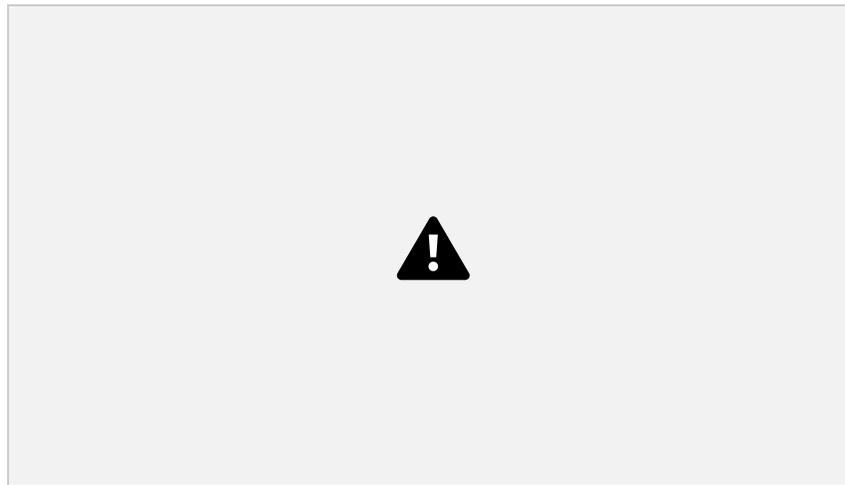


## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wild Hog Marathon is three days of family-friendly events centered around running. The weekend includes the 5k, 10k, half-marathon, full marathon, a pasta feed, and the Scheels Health and Fitness Expo, where runners pick up necessary materials before the race and post-race party.

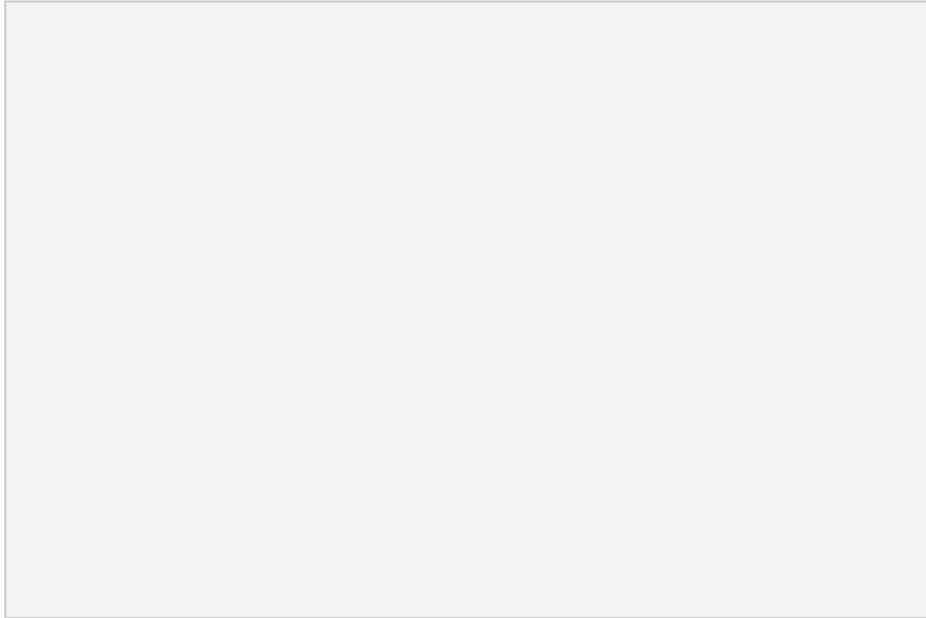
### Current Customer Experience



### Summary of Research Methods and Results

Information was found using various methods. Qualitative research was found by interviewing individuals and contacting the race director and quantitative research was found by sending out two surveys, . The majority of people value swag and receiving prizes quickly after the race. Although many participants feel as though the check-in before the race was very easy, most respondents thought that an online check-in would be beneficial to the overall experience of the weekend. The following chart represents the results of the surveys and the the proposed activities that would take place in order to strengthen the overall customer experience.

