

5-2021

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Stories of Resilience During COVID-19 Pandemic

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9/9/20

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Abstract

Community Builders for Monterey County is a non-profit serving online and physical hubs linking citizens with local needs within the population of Monterey County. Its mission is making connections, while assisting nonprofits to retain new/returning volunteers. The problem is communities are impacted by COVID-19 to the extent where agencies encounter issues because of new procedures and requirements needed to be taken to meet COVID protocols. The purpose is to address client concerns of new adjustments through developing interviews for stories of resilience. The outcome is to conduct a total of five stories where they share information to acknowledge the innovation in the resiliency of non-profit's good will. The result is that agencies who participated were encouraged to help during such unusual times, providing little to big changes such as who was involved, what challenges they faced, and what they learned to pass onto future struggles that can help communities.

Keywords: Volunteers, negatively impact nonprofits, resiliency, awareness. interviews

Agency & Communities Served

Community Builders for Monterey County (CBMC), serves as an online and physical hub that links community members to impact local needs within the diverse population of Monterey County in order to build a vibrant community. CBMC strives to further its overall mission by connecting volunteers to specific causes of their choosing, while also assisting nonprofits to retain new and returning volunteers. The main focus of the population within Community Builders varies from adults, adopted/foster youth or young adults, immigrants/refugees, people experiencing poverty, impacted by crime, and experiencing homelessness. This agency is really open to take any volunteers in and be able to create projects that can really make a difference to the community. Community Builders for Monterey County currently has over 90 organizations and that number is still growing so the greater the number of volunteers the better for not only to get hands-on experience for one's self but for their community also. Every volunteer that the agency receives has the ability to get started right away and each is assigned to different organizations/agencies that have already reached out to Community Builders and makes sure we are doing our best to get their needs done by either doing some phone calls, sending emails, etc.

Community Builders also have their own website where they can access the agencies they have within their system and see whether that agency's information is correct and up to date to further the process. They then have to do a lot of research based on those agencies and get to know them a little better to develop a stronger understanding of what they are and what they do in order for us to be able to send volunteers their way. All in all Community Builders is a broad nonprofit startup with some pretty ambitious goals and that are on the lookout for people who are

equally as ambitious to get involved and have the ability to gain new skills and experiences while also helping and serving the communities that are around them.

Community Builders for Monterey County is highly open-minded when it comes to serving communities who are in need of volunteering programs/opportunities. Most of the cities that my agency serves are within Salinas, Monterey, and Pacific Grove in which we are located. Some organizations typically hear about us through other agencies, but it is most likely for them to hear from us through emails or phone calls because we are the ones reaching out to them asking if they need any assistance with their volunteering programs. CBMC also uses a website they created to connect any volunteers all over Monterey County; volunteerism has been a huge key in building healthy different communities (2020). Today, Community Builders remains a diverse volunteer-driven grassroots activity of students, youthful professionals and philanthropic veterans. We stay focused on serving the requirements of Monterey County by interfacing our neighbors to freedoms to draw in with the local area and have a significant effect (Sammon, T. 2020).

The U.S Census quick facts show that the highest population from all three cities that are listed above is Salinas, California of 155,465. Most agencies/organizations that Community Builders serve are located within that city and are known to have a lot more organizations that are yet to be identified in our system. Pacific Grove, California has the least population of 15,413 from all three cities, but that's where our agency is located and where it is most likely to be seen and reached out to when looking for help for the community. At the moment, Community Builders has a total of ninety organizations in their system and those are all within Monterey County as a whole with of course more agencies waiting to get assistance also.

Some agencies typically stick around for a very long time because they really do need the help, but others stay around for only a short period of time and then let us know they don't want to be in our system anymore just because they aren't offering any volunteering opportunities at the moment. COVID-19 has had a huge impact on that topic because it is much harder for an organization to reach out for assistance when there is a pandemic through it all and not much we can do to stay one hundred percent healthy while still trying to maintain our daily lives.

