of our subscribers probably see themselves as customers paying for a publication [Nutrition Action Healthletter] from a nonprofit, well-respected publisher. I think it might be more transactional than what happens at a lot of organizations.

Hansen also mentioned products, but exemplified the brand-as-symbol perspective, when she noted the value provided to consumers through the American Heart Association’s nutritional checkmark. She said:

We have the heart with the check in it, and that's our nutritional certification mark, so you'll see it on products, consumer goods, foods that meet certain nutrition criteria…. It's kind of a recognition mark that we want consumers to see and know that it’s a good product for them to choose from.

Though interviewees’ descriptions of their brands shed light on their current states, a look at the effect of the organizations on brand development reveals more about how they got there. RQ3A asked how nonprofit organizations support and emphasize the development of their brand identities through their employees, values and customs. The organizations in this study supported their brand development by communicating internally about their brands, fostering organizational cultures based on the brand’s values and treating staff members and volunteers or supporters as brand representatives.

**Employees and customs**

Internal communication about the brand was a primary way by which organizations supported and emphasized their brand development. This
communication tended to take place in meetings, retreats and orientation activities, and it served as a way to keep the brand at the forefront of employees’ and volunteers’ minds.

Martin of iGo Global stated:

Within the staff, we are reminded of it in staff meetings, and we have monthly off-site meetings that our staff go to and our staff retreat every year…. All of our events we talk about what our vision is, of mobilizing and training students.

Morton of Best Friends Animal Society said:

When we first documented the brand strategy, I did educational sessions without the organization with the different division and departmental meetings, and we also talk about it in new employee orientation … but I think there's still lots of opportunity to keep it in the forefront. We do have a regular internal newsletter that goes out, so there's opportunities to put stories and reminders in that…. We have an all-staff meeting, so [the CEO] is really good about weaving the core messages into the speech he gives at the all-staff meeting.

Many interviewees also stated that internal communication about the brand took place during the brand development efforts detailed in the section on RQ1.

Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation, speaking of their brand development work:

We've engaged staff right from the out, and after the ad agency came up with proposals, we showed those proposals to staff and they were very forthright about stuff they liked and the stuff they didn't.
Brown of Reading is Fundamental:

When we did the new brand ... we did a lot of work with the staff to make sure they understand it and that they kind of got a sense, as things were changing, of why and how they were changing.

For the YMCA, in particular, the brand revitalization efforts—and the internal communication that took place as a result—were what finally enabled staff members to articulate the brand publically in ways in which they previously had been unable to.

Walther said:

The Y has so much going on. We had [one] CEO who came to our CEO meetings [during the brand revitalization process], and ... when we presented the areas of focus—youth development, healthy living and social responsibility—to this group of about 20 CEOs ... he stands up, and he goes, "I can't believe it.... For the first time in my 40 years with the Y, I can actually describe what we do.” ... And he was like, “You know, everybody asks me what the Y is, and ... I never had a short, succinct way to say, and now I can: The Y for youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.”

This demonstrates that internal communication about the brand facilitates external communication about the brand. By keeping employees informed about the brand, the YMCA enabled these employees to be more prepared brand representatives. This example also supports Aaker’s statement (as cited in Berry, 2000) that “‘When a brand identity and position are clear, they help all employees gauge their actions in terms of a central strategy’” (p. 135). Further analysis of the application of Aaker’s model to the organizations studied will be provided in the discussion section.
Employees and values

Another way in which these nonprofits supported brand development was by promoting the brand values within the organizational culture. This relates to Aaker’s brand-as-organization perspective, which focuses on organizational attributes. Multiple interviewees said that employees were evaluated on how well they represented brand values.

When articulating International Justice Mission’s brand identity, Li discussed IJM’s core internal values, “being Christian, being professional, and being bridge-building,” and these values served as a basis of evaluation for employees. He stated:

We're very intentional about [communicating within the organization about the brand values]. It starts from day one as an employee. When you first start at IJM, you actually go through what we call training week, literally five days of education and understanding of IJM culture, our history.... Then [we] have the periodic reinforcement that we do throughout the year reminding ourselves of these core values....

We actually do evaluate annual performance on those values, and one of the things we do is rate whether or not this individual, this employee, has exhibited or embodied the core values.

Mester described WINGS’ internal communication and evaluations similarly:
We do a lot of professional development and bonding as a staff.... What we have to work hard on, through these trainings and through these Soar Sessions and professional development opportunities, [is] really teaching everybody what the culture is.... It's what we teach, especially to new staff when they join
WINGS…. Our CEO absolutely 100% lives WINGS, and it trickles down all the way into volunteers, so it's very top to bottom, everybody lives this brand…. We have evaluations—a six-month evaluation, a year-end evaluation. A lot of what each employee is evaluated on is if they're living the culture of WINGS, so whether they are able to be flexible... if they're able to work well as a team, if they are able to persevere and not give up. Things like that, that we're teaching to kids, we are also learning and being—quote, unquote—tested ourselves as a corporate staff.

These evaluations demonstrated that staff members were seen as stewards or representatives of the brand. This reflects Berry’s (2000) statement that those who work for service organizations “are a powerful medium for building brand meaning and equity” and that they “make or break a brand” (p. 135). For some organizations, this idea of brand stewardship also extended to volunteers or financial supporters.

Hansen of the American Heart Association:

We have about 3,000 staff, but we have about 22,000 [or] 23,000 volunteers, and we treat those volunteers as staff, and they are as involved, and they are very passionate ... so I think those that work for the organization are very passionate and care about what we do and the mission.

Morton of Best Friends said of supporters:

The people that we do have are super loyal and completely satisfied with their experience with Best Friends, so I think once we get them into the organization, their work from a brand advocacy perspective is amazing.
Mester, speaking of the college students who lead the after-school WINGS programs, said, “The part-time staff, our college students, they do know the brand. They are the brand. They are literally the brand on the ground every day.”

Organizational cultures and attributes do not always positively affect brand development, however. RQ3B asked how nonprofit organizations oppose and hinder the development of their brand identities through their employees, values and customs.

**Employees and customs**

Just as internal communication about the brand was one way in which organizations supported brand development, failure to communicate internally about the brand hindered brand development by leaving staff members unprepared and unable to articulate their brands publically. Cronin of Center for Science in the Public Interest gave this example:

A few months ago I was doing a mock radio interview with one of our nutritionists who was preparing to do some media around one of the studies we were putting out…. My last question was something like—with me being the radio interviewer—“Okay, so finally, we have about 90 seconds left. Can you tell us a little about CSPI and who you are and what you do?” And she blanked out, meaning she didn't have that at the tip of her tongue….

