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COMMUNICATING EQUALITY IN NEW SOCIAL-MEDIA PLATFORMS



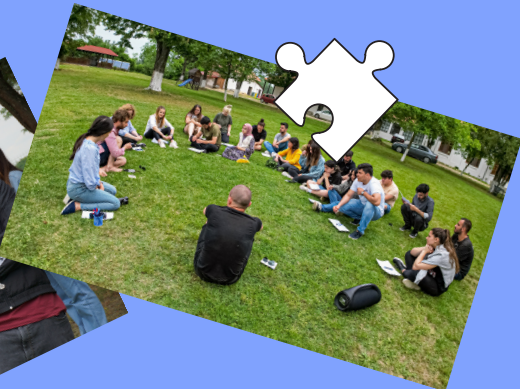
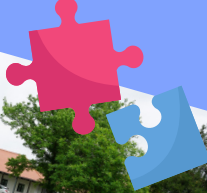
A GUIDE TO 'ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE' STRATEGIES AGAINST HATE SPEECH



This Handbook has been created by the partners and participants involved in our Erasmus+ project named 'Communicating Equality in New Social Media Platforms (EQUAL-Lit),' funded by the Erasmus+ program. It's important to note that this Handbook does not represent an activity within the project and is not financially supported. Rather, it is a tool that was developed as part of the project.



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CONTENTS



I. INTRODUCTION

II. EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

1. HATE SPEECH

- WHERE DOES IT START
 - WHERE DOES IT GO
 - HOW DOES IT END
- 

2. ONLINE SURROUNDINGS AND STEREOTYPES

3. PERSONAL BRANDING AND REPRESENTATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA

4. 'ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE' STRATEGIES TO HATE SPEECH

- LANGUAGE STRATEGIES: ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION AND SELF-ESTEEM
- LANGUAGE STRATEGIES: EMPATHY AND COMPASSION
- LANGUAGE STRATEGIES: HUMOUR

5. VIEWS ON OCCUPYING ONLINE PUBLIC SPACE

6. VICTIMS OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION

III. ONLINE CAMPAIGNS



IV. KEY TAKEAWAYS





INTRODUCTION



Promoting human rights education through counter and alternative narratives online is absolutely vital in our digital age, where online platforms can be both channels for communication, and breeding grounds for hate, discrimination, and prejudice.



Notably, the digital environment has become intricately linked with the issue of hate speech. Furthermore, recent events have exacerbated the problem, making it a pressing concern that requires proactive measures. A concerning aspect of online hate speech is the difficulty in monitoring and reporting such incidents, sometimes leading to a gap in law authorities's ability to address them effectively. For instance, cases of hate speech often go unreported, creating challenges in tackling this issue. We see them online and they die there.



Online hate speech doesn't restrict itself to specific social media platforms; it spreads across the digital landscape, including popular ones. What makes it even more challenging is the difficulty in monitoring and reporting these incidents. To tackle this, both the European Commission and the Council of Europe have issued guidelines for countering illegal hate speech online, receiving support from major tech players.



Resources

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-code-conduct-countering-illegal-hate-speech-online_en

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/combating-hate-speech>



ABOUT THE PROJECT



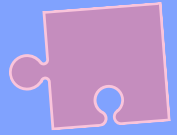
Our project's mission was to equip youth workers with the skills they need to combat online hate speech effectively. Hate speech encompasses "expressions that promote racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance, etc" (CoE). We were using a methodology that combined digital tools with alternative narratives, aiming to nurture empathy, self-esteem, and compassion among youth workers so they can confidently recognize and address hate speech.



This project is a direct response to the need to empower youth workers in addressing hate speech among their beneficiaries. By providing them with advanced training and an in-depth understanding of emerging social media platforms, we're helping them with the tools to not only identify and combat hate speech but also to prevent the adoption of extremist beliefs that fuel online hate speech. In summary, promoting human rights education through counter and alternative narratives online is pivotal in our fight against the rise of online hate speech and in creating a safer and more inclusive digital environment for all.



EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES



Hate speech - Where does it start

Allocated time: 1:30h

Short description: The group is introduced in a short presentation of the key elements that can be found the basis of hate speech. The session highlights the human reactions to different stimuli through different reactions.

