Public Relations Team, Fall 2015

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Abstract

This semester the Public Relations (PR) Team has ordered team merchandise, represented the team at public events, and organized team events. These team events have been geared towards recruiting new members and publicizing AguaClara's mission. Completing these tasks have promoted a productive lab environment and has assured that the team has the resources and support to accomplish its goals.

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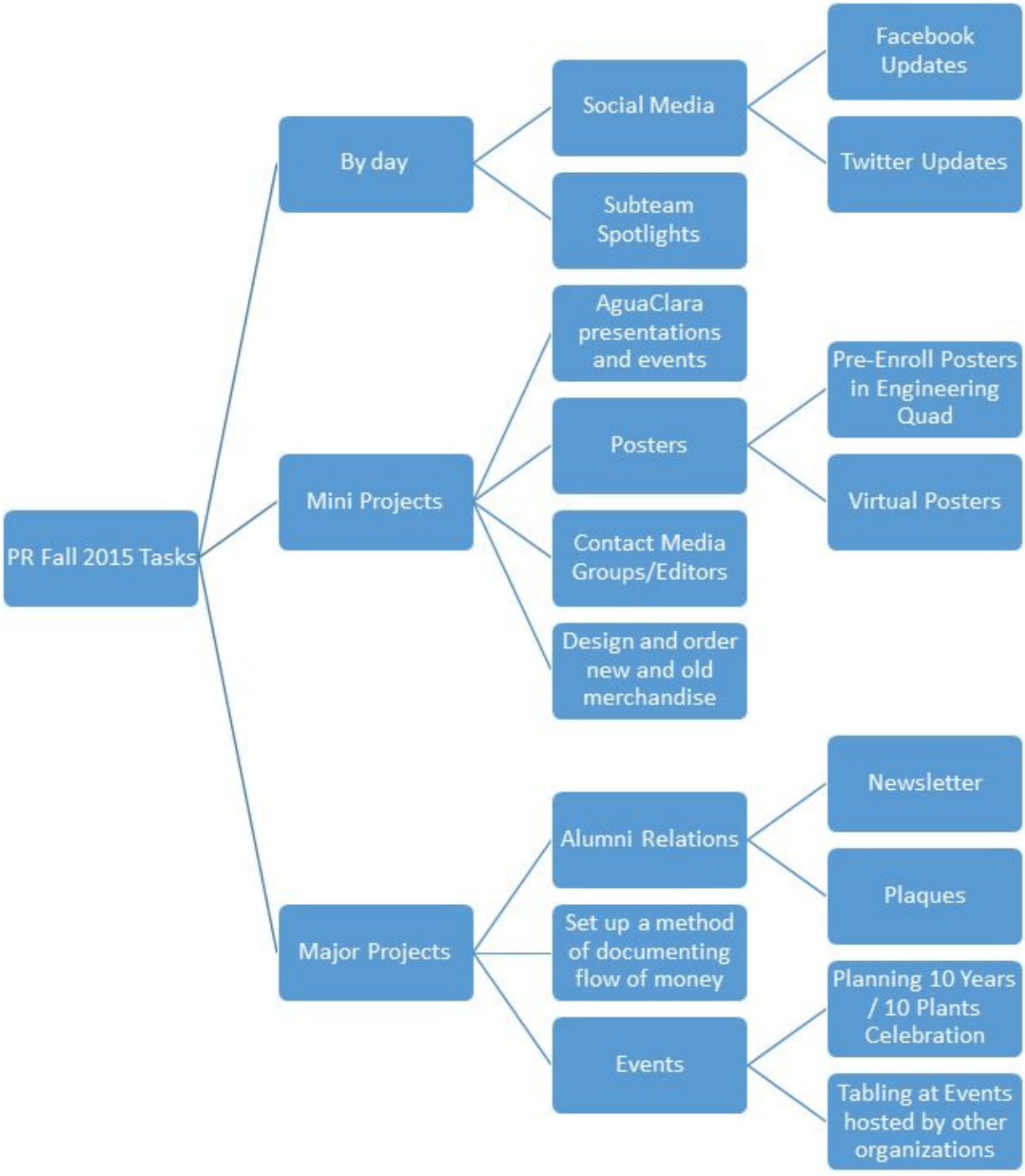
Task List

Task Map



Introduction

AguaClara research teams design water treatment processes that improve water quality for resource poor communities. However it is the PR team that makes sure that their accomplishments are appreciated and recognized widely by potential members, clients, or stakeholders both on campus and beyond. In addition, the PR team works to convince new students to join the team while fostering teamwork in the lab.