## Results and Proposed Activities



## **II. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Description of the organization**

The Wild Hog Marathon is the largest marathon in Grand Forks, North Dakota. It was originally founded in 2012. Richard Dafoe, who is also the owner of See Dick Run, and Jared Davis are two of the main developers that made the Wild Hog Marathon a business. Geoff Bengton participated early on in the design of the website and as the general advisor to the race. Rachel Hellyer is the current race director, and Paul Sproule is a main investor who is considered the “idea guy.” The race started because there were no half marathons in Grand Forks, and the founders wanted to cater to the many health conscious people that were searching for opportunities to further their fitness. The main sponsor and a partner to the race, the Wild Hog restaurant, was how marathon got its name. It offers free beers on Wednesdays for those who train prior to the marathon.

Since the founding of the marathon, it has been very family oriented. The 5k has been an inclusive run for those who want to race to win, or just simply walk with children. In addition to the 5k, there are the half marathon, 10k, and the full marathon, which has been offered for two years. Each year the races are set to happen in September. This year the races are scheduled for September 27-29.

There are limited competitors for the Wild Hog Marathon, however the main competitors are the marathons held in Fargo, North Dakota. There are other smaller marathons around North Dakota and within Grand Forks. The Wild Hog Marathon happily works with the Special Olympics which reaps benefits for all who are involved. Before the race, there are T-shirts, flyers, and other products that are given to customers for advertising. During the race, there are bus rides that are offered to the runners and those who want to watch. Busses leave from Scheels and there are also rides offered every thirty minutes as the races finish. When the race is concluded, the participants get a shirt, socks, and a medal. Winners receive cash prizes, their clothing, and an engraved mug.

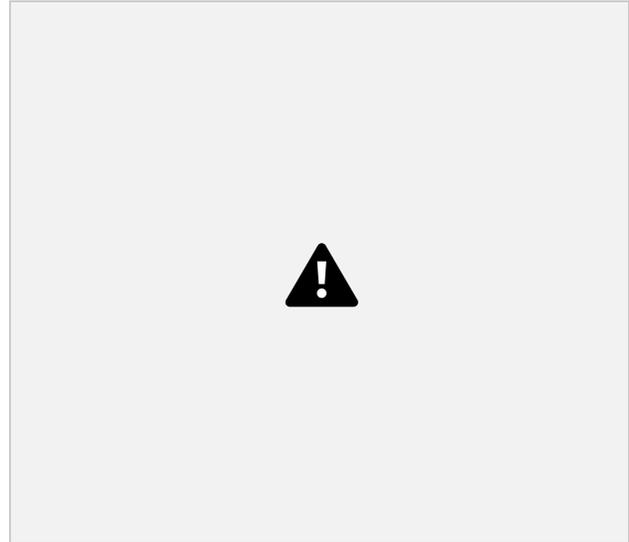
## **B. Description of community**

### **Geographics**

The geographic region for this research project is Grand Forks County, North Dakota. The terrain is flat with very few hills and four distinct seasons. The elevation is 843 feet. The summers are hot and the winters are very cold.

## **Demographics**

The population of Grand Forks County is 71,083 as of July 2016. 84.6% of the population is White alone, 4.2% is Black or African American, 2.7% is Asian, 4% is Hispanic or Latino, 2.8% is American Indian and Native American, 0.1% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 2.5% is two or more races. The median age of people residing in Grand Forks is 28.5.



## **Socioeconomics**

The average household income is \$46,149 which is lower than the average for the state which is \$60,557. The poverty rate is 20.4%. Grand Forks is 51% male and 49% female. The percentage of people with a high school graduate or higher degree of education age 25 or older is 92.8%. Residents age 25 or older that have a Bachelor's degree or higher degree of education is 33%. Persons without health insurance age 65 or younger is 8.4% as of 2015. These facts combine to show that Grand Forks is mostly a middle class community. North Dakota as a whole is a state that most people feel is a safe community for families and a good place to raise children.

The population per square mile of Grand Forks County is 46.5 which is a relatively low population density, mostly because there are many people that live out of town or on farms. 757,952 people or 0.224% of the US population is located in North Dakota and

57,339 people or 9.826 % of the North Dakota population is in Grand Forks. The economy is thriving with strengths in agriculture businesses, such as banks and tractor supplies, manufacturing, aviation and aerospace, unmanned aircraft systems, and professional/technological services. The largest employer in the county is the University of North Dakota, followed by the Grand Forks Air Force Base, and Altru Health System.