Objective: To create a common understanding of the key concepts and elements used regarding hate speech.

Steps of the activity

1) Participants are invited to illustrate through a statue different elements as follows: Breath, Walk, Listening, Observing, Touching, Tasting, Smelling, Anger, Sadness, Happiness, Surprise, Aggression, Patience, Mercy, Violence, Empathy, Peace, Love, Curiosity, Compassion, Revenge, Hate, Forgiveness, Disgust, Confidence, Death.

2) After this moment, they are invited to discuss the experiment and to identify how these elements are developed and observed by the human being. Following this, the session continues with a brief brainstorming in concepts related to 'violence':

- Anger: presented as a basic emotion.
- Definition of aggression: defined as a behavior.
- Definition of instrumental aggression: a secondary result of another action.
- Definition of reactive aggression: a behavior that intends to hurt other.
- Definition of violence: extreme form or reactive aggression.
- Definition of hate: intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury.
- Definition of hate speech: broad discourse that is extremely negative and constitutes a threat to social peace.

3) Debate and reflection

Debate on what participants saw and felt. Reflect on their feelings during the method, but also outside it.

Continue with a discussion about how these concepts are addressed in the daily work of the youth workers, mainly in relation with the online environment. Focus might be added on reaching a common understanding of the group from a conceptual perspective.

Hate speech - Where does it go



Allocated time: 1h

Short description: This activity follows-up the previous one and explores the concept of anger and fear. Participants will try to understand and realize how anger can be perceived in a physical way and what reactions it could trigger when being exposed to online hate speech.

Objective: To further explore socio-emotional concepts that are frequently addressed when working with hate speech and in particular with online hate speech.

Steps of the activity

1) Working in groups of 4, each group receives a scenario with an example of online message posted on social media and includes a threat to a person. The topics are diverse: political orientation, race, financial status, and gender. Reading individually, each participant will write on a paper which are the immediate emotional reactions that are triggered by this message.

2) After 5-10 minutes, the participants will share in their groups the reactions and will discuss which are the most common reactions they observed among their groups.

3) Each participant will choose one reaction that feels like the most powerful one and the participants should put in the shoes of artists and sculptors. Each participant will share with the others which is the most powerful emotional reaction they had and the other three participants will sculpt him/her using the person's body in a way that reflects accurately that reaction. The trainer will take a picture with the person who is the sculpture, while the others will observe the physical details. The activity goes through four rounds, as each one will go through.

4) The trainers organize a short gallery of pictures that are projected on a screen/wall and invite all the participants to sit down and debrief on the image of each person:

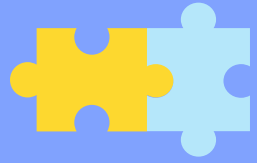
- what do we see?
- what emotion is there and how could that be triggered?
- what reactions could this emotion trigger further on?
- how safe is to express these reactions publicly?
- how authentic are the emotions expressed online?

Debate and reflection

The activity can end with a discussion in pairs, based on the following questions:

- What could trigger aggressivity and violence in an online setting?
- How could we support youngsters who have difficulties in expressing their emotions?
- How could we work with youngsters who deliberately express aggressivity in public, including social media?

Hate speech – How does it end



Allocated time: 1:30h

Short description: This activity is based on improvisation following different scenarios proposed by the trainer. Participants work in couples and will go through a set of actions where they try to observe if they are, or are not, angry, aggressive or even violent.

Objective: To increase the understanding of the potential results of an act of violence in the online environment.

Steps of the activity

1) Participants work in pairs, taking turns in different scenarios:

- Offer a handshake, rejected non-verbally.
- Offer an imaginary gift, rejected non-verbally.
- Attempt to make eye contact, avoided persistently.
- Offer an imaginary gift, partner accepts and slowly destroys it.
- Say 'You are beautiful,' partner responds with 'I don't care.'
- Say 'I'm sorry,' partner responds with 'You should be.'

After each round, the trainer asks the participants to close their eyes and reflect on what reactions they had and how authentic were these reactions. The participants will work in the same couple and will write/draw each other's name on a piece of paper.