Community Builders for Monterey County's vision is to become some sort of ecosystem to be able to combine community members together and reach their everyday needs and be able to connect, challenge each other with social issues and share ideas to maintain a good quality lifestyle that helps everybody meet their community needs. Therefore, this agency really has a broad set of issues they can face because they first have to get in contact with an organization and learn about it and identify their needs. For example, within our system, we have an agency named ITN (Independent Transportation Network), a volunteer-driven nonprofit that helps senior citizens transport wherever they need to go. Therefore, it does depend on the type of agency and what their mission is, and what they are committed to doing for the community.

The population that Community Builders addresses is unique because I wasn't aware of this agency and what they do before and now that I am aware, it is very helpful not only to the organizations reaching out but also to the communities around them within their public health and social justice. They are committed to reaching out to any type of need that has to do with communities such as public health, economy, social issues, etc.

My agency primarily serves communities to strengthen their quality of life by connecting volunteers together to reach local needs and make a difference. For example, during a pandemic many communities can be at risk of losing services provided to them. Community Builders

thrive to make any suggestions and changes whether it is through emails or phone calls to ensure that they are working with the community one and one basis to be able to identify the correct opportunities that fit one's interest, skills and needs. moment, with a high number of volunteers gives us more opportunities to be able to reach out to a numerous number of organizations that really need the assistance. We still highly encourage other students and people from the community to reach out and get to know a little more about Community Builders and see if that is something they would like to assist us with.

Problem Description

The stories of a resiliency project will address nonprofit agencies and their concerns on how the pandemic, COVID-19 has negatively impacted their requirements to give to the communities around them by collecting information and creating stories on what is being done differently within the nonprofits. Nonprofit agencies are struggling during COVID-19 because of new procedures and requirements needed to be taken. It is known that a few changes within the community have been going around adjusting to the current unusual times, but have not been recognized by the clients. These organizations have been hit hard during this pandemic and new studies have identified that they are being asked to put in more work and effort with no higher wages and with little staff involved (Pasic, A. Jovanovich, M. Voss, M., 2020). Clients want to be aware if community engagement is connecting with networks to be able to support their communities.

The initial purpose of the Stories of Resilience project is to collect and document any changes that are happening throughout the pandemic times and how individuals work together in organizations so that we can learn from moving forward as a community. This will be determined through surveys and remote interviews that help us collect interesting data on drastic

changes. The outcome of this is to create a showcase for the public and community to acknowledge the innovation in the resiliency of everybody's good doing. CBMC expectations for this project are to help build stronger relationships with communities part affiliated with Latino communities such as farmworkers and those who are underserved mostly in the Monterey/South County area to help understand what is going on and if services will be eliminated or changed.

Contributing Factors

Contributing factors that can contribute to the issue include higher community engagement. For example, if there is not that much engagement within the community then the result would be that the changes would remain the same or even decrease. Without community engagement that would mean nobody is being told or being aware of implementing changes. According to Tish Sammon, she expresses how she shares new changes/programs to clients that they appear to not be aware of. The impact that COVID-19 gives is not having the ability for organizations and agencies to perform their regular tasks/work also having to do with traditional funding. It has disrupted because of the pandemic and it disrupts its ability to provide services to meet its mission which is initiated to make changes to provide longer term resiliency and community needs. According to Rebecca Robbins (2020), COVID-19 had canceled many in-person events and has left them with a funding shortfall that has led them to end grant funding, cut down staff, and even worse to shut down entirely.

Another risk factor can be clients' demands expand and needs may need to shift around. While monetary assets might be decreasing, interest for a nonprofit organization may increase during and after a pandemic. Past studies show that Hurricane Katrina (a disaster), demonstrated nonprofits chipping away at health and wellbeing, frequently had more customers looking for

help. There are cutoff points to what a charitable organization can do, however, the examination proposed that nonprofit organizations could utilize monetary stores and other accessible assets to address these extra requirements and may likewise need to look for supplemental donations to balance the cost of additional assistance requests. Therefore with that type of resiliency, we have to find new ways to find resiliency. Many clients and even staff are often vulnerable which leads them to having to shut down person to person contact that includes providing services.