We have people here who work in very highly specialized roles. An epidemiologist in our food safety department is probably not going to know what's going on in the pages of Nutrition Action Healthletter. A dietician on that staff is probably not going to know a heck of a lot of what we're doing in Congress advocating on soda taxes…. It's a challenge because most people are
pretty focused on their highly specialized role and aren't in the position of having to articulate our brand. Certainly anyone here who is in the position of speaking to the media could do it, but we could probably do a better job with a good chunk of our staff.

As discussed under RQ3A, many organizations view their employees as representatives or stewards of the brand. When these brand stewards are unable to communicate clearly about what the organization does, they can misrepresent the brand and lose opportunities to increase awareness and understanding.

Another aspect of some organizations that seemed to hinder brand development was the lack of communication among separate departments. Multiple interviewees referred to their departments as being like “silos.” Hansen of the American Heart Association stated:

The one thing from the operational standpoint that has a negative impact is we are structured very silo, so our communication are one arm, but we have another department that oversees the development of programs, and so they're separate from us, and there isn't a traditional marketing department, so marketing efforts and campaign efforts are all kind of mixed in there, attached to individual programs, and the reason we're structured that way is because of our funding model…. A sponsor is funding one program, so staff are delegated based on that one program with that one set of funding, and they have to work to independently, so it creates silos.

Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation explained a similar problem, which his organization has moved away from in recent years:
The leadership here changed five years ago, and thank goodness it did because in those five years we've really made some giant leaps in terms of progress, but the reason I float back to this is … it was certainly an obstacle to development, to overall progress: every department here operated as its own silo. You had development: “We're all about donors; we don't need to know about grant making.” And then you had the program department, which is grant making: “Oh, we're grant making. We don't need to know about donors. We just make sure we know where the money's going to go.” And finance: “Well, you're both wrong because the most important thing is finance and investment, so what we do is the most important.” … And it was like this tension, this tension within the organization.

In addition to failing to communicate internally, organizations hindered brand development through inconsistencies. As Aaker (1996) stated, “Being consistent over time with respect to a brand’s identity, position, visual imagery, and theme or slogan is clearly a key to strong brands” (p. 224).

The inconsistencies that had arisen in organizations were much of what was combated by the brand development efforts detailed in the section on RQ1. Walther of the YMCA stated, “You're not supposed to have any other logos now but the Y. We had hundreds and hundreds [before the brand revitalization]. YUSA itself had 182 different logos, and if you take that times 2,700 Y's, tons of logos.”
As earlier mentioned, the rebranding efforts by the American Heart Association and Center for Science in the Public Interest, too, addressed confusion and inconsistencies caused through the use of multiple logos and too many sub-brands. Cronin of Center for Science in the Public Interest stated:

In 2006 we did our logo redesign. [There had been] an uneven hodgepodge of the logos that were in use here around 2005…. One version on the web, another version on the letterhead…. We had no one really policing its usage across the organization in our materials.

Working toward consistency, on the other hand, can help organizations build stronger brands and facilitate public understanding of mission. The importance of mission and public understanding is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Discussion

The interviews revealed that the nonprofit brands studied fit some of Aaker’s four brand perspectives better than others. The perspective that fit best was that of brand-as-organization, which, according to Aaker, focuses on the organizational attributes created by people, culture, values and programs. International Justice Mission and WINGS for Kids serve as clear examples of nonprofits whose brand identities reflect the cultures of the organizations and vice versa.

Mester of WINGS stated:

We tout that we are innovative and we're fresh and we're fun. That is something that we carry over into our organization, and so just as we try and succeed at
offering kids a really fun, energized program, we also try to maintain that in our corporate environment as well—being fresh, being innovative, being fun—really trying hard to stand out against other youth-serving organizations.

Li of International Justice Mission articulated a similar relationship between brand and organization.

Here's a little bit of our brand culture. We're a business-formal environment. We wear suits and ties to work like every day. We have no casual Fridays, and the people in the field practice the same dress code as well, especially when they're going to court or meeting government officials. And for us we believe that, if we believe these clients [are] worthy of the best services that we can provide, [then] we want to be able to communicate that through everything that we do, even if that means looking like lawyers, having a business card that makes us look professional and [being] dressed professionally, and that works.

The brand-as-product perspective, which focuses on product scope, attributes, quality or value, uses and users, was the least applicable to these nonprofit organizations. It did, however, apply in the case of Center for Science in the Public Interest, which is known largely for the Nutrition Action Healthletter that it sells to subscribers. Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation even noted that his brand cannot be built around a product because the organization does not offer one. When describing the brand identity, he said, “It’s not [as if] we make nuts and bolts, where we can say, ‘We make the best nuts and bolts in the world.’”

The brand-as-person and brand-as-symbol perspectives also fit some organizations better than others. The brand-as-symbol perspective, which focuses on
visual imagery and metaphors, was clearly seen in the example of the American Heart Association, whose recognizable food certification checkmark reminds consumers of the organization and what it stands for. Hansen stated:

We have the heart with the check in it, and that's our nutritional certification mark, so you'll see it on products, consumer goods, foods that meet certain nutrition criteria…. It's kind of a recognition mark that we want consumers to see and know that it’s a good product for them to choose from…. We are—this is verbatim what consumers tell us—we are, kind of, a sacred trust with the content that consumers get from us.

Best Friends Animal Society, the YMCA, WINGS for Kids and Reading is Fundamental all exemplified the brand-as-person perspective, which focuses on brand personality and brand-customer relationships. Morton stated that Best Friends’ “personality traits are positive, dedicated and empowering.” Other interviewees hinted at their brand personalities when they spoke of their brands’ voices. Walther of the YMCA stated:

How do we want to represent ourselves as an organization by our voice? We determined the characteristics of [that], which was determined, welcoming, genuine, hopeful.

Mester of WINGS for Kids also made the connection between voice and personality. She said, “We have a really fun voice…. It's not stiff and stuffy because we're not stiff and stuffy.”

Though Aaker’s four perspectives can and do help explain the brands of these organizations, there are aspects of each brand that do not fit clearly into any of the four
categories. The theory developed through this research helps to cover the brand aspects insufficiently covered by Aaker’s model.