In previous semesters, AguaClara's PR team has focused on merchandise sales, competition applications, new member recruitment, and fundraising. This semester, the Public Relations team made general publicity its top priority. This was accomplished by representing AguaClara at various events, creating virtual and physical posters, and hosting an AguaClara Open House.

The PR team also worked on posting updates to AguaClara social media accounts, recruiting new team members, creating subteam spotlights, managing merchandise sales, and creating documents for managing money transactions within the Public Relations team. The more public awareness and support AguaClara has both on and off campus, the more impact AguaClara's research will have towards providing safe water to communities in need of safe drinking water.

Part I: Project Details

Merchandise

The PR team organized sales and production of AguaClara team merchandise. First, old merchandise was cataloged and sold. Then, new merchandise was designed and ordered for interested team members.

This semester, the Public Relations Team sold the leftover AguaClara t-shirts from previous semesters. These shirts were stored in Cabinet 3 and were available in both navy-blue or light blue. The PR Team created an inventory of the shirts, then sold these shirts to team members. This inventory is saved under the "Public Relations Fall 2015" folder in the AguaClara drive.

Surveying the team in the lab proved that there was more interest in purchasing new t-shirts or quarterzips over any other type of merchandise. Originally, the PR team considered ordering polo shirts with new designs as well as stickers for this semester. Polo shirts shown in Figure 1 would serve as a more formal apparel compared to t-shirts and quarterzips. The existing AguaClara polos are too small for most of the team to wear and there are not enough of them available to use. The PR team also looked into the sale of non-apparel items. The stickers in Figure 2 were an option for both personal use by team members and for publicity around campus or giveaways at events (CustomInk Design 'acsticker', September 10, 2015). While stickers are cheaper than purchasing custom apparel, they have to be ordered in bulk and would be more difficult to raise funds for as opposed to offering polos that can be bought for an exact number of interested team members. This is because stickers usually cost anywhere from

$200 to $300 per bulk order. While cost for stickers per person, the price is high enough that students would not be interested in spending what could be $10 for a pack of AguaClara stickers when most team members are more interested in only having one or two stickers at a much lower price.

The team ordered a new design of quarterzips because of popularity amongst the team. The designed quarterzips feature the Cornell logo as seen in Figure 3, and the treatment plant locations as seen in Figure 4. There was a spreadsheet sign up sent out to the entire team on November 15 via weekly emails from Theresa that allowed team members to choose their size order and asks them to pay for their orders either through Venmo or cash before the actual order is sent in to avoid the issue of any individual person having to front hundreds of dollars worth of merchandise. The quarterzips were ordered through the 4imprint Company, a Cornell-approved printing company. Approval for the logo usage was obtained From Ms. Roxanne Edsall in the Office of Student Activities in Willard Straight Hall. Rather than ask members of AguaClara to buy their own polo shirts, official team polos will be a project for the Spring 2016 Semester (CustomInk Design 'acpolos', September 10, 2015). The future PR team should work with team leads to request official funding from SAFC, or another student funding organization, for team-owned polos.

The PR team found that over the course of a single semester they were able to start off with the sale of old merchandise and end with the creation of one new piece of merchandise to design and offer to the team as the ideal amount to offer the team of around 60 people over the course of a semester.

Figure 1: Initial Cornell AguaClara polo designs.

Figure 2: Initial Cornell AguaClara sticker design.