Consequences

Consequences can also occur when nothing new is being done to have the community feeling safe around the pandemic. As much as traditional funding can be seen as a contributing factor it can also be addressed as a consequence. Before the pandemic began nonprofit organizations were under-resourced because they had budgets under \$500,000 according to Harvard Business Review. “The pandemic has severely reduced our fundraising revenue and forced us to take significant cost-saving measures,” American Cancer Society (ACS) Community Development Manager, Stephen Cavanaugh, told USA TODAY. The American Cancer Society was forced to make dramatic changes to its budget and funding costs reducing its budget by 30%. At this point, if funding trends continue to adapt the (ACS) program will be at a higher risk of a funding cut. Another consequence can be having a complete shutdown due to not having enough funds or resources to keep going through an unusual time. Lastly, cutting interactions with populations the agency serves can also interfere with the micro-level problem because with no person-to-person meets people will most likely not have any other way to reach out.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
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Factor 1: Low community engagement	Nonprofit agencies are struggling during COVID-19 because of new procedures and requirements needed to be taken.	Consequence 1: Reduction of services
Factor 2: Traditional funding		Consequence 2: Shutdowns
Factor 3: Clients' demands		Consequence 3: Cutting volunteer interactions.

Overview

The first stages of my capstone project begins from September 2020 to the very last stages that will be finalized and completed in May 2021. This project is worth a lot of work and will need effort and time to be completed. From the beginning of researching to developing the stories of resiliency itself with data gathered. This capstone project will be a great opportunity for non profit organizations to help serve during unusual circumstances such as COVID-19 to the community.

During this project there is a need of having a total of at least 4-5 stories or resilience to be able to give and tell to the audience in the community in order to ensure and bring out awareness that they are not alone. The final stages of my capstone project will assist, support and bring assurance to the people who have been affected by the deadly pandemic through non profit organizations.

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project & Project Purpose

A nonprofit organization is a business that is operated for a collective by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) since it promotes a social cause and gives a public benefit. Community

Builders for Monterey County is nonprofit organization management that is committed to addressing regular and volunteering needs for other nonprofit agencies. Communities tend to not be aware of the mission that CBMC is out to put to the public. COVID-19 has brought a lot of scariness into some organizations and they are left with negative impacts that can possibly leave them with a complete shutdown on providing to the community.

As a starter, Community Builders for Monterey County individuals have been doing some research on nonprofit organizations to see if they are indeed struggling through new adjustments because of the huge hit the pandemic has given to everybody. We want to find out if they are struggling and what they are doing differently to change that impact in order to keep their services going for the public. This project will help Community Builders for Monterey County expand our reach to organizations and volunteers which is our focus and will justify our message of making community connections, we will be able to build our programs from what we learn from this project.

Many nonprofit organizations are having to completely shut down, lay off numerous staff, and have to cut resources and funds for the public. McCartney (2020) features a non-profit in Rockville, MD., at risk of closing along with their programs that support victims of trauma, “the organization has also been notified that it will not receive grants it was expecting and has laid off all five of its paid instructors” (McCartney, R., 2020). A global survey has demonstrated that some nonprofit organizations are at very high risk of completely closing down within the next year due to coronavirus. The survey which was conducted by the Charities Aid Foundation (2020), discovers that one-third of nonprofit organizations are experiencing fund debts. Other organizations are having a very difficult time trying to figure out how their services will continue to strive during this pandemic and if they will also be the ones to shut down as well. The

Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) survey was able to show that 16% of different agencies were highly affected by the coronavirus pandemic that they were not able to receive the usual funding they typically receive every month (Nonprofit Business Advisor, 2020). The survey also allows us to see that the pandemic is shifting charities around the world. Finding new ways to engage with donors towards funding was one positive aspect of the survey, whether it was by developing new or making smaller fundraising campaigns. Remotely campaigns were an idea to make it easier for those who donated to be highly engaged during the current conditions.