**Theory**

Coding and analysis of the interview transcripts revealed a number of telling concepts, the most significant of which is the concept of brand-as-mission. When describing their brand identities—as well as their brand images, positions and value propositions—interviewees tended to articulate them, as detailed under RQ2, in terms of their organizations’ missions.

This suggests an addition to Aaker’s brand perspectives as they apply to nonprofit organizations. It leads to the theory that, when applied to nonprofit organizations, the Brand Identity Planning Model should include the perspective of brand-as-mission. This perspective, informed by the definitions of mission provided by Falsey and Williams (2008), would encompass what the nonprofit organization does, its reason for existence, its direction or goals; its priorities, values and beliefs; and its distinctiveness.

The usefulness of a brand-as-mission perspective is supported by the fact that the missions of the organizations studied have played a fundamental role in their brand development efforts. For instance, the YMCA’s brand revitalization involved first categorizing the organization’s services and programs by the Y’s three focus areas: youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. This categorization shed light on what the organization does, its reason for existence and its priorities and values, all of which are aspects of mission.
Similarly, Morton stated that those at Best Friends “solidified ‘No More Homeless Pets’ as the mission of the organization,” as part of their brand strategy work before they identified their business descriptions, personality traits and positioning.

Li, too, stressed the centrality of mission to his organization’s brand. He called the mission the “core” of IJM’s brand identity:

The mission of IJM is being a leading global human rights organization dedicated to rescuing and restoring victims … of violent oppression around the world and energizing a global movement to resolve these issues. Just, kind of, at its core, that's our brand identity, what we want to be known for.

The unique importance of mission for nonprofits is supported by previous research on nonprofits’ mission statements. Kirk and Nolan (2010) said, “Mission statements often are viewed as more important to nonprofit organizations than to for-profit entities…. This view derives from the belief that, lacking a profit motive, nonprofit organizations rely on a mission statement to articulate their raison d’être” (p. 474).

Two others concepts that emerged during the coding and relate to the idea of brand-as-mission include (1) the public’s misunderstanding of what organizations do and (2) the need to demonstrate impact as a reason for support.

The first concept, the public’s misunderstanding of what organizations do, was exemplified in the discussion of brand image under RQ2. Many organizations have found that, despite the public’s high awareness of their brands, members of the public simply do not know or cannot articulate what their organizations do. For example, as in the case of Reading is Fundamental, the public may know what the organization stands for but fail to realize what it does. As Brown stated:

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People remember … that we are involved in reading … but [are] not necessarily clear on what it is we are doing, that we actually get books to underserved children, and they're not as clear on the real issues that RIF is fighting for.

For others, as in the case of WINGS for Kids, which provides social and emotional education for children, members of the public may misunderstand what they do. Mester stated:

What's hard is that people think they know what we do when really they don't. They hear WINGS for Kids, teaching social and emotional learning after school. They think that we're teaching self-esteem to kids…. Sometimes you have to tell them… you don’t know what you think you know, and let me tell you what we really do.

For others still, as in the case of Center for Science in the Public Interest, members of the public may be completely off-base in their assumptions about what an organization does. All of these brand image issues stem not from a lack of awareness but from a misunderstanding or an unclear picture of the mission of the organization.

This is a problem because, according to past research by Faircloth (2005), respect and differentiation, not brand awareness, positively influenced people’s interest in donating to specific nonprofits. If awareness alone does not generate financial support, organizations need to communicate their missions, specifically their distinctiveness, work and reason for being, to gain the respect that will result in financial support. Similarly, O’Neil (2008) found in her study on the relationship between nonprofits’ communication and donor trust that “communicating the mission and work in promotional efforts is one way nonprofit organizations can foster a strong relationship with donors” (p. 266).
Communicating an organization’s work and mission also relates to the second concept, the need to demonstrate impact as a reason for support. As detailed under RQ2, one of the messages organizations are most concerned with communicating is that they are making an impact. They want to be known for delivering on their missions, making a difference, using support effectively and helping people. This goes hand in hand with previous research that suggests that, when differentiating among organizations, people show particular concern for organizations’ efficiency and effectiveness. Communicating the work that an organization has done is a primary way both to demonstrate impact and to explain the mission to the public.

Organizations can communicate their missions, particularly what they do and their reason for being, in a number of ways. They can teach staff members and other supporters how to talk about their brands and missions, thereby making sure brand representatives are ready to share organizations’ work with the public. As in the cases of the YMCA CEO and the CSPI nutritionist who experienced difficulty articulating the brand to others, organizations lose opportunities to communicate their missions when their own employees have not been taught how to do so. Like the YMCA and the American Heart Association, organizations also can straighten out their brand architecture, which should be built on the mission itself, so that work can be both seen and articulated more clearly in terms of the big picture.

Additionally, nonprofits can tell the stories of their supporters and those whom they have helped. Storytelling was a way in which many of the organizations represented,
including iGo Global, Reading is Fundamental, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Best Friends and WINGS strove both to demonstrate their impact and articulate their missions.

Finally, communication about what an organization does must itself be consistent with the overall brand and mission. Just as International Justice Mission and Best Friends Animal Society set photography guidelines that stayed true to their overall goals, values and distinctiveness, other organizations should make sure that their materials and messages represent the mission itself.

By evaluating and developing their brands in light of the brand-as-mission perspective, nonprofit organizations can ensure that their messages and efforts line up with their work, reasons for existence, goals and distinctiveness. Additionally, they can facilitate the consistency that is so important for nonprofits as they strive to differentiate themselves, explain their missions and communicate their effectiveness.

**Limitations of the Present Study**

Due to the non-probability sampling and the small number of organizations studied, these findings are limited and not generalizable. Studies of the 17 organizations that were contacted but not included—as well as studies of the countless other nonprofit organizations that were not contacted—would undoubtedly reveal more information and insights about the brand-building efforts of nonprofits and about the applicability of the perspective of brand-as-mission. More research would reveal which insights gathered in this study are the most universal and which are unique to the sample studied.

**Future Research**

This study contributes to the field by adapting Aaker’s Brand Identity Planning Model to make it more applicable and useful to nonprofit organizations, thereby
providing a new perspective through which researchers and strategists can evaluate and build their brands. Additionally, it provides more information about ways in which nonprofit organizations are working to build their brands and sheds light on ways in which organizations either support or hinder their own brand development efforts. It reveals the actions organizations have taken to strengthen their brands or rebrand entirely and also identifies some of the problems that led organizations to undertake these brand development efforts.