Figure 3: Front design for new quarterzips

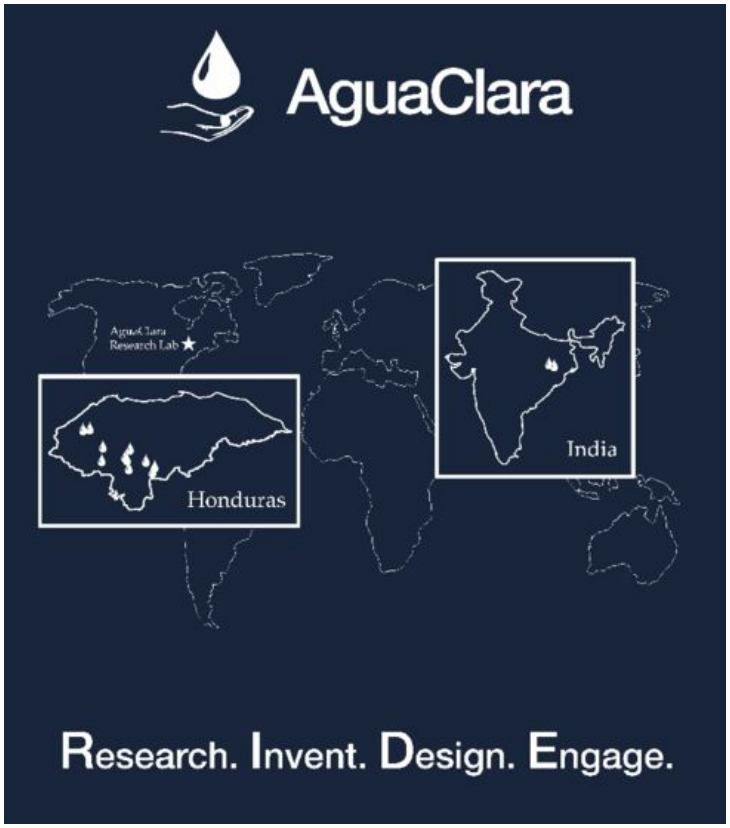


Figure 4: Back design for new quarterzips

Social Media

The PR team was in charge of spreading the news about AguaClara both on and off campus. To raise awareness of the work we are doing and promote the events on our team, the PR team ran the facebook, twitter, and the website and also actively reached out to the publications outside of campus. An example of the outreach of these sources can be seen for the success of Facebook posts between 12/07/2015 and 12/13/2015 in Figure 5. The team was also responsible for updating the information and data online, making sure that all the direct sources that people outside of the team got access to are accurate about the team.

Figure 5: AguaClara Facebook Outreach Statistics

Public Relations had an ongoing responsibility to run and mediate the various social media that AguaClara has. The team's facebook account will be instrumental as the medium for creating Weekly Spotlights due to its ability to link with the names of the people on our team. It is also the form of communication that is most effective to share information for both members of the team and anyone else interested in AguaClara's research. Another major form of social media used is Twitter. Because tweets have a 140 character limitation, it is better suited towards short blurbs and quick updates and notifications of what is happening with the team, as seen in Figure 6. Since the start of the Fall 2015 Semester, the twitter account has been used for different reasons. One of those reasons was to promote both the various events and club fairs that AguaClara has participated in. The twitter account is also used to post various pictures of the team at work in the lab. Additionally, the twitter account is used as a communication tool between organizations on twitter that either advocate for AguaClara or between organizations that AguaClara advocates for. For example, the AguaClara twitter account participated in the

social media events that occurred in conjunction with the United Nation's World Water Day during the Spring of 2015. Updates with social media were made throughout the semester.

