COMMUNICATIONS BRIEF

THE **CENTER** FOR **COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING**

OVERVIEW Outline and Goals

Michigan State University's Center for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL) has been facilitating opportunities for students to connect with and support the community beyond the university since 1968. The Center's mission is to "prepare students for lifelong civic and social responsibility," which it accomplishes by connecting students to a multitude of service opportunities and resources for social change.

CCEL is in need of a comprehensive communications strategy in order to better serve the student body at MSU. Even with limited resources, the Center can still revamp its messaging to better resonate with students, and their digital presence should be improved to better engage with the students that they serve. This is not just about building awareness for the center; a better digital strategy means helping more students connect with the community to build a better world.

This brief will lay out the foundations for that strategy.

- **First,** looking at what the Center needs to understand about its audience of students

- **Second,** using what is known about the audience to unite the messaging and content for the Center

- **Third,** determining how the new messaging will interact with the audience via the Center's platforms

- **Finally,** outlining the ways success will be measured for this strategy

The goals of this strategy are to:

1) increase total student registrations for community-engaged learning experiences to above 30,000 for the 2021-22 academic year from 20,205 in the 2020-21 academic year

2) have 500 student sign-ups in the Center's volunteer matching system, My Spartan Story, by the end of the Fall 2021 semester.

HUNT STATEMENT *Better Understanding the Student Audience*

To begin, CCEL must determine what key insights in audience behavior should inform the Center's messaging. This is accomplished through the Hunt Statement, which frames the main research questions regarding an organization's consumer base. CCEL's Hunt Statement is:

Understand student attitudes and desires regarding volunteerism and social change in order to connect MSU students with memorable and beneficial community-engaged learning experiences.

This is what must be known about the Center's student audience in order to better know how to engage with them. The good news is that these student attitudes and desires regarding volunteerism are not completely unknown, as represented by the following Consumer Insights.

CONSUMER INSIGHTS *What Do We Know About our Audience?*

1) 2,328 students registered their volunteer experiences in the MSU Civic Life App during the 2020-21 academic year—an increase of 200 from the previous year.

Why the increase? Students have an incentive to use the app. Logging 100 or more hours of service in a given year leads that student to win the Spartan Volunteer Service Award, an official certificate from CCEL and the Office of the President. This indicates that **recognition** for their volunteer efforts is importance to students.

2) Only 271 students participated in MSU's Days of Service during the 2020-21 academic year. For 2019-20, participation was at 1,477.

This drastic decline is explained by the COVID-19 pandemic causing CCEL to halt all in-person volunteer activities. CCEL's alternative virtual programming involves mostly solitary activities that did not seem to draw students to participate. This indicates that **connection** is a crucial component of why students volunteer.

3) Instagram is CCEL's social media platform with the highest percentage of followers ages 18-24 at 38.2%. However, with just 782 followers, this mean only roughly 300 followers are in the typical student age range.

Instagram is one of the platforms CCEL should look to grow due to its popularity with student-aged individuals. Considering other data from CCEL's social media, namely low engagement rates, it is clear that CCEL struggles to meet its audience "where they live" online and engage with students in the realm of social media. This needs improvement if CCEL hopes to increase participation in community-engaged learning activities.

Now we transition from quantitative consumer data to the anecdotal (but based in data) consumer journey. For the Center the consumer (or student) journey has as many entry points as there are answers to the question: "why do we volunteer?" Despite the many ways that this journey can begin, the hope is that all roads lead to the same outcome: student learning. As a university department, education is the real "product" of CCEL.

This journey displays how students reach that goal of education by proceeding through 5 Steps: Awareness, Consideration, Participation, Recognition, and Loyalty.