More research could expand upon these findings even further. Future research could address rebranding efforts—for example, the problems or stagnation that lead brands to rebranding or the effects of rebranding efforts on brand image. Research could also address the effects of different types of brand messages on public understanding of organizations’ missions. In addition, research could address the ability of organizations’ employees to articulate their missions to those outside the organizations. More research about the applicability of the brand-as-mission perspective would also be beneficial and reveal the extent to which it would be useful to other nonprofit brands.
Appendix A: Original Proposal

Introduction

The primary reason I was drawn to the Missouri School of Journalism when picking a graduate school was the breadth of the strategic communication track. I had majored in public relations as an undergraduate, and I wanted to find a graduate program that offered a broad yet integrated study of communication. Other graduate schools I visited emphasized that students had to pick one aspect of communication—writing or designing or research, advertising or marketing or public relations. I wanted a program that incorporated aspects of all of these, and that is what I saw when I visited Mizzou.

My interest in many areas of communication is also one of the reasons that I am drawn to working with nonprofit organizations after graduation. Small nonprofits, in particular, often do not have the budgets to have large communication departments, so those who do their communication work must be competent with many communication tasks. After graduation I hope to find a job at a nonprofit organization where I can work on all aspects of communication—strategic planning, graphic design, writing, Web design, social media, public relations and the like.

I am so grateful for the broad array of communication-related experiences and classes that I have had in college and graduate school. I have had classes such as strategic writing, graphic design, marketing, persuasion, multimedia planning and design, feature writing, public relations, communication theory and photography. I have completed internships in both a social media agency and a university’s public relations office. These experiences have prepared me for both the professional skills component and the research component of my master’s project. For my professional skills component, I
will be working at a local nonprofit organization, getting to work in all areas of its communication efforts. For my research component, I will be studying the brand-building efforts of nonprofit organizations and learning more about the ways they are actively working to develop cohesive brands.

My professional skills and research components both relate directly to my professional goal of working in communication at a nonprofit organization. I want to help nonprofits develop strong, consistent brands and communicate their visions and messages effectively. What I learn from working at a nonprofit and studying nonprofits will surely help me achieve this professional goal.
Professional Skills Component

For my professional skills component, I will be working at the Voluntary Action Center here in Columbia. My work at VAC will be directly related to my program emphasis in strategic communication. I will be working with VAC’s seven-person strategic communication committee, seven-person resource development committee and six-person calendar campaign committee.

The strategic communication committee is in the process of beginning a communication audit. I will work with the committee to review all elements of VAC’s communication, including the website, newsletter, e-newsletter, social media, media relations, and promotional materials such as brochures, letterhead and logo. I will assist in revisions to these. I will work with the resource development committee on outreach efforts, specifically helping to develop a brochure for local churches interested in getting involved with VAC and a menu of opportunities for potential sponsors. My work with the calendar campaign committee will involve helping to develop and implement a new fundraising initiative that aims not only to raise funds but also to increase community understanding of VAC’s work.

Additionally, I will help to develop white papers that describe specific elements of VAC’s work to be used by board members and staff in communication with media and others. I also will help to develop other new elements of multimedia communication, such as short videos describing VAC and its services and programs.

The classes and previous internships that I mentioned will surely help as I undertake these tasks for VAC. I expect to put to use what I’ve learned about design and layout, writing, Web design, social media, public relations, persuasion and
strategic planning. The physical evidence that I expect to have from the job at VAC includes design and writing samples, copies of the materials revamped as a result of the communication audit, the menu of opportunities, the white papers, the short videos and materials related to the fundraising initiative.

The field notes and work evaluation included in my final project report also will provide evidence of the strategic planning, research and analysis that will go into my work. The communication audit, in particular, will require analysis of current materials. The revamping of materials after this audit, as well as the development and implementation of white papers and new elements of multimedia, will require strategic planning. Additionally, my work with the calendar campaign committee to develop a fundraising initiative will involve both research and strategic planning.

VAC executive director Nick Foster will be my supervisor. As director he oversees all of VAC’s developmental activities, organizational communication and community relations. He previously worked as executive director for two other nonprofits, an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity and the Alabama Poverty Project, and oversaw resource development for these organizations. He will work closely with the various agency committees I will work with (strategic communication, resource development and calendar campaign) and VAC as a whole. I will receive instructions through conversation and email, and the work that I do will be disseminated to others through email, the VAC website, social media, mail and the like.

I will work 30 hours a week for 14 weeks—beginning on Jan. 14 (a week before the semester starts), taking off the week of March 24, and working through April 26. Due to limited space in the VAC building and the fact that VAC has other students
working in the building during certain days and hours, I will spend half my work hours at VAC itself and half my hours working from home or campus.
Analysis Component

Theoretical Framework

More than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations operate in the United States today. They promote ideals, raise awareness and funds and provide important services. Many, however, must fight to keep their services running. Decreased government funding, declines in giving and increased numbers of nonprofits account for this problem and result in greater competition for funds among nonprofits (Griffiths, 2005, p. 122).

In a competitive charitable market, nonprofits must pay increased attention to their brand identities (Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert, 2005, p. 296). Brands differentiate organizations, and they are particularly important for service organizations because of “the inherent difficulty in differentiating products that lack physical differences” (Berry, 2000, p. 128-29). Though research has shown the competitive advantage strong nonprofit brands provide, little research is available about the actual brand-building efforts being made by nonprofits (Venable et al., p. 297). This study’s purpose is to reveal more about ways in which nonprofits are working to develop strong and consistent brand identities.

This study will both draw from and build on current communication research. Current research has addressed whether nonprofits have brand identities and personalities, how brands influence donor support, how organizations’ communication with the public builds trust and branding in service organizations (Berry, 2000; Bryce; Faircloth; O’Neil; Sargeant & Lee; Venable et al.). There is a gap in the research regarding how nonprofits are actively working to build their brand identities.

This study will address this gap, providing more data about real brand-building efforts of nonprofits, by focusing on the following research questions:
Q1: How are nonprofit organizations working—through actions, standards or language—to develop their brand identities?

Q2: How do nonprofit organization employees (paid or non-paid) articulate their brand identities, brand positions, brand images and brand value propositions?

Q3A: How do nonprofit organizations—through their employees, values and customs—support and emphasize the development of those organizations’ brand identities?

Q3B: How do nonprofit organizations—through their employees, values and customs—oppose and hinder the development of those organizations’ brand identities?

This topic is relevant to my professional component because I will be working at the Voluntary Action Center, a nonprofit, on their communication and fundraising efforts, which are integral to brand building.