Figure 6: AguaClara Twitter Post from 10/19/15

The Public Relations team also looked into potentially changing the AguaClara website design. Any major redesigns of the website had been deemed too large of a task for just the Public Relations team to complete alone. In order to improve the website, the PR team and the webmaster would have needed to rewrite code for all the subpages of the website and map out plans for a completely reworked outlook (for example, condensing all of the tabs within the about section of the main visitor page). Because there was so much information within the wiki and the visitor page to sift through and reorganize, there would need to be at least one person who is dedicated to just working on website improvements for an entire semester. However, the Public Relations team met with Michael Stella (the current webmaster) and Professor Monroe Weber-Shirk and discussed how to improve the website. One of the ideas to assist in the ease of information about the team, whether it is the introduction of the team, or what the team had

achieved so far, was to make sure that all of the information on the website is up to date. The other was to condense the various tabs on the website into larger sections while cutting down on the repeated or extraneous information between sections to create a more efficient website. Michael Stella and the PR team also established that any changes that need to be made to the website must be written out and modeled within Word or via email so that he will take any changed material and apply it directly to the website. Any proposed changes to the website are required to have approval from Monroe and team leads before they go live on the website. In the future, there should be a one-time, smaller subteam that focuses entirely on website improvements.

In the Spring 2015 semester, the Public Relations team was given a list of media contacts

Along with publications, our web master and all the other social media resources available such as twitter and facebook, the PR team had been spreading out news and accomplishments of AguaClara.

Media Groups and Editor Relations

In the Spring 2015 semester, the Public Relations team was given a list of media contacts by the former PR Subteam Advisor, Andrea Cashon, as a preliminary list of possible people to reach out to for the purpose of asking them to publish articles about AguaClara research. This list contains over 200 contacts of editors and writers of publications that span from The Wall Street Journal to local plumbing magazines. Not all of the editors and publishers on the list have been contacted, people on the list have been sent general emails about our organization asking them to feature our work in the future. A few writers have responded in the past with possible interest though no articles have yet been published. This effort is in the interest of making AguaClara more well-known outside of the Cornell community. Not only will the team's work receive more notice but these publications could possibly lead to assistance from companies or donors who want to contribute to the team's projects. The biggest complication comes in the form of trying to increase the success rate of these emails. This problem should be addressed in the Spring of 2016 by a future Public Relations team by focusing on more of a local scale first before moving toward contacting big-name publications (i.e. the New York Times). The information for media contact lists is saved in an excel file within the Fall 2015 PR Team folder in the AguaClara Drive and there is also a saved document that is the template for all emails to the media contacts.

Subteam Spotlights

The Subteam Spotlights are a new initiative that started this semester. This was an idea that was created by the Spring 2015 Semester PR team. Every few days for the rest of the

semester the PR team posted a short blurb and accompanying picture about each subteam on the AguaClara facebook page. These were done in an effort to create publicity for the team by reaching out to the connections of each individual within AguaClara. The picture of the subteam was tagged with each member and was also be used for any sort of AguaClara team collages that can be made in the future. Each spotlight has a description of what each team does, who was on it, exciting team moments and ideas, or anything that each team liked to share. A template for what each spotlight needs was added onto the Public Relations team drive. Emails were sent out to each subteam two weeks before their spotlight needed to be completed.

While it was initially thought that PR could write these spotlights alone, a similar idea had been run in a previous semester that ended up failing because of miscommunication. Allowing the subteams to write the spotlights themselves prevents most of the miscommunication that might occur by creating a middle man. Any and all spotlights need to be first checked and formatted by PR, then by team leaders and faculty before eventually being posted for the team. Templates and contacting subteams will be completed and sent out starting Wednesday, October 14. The first set of posts will be ready for publishing according to each designated subteam's set date for contact, writing, and publishing listed on the spreadsheet on the PR Team Drive. Each day there was one new subteam that was set to be posted to facebook with both the subteam blurb and its team picture.

Posters

The PR team was responsible to promote the project team during major events such as club fest and pre-enrollment for recruiting new members for the team. To expand public awareness of the team, the PR team had created virtual posters for hanging around the campus as well as slides for showing on the flat screen in Hollister Hall.