### **C. Overview of the organization's current customer experience**

Prior to the race the word is spread in many ways. The main sponsors advertise throughout their businesses with flyers and banners as well as posters and handouts and there is clothing offered from the Wild Hog restaurant. There are also advertisements on the radio, television, and social media outlets such as Instagram and Facebook. On the website for the race there is information about the upcoming races, how the entire race weekend is structured, course maps, and users can see who the winners from the latest race. At the Wild Hog, people can ask for booklets which contain the same information. Runners can register for the race online where there is also an option to sign up to be a volunteer. Jobs for volunteers include marshalls, pacers, aid stations, photographers, and setup/cleanup. If a business owner would like to get involved and be a vendor there is also an option to sign up and participate.

When the race is approaching information is sent out to runners and volunteers who signed up. Participants who expect to be involved in the race are to pick up their race number, shirt, pint glass, and socks beforehand during the Scheels Health and Fitness Expo at the designated times. On Wednesdays during the year, people who run the training

course can get a free beer from the Wild Hog. The day before the race there is a pasta feed that is held for the runners to ensure they have enough energy for the next day.

Early in the morning on the days of the events the ICON Arena opens to be a warm indoor area and health and fitness trainers are available to help participants warm up. Busses offer rides from the Scheels parking lot to the race before it begins. Upon their arrival the participants sign in with the help of the volunteers, receive T-shirts, warm up, socialize, and then the races begin all throughout the Grand Forks area. When they arrive at the finish line, they are greeted by many spectators that are clapping and cheering. They are awarded finisher's medals, water, and snacks. The Finisher's T-shirt is awarded to the runners of the full marathon.

After the races, busses are available to bring people back to Scheels every half hour if they so choose. The celebration tent opens for runners and spectators where runners can have free soda or adult beverages and awards are handed out at the ceremony. The top three men and women from each race receive money prizes in the form of checks but do not obtain them until the results are certified by the timer and the money has gone through the approval process. The post race party is the last event of the weekend. They create a customer base with their runners and keep them coming back because of the publicity, the weekend, and the different race options.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODS USED IN THE STUDY**

#### **A. Description and rationale of research methodologies selected to conduct the research study**

##### **Qualitative Research**

To begin the qualitative research, Race Director Rachel Heller was interviewed. She explained the events of the weekend, their order, the different races, prizes, and the roles of all involved. This is qualitative because the information given was experience-based. The next interview was with Richard Dafoe who spoke of the founders of the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend and what they contributed to the organization. Next a former winner was interviewed. He gave information on some of the issues he encountered such as the long waiting period for the prize money, and the fact that there were only people cheering for the runners at the very beginning and ends of the races. Finally, during a class interview, a number of students had volunteered at the most recent Wild Hog Marathon Weekend. There they encountered issues such as loud and long check-in lines that slow down the process even further. Because of the noise, the volunteers were unable to hear the names and numbers of the competitors which caused disorganization and lessened the appeal of the event. They also stated that there was not enough of the correct T-shirt sizes, which many competitors were unhappy about. This research is qualitative because the questions asked were things like “why,” “how,” and “when” and is based entirely on opinions of specific people.

## **Quantitative Research**

Two surveys were conducted. The first being tailored toward runners in general, and the second aimed toward people who have specifically run the Wild Hog Marathon. In the first survey, attitude research was performed through a variety of questions asking how many people liked or disliked certain things about the races. Questions about the experience and customer preference were asked and the overall satisfaction was rated based on the percentage of people who felt a precise way towards the question.

The second survey was sent out by Rachel Hellyer and was based more specifically on the Wild Hog Marathon and other races during the weekend. A question asked was “How beneficial do you think online check-in would be versus in-person?” and a number of people had a positive response. Finally, existing customer satisfaction was rated on a scale from one to five, giving an accurate representation of what the general participant feels.

## **B. Process used to conduct the selected research methods**

### **Qualitative**

To begin the research process, Rachel Hellyer was contacted via phone. She provided information about the race weekend, small details such as prizes, who to contact to understand the upbringing of the organization, and she agreed to assist in the research process. Next, Richard Dafoe was contacted through a phone call to find out who the founders of the Wild Hog Weekend were. He gave an explanation on many different developers and their roles in the development of this organization. Jared Davis, Geoff Bengton, Paul Sproule, and Rachel Hellyer contributed to the early beginnings of the races. The next person that was contacted was a former winner, he described his experience with

the race and what he would change to improve it. Lastly a small in-person group interview was conducted, a few of the interviewees had volunteered at the most recent Wild Hog Weekend and also explained troubles they had encountered with the program.