The accompanying graphic depicts details of what is the ideal student interaction with CCEL. While some student interactions occur in this manner, most do not. There are items to be addressed at each step of the journey, and two steps in particular:
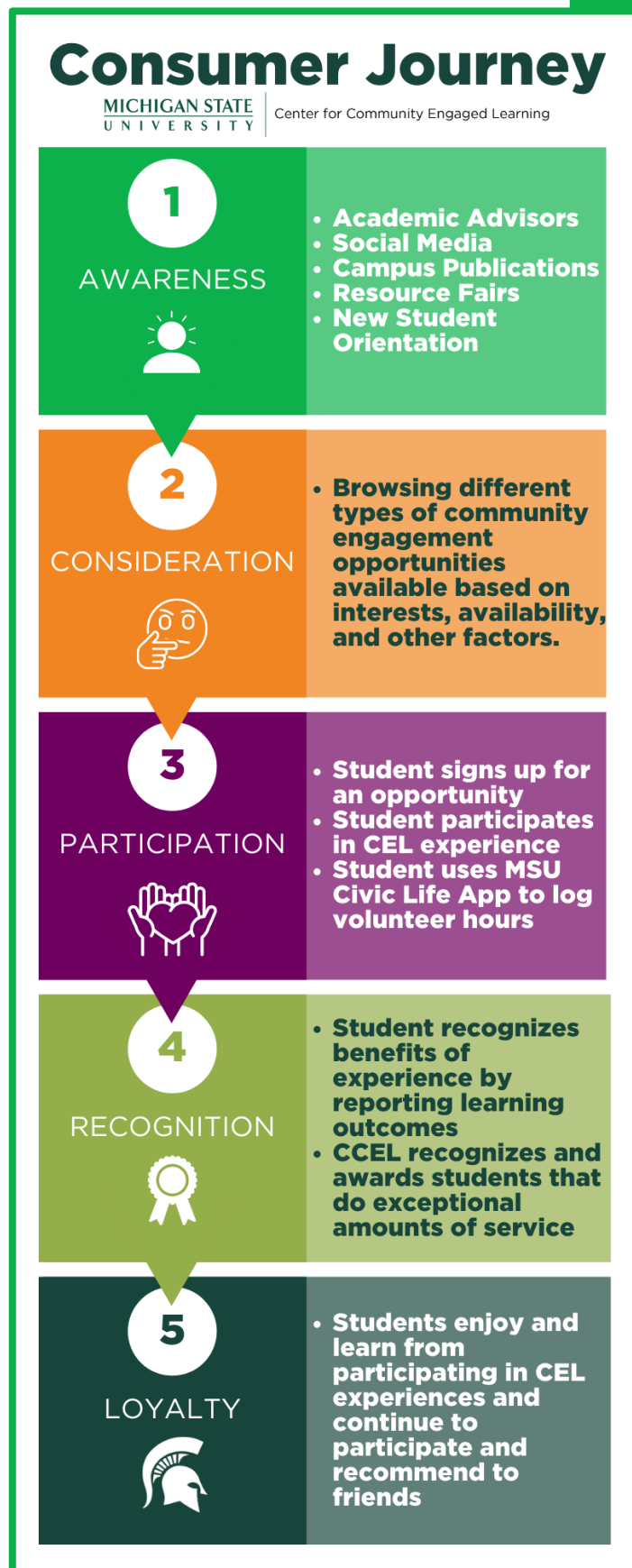
AWARENESS
Ensure that students are aware that CCEL exists and what its purpose is.

RECOGNITION
As brought to light in the consumer insights, students should be recognized for their contributions in the community.

In order to understand how to improve in these areas, we must better understand CCEL's brand through a communications audit.

Consumer Journey

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Center for Community Engaged Learning

1 AWARENESS
- Academic Advisors
- Social Media
- Campus Publications
- Resource Fairs
- New Student Orientation

2 CONSIDERATION
- Browsing different types of community engagement opportunities available based on interests, availability, and other factors.

3 PARTICIPATION
- Student signs up for an opportunity
- Student participates in CEL experience
- Student uses MSU Civic Life App to log volunteer hours

4 RECOGNITION
- Student recognizes benefits of experience by reporting learning outcomes
- CCEL recognizes and awards students that do exceptional amounts of service

5 LOYALTY
- Students enjoy and learn from participating in CEL experiences and continue to participate and recommend to friends

This audit explores CCEL's current messaging in four phases: immerse, assess, originate, and articulate. In *Immerse*, we consider the history and foundation of CCEL. Next, to *Assess* we account for how CCEL's messaging is shaped by organizational leadership. Then, in *Originate*, we examine the purpose of CCEL and explore ways to amplify that in our messaging. Finally, we *Articulate* the desired outcomes of this messaging shift.