The Fall 2015 Semester used posters as a form of publicity for AguaClara. Posters are incredibly helpful for the team. They make sure that the AguaClara name is circulating around campus. This is important because in the Fall of 2015, the majority of Cornell freshmen have never heard of AguaClara before. A single PowerPoint slide was created as a "virtual poster" that was played on the slideshow for the flat screen television in the entrance of Hollister Hall. The slide was checked by team leads and faculty before it was sent directly to Carl E. Cornell and the poster included information such as a descriptive phrase of what AguaClara does as a team with the title "AguaClara: Research, Invent, Design, Engage" with pictures of the team. A formal copy of all forms of posters created was saved on the PR Subteam Drive for future reference. The 'virtual poster' was completed by Wednesday, October 14. Posters for pre-enroll signups were distributed and hung around campus in mid-November. These posters were also designed and saved onto the AguaClara drive as can be seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7: AguaClara Pre-Enroll Flyer

Alumni Relations

As one of the oldest student-run project teams on campus, AguaClara has a strong alumni base full of intelligent people who were on the team in the past ten years. PR team's goal is to reach out to these people and build up a networking system for opening up new opportunities for present members. In the Fall 2015 semester, the goal for PR team was to reach out to the Alumni, creating newsletter as well as making plagues for the donors to the station as an encouragement for donation.

Alyssa Diminich ('07-'08) had been working on setting up the Alumni connection system. The goal for Fall 2015 included building up an alumni network database, getting anonymous feedback about the team from alumni, and creating a mentor-mentee buddy system to provide advice on industry, grad school as well as future career for present members in the AguaClara. In order to establish a close connection with the large body of alumni, in Fall 2015 semester, the PR team worked with Alyssa to collect the information and contact AguaClara's former team members, asking them if they want to be mentors. Once the alumni agreed to be the mentors, The Public Relations team would arrange lecture time for them to introduce themselves and share their experiences outside of Cornell. The PR team would also collaborate with Alyssa to connect the mentors and mentees, keeping track of how the system works by getting feedbacks from them twice every semester.

Alumni relations also included working to keep AguaClara's existing donors involved in what is going on with work done each semester. In fall 2015 the PR team and Monroe created

plaques for donors providing them with the opportunity to give a donation in exchange for getting to name a specific station in the renovated lab space. All the Plaques had been added onto their corresponding work station by Open House to give donors a chance to view their contribution (Custom Cut Stainless Steel Signs, October 3, 2015). Monthly newsletters are also in progress as an additional means of keeping a list of alumni up-to-date on the work being done both in the field and in the lab. So far, the newsletter had included a brief introduction of the current AguaClara team, a update on our water plants in Honduras and India, a celebration note of our renovated lab down in Hollister Hall as well as the weekly spotlights featuring our current subteam members. The completed version of the newsletter is already on Constant Contact and it would also soon be posted on mailchimp, with an easy access to roughly 500 previous and current members.

The PR team realized how important it was to keep in contact with the alumni and it was our goal to build a long-lasting connection between the current members and the former member outside of campus through team events and newsletter..

Events

Part of the Public Relations team tasks list is to represent AguaClara at various events and presentations on the Cornell Campus throughout the year. This past semester, we were able to attend a lot of events around campus to promote our public image as a major research team solving real-life problems in Cornell. Besides that, the PR team was also actively involved in introducing our team to the new students and recruiting new team members.

Presentations play a huge role in the Cornell community. They are the team's main form of reaching out to students in person and giving them a chance to ask questions and find out what the team does from a live team representative and member. The Public Relations team has the opportunity to give students a personal account of what being on the team is like and often present this information not just to students, but to alumni and Cornell administration as well. Live conversations with AguaClara members give a unique and conversation-specific perspective that cannot be easily replicated online. Conversations can also be so tailored to the questions of potential new members. As of this semester, the PR team has attended presentations to Engineering 1050 classes, Reverse Career Fairs, GHSC Club Fair, Homecoming Project Team Showcases, Engineering Sesquicentennial Showcases and other presentations of the like. Though the PR team cannot always attend every event (Engineering 1050's for example often overlap with regular classtimes of AguaClara members), they are able to attend as many as there are open possibilities for. Instructions for how events work and need to be prepared for can be found in the Fall 2015 PR Team Folder.