### **Quantitative**

The general survey was sent out through social media such as, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for people of the general public to take. The business specific survey was approved by race director Rachel Hellyer and she distributed it out to the members of her email list.

## **IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **A. Findings of the research study**

#### **Qualitative**

The former race winner stated that he was upset about not receiving his prize until months after the race, and that he would prefer that it be a cash prize than a check. He also encountered issues with receiving the wrong shirt size. The in-person interview with the four girls who had volunteered to work the event revealed that they had a very difficult time with the check-in process. It was loud, very time consuming, and many runners were agitated that they were not given the shirt size they ordered.

#### **Quantitative**

Both of the surveys also asked questions to evaluate the amount of people who responded a certain way to each question. In the business specific survey, 36.9% of the respondents were male and 63.1% were female, whereas in the general survey, 23.8% of respondents were male, 74.1% were female, and 2.1% preferred not to say.



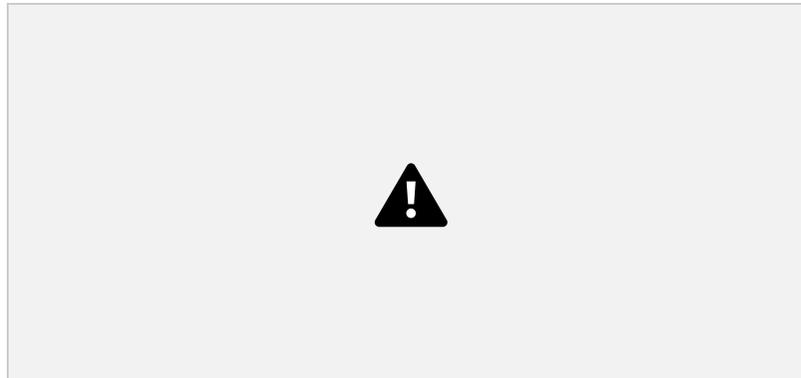
Zero point seven percent were 9-18 years old, 18.4% were 19-28 years old, 29.9% were 29-39, and 51% were 40 years old or older according to the survey that was sent out by the business. In the general survey 34.7% of respondents were 7-18, 8.4% were 19-28, 19.7% were 29-39, and 37.2% were 40 or older.



After distributing the surveys, information based on customer experience was analyzed. Out of 221 responses, 33% of respondents said that having people to run with is most important, followed by 28.1% of people who said scenery, and 14.5% of runners looked forward to people cheering for them. Clear marking of the course was important to 10% of the participants and the remaining 14.4% of answers varied by person.

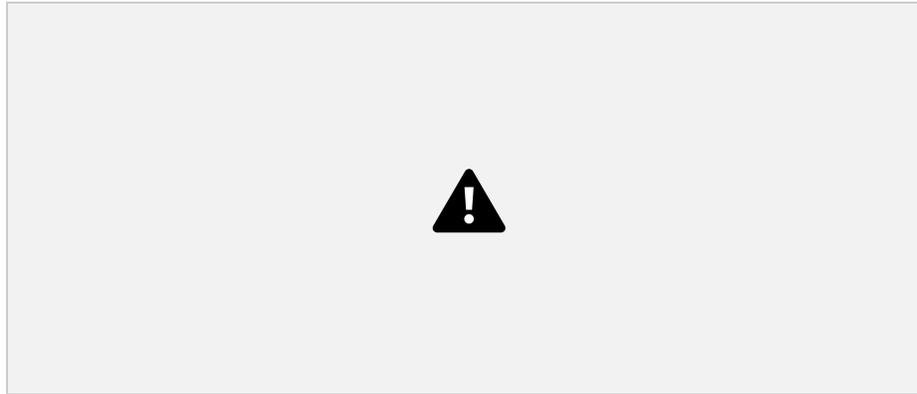


When the customers were asked what events they ran throughout the Wild Hog Weekend, results showed that the Half Marathon was the most popular event with 43.8% of people involved. Of 290 people taking the survey, eighty-five of them participated in the 10k. The least popular race was the Full Marathon with 19.7% of people having participated.