This study will rely on Aaker’s Brand Identity Planning Model as its theoretical framework and starting point. This model was originally designed for brand strategists, but it has also been useful to researchers who study branding because it identifies several elements of brand identity and differentiates among them. This study will focus on the concept of brand identity, which Aaker defines as “a unique set of brand associations that … represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers,” as well as related concepts including brand image, brand awareness and brand position (1996, p. 68).

Aaker’s Brand Identity Planning Model was first presented in his book *Building Strong Brands*. The model was chosen as a starting point for the research at
hand because of its use in brand development and because it breaks the concept of brand identity into many elements organized around four perspectives: brand-as-product, brand-as-organization, brand-as-person and brand-as-symbol (1996, p. 105).

The brand-as-product perspective is built around the idea that a brand’s products are central to its identity. According to Aaker’s model, the scope, attributes, quality and value, uses, users and country of origin of a product can all affect the brand identity. Because many nonprofits provide services rather than products (and some provide neither), this perspective will be adapted for this study, but the model is still applicable considering Aaker’s acknowledgment that not all perspectives fit all brands (p. 78-82).

The brand-as-organization perspective posits that basing brand identity in part on the organization itself can help a brand differentiate itself from competitors (p. 117). This perspective focuses primarily on organization attributes and associations. These include an organization’s community orientation, level of innovation and global or local orientation (p. 118-128). These associations benefit a brand by adding credibility, clarifying its culture and values and influencing its value proposition (p. 95, 130-131).

The brand-as-person perspective focuses on brand personality, the “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 141). This perspective suggests people perceive brands as having both human-like characteristics such as age and socioeconomic class and personality traits such as competence and trustworthiness (p. 83, 141). Strong, positive brand personalities can act as the basis of supporters’ relationships with a brand (p. 83-84). They can also add to a brand’s self-expressive benefits, “by providing a way for a person to communicate his … self-image” through support of the brand (p. 84, 99).
The brand-as-symbol perspective focuses on three types of symbols: visual imagery, metaphors and brand heritage, all of which can add cohesion and structure to a brand identity. Such symbols can represent brand benefits, act as cornerstone for brand strategy and represent the essence of a brand (p. 84-85).

These four perspectives are not the only components of the Brand Identity Planning Model, which also includes secondary components related to value proposition, credibility and brand-customer relationship as well as initial brand analysis and eventual brand identity implementation. The four perspectives do, however, serve as the core of the model and provide guidance for developing and evaluating brand identities.

The Brand Identity Planning Model was used in Hill and Vincent’s study on the branding of English football club Manchester United (2006, p. 213). Hill and Vincent used the model to “delineate the distinctive features of the Manchester United Brand” (p. 218). Like this study will do, they focused on the portion of the model composed of the four perspectives of brand identity. Though Manchester United is a for-profit organization, it is similar to many nonprofit organizations in that it does not offer a traditional product. Nevertheless, the researchers managed to study the brand from the brand-as-product perspective. They considered its product scope to be the game of soccer; its product attributes to be its fan base, team-orientation and strategies; and its quality to be the excellence of the players (p. 219). Though the topic of their study is largely unrelated to the research at hand, their study exemplifies how Aaker’s model can be applied to a brand that does not offer traditional products.

Wallström, Karlsson and Salehi-sangari also drew on the Brand Identity Planning Model in their study of the internal brand-building process in Swedish service
firms. These researchers focused on the brand-building efforts of a financial services supplier, a commercial bank and a chain of real estate agents. All three firms were chosen because they had recently undertaken internal brand-building processes, which included brand audits, brand identity planning and brand position statement development (2008, p. 43). Their study, like the one proposed, focused on brand building from the organization’s perspective rather than customers’, and the researchers relied on Aaker’s brand component definitions and four-perspective approach in their analysis (p. 46).

Mohan and Sequeira evaluated Aaker’s model by using case studies to analyze whether brand-building initiatives undertaken by Fevicol, Nokia, Kingfisher and Airtel could be classified under Aaker’s four brand perspectives. The researchers found these cases to be in line with Aaker’s model. Fevicol’s brand image had been built primarily around the quality of its product; Nokia’s, around the organization’s attributes; Kingfisher’s, around a personality; and Airtel’s, around a symbol (2009).

Moorthi, too, drew from Aaker’s brand identity framework in a study proposing a comprehensive approach for branding services. Moorthi integrated Aaker’s model with Booms and Bitner’s Extended Marketing Mix, categorizing the aspects of marketing under Aaker’s four brand perspectives and then relating this modified Aaker model to the three-fold economic classification of goods as search goods, experience goods and credence goods. In addition to using Aaker’s model, Moorthi relied on Aaker’s brand component definitions throughout his study (2002, p. 260-270).

As exemplified by the studies mentioned, Aaker’s model has a history of use within communication and marketing research in addition to its use as a tool for brand strategists. The four-perspective approach Aaker proposes and the brand concept
definitions his model provides, in particular, have aided researchers to analyze brand identities and brand-building efforts. The model will also serve as a strong starting point from which to research the brand-building efforts of nonprofit organizations.
Methods

In addition to relying on Aaker’s model, this study will explore the research questions at hand through a method of semi-structured interviews with nine nonprofit organization workers and through the grounded theory method. The IRS recognizes eight types of nonprofit organizations: charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering amateur sports competition and preventing cruelty to children or animals (“Exempt Purposes,” 2012). One of each type will be used for this study, including both an organization working toward prevention of cruelty to children and an organization working toward prevention of cruelty to animals. It is probable and expected that more than nine organizations will be contacted initially in an effort to gain access to one of each type. The organizations chosen will likely and ideally vary in size, impact level, location, funding level and background.

In order to conduct semi-structured interviews, the interviewer must first locate informants to interview. These interviewees should be knowledgeable about the topic, able to provide detailed information about the topic and willing to talk (Whiting, 2008, p. 36). For this study the interviewer will gain access to interviewees in the organizations by contacting each organization’s media representative or marketing manager and asking for the name of the organization worker he or she believes is most familiar with the organization’s brand. Because media representatives and marketing managers are often at the forefront of brand identity and brand promotion, they are likely to know (or be) the interview candidates who will have the most knowledge about each organization’s brand-building efforts. The goals of the study will not be disguised in an attempt to gain access to the various organizations.
Interviews with organizations’ workers are a practical and appropriate way to gain information about organizations’ brands because these workers themselves represent the brand. Berry pointed out that those who work for service organizations “are a powerful medium for building brand meaning and equity” and that they “make or break a brand” (2000, p. 135). He also pointed out that branding is important not only for those people who are served by service organizations but also for the service providers themselves (p. 135).