The Sesquicentennial Open House, in particular, coincided with the new laboratory opening and celebration of 10 years and 10 plants for the AguaClara program. It was a major event that took place in the middle of the Fall 2015 Semester that the Public Relations team planned with Monroe to showcase the new laboratory in Hollister. In preparation for the Open Lab Event, the PR team decorated the lab, bought snacks for the guests to the lab and also

printed out flyers and setting up big posters for introducing our team. PR team member, Erika, also participated in the event of meeting the president. The PR team also took pictures of team members working in the lab and the plagues of the station and sent them to Alissa, the person in charge of donation for the team, setting up the first relationship with the Alumni network. Public Relations has also finished the photo taking of the team of Fall 2015 and posted the new photo on Facebook.

Most events require the PR team to be in communication with a contact from the event to plan out specific details of where and when to set up as well as what to bring and expect. The Public Relations team has triboard posters (found in the corner of the B60 Lab) as well as the scale model of the plant and white pages pamphlet booklet and pages to bring (found in the suitcase in Cabinet 4 in the main lab space). There are also presentations that can be found in the PR/COMMS folder of the AguaClara drive that are tailored for 1050's or club fairs that can be presented on the laptop of whatever representative comes to each event. Attire for these events typically consists of either AguaClara apparel (preferably the team polos but t-shirts and quarter zips are also okay) or business casual. What to wear can, however, be altered to fit whatever type of event is occurring. The suitcase with presentation materials also contains several spare AguaClara t-shirts that can be used either by the PR team or any team volunteer who has either forgotten to wear or doesn't already own team apparel for an event. The importance of looking presentable at these events is unparalleled because of the impact they have on student and administration's view of our standing as an organization. This contributes to why it is a good idea to have a team-owned set of AguaClara polo shirts that can be permanently kept by the team and can be lent out to members on an event-by-event basis.

Creating new events for publicizing the our projects and actively involved in the ones on and off campus would continue to be an important part of our jobs. By now, the PR team already stored all the major equipments such as posters and models prepared and served for most of the events around campus.

Fundraising/Budgeting

In order to perform well at various events and create more activities for both current team members and potential newcomers, the PR team needed constant money support. The current difficulty was to self-fund the team as we couldn't extract money the same way as our research teams did. The major ways for fund raising were merchandise selling and entering competitions.

One of the biggest problems that the Public Relations team has been facing in the past few semesters has been the lack of an accessible budget to be tapped into for nearly all PR related work. Funding requests for the PR team is often rejected because the funds for AguaClara can only be accessed for strictly academic purposes. This money shortage has made carrying out activities that requires funding extremely difficult. Bagel Mondays, an event

where bagels were purchased for the entire team to snack on, that were typically held once a month in the past were canceled because individual AguaClara team members were funding it out of pocket. Purchasing any stickers or team-owned apparel was also made impossible because there is no budget to purchase them from. Not only should there be some kind of set budget, but there also should be an existing system any PR team budget that is formed. Any money that was made from t-shirt sales before the Spring of 2015 was either lost or stolen because the envelope that money was supposedly in was found empty in the box were team apparel is typically kept. A separate bank account for this money needs to be created once some kind of budget is created and will need to be monitored by the AguaClara team treasurer or Monroe. Information about how to create a bank account was documented by the Spring 2015 PR Team and can be found in their final report found in their folder of the AguaClara Drive. Public Relations has created a spreadsheet on the Drive account specifically for monitoring the budgeting of this sub-team's finances in order to keep track of spending and reimbursement.