This project will help Community Builders for Monterey County help address nonprofit organization's challenges that they might be facing during the pandemic that can dramatically shift them from having new restrictions. It will also inform the community of any new changes being made within the agencies that can potentially benefit them from going through difficult times.

Project Justification

Purpose explained above - goal is to hear and see changes that are being made are effective and that the community is aware to be able to receive services needed under certain circumstances during COVID-19. As well as looking at what changes and challenges nonprofit organizations have faced during this time which include, lack of funding, shutdowns, cut staff, lower incomes, less services, unreliable services that may affect the community which they are striving to serve. Finally, to be able to demonstrate through a showcase the wellbeing of each other whether it's the community and the nonprofits.

CBMC has collected many different types of information on stories that explain what changes are being made, for example interviewing nonprofit Alliance on Aging we were able to find out they created a cards of humanity little project. In response to the extreme isolation

seniors had to endure as a result of the COVID pandemic lockdown, one non-profit organization and volunteers from all around the county set out to bring some joy and connection to the 2,846 seniors in long term care, skilled nursing and assisted living facilities by creating over 6000 cards (Pina. M, 2020). CBMC will provide awareness of what nonprofits are going through and what changes, steps, challenges they have to encounter to get through with their services and provide to the community. CBMC has a big team of volunteers and staff from the last semester I joined. Together we gave in ideas and thoughts on what we can do for our agency and the community. Later, CBMC proposed this project where it would collect stories online and provide a showcase so that these incredible efforts could be celebrated and shared broadly. The goal of the project is to bring forward stories that will inspire others to get involved (volunteering) in both organized and individual grassroots efforts that build community resilience even in the most difficult times.

Project Implementation

The network needs strengthening in Monterey County and this project is going to address that agency-level issue with community engagement and how it is responding to the pandemic. As a starter, our CBMC team created a whole spreadsheet that was full with a total of almost 50+ different agencies with whom we were able to identify and possibly have interaction. Of Course, we weren't able to get a hold of each and one of them but did have a good amount of who was able to contact us back but weren't willing to be a part of the project. Fortunately, there were a total of five organizations that were really excited about being involved with the stories of the resilience project. It started out by contacting them either through phone calls or email and I would explain to them that it would be conducted through an interview which included a total of about ten questions. The interviews always took a while to conduct because the agencies would

have a lot of interesting information for CBMC. Interviews were as long as an hour and a half, shortly after I would reflect on what was given to me and create a story out of the data that could be shared with the public.

By the end of this project, a minimum of 5 stories was completed through these interviews and part of public initial showcases promoted to the Monterey County area to initiate recognition in actions of community building in response to COVID-19.

Participants

My role and responsibilities carrying out this project will consist of identifying and reaching out to nonprofits that are interested in sharing their experiences behind COVID-19 struggles. This project will include everybody who is involved with CBMC as a team. We are researching nonprofit organizations and reaching out to them as needed. Now that we are beginning to develop this project I don't think we are going to have representatives from agency partners, it would just consist of the various agencies we will reach out to.

Resources

Setting up a lot of interviews to be able to get information that we are looking for and being able to meet remotely to discuss community assets that can contribute to the project.

Supplemental

The need for this project to keep the ball rolling is to be able to reach out to organizations and hope to receive answers back, if we don't hear from them we would continue to do more research on other nonprofit organizations and try to reach out to them as well. After completing this first step, then we would like to write these stories to make it aware to the public how the services are continuing to adjust during this unusual time.