Similarly, Aaker stated that “‘When a brand identity and position are clear, they help all employees gauge their actions in terms of a central strategy’” (qtd. in Berry, 2000, p. 135). Thus, the actions and words of interviewed employees should speak to their organizations’ brand identities and positions. Employees at the forefront of brand management have also served as interviewees in other researchers’ studies of brand-building efforts. For example, Wallström, Karlsson and Salehi-sangari conducted semi-structured interviews with marketing managers in their study of the internal brand-building process in Swedish service firms (2008, p. 43).

Semi-structured interviewing differs from many other research methods in that it does not follow explicit and predetermined steps (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 17). Rather, as stated by Kvale and Brinkmann, “many of the methodological decisions have to be made on the spot, during the interview” (2008, p. 16). In conducting these interviews, the interviewer will begin with a set of pre-established questions, but there will not be a limited set of response categories. In addition, the interviewer may improvise, adding new questions and following new paths of conversation based on the interviewees’ responses.
Room for improvisation is necessary because semi-structured qualitative interviews often take unexpected turns as they progress (Johnson, 2001, p. 111). According to Johnson, “Although interviewers might anticipate following a nice, neat, rational plan before they begin interviewing, they inevitably find that the path, tone, and trajectory of actual interviews rarely follow this sequence” (p. 111).

In their book *Qualitative Interviewing*, Rubin and Rubin echo this idea, pointing out that qualitative interviewing design must be “flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and locked in stone” (1995, p. 43). Though researchers begin with a set of questions, they must listen to the answers and base their subsequent questions on what was said (p. 7). Rubin and Rubin delineate three types of questions used in semi-structured qualitative interviewing: main questions, probes and follow-up questions (p. 145-146).

Main questions are those with which to begin and guide the interview (p. 145). Those used in this interview will be written specifically to answer the primary three research questions at hand. Many of them will be adapted from Aaker’s *Building Strong Brands* so that they specifically relate to the Brand Identity Planning Model. A few sample questions include:

- Related to Research Q1: How does your organization show that it is different from other nonprofit organizations? How are those who work in your organization made aware of the organizations’ values and vision?
- Related to Research Q2: What is the desired image of your organization? What do supporters of your organization say about themselves through their support? In what ways might those whom your organization
serves perceive the brand differently from the way your organization’s supporters perceive the brand?

Related to Research Q3: What internal organizational pressures work against brand building? What internal organizational pressures work toward brand building?

Probes are those questions used to encourage interviewees to clarify and complete their answers with more elaboration and evidence (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 148). Follow-up questions are those that pursue discovered themes and the implications of the answers to the main questions (p. 151). Though those who conduct semi-structured interviews may improvise as the conversation progresses, they must play neutral roles and avoid interjecting answers.

It is probable and expected that some, if not the majority, of the interviews conducted will take place over the phone or over Skype because this study is not limited to nonprofit organizations within one region of the country. Creswell noted in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* that telephone interviews are the best option for interviewers who do not have direct access to interviewees. One drawback of this approach, however, is that it prevents the researcher from seeing the “informal communication” provided by the interviewee’s expressions, posture and so on (1998, p. 124). The use of Skype could restore some of the informal communication lost in phone interviews.

The interviews conducted for this study will be recorded with a digital audio recorder, and the interviewer will take notes during the interviews. Use of an audio recorder is not only common in qualitative interviewing but also important. It
provides a verbatim account of the interview and frees the interviewer from the pressure to take notes word for word, thereby enabling more careful listening and creating a more relaxed atmosphere overall (Whiting, 2008, p. 36-37).

Many researchers have used interviews to gain information for their studies on brands. Faircloth used in-depth interviews with agency members to identify attitudes, images and perceptions of agencies that would serve as preliminary data in his study of the influence of brand equity on donor support in nonprofits (p. 4). Abreu used informal interviews with the staff of a nonprofit organization in her study on the brand positioning of a Catholic shrine (2006, p. 142). Venable et al. also used semi-structured, in-depth interviews with both donors and nonprofit practitioners to explore perceptions of brand personality for their study on the role of brand personality in charitable giving. As will be done during this study, Venable et al. recorded audio during their interviews and subsequently transcribed them (p. 300-302).

Similarly, researchers have used a method like the one outlined in this section to gain initial access to organization members. In their study on corporate visual identity in different types of organizations, van den Bosch, de Jong and Elving began by contacting organizations over the telephone and asking for the people responsible for the corporate visual identity and then asking them to participate in the study (2006, p. 143).

After each interview for this study is completed, the audio recording will be transcribed, as is often done following qualitative interviewing (Venable et al., p. 300; de Chernatony, Drury, & Segal-Horn, 2003, p. 8). The researcher will then use the grounded theory method, which fits well with qualitative interviewing, to analyze interviewees’ responses and the information they have provided (Charmaz, 2001, p. 676).
The purpose of the grounded theory method is to enable the researcher to generate a theory that is “integrated, consistent, plausible [and] close to the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 101). Though Aaker’s model will serve as a starting point for the research, using the grounded theory method once data has been gathered will help the researcher to avoid forcing the gathered data back into a model that it may or may not fit (Charmaz, p. 687).

Grounded theory method involves four stages: comparing incidents within categories, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory and writing the theory. (Glaser & Strauss, p. 105). The researcher will first code data—in this case, interview content—into as many categories of analysis as possible, either as categories emerge or as data emerge that fit into an existing category. While coding a piece of information, or an incident, for a category, the researcher must compare it with other incidents coded into the same category (p. 106). This constant comparison is integral to grounded theory method, as is the practice of memo writing (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 10). The analyst must stop coding and record memos of theoretical notions that come to mind while dealing with data. According to Glaser and Strauss, this rule is “designed to tap the initial freshness of the analyst’s theoretical notions” (p. 107).

Through memo writing, researchers “define the properties of each category; specify conditions under which each category develops, is maintained, and changes; and note the consequences of each category and its relationships with other categories” (Charmaz, p. 687).

As coding continues the analyst will begin to compare incidents not with each other but with properties of the category that have resulted from the initial
comparisons of incidents (p. 108). Constant comparison will result in these category properties becoming integrated and unified, and the theory develops as this integration “force[s] the analyst to make some related theoretical sense of each comparison” (p. 109).