2) At every minute, they will add one more ironic and defying word/symbol/text/element to the draw. They will not share the content with the partners or with others. They can say anything about the other person on the paper, but they will not show it. After 5-7 rounds, they will add some hashtags to the picture, in the same line as the words indicated already. Once they reach minimum 5 hashtags, they will indicate which is the worst they consider. Participants will fold the paper and will keep it.

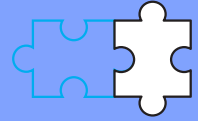
3) Participants are asked to say how they feel after each round (i.e.: Frustrated, annoyed, uncomfortable, ridiculous, tense, anxious, sad, hurt, offended, etc.). Discuss these feelings!

4) In the end, ask the participants to have a quick social media research using the hashtags they added on the paper. Talk about the content is associated with that.

Debate and reflection

End the activity with a group reflection on how words on social media can transform from harmless to powerful instruments, highlighting the responsibility of online communication and the impact of seemingly small actions.

Online surroundings and stereotypes



Allocated time: 1h

Short description: This activity aims to elucidate how online prejudices mirror real-life contexts.

Objective: To explore how stereotypes influence online behavior and contribute to radicalization.

Steps of the activity

1) Begin with three large papers where participants randomly add different stereotypes related to ethnicities, political orientation, and financial status. The trainer emphasizes that this information is a tool for learning, not a label for others or themselves.

2) After 20 minutes, the trainer reads the examples and initiates a short discussion about the definition and roots of stereotypes.

3) Provide additional examples and introduce the official definition of stereotypes.

4) Divide participants into small groups (maximum 4/group). Instruct them to conduct simple research on which groups are trending on various social media platforms (e.g., Reddit, TikTok, Snapchat, Telegram, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) related to different stereotypes and how young people become part of these groups. Suggested categories for exploration include ethnicity, nationality, religion, professional orientation, sexual orientation, etc. Participants may use laptops or their own phones.

P.S.: Before starting their research on social media platforms, trainers provide a brief technical introduction for each platform. Specific technicalities will be covered in future sessions, ensuring participants have a comprehensive understanding of online hate speech.

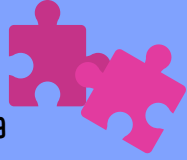
5) Debate: a plenary discussion on how stereotypes can lead to extreme violence, hatred, and radicalization:

- Share examples of such groups discovered during research.
- Discuss how these groups sustain their activities.
- Explore the consequences if an IT company shuts down such a group.
- Examine the dynamics within such groups.
- Consider how to identify when a youngster joins these groups.

Reflection

Encourage participants to reflect individually or in small groups on what they've learned during the session, how it relates to their own experiences, and what actions they can take to combat stereotypes and promote a more inclusive online environment.

Personal branding and representation in social media



Time allocation: 1:30h

Short description: This activity enhances creativity by guiding youth workers to help beneficiaries enhance their online profiles through interactive steps, including self-reflection, content creation, and real-time reaction analysis on various social media platforms.

Objective: Enable youth workers to understand how to assist young people in improving their online presence and combating hate speech.

Steps of the activity

1. Each youth worker should prepare for a conversation with one of their beneficiaries about social media and follow these steps:
 - **Understand the context of the young person:** Dive into the individual's background, interests, and values.
 - **Identify the personal branding in social media:** Start by having a conversation with the youngsters about their goals and aspirations for their online presence. Help them envision the type of content, values, and image they want to project online to foster positive interactions.
 - **Identify and discuss potential mistakes in creating online content and analyze their impact:** Explore common pitfalls in online content creation, such as offensive language, insensitive jokes, or controversial topics. Discuss the potential consequences of these mistakes, including how they might attract negative attention and harm them.
 - **Analyze online audience:** Explore their online audience and preferences. Study what content resonates with their peers.
 - **Create an empathic post together:** Collaboratively draft a post on a universally positive topic. Share the post and track reactions.
 - **Engage privately:** Discuss the post with friends privately, including handling online hate speech if appeared.
 - **Discuss Emotions:** Talk about the emotions experienced throughout the process.
2. Conclude the session with a trainer-led discussion, addressing the reasons for this activity and its potential outcomes.

Reflection

Encourage participants to reflect individually or in small groups on the experience and insights gained from the activity, emphasizing how they can apply these lessons to help youngsters improve their online presence and combating hate speech.