Immerse	Historical Audit	- Founded 1968 - Been through several changes to name and programming - Most recent rebrand in 2018
	Staff Insights	9 full-time employees - Houses over 15 service programs - Try to make variety of offerings simple to navigate for students
Assess	Organizational Leadership	- CCEL reports to both Student Affairs and University Outreach and Engagement - Both entities have differing main points of interest in CCEL
	Guiding Principles	- UN Sustainable Development Goals - Social Change - Emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion
	Engagement Insights	- Low engagement rates in general - High engagement rates on posts that recognize students for community contributions and achievements
Originate	Why	CCEL should not be a gateway, instead it should connect students with resources and facilitate meaningful experiences
	How	- Spread awareness of resources - Improve digital presence
	What	- Feature more students and do more to showcase the results of CCEL events and experiences - Strive to educate about services through concise, comprehensive tutorials - Break down barriers to community-engaged learning and keep content in accessible formats
Articulate	Communication Outcomes	- Boost student registrations for community-engaged learning activities with the targeted outcome of over 30,000 registrants for the 2021-22 Academic Year. - Increase brand awareness by improving digital presence and doubling engagement rates. - Reach a target of 500+ signups on the My Spartan Story Platform for Fall 2021 semester. - Continue to facilitate positive interactions between campus and community and regularly include more voices from the students, faculty, and partners that participate in CCEL in our content.

ORGANIZING IDEA What is Our Story?

After evaluating CCEL's current messaging and taking into account the Center's purpose, it is clear that CCEL is an organization with a lot of ideas, stories, and services. With so much happening, it is crucial that they connect it all with one through line, which is where the organizing idea comes in.

"Connecting campus and community" encompasses what is at the heart of the experiences CCEL seeks to provide. We want our students and partners to forge connections, share stories, and learn from one another while working toward the betterment of the community.

This helps to define the role of the channels that CCEL uses and places an emphasis on connection. Some students spend four years at Michigan State without ever setting foot in Lansing and that is a missed opportunity for learning. CCEL connects students to the broader, off-campus community to further their learning. This organizing idea activates behavior in our staff to strive to facilitate meaningful connections. For students, it demonstrates that there is more to be learned outside the boundaries of campus and that CCEL can take them there and facilitate that experience.

Connecting campus and community is CCEL's story, and now it is time we look into some ways to tell it effectively.

ELEVATOR PITCHES Telling Our Story to Newcomers

The following elevator pitches provide an idea of how CCEL might position itself to students around the above organizing idea. They are written in 3 formats:
- A Tweet that is targeted towards incoming freshmen that provides a concise introduction to what CCEL is
- A paragraph that would describe CCEL in student-centered publications that provide an overview of the various departments on campus
- A page that could function as a flyer or webpage that goes more in-depth in regard to the services that CCEL provides

TWEET PITCH

Looking to get involved? The Center for Community Engaged Learning has you covered! We'll help you find a volunteer experience that fits your interests and needs. Visit ccel.msu.edu to get started!

The Center for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL) is the place to go on campus for students looking to volunteer and help out the community. For students who want to make an impact but are not sure how to start, CCEL can point you in the right direction. There are many different ways to get involved including the community engagement scholar program, Spartan Days of Service, service-based student organizations, community-engaged courses, and more. Contact CCEL at communityengagedlearning@vps.msu.edu or visit our website at ccel.msu.edu to get started!

PAGE PITCH

MSU students looking for ways to get involved in the community need look no further than the Center for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL). Since 1968, CCEL has helped to connect students with volunteer opportunities all over the state of Michigan and beyond. We believe that helping students connect with community allows for powerful learning experiences beyond the classroom as well as allowing students the opportunity to be agents for positive social change.