Any profits that were made from selling the old shirts were used to fund the Sesquicentennial Open House celebration. The Public Relations has sold as many of the old shirts as as possible. While a portion of the sales from these shirts went directly into the funding of the Sesquicentennial Event, all additional old merchandise sales. The purchases made for the Sesquicentennial Open House included food and refreshments, table covers, balloons, streamers, and printing costs for basic name tags for every station on lab open-house day and other future club festivals. After this event have been added into the PR team savings because the lack of fund is the major obstacle the PR team had encountered in planning future activities and in buying supplies for AguaClara. Documentation of money inputs and outputs with merchandise sales were reported in the "PR Budget Information" spreadsheet in the "Public Relations Fall 2015" folder on the AguaClara drive.

In order to set up a budget for future PR teams to have more flexibility with different team improvements and projects, the Public Relations team is starting with a fundraising idea that was proposed by the Spring 2015 Semester Public Relations team. To establish a significant amount of funds there should be a major yearly fundraiser that can maintain a constant amount of money in the PR account. It was intended that the date for this event is later in the Spring 2016 Semester (ideally in March or April), that way any major preparations and publicity for this event can be well established and planned out. Ideas for possible event types will be examined and brainstormed by the end of the semester and this process will include researching fundraisers done in past years by the PR Team. For example, the fundraising event that was held at the Nines by AguaClara a couple years ago. The event needs to be something that can be done with relatively little budget and can have guaranteed results so that if starting funds need to be contributed by team members there would be little risk of not being able to refund funds. Possible ideas can include bake sales, material sales, or events that can include people from all across Cornell University. If any room reservations or coordination needs to be done with point people or business owners, plans should be in the works so that they can be contacted at the latest by the end of November.

In combination with an official team fundraiser, the Public Relations team will continue to be involved with applying to various competitions and grants for recognition and funding for either PR team funding or academic funding as has been done in past semesters. There are folders in the AguaClara Drive detailing applications to past grants and competitions that will be evaluated for possible submission this semester. The PR team will also be looking into any new competitions or grants that AguaClara would be eligible for in combination with repeating older applications. Though the funding benefits the team for the same reasons as addressed above, any kind of awards or recognition for work our team as done would be very beneficial for the team's ability to present ourselves as a very accomplished organizations.

Eventually, all the funds raised either through merchandise selling or through competitions and other funding events would be used for managing supplies for the activities during the semester.

Future Goals

After a semester of work there were still a number of ideas that the Fall 2015 PR team would suggest for the Spring 2016 PR team work on. These plans include PowerPoint Presentation Updates, Spring 2016 Fundraisers, future newsletter writings, and team polo orders.

PowerPoint Presentations have played a crucial role in introducing AguaClara to the people who were not familiar with the work we had been working on. Therefore, the accuracy of the information appeared on the slides was what we concerned most when presenting to the audience. The problems the Public Relations team encountered right now with the slides mainly came from outdated data which were incapable of displaying full accomplishment and potentials of our project team. In order to prevent degrading our own work by incorporating the outdated information in our social media, one of PR's goal in the near future is to update the major accomplishment of the past semester, for example, new designs on water plants or newly constructed water plants around the world. It is important to make sure that all the presentations include the most up-to-date information about the team. All the presentation updates will be accomplished to guarantee the validity of all the slides that would be used during the Lab open-house events.

The PR team has planned fundraisers in the past but not in the last few semesters. Next semester, the Public Relations team should make fundraising a top priority. As detailed in the budgeting section of this report, funding is a setback for the Public Relations Team and continual fundraisers are the best way to combat this. This can potentially coincide with 2016's World Water Day on March 22.

The future PR team should work with team leads to request official funding from SAFC, or another student funding organization, for team-owned polos. As mentioned in the

merchandise section of the report, team-owned polos are the kind of merchandise that the team should own rather than ask individual members to buy so that there is an available uniform for team members to use at professional team functions.

In addition to these specific projects and ideas, it is recommended that future PR Teams recruit their members from majors like Communications or Business. It would still be necessary to have engineers on the PR team who can understand the work being done by the research subteams of AguaClara so that there isn't any miscommunication when presenting information about what AguaClara designs and researches. AguaClara would also be able to have more expertise in better outreach and communication by including Communications or Business Majors who have more to offer with general public relations knowledge and experience than most engineers.

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