Potential Challenges

The biggest challenge we can face during this project is not being able to receive enough information to develop stories and not being able to showcase the results in person to see the public's reaction.

COVID-19 Accommodations

The actions that would be taken to follow state and county safety guidelines will be to keep services provided remotely along with the interviews, zoom meeting, sending emails, and phone calls for developing stories.

Scope of view Overview

Title: Stories of Resilience

The story of resilience project is going to address agency-level concerns on community engagement in Monterey County's organization's ability or inability to respond to pandemic times such as COVID-19 through stories of resilience by collecting data on changes being made through downfalls within nonprofits. The goal of this project is to help individuals and communities be aware and part of making a change to see what can be done through pandemic times to support resilience and innovative approaches. This project will consist of multiple tasks in order to be completed. One main task is to identify and collect the stories of resilience and community building in the south county area. As well as highlighting the changes in responses that have helped strengthen the community.

Phase 1: Planning- Establishing interview procedures, Researching community and agencies, Promoting showcase

Phase 2: Implementation- Carrying out the interview in a team to collect the stories and activities. Creating the stories on how it's going to be presented.

Phase 3: Presentation & Promotion: Collect and build the stories to put them all together for one presentation to promote it towards the community and generate interest in this project. Getting to know my community better will help me reach out to people and gain more research.

Phase 4: Evaluation- To be designed and evaluating on what works and what doesn't. Meeting my goal and receiving feedback from those who participated and visited the site in some way.

For example creating a survey to see what communities think about the presentation and if it had an actual purpose. As mentioned above, a lot of researching was done before and during the implementation. Creating surveys before and after that gave feedback from different sites. After implementation, getting all the information from the stories together to have one whole presentation showcase that gave interest to the public. I created a plan where I documented and had outlines for the community research looking at whom I interacted with and identified how south county was impacted by COVID-19. The main deliverables for this project was developing stories and completing a total of five from the Monterey County community. Projected timeline began with planning, research and gathering information by at least the end of March beginning of April as an outreach to be ready to go by May.

Assessment Plan

The outcome from this piece of this project is to give CBMC the ability to expand our programs to South County to support the connection of volunteers to community needs. Knowing the community organizations, active groups and key leaders will help us help others through community engagement by delivering a total of five stories with different organizations. Doing research for stories of resilience will help determine evidence to measure the outcome by finding main points of organizations such as what they do, who they are, who is involved, etc.

The data will be collected and inserted into an excel spreadsheet for the CBMC team to be able to connect and share any insights. A knowledge/directory or list of community organizations, community groups that are actively engaged (or engaging) to support a healthy thriving community through community engagement (our mission). The method that will be used to gather evidence to measure the outcome is having an evaluation survey for those individuals who were part of and participated in the online showcase if applicable in any way at the end of the capstone project or for those who were part of the individuals that gave us information on their agencies. This will help to design and evaluate what seems to have worked and what can be improved for future reference. At the end of the capstone, we say that CBMC has a path and introduction to South County communities through the stories project and research project to support strengthening community engagement and celebrating resilience/community building during this time.

My capstone project's short-term outcome is to increase knowledge of the changes of community organizations during the pandemic. Once we have gathered information we would be able to analyze and put together stories for the community to gain awareness and develop a better understanding of their resources. The intermediate outcome of my capstone project is to be able to meet organizational volunteer needs to improve access for the community that can help them during uncertain times such as the pandemic. Lastly, my capstone project's long-term outcome will be to see all stories of resilience in South County together and recognize the community's well-doing through organizations.

Expected Outcomes

This capstone project will bring out the community's resiliency and help everybody come together during uncertain times in order to keep resources and programs ongoing for the public. Living through a deadly pandemic can cause a lot of losses within the community which involve shutting down some agencies that provide reliable resources for citizens.