CCEL can connect you with a service opportunity that fits your needs, no matter your major, interests, goals, or time commitments. The Center hosts and supports numerous community engagement programs including:

- The Community Engagement Scholars Program
- Community-engaged courses
- Service-focused registered student organizations including:
  - Alternative Spartan Breaks
  - Spartans Rebuilding Michigan
  - Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)
- Recognition programs including the presidential recognition: The Spartan Volunteer Service Award (SVSA)
- Pre-professional volunteer placements
- And more!

If you need service hours as a requirement for a class, scholarship, fraternity, or sorority CCEL can help. If you are just looking for a way to explore your interest in social issues, CCEL can help with that too. Even if you already have a volunteer placement and need transportation assistance, CCEL has the resources to help you. Contact us and get involved!

Website: ccel.msu.edu
Email: communityengagedlearning@vps.msu.edu
Phone: (517) 353-4400

Now that CCEL has determined how to position itself with an Organizing Statement, they must determine how that statement will be distributed across their messaging channels into the worlds of the students. This means determining the Experience Space for CCEL.

	Reach	Engagement	Conversions	Tag
Email Marketing	9	6	7	Signpost
Facebook	4	4	3	Signpost
Instagram	6	4	5	Signpost
MSU Civic Life App	6	8	5	Destination
Twitter	3	2	2	Roundabout
Website	8	6	8	Town Center

In this table, CCEL's channels are given scores for different categories and tagged according to how students interact with each. The reasons for each platforms' scores and tag are as follows:

Email Marketing: Emails get high scores because the Center can send them to specific Listservs interested in volunteering or even all students at MSU. If you are enrolled at MSU, an email for CCEL will find its way to your inbox at some point. Emails are a signpost for CCEL because they highlight the Center's programming and provide an outlet for students to reply and asks more questions.

Facebook: A decent portion of our Facebook following is 18-24, but our overall following is still relatively low. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while many students have a Facebook, not many check it regularly. Still, the platform acts as a signpost for CCEL's content as there is a decent following among MSU staff and other departments who cross-promote our messages.

Instagram: Instagram is Facebook except a larger portion, over 60%, of the following is the age of the typical student (18-24). Since Instagram has seemingly cornered the market on photography-based social media, it has maintained a place in most student's social media repertoire. Thus, the platform scores higher and acts as one of the better signposts for the Center.

MSU Civic Life App: The app is one of the key destinations for CCEL. It scores lower for reach and engagement because not as many students know if exists, but its engagement scores are high because the sole purpose of the app is for students to utilize it to track their volunteer hours in the hopes of being recognized.

Twitter: CCEL's Twitter has the lowest following out of its social media, and students don't seem to do much on it anymore. It is still worth posting some "signpost" content on for the students that do use it, but the low engagement leads me to label it as a roundabout.

Website: CCEL's website is the hub of all the content for the Center. Every other touchpoint links back to it, and the website expands on the content from the other platforms. There is still work to be done here, but the website certainly is the town center for CCEL.

EMAIL Utilizing Our Resources to Spread the Message

One way our organizing idea makes its way through the experience space is through email messaging. As evidence by the experience space chart, Email messaging has been incredibly effective for CCEL in the past. The message to the right is an example of an email that would be sent to students who are either new to campus or have recently heard about the center. It provides an overview of CCEL's services and provides links for students to learn more information. This particular email serves as an introduction to CCEL's messaging, but the template can be adapted to a newsletter that features the Center's events as well.

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING

MSU Center for Community Engaged Learning

Looking for ways to get involved?
We're here to help.

Whether you need volunteer hours to fulfill a requirement, are looking to build your résumé, or just want to find a way to serve in the community our Center is here to help. CCEL can connect you with a service opportunity that fits your needs, no matter your major, interests, goals, or time commitments.

CCEL can connect you to a wide variety of opportunities.

Since 1968, CCEL has helped to connect students with volunteer opportunities all over the state of Michigan and beyond. We believe that helping students connect with community allows for powerful learning experiences beyond the classroom as well as allowing students the opportunity to be agents for positive social change.