Alternative narrative' strategies to hate speech



LANGUAGE STRATEGIES: Empathy and compassion

Allocated time: 1h

Short description: This activity focuses on empathy, compassion, and self-esteem in the context of responding to or avoiding being drawn into online hate speech. It consists of two parts: an empathy-building activity and a self-reflection and planning exercise.

Objective: Develop empathy, compassion, and self-esteem as tools to respond effectively to online hate speech and promote positive online interactions.

Steps of the activity

Part 1: Empathy-Building Activity - "Empathy Storytelling": Begin by introducing the concept of empathy, compassion, and self-esteem as essential components of responding to online hate speech. Create a calm atmosphere with soft background music.

Role Cards: Provide participants with role cards from a hat. Instruct them to keep their roles private and to immerse themselves in the character they've been assigned (i.e., refugee, migrant, poor youngster).

Empathy Storytelling: Participants, while remaining seated, take turns sharing a brief fictional story from the perspective of their assigned character. Encourage them to focus on experiences, challenges, and emotions that their character might encounter in daily life.

Listening and Reflection: As each participant shares their empathy story, others should actively listen and reflect on the emotions and experiences being described. Encourage participants to empathize with the characters portrayed in the stories.

Group Discussion: After all participants have shared their empathy stories, facilitate a group discussion. Encourage participants to reflect on the impact of hearing these stories and how it relates to empathy, compassion, and self-esteem.

Part 2: Self-Reflection and Planning: Participants work individually to create a plan outlining at least five ways to demonstrate empathy, compassion, and self-esteem when faced with hate speech directed at them, based on the roles they embraced. They should also consider their own needs in relation to their assigned role.

Sharing: Participants share their plans with the group, discussing their strategies for responding to online hate speech while maintaining empathy, compassion, and self-esteem.

Debrief and Discussion: Conclude the session with a question-and-answer session where participants can seek clarification and engage in a discussion about their insights and plans.

LANGUAGE STRATEGIES: Assertive communication and self-esteem



Allocated time: 1h

Short description: This activity fosters critical thinking about the intersections of online issues and target groups, providing participants with practical strategies for effective communication and intervention.

Objectives

- deeper understanding of the intersections between online issues and target groups, leading to increased awareness of the challenges and potential consequences;
- development of assertive communication strategies that can be applied to address hate speech, online discrimination, and cyberbullying while maintaining a respectful and assertive tone.

Steps of the activity

Step 1: Exploring Intersections

1) **Group Formation:** Divide participants into six major groups based on the identified issues and target groups. Each group represents one of the following: - hate speech, - online discrimination, cyberbullying and -youngsters, -youngsters with fewer opportunities, refugees/migrants. Arrange the six groups into an inner and an outer circle, facing each other. Each group in the inner circle will pair up with a group in the outer circle.

3) **Discussion Pairs:** Assign 10 minutes for each pair of groups to discuss what happens when their respective issues and target groups intersect. Encourage participants to explore the dangers, effects, and potential scenarios that arise. After each 10-minute discussion, the outer circle groups will rotate clockwise to the next pair of groups. Continue until all groups have interacted with one another.

5) **Debriefing:** Facilitate a group discussion where participants share their findings and insights regarding the intersections between various online issues and target groups. Encourage participants to identify common themes and challenges.

Step 2: Developing Strategies

1) **In-Group Brainstorming:** In their respective groups, participants should brainstorm and develop strategies for assertive communication to address the three identified issues (hate speech, online discrimination, cyberbullying) while keeping their communication tone assertive.

2) **Strategy Sharing:** Each group presents their strategies to the entire group, focusing on how these strategies can be applied effectively in various situations.

Debriefing: Facilitate a final discussion where participants reflect on the strategies proposed. Encourage them to discuss the impact and challenges associated with implementing these strategies.

LANGUAGE STRATEGIES: humour



Allocated time: 1h

Short description: This session focuses on the concept of alternative narratives to combat online hate speech, following the 'WE CAN! Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives' Booklet by the Council of Europe. Participants use their gadgets in these interactive sessions. This activity encourages participants to develop creative and empathetic approaches to counter online hate speech through humor-driven alternative narratives while utilizing a practical mobile application for engagement and learning.