The next stage of this method is delimiting of the theory. As comparison continues, underlying uniformities among categories and their properties allow the analyst to generalize and formulate the theory with a smaller number of higher-level concepts. The final stage is that of writing the theory, which, as a result of the constant comparison, should correspond closely to the data initially gathered in interviews (p. 113-114).

The resultant theory will be included in the report on the findings, which will detail what has been learned, include examples and insights from the interviews, and, ultimately, answer the primary research questions with information gathered in the interviewing process. It will reveal examples of ways in which nonprofits are working to develop their brand identities, show how nonprofit employees are articulating aspects of their brands and examine how nonprofits are enabling or hindering further brand development. Overall, this research should provide valuable insight about what makes a successful brand and how resources should be allocated in light of this.
In looking at the research questions at hand, it is important to review what current research reveals about nonprofit brands. Though the majority of studies about brand building have focused on for-profit organizations and companies, a number of studies have shown the importance of brand identities for nonprofit organizations as well (Venable et al., p. 296; Faircloth, 2005, p. 3). In a broader but closely related vein, studies have also shown the importance of nonprofits’ promotional and communication efforts as a whole, which contribute to what Aaker calls “brand image,” or the public’s perceptions of a brand (Berry, 2000, p. 129; Aaker, 1996, p. 71).

In her study on the relationship between nonprofits’ communications and donor trust, O’Neil states that “communicating the mission and work in promotional efforts is one way nonprofit organizations can foster a strong relationship with donors” (2008, p. 266). These ideas of mission and work relate to Aaker’s brand-as-product and brand-as-organization perspectives of brand identity. Through surveys sent to nonprofit donors, O’Neil found that the types of communications that most influence donors’ trust, commitment and satisfaction are those that show how donations are being used (p. 270). This type of information sheds light on a nonprofit’s organizational attributes, such as community orientation, which according to Aaker’s model, leads to increased credibility (1996, p. 131).

Bennett and Barkensjo consider donors’ perception that an organization is credible to be evidence of trust (2005, p. 129), which Berry calls perhaps the single most powerful marketing tool available to an organization (1995, p. 242). Bryce also
emphasizes the importance of trust, defining it as the expectation that the other will act in accordance with a shared interest, and stating that nonprofits need public trust for legitimacy, effectiveness and financial support (2007, p. 112-115). In their study on public trust in the voluntary sector, Sargeant and Lee used focus groups to determine the factors that affect donor trust, which they define more narrowly as the “the belief that an organisation/sector … will never take advantage of stakeholder vulnerabilities, by being fair, reliable, competent and ethical in all dealings” (2002, p. 70).

The concept of trust is particularly relevant to a study of brand-building efforts because, according to Bryce, “the public’s trust in an organization reflects the organization’s projection of itself,” or what Aaker calls “brand position” (Bryce, p. 114; Aaker, 1996, p. 71). Bryce also notes that the goodwill of an organization plays an important role in restoring and maintaining trust. Goodwill arises from the organization’s identification with the public, the history of the organization, the social significance of past performance, the reputation of the organization’s leadership and the degree to which the public participates in the organization’s decision-making process (Bryce, p. 125-127).

Building on research about brand identity in for-profits, Venable et al. used a six-study multi-method design to address whether nonprofits have personalities, what the dimensions of these personalities are and whether these brand personalities can affect the intent to donate (p. 300). Their focus relates clearly to Aaker’s brand-as-person perspective. Through focus groups and depth interviews, Venable et al. found that participants not only easily ascribed personality traits to nonprofit organizations but also differentiated among organizations on the basis of personality and showed particular concern for organizations’ efficiency and effectiveness (p. 301, 304). The researchers
found the overarching dimensions of nonprofit brand personality to be integrity, sophistication, ruggedness and nurturance and that these did correlate to participants’ likelihood to contribute to an organization (p. 307).

In her study on the values dimensions of branding charities, Stride explains that some practitioners and researchers have expressed concern that using branding techniques associated with for-profit organizations to develop the brands of charities can lead to their over-commercialization (2006, p. 116). Grounds also addresses this concern, stating that “there are those in the not-for-profit sector who believe that the world of branding and corporate identity is something for the ‘dirty’ world of business and consumer products to worry about” (2005, p. 65). He points out, however, that charities—and this could be said of other nonprofits as well—have long sought to communicate clearly about what they do and why they need support and that this is the basis of brand strategy (p. 65).

Faircloth conducted a study focused on how the factors antecedent to brand equity influence donors’ support of nonprofit organizations (2005). Faircloth draws from Aaker’s earlier work on “brand equity,” which Aaker defines as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” (1991, p. 15). The antecedent factors that Faircloth addresses are brand personality, brand image and brand awareness, or the consumer’s knowledge, recall and recognition of a brand (p. 6). Like Venable et al., Faircloth used focus groups and depth interviews. He found that respondents were more interested in providing resources to those nonprofits they respected and saw as different from other nonprofits. He did not, however, find level
of brand awareness to influence responders’ interest in donating to specific nonprofits (p. 7-9).

In his study Faircloth pointed out that clear brand identities are particularly important to nonprofit organizations because consumers are more likely to contribute and support nonprofits whose goals and values they identify with (p. 4). Venable et al. also emphasize the unique importance of brands for nonprofits, stating that “because the characteristics and benefits of becoming involved with a nonprofit organization are largely intangible, branding can facilitate a donor’s understanding and support of a charity” (p. 298). Similarly, Berry notes that because service organizations lack tangible products, the company itself is the brand. Service companies with the strongest brands, he posits, are those that consciously differentiate themselves from competitors (2000, p. 130-131).

One problem posed by current research on brands is the lack of consistency in the use of related terms. Venable et al. used the terms “corporate identity” and “corporate image” when describing brand identity and brand image (p. 298). The terms “brand personality” and “brand meaning” have also been used in lieu of “brand image” (Faircloth, p. 2; Berry, 2000, p. 129). The branding definitions included in this proposal thus far—for brand identity, brand personality, brand awareness, brand image, brand position and brand equity—have all been provided by Aaker or are congruent with his definitions. These definitions have been chosen for this study because Aaker’s model will be used as the starting point for the research. (The only definitions included thus far that were not derived from Aaker’s writings were the definitions for “trust,” which were provided by Bryce and Sargeant and Lee.)
This study will build on the research mentioned by providing more data about the real brand-building efforts of functioning nonprofit organizations. To this point research has addressed branding in service organizations, the importance of brand identities and personalities of nonprofits, the influence of brands on donor support and the ways in which organizations build trust through their communication with the public (Berry, 2000; Bryce; Faircloth; O’Neil; Sargeant & Lee; Venable et al.). There is little information available about the actual steps and actions being taken by nonprofit organizations as they work to build their brands, and that gap is what this research aims to address.