Find your opportunity to get involved today.

My Spartan Story
Browse our volunteer matching platform to find open service positions in the Greater Lansing Area.

Join a Student Org
CCEL supports four Registered Student Organizations where you can get involved while forming connections with other students.

CCEL | Website

Another way our messaging can unite the organizing idea with the experience space is through an infographic. Visual representations of data and other information are proven to be effective with CCEL's student audience. Through infographics, CCEL can highlight both its services and the outstanding work done by students and partners in the community.

This graphic provides a snapshot of what CCEL is all about and connects to the Organizing Idea of "Connecting Campus to Community." The circles are designed with that theme in mind and "connect the dots" between the different aspects of the Center that are mentioned. Each colored box highlights a different fact about CCEL to answer the questions "What is CCEL?" and "Why should I care?"

The bright colors used fit with CCEL's current branding and help to distinguish the infographic from other graphics on MSU's campus. There are images in the background of each square that show students engaged in service activities to add a more personal touch to the graphic.

The graphic is sized in this way to make it a good size for a handout at one of the many campus resource fairs that CCEL is present at. The bright, paint-swatch aesthetic is sure to make it catch the eyes of passersby. The shape also makes it function as a bookmark, making it multi-purpose.

Ways to Get Involved
with the MSU Center for Community Engaged Learning

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING

50+

For over 50 years, CCEL has supported student volunteers.
We are here to help you find opportunities to engage with the community that fit your interests, needs, and time commitments.

4

CCEL is Home to 4 Service-Focused Student Organizations
- Alternative Spartan Breaks
- Design For America MSU
- Spartans Rebuilding Michigan
- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

1

There is 1 Site to Visit to Browse Local Volunteer Opportunities
Visit My Spartan Story at mystory.msu.edu to browse volunteer positions open to all students today!

100

Win the Spartan Volunteer Service Award!
Students with 100 or more service hours in an academic year qualify. Log your hours in the MSU Civic Life App to be eligible!

communityengagedlearning.msu.edu

The key is this: CCEL's messaging needs to be united through the Organizing Idea of Connecting Campus to Community. That theme of connection should be ever-present in the Center's content, as students will now be seeking to form connections more than ever after the COVID-19 pandemic forced everyone into isolation for over a year. Through the experience space, CCEL can see what platforms it should prioritize in distributing this messaging. The first key performance metric will be the engagement rates on social media. The likes and shares are a good indicator that the strategy is working and that students are seeing the value in CCEL's programs.

TIMELINE
July 2021: Develop Content for Incoming Students
- Content centered on **Connecting** students to opportunities and **Recognizing** students for service, based on Consumer Insights

August 2021: Targeted Messaging to New Students
- Utilizing Organizing Idea and what we know about our Experience Space. The email and infographic template are useful here.

Throughout Fall 2021 Semester: Promote and Evaluate
- Use the strategy detailed in this brief to promote CCEL's events and take note of what is effective and what could use work.

December 2021: End of Semester Evaluation #1
- **Goal:** There should be 500+ student sign-ups in My Spartan Story by this time.
- Create analytics report to see if new messaging is improving engage rates on social media as well as student event sign-ups

Spring 2022 Semester: Adjust and Relaunch
- Continue to spread awareness of CCEL through new messaging on social media, emails, and website.

May 2022: End of Semester Evaluation #2
- **Goal:** Data from survey results should show 30,000+ students have registered as participants in community-engaged learning activities.
- Create another analytics report to see where messaging adjustments should be made

Beyond: Continue to Evaluate and Adjust Messaging as Needed

IN CONCLUSION
The time for empty gestures and busy-work is long gone. Students want to participate and learn in and environment where they can make a positive, meaningful impact on the world. CCEL can provide that and will do a much better job of providing that with a strategic communications strategy. Taking these suggestions into account will increase awareness and see student service participation numbers continue to climb with each passing academic year. Numbers aside, the true measure of success will always be feedback from the students that the experiences that CCEL facilitates are meaningful and worthwhile for them.