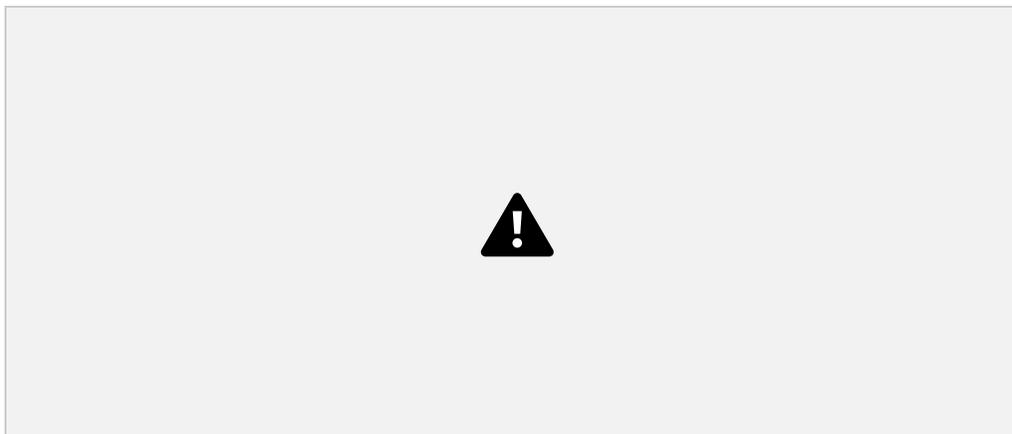


Thirty five point two percent of people had heard about the Wild Hog races from social media, followed by 29.6% of people who had heard about the events of the weekend from friends or family. Seventeen point six percent had heard about it from TV or radio and 9.3% had gotten information from past participants.

When asked about the swag (items received before the race), the majority of people said it was neither important nor unimportant to receive swag, 21.5% of people found swag not important at all, and 19.7% of people said it was very important.



Out of 217 responses, 30.9% of respondents stated that it is important to receive the prizes quickly after the race, 22.1% said it is extremely important, 18.9% said it is very important, 17.1% said it is not at all important and 11.1% said it is not very important.



When asked how beneficial participants thought it would be to have a precheck-in online and the bib mailed to them versus an in-person check-in, 43.5% of people thought it

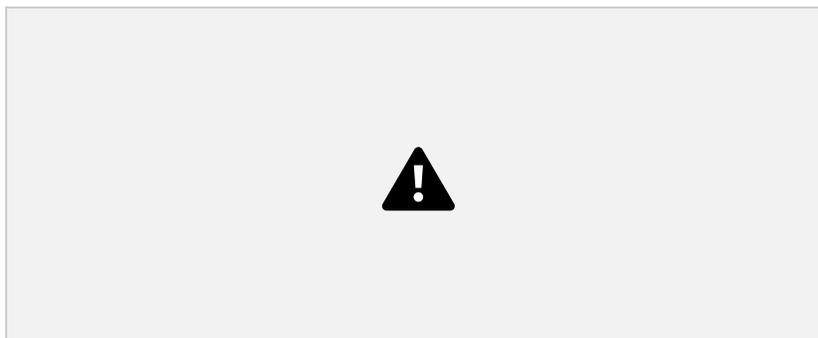


would be extremely beneficial and 28.3% thought it would be very beneficial to the overall check-in process.

Thirty-eight point one percent of people said that it is extremely important to get checked in quickly, and 31.1% said it is very important. Five point nine percent of people said it is not at all important.

Fifty-two point six percent of runners found information and clothing before the race extremely accessible, and 28.4% found information very accessible, compared to 1.4% of people who had not found information accessible at all.