Objective: To explore alternative narratives using humor to counteract online hate speech and promote empathy.

Steps of the activity

1) **Scenario Introduction:** The trainer presents a real-life scenario of online hate speech that led to acts of violence. Each group is assigned a different scenario, and the participants are divided into working teams.

i.e. of online hate speech: One of your peers created a short video and posted it online, expressing their political beliefs and sharing a glimpse into their personal life. However, within just one hour, the comments and reactions to the video turned overwhelmingly negative. The comments included derogatory and offensive remarks about the peer's family. The situation escalated when an anonymous user posted the peer's home address online, encouraging harm and violence against them.

2) **Alternative narrative building:** Each group's first task is to create an alternative narrative that counters the hate speech story they received. They focus on using empathetic humor and employ a mobile application called Actionbound for this purpose.

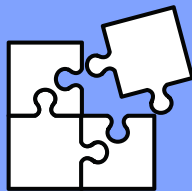
3) **Create a quiz:** Using Actionbound app, each group prepares a quiz related to their alternative narrative, which should not exceed 10 minutes in duration.

4) **Rotation of challenges:** Groups take turns running their Actionbound challenges for the other groups. This rotation allows each group to experience and interact with the alternative narratives created by the others.

Debrief and discussion

After going through all the Actionbound challenges, the entire group engages in a debriefing session. Participants discuss their scenarios, reflecting on what happens in real life, and on the importance of incorporating such empathetic, humor-based narratives into their lives in order to combat hate speech.

Views on occupying online public space



Time allocation: 1:30h

Short description: This activity empowers participants to practically apply their knowledge by using a mobile application to create engaging online events that promote empathy and counteract hate speech among youngsters.

Objective: Develop skills in using mobile applications for creating engaging online events that counteract hate speech and encourage empathy among young individuals.

Steps of the activity

1) Begin with a brief introduction to a scenario where a group of youngsters is facing online discrimination (you can choose the topic). This sets the stage for the importance of promoting an alternative narrative. Emphasize the need for compassion and self-esteem in their responses.

2) Divide the participants into groups. Each group represents a team of youngsters responsible for creating an online event aimed at countering the negative narrative described in the scenario. Encourage them to brainstorm and collaborate effectively.

3) Online Event Creation: Introduce a mobile application (i.e. Eventmobi, Mentimeter, Eventzee etc.) and provide instructions on how to use it for creating online events. Participants can actually create and publish these events, inviting friends and a wider audience to join. Participants should design and structure their online events. They can include various challenges, tasks, or questions that encourage participants to engage with the alternative narrative and share positive messages.

4) Alternative Narrative Development: In their respective groups, participants should brainstorm and craft an alternative narrative that promotes understanding, tolerance, and unity. Participants will publish their online events and invite their friends and others to join.

Outcomes

The main outcome of this activity is the creation of multiple examples of online events that counteract hate speech and promote empathy. These serve as powerful tools (i.e. for teenagers) to engage with different audiences, fostering compassion and self-esteem in their responses.

Debrief and Discussion

Conclude the session with a debriefing discussion that includes the following questions:

- What strategies and challenges did you encounter in creating online events to promote alternative narratives and empathy?
- How can you encourage the beneficiaries you work with (i.e. youngsters) to use such tools to combat hate speech and foster understanding?
- Reflect on the importance of spreading positive narratives and challenging hate speech online.

Victims of online communication



Allocated time: 1:30h

Short description: This activity aims to equip youth workers with a deeper understanding of online hate speech, its language, and the early signs associated with it. The collaborative effort results in a valuable resource to assist in supporting beneficiaries facing these challenges.

Objective: Increase participants' awareness of the range of online violent acts and their connection to offline communication. Develop a better understanding of how slang language is created for online hate speech and how to recognize early signs of hostile communication.

Steps of the Activity

1) **Introduction:** Begin by explaining the session's goal: to explore online hate speech, its language, and early signs. Emphasize the importance of understanding this phenomenon to better support beneficiaries. Make sure the participants can use mobile phones or laptops in this research-based session.