Additionally, the information gathered through this research will provide insights about ways in which other nonprofits can build their brands. As mentioned in the introduction, small nonprofits, which I am most interested in working with, often face unique communication challenges as a result of limited budgets and work forces. These organizations, in particular, could benefit from strong brand identities and the resultant increase in credibility, public trust, differentiation and contributions. By including insights from those who work to develop a number of nonprofit brands, this research ought to provide information about ways in which many types of nonprofits can develop their brands as well. Overall, this study should shed light on what makes a brand strong and successful and how organizations can work most effectively to build their own brands.
Bibliography


Appendix B: Changes to the Original Proposal

My original proposal stated:
The IRS recognizes eight types of nonprofit organizations: charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering amateur sports competition and preventing cruelty to children or animals (“Exempt Purposes,” 2012). One of each type will be used for this study, including both an organization working toward prevention of cruelty to children and an organization working toward prevention of cruelty to animals.

In looking for organizations whose employees I could interview, I learned that, though the IRS recognizes these eight types of nonprofits, nonprofits themselves cannot always easily be ascribed to one of these eight categories. Many nonprofits fit into multiple categories, and others do not fit clearly into one specific category.

Instead, these categories served as rough guidelines for the organizations that I contacted and ultimately ended up studying.

Charitable: The Pittsburgh Foundation
Religious: iGo Global
Educational: WINGS for Kids
Scientific: American Heart Association
Literary: Reading is Fundamental
Testing for public safety: Center for Science in the Public Interest
Fostering amateur sports competition: YMCA
Preventing cruelty to children: International Justice Mission
Preventing cruelty to animals: Best Friends Animal Society.
Appendix C: Phone Script Approved by IRB

I will recruit and gain access to interviewees in the organizations by contacting each organization's media representative or marketing manager and asking for the name of the organization employee he or she believes is most familiar with the organization's brand.

Phone script #1 (to media representative or marketing manager):

My name is Kate Brannen, and I am a graduate student studying communication at the Missouri School of Journalism. For my master’s project, I am examining the brand-building efforts of nine nonprofit organizations. I am completing this project under the direction of Suzette Heiman. I am seeking to interview knowledgeable nonprofit organization employees about their organizations’ brands. I was hoping to interview someone at [name of organization] and, if this is possible, could you recommend someone knowledgeable about the brand identity and brand-building efforts?

Once I have been given the names of potential interviewees, I will use phone script #2:

My name is Kate Brannen, and I am a graduate student studying communication at the Missouri School of Journalism. For my master’s project, I am examining the brand-building efforts of nine nonprofit organizations. I am completing this project under the direction of Suzette Heiman. I am seeking to interview knowledgeable nonprofit organization employees about their organizations’ brands. I was given your name by [name of media representative or marketing
manager whom I first spoke to], and I was wondering if I could schedule an interview with you about your organization's brand identity and brand-building efforts.

After speaking to these employees and potential participants on the phone, I will email them the cover letter if they demonstrate interest or willingness to be interviewed. The cover letter has been uploaded as a separate document.

I will provide more information during the phone call if those I speak to show interest.

I've prepared statements for a few questions that they may bring up.

Time commitment/scheduling:

The interview will take place over the phone or over Skype, and it is expected to take approximately one hour. It can be scheduled to accommodate your availability.

Study purpose:

Current research has shown the importance of strong brands in nonprofit organizations, but there is little research available about how nonprofits are actively working to build their brand identities. This research will address that lack of information.

Records:

The interviews conducted for this study will be recorded with a digital audio recorder. Use of an audio recorder provides a verbatim account of the interview and frees the interviewer from the pressure to take notes word for word, thereby enabling more careful listening and creating a more relaxed atmosphere overall.
Confidentiality:

Information gathered in this interview, as well as your name, title, and your organization’s name, will not be kept confidential. They will be included in the final report of the findings, which will be read by faculty and available through the journalism school library.

Participants:

Participants will be selected on the basis of their employment at a nonprofit organization and knowledge or familiarity with the organization's brand and brand-building efforts. Participants from nine different organizations will be interviewed in order to gather information from all the types of nonprofit organizations recognized by the IRS.

Additionally:

I will provide those I talk to with my overarching research questions if they ask for them or seek more information. I will not disguise the purpose of my study in order to be able to talk to them.

Q1: How are nonprofit organizations working - through actions, standards, or language - to develop their brand identities?

Q2: How do nonprofit organization employees articulate their brand identities, brand positions, brand images, and brand value propositions?

Q3: How do nonprofit organizations - through their employees, values, and customs - support and emphasize or oppose and hinder the development of those organizations' brand identities?
Appendix D: Email Cover Letter Approved by IRB

Date
Recipient name
Address
City, state, zip

Dear [Participant name]:
My name is Kate Brannen, and I am a graduate student studying communication at the Missouri School of Journalism. For my master’s research project, I am examining the brand-building efforts of nine nonprofit organizations. I am completing this project under the direction of Suzette Heiman. I was given your name by [media representative or marketing manager name] because you are knowledgeable about [organization name]’s brand. I am inviting you to be part of this research by participating in an interview about your organization’s brand-building efforts.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately one hour. The interview will take place over the phone or over Skype, and it will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information. Information gathered in this interview, as well as your name, title, and your organization’s name, will not be kept confidential. They will be included in the final report of the findings, which will be read by faculty of the journalism school and available through the journalism school library. The purpose of this interview and this study is to provide useful information regarding how nonprofits are actively working to build their brand identities.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational and research endeavors. If you have questions or would like to schedule your interview, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Kate Brannen

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Appendix E: Follow-Up Email Approved by IRB

Dear [Participant name]:

I look forward to talking to you at [time] on [date]. As earlier mentioned, the interview will focus on the brand-building efforts of nonprofit organizations, specifically how they are being developed, articulated, and influenced. I encourage you to think about this topic before our interview. Information gathered in this interview will be included in the final report of the findings, which will be read by faculty of the journalism school and available through the journalism school library. The purpose of this study is to provide useful information regarding how nonprofits are actively working to build their brand identities. Thank you so much for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors.

If you have questions, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Kate Brannen

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