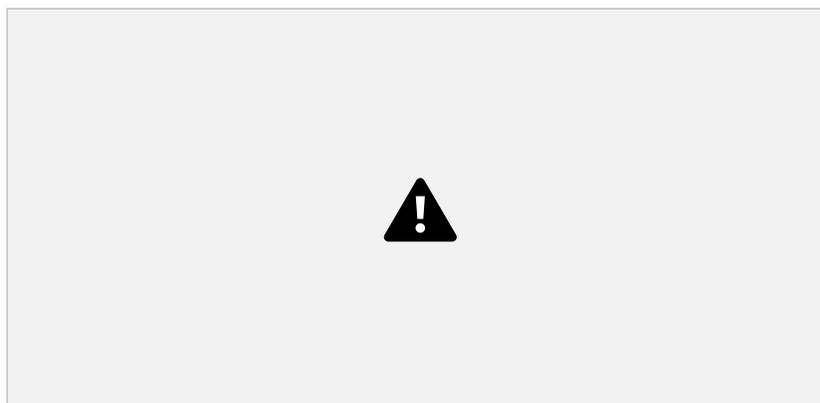
When the customers were asked how important post-race events were, it was an even mix. 35.8% of people said it was neither important nor unimportant; accounting for a little over a third of the total amount people who voted. Sixteen point three percent of people did not think post-race events were important at all and 9.3% of people said that they were very important.



Out of 217 responses, 30.9% of respondents stated that it is important to receive the prizes quickly after the race, 22.1% said it is extremely important, 18.9% said it is very important, 17.1% said it is not at all important and 11.1% said it is not very important.

The majority of people were extremely satisfied and very satisfied with the overall experience of the Wild Hog Marathon weekend. Six point six percent was not either satisfied or dissatisfied, and 1% was not very satisfied.

Three point one percent of the 289 respondents thought that the check-in before the races of the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend was extremely difficult and 4.8% found it very difficult. Twelve point five percent of people stated that it was neither an easy or difficult process, but most people were fairly satisfied.



## **B. Conclusions based on findings**

### **Qualitative**

The interviews with the former winner and the girls who volunteered at the Wild Hog Marathon in previous years exhibited three main issues with the overall customer

experience. The first being that the winners of each race are rewarded with their prizes months after the race, and the prize is in the form of a check rather than cash. The second issue is the check-in process. It is loud, time-consuming, and unpleasant for both the volunteers and the runners. The final problem is the distribution of the shirts; many runners commented that they were unhappy about the shirts, which were not the sizes they ordered.

### **Quantitative**

On both surveys, most surveyors were female and most respondents were forty or older. For the general survey the people aged 7-18 were the next greatest group and for the business specific survey it was the age range of 29-39 years old. The most popular event was the half marathon, followed by the 10k, then the 5k. The majority of people had heard about the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend through social media, then friends or family, and TV or radio.

That there are many mixed reviews on the entire process of the weekend. Many people value having people to run with, scenery, support from the crowd and fellow runners, and clear marking of the course. Participants wanted more support from the crowd and fellow runners and a number of people involved stated that the course which the runners were to follow was not very clearly marked.

The majority of respondents said that it was important to get checked in quickly and in the comments and questions part of the survey, many people had concerns about the lengthy amount time it took to get checked in. When asked about the swag, the runners were not partial about the items received. Some said it was not at all important while

others claimed it was extremely important. Few people thought it was extremely important for post-race events to occur. The majority of people said it was neither important nor unimportant, and more people thought it was not important than the people who did. Many people said that they were indifferent towards receiving their prizes quickly.

The overall satisfaction of the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend was very high with the main concerns being the check-in time, the course not being very clearly marked, and incorrect T-shirt sizes.

The majority of people who took the survey thought it would either be extremely beneficial or very beneficial to implement a check-in service that involves checking in online prior to the race and having the race bib mailed to them. In the comments section of the survey, surveyors thought it might also be helpful to have the information packet and T-shirt of the correct size mailed to them along with the bib.

## **V. PROPOSED STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **A. Objectives and rationale**

The vision for the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend includes changes to the overall customer experience. It is critical to note that the planning for customer experience begins before the advertisements are even created. To keep satisfaction high, especially in past participants, distributing the prizes for the winners of each race should happen more quickly than in years past. In fact, in the comments and concerns portion of the survey, there were complaints about the process of receiving the prizes in a timely manner. To improve this sponsors need to be contacted months before the events take place. In doing this, the winners can receive cash prizes versus the checks that have been given in the past,

and the money would be quickly and correctly distributed to the winners the day of the race.