2) Divide participants into groups, ask each group to choose a different social media platform (i.e. Reddit, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok etc.). Each group is responsible for exploring the social media context of their beneficiaries.

3) **Context exploration:** Guide participants through various paths to delve deeper into the online context of their beneficiaries. Encourage them to analyze interactions, discussions, and content shared on the selected platforms. Participants should start documenting phrases, keywords, acronyms, and symbols relevant to online hate speech, cyberbullying, disinformation, and violent communication.

5) **Online contact with beneficiaries:** During the session, participants can engage with their beneficiaries online, discussing the topic of online hate speech. They will also inquire about common reactions of youngsters when encountering hate speech online.

6) **Collecting data:** Conclude the session by collecting the phrases, words, and symbols related to online hate speech used in each group. You can compile this information to create a dictionary of online hate speech terms and symbols. This resource enhances participants' ability to recognize early signs of hostile communication and supports their efforts to help beneficiaries repel online hate speech.

Debrief and Discussion

- Reflect on the experience of engaging with beneficiaries and exploring the language of online hate speech.
- Discuss strategies for recognizing and addressing early signs of online hate speech.
- Share insights and findings from the session and how they can be applied in supporting young individuals dealing with online hate speech and cyberbullying.

ONLINE CAMPAIGNS



How to start a campaign against hate speech on social media?

(example made by our participants during the project)



Recommendation: Clearly outline **the goal of the campaign**. Keep the description concise and focused on the campaign's mission.

Which is the **topic** of your campaign? Any topic on online hate speech should resonate with your target audience.

The key message: Compose a message that is clear, compelling, and aligned with the campaign's objectives. Emphasize the importance of unity and inclusivity in tackling online hate speech.

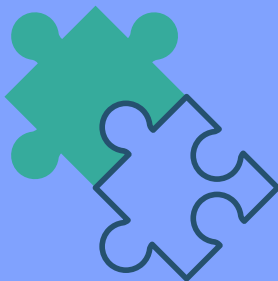
Concept and Implementation


Implementation: Plan a consistent **posting schedule** and consider the timing of your posts to reach the widest audience. Use social media platforms that are most popular among your target demographic.

Concept: Develop **a concept** that illustrates the distinction between manufactured conflicts and genuine issues related to online hate speech. Use alternative and empathetic narratives to connect with your audience.

Timeline: Set **a realistic timeline** that allows for adequate preparation and execution. Ensure that you have enough time to create and promote content effectively.

Audience: **Know your audience's preferences, interests, and behaviors**. Tailor your content and messaging to resonate with them.



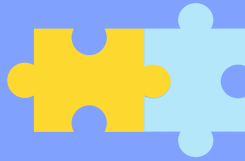


Expected impact: Set measurable and achievable impact goals. **Monitor the campaign's progress** and make adjustments as needed to meet your objectives.

Evaluation tools: **Use analytics tools** to track key metrics such as views, likes, comments, and shares. Analyze the data to gain insights into the campaign's performance and audience engagement.

- Views
- Likes
- Comments
- Shares

Final recommendation: regardless the campaign you are going to build, a well-structured and effective online campaign against online hate speech focuses on **unity, inclusivity, and impactful messaging**.





Key takeaways



Relevance: Your activities should resonate across the age groups you work with; if you serve different age groups, emphasize the widespread concern about the impact of online hate speech.

Effective Messaging: Clear and impactful messaging that emphasizes unity and inclusivity plays a pivotal role in engaging and motivating participants.

Quality: Creating high-quality content, including videos and blog posts, can be highly effective in educating and engaging the audience.

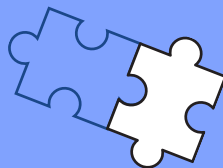
Planning: A well-structured timeline for activities will drive participation.

Conceptual empathy: The concept of distinguishing between manufactured conflicts and genuine issues related to online hate speech encourages critical thinking and fosters empathy among participants.

Sustainable impact: Emphasizing community-building and knowledge transfer ensures the long-term impact of the activities in the fight against online hate speech.

Data Analysis: Utilizing analytics for data collection and impact assessment will guide future campaigns and strategies.

Collective efforts: Collaborative efforts among participants, stakeholders, and the wider community were instrumental in achieving project success.





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