The next change would dramatically enhance the process of check-in. On both surveys the majority of customers highly valued a quick and stress free check-in. Complaints were made in the comments section of the survey about the long period of time it takes to get checked in prior to the race and many people were unhappy about receiving the wrong shirt sizes. The vision for the check-in includes drastic changes. To ensure that all participants are signed up for the correct race, receive the correct information and proper items, and the experience is quick and not stressful, implementing an online check-in would be extremely beneficial. By creating a platform by which participants are able to be in control of their own check-in, the issues of the noise, miscommunications, lengthy check-in, and overall inconvenience would be reduced. Anyone who encounters a problem with any part of the check-in would be able to be assisted by those working at the help desks the day of the races. This would also provide alternate opportunities for those who are unable to check in online.

As stated above, the issue with shirt sizes affected many people. It made the results of the survey in which the customers rated their satisfaction go downward and in the comments, many people addressed the issue. Included in the overall check-in process, T-shirts and race bibs would be mailed to the participants prior to the races. The information packets would be primarily put online for easier access, however, there would be a paper option as well, which would be mailed to the participants with the T-shirt and bib.

## **B. Proposed activities and timelines**

In order for the participants to receive their cash prize in a timely manner, the sponsors need to be contacted months in advance. To do this the people that are in charge of collecting the money from the sponsors and distributing it to the winners will need to contact those sponsors prior to the race. The current issue is that winners receive checks, which people find problematic, and the checks are issued months after the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend. To get the money from the sponsors further in advance would allow the organization to exchange the checks for cash and enclose it in envelopes which, in turn, allows the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend organization to reward the winners with their correct prizes, the day of the race, eliminating both the inconvenience of a late delivery and the likelihood of a mistake. The very first event of the weekend is on a Friday in mid to late September. The sponsors would be contacted in early July to ensure there is enough time before the race to address any issues that may arise, and the organization can set a deadline, preferably late August, to assure the timely delivery of the prizes.

Creating the online platform for more convenient check-in can be done by utilizing free online sites which allow organizations to create, customize, and distribute the form. The registration form would have to be altered slightly by allowing participants to sign up for the race, give contact information such as email and phone numbers, and give their address so the bibs, timing chip, and swag can be sent to them through the mail. The link to the online check-in would be sent in an email to those on the email list and also put on the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend website for easy access to everyone. The registration would enable the participants to sign up, order shirts, and anything else they would need. The day

of the race the participants can go to the Wild Hog Marathon website where they can find the link to the check in. When they get to the race entry, they can show the volunteers the confirmation of the sign in on their device and the volunteers can direct them to the correct area. To service those who choose not to sign in online, the shirts, bibs, and any other swag would be given to them via the help desks the day of their event(s). Here, anyone with an issue or miscommunication of any sort can be assisted as well.

Along with the link to the online check-in, the information about the weekend that is needed for runners and volunteers would be put on the Wild Hog Marathon website, however, there would be an option on the registration form that would allow participants to request a paper copy which would be mailed to them as well. The day of their event(s), participants would be able to bring their bib and device with the confirmation of the check in to any of the waiting volunteers who can ensure they reach the correct area and answer any questions they might have. The process of changing the customer experience would begin after this year, as registration has already begun.

### **C. Proposed metrics or key performance indicators to measure plan effectiveness**

After the plan has been implemented, the organization would like to verify the effectiveness of the process. Because the Wild Hog Marathon Weekend Organization already has a survey to rate the overall customer experience of the weekend, simply adding a few questions relating to the process of the online registration and check-in would be easy and less time consuming than creating another survey for the customers to fill out. If the customers are mostly satisfied then comments and questions can be analyzed to keep

improving the process of the online registration and check in. Improvements over time would benefit the customers and the organization by way of overall convenience.

## **VI. COST ASSOCIATED WITH PROPOSED PLAN**

Not all proposed changes will require a budget. Contacting sponsors early on only requires a phone call or email. Collecting the money, which is the same process every year, would just take place earlier. Adding questions to the registration would not cost money and creating a form for the online check-in can be done for free on a number of sites, for example, google forms. To distribute the swag, bib, and race timer, it would likely be shipped in a medium flat rate box which costs about \$12.85. The overall price of this plan is no cost to the Wild Hog Marathon Organization; whoever chooses to have their swag shipped would pay the shipping fees. Those who choose not to have their swag shipped would be responsible for picking up their items at the Scheels Expo and the day of the race.

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**VIII. Appendix**