Project Results

Appendix

Scope of Work Template (<i>Sample phases, activities, deliverables, timeline</i>)					
Title: Stories of Resilience					
Project description: Stories of resilience that help serve the community through pandemic times.					
Goal: For new resources to be out to the public to become aware of in order to receive the services they need.					
Primary objective of the project: Provide the community with stories of resilience for them to be aware of and take advantage of as we all know the pandemic can cause inconveniences.					
Phases		Activities/Tasks		Deliverables	Timeline/ deadlines
1	Select capstone project	1.1	Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor and agency staff	Generate a list of capstone project ideas.	Sept 2020

		1.2	Discuss ideas with agency staff	Submit a list of potential ideas to mentor for review/approval	Oct 2020
2	Plan project	2.1	Narrow down steps needed to ensure the project is a success, begin researching nonprofits organizations.	Research all nonprofit organizations we are interested in and reach out via email/phone call to get in contact.	Nov 2020
		2.2	Introduce research findings to my mentor and rest of the team to receive feedback.	After collecting research, set up remote interviews with nonprofits.	Nov/Dec 2020
3	Implement project	3.1	Organize all information/stories.	Collect research, information and feedback in order to create stories.	Dec/Jan 2020-2021
		3.2	Begin getting all maximum 10 stories together.	Begin to implement sources and helpful information to the stories of resilience.	Jan/Feb 2021
		3.3	Finalize stories of resilience/	Check to make sure final touches are made, and everything is correct.	Feb/Mar 2021
4	Assess project	4.1	Analyze Data	Analyze data from pre and post surveys from stakeholders	April 2021
		4.2	Survey Analysis	See if anything can be changed	April 2021

5	Report on project findings	5.1	Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	May 2021
		5.2	Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	Present at Dress Rehearsal for grading	May 2021
		5.3	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final Capstone Festival presentation!	May 2021

One of the stories collected, for example, was with the Elkhorn Slough organization where they were able to connect to their served population through a social media page (Facebook) that was created prior to the shelter in place but with many more followers after doing some research and edits to the activities being placed. The Facebook page sought to keep users busy while having fun at the same time. By adding eye-catching and interesting pictures to the webpage created by Hunter, in addition to the new necessity of online activities, users logged on frequently. Although they could all agree the in-person programs were preferred by all, the online services allowed Elkhorn Slough to remain open and serve the community. Once they got the hang of using this online platform, Ariel and Virginia were able to get more creative with it. One week, they posted pictures of cute animals that seemed to get the attention of more people and increase participation. By the end of the week, they notice a dramatic change in their followers... by over 1,000!

Hunter was able to share that the ending result of covid impacting their organization turned out to be a huge positive change than they anticipated and it's all thanks to the Facebook page, the in-person interaction with the organization grew. Locals who had not previously

known about Elkhorn Slough were now discovering another great local place to experience the benefits of nature in a variety of ways.

There was another similar story that I was able to gather with All in Monterey. Tanya Kosta, along with her friends, created a Facebook group as a way for people to support each other through these difficult times. Facebook, a convenient way to reach a large group of people virtually, served as a successful virtual platform to bring the community together. All in Monterey County became a private Facebook group that encouraged community members to support each other throughout the pandemic. The media page had an “all in-market” event twice a week where members of the community could request delivery on their free essential items such as food or supplies. Tanya was able to share that The result of this project was to let people know they aren’t alone.

The last story I conducted was a little different with Alliance on Aging. They shared new projects in regards to changes they made. The Cards for Humanity project was one creative initiative to strengthen connection when their clients needed it most. The idea was simple and beautiful: Send a card to each and every resident of these facilities to let them know that their community cares about them! Through community support, Masks with Monterey has offered about 8,000 facemasks throughout Monterey County.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The stories of resilience projects consist of multiple tasks in order to be completed and successful. The method that will be used for this project’s outcome is to be able to identify what organizations are doing and pinpoint their volunteer needs as the problem is that nonprofits are struggling, and community members don't know the changes that have occurred in providing

services. We did have planned to deliver an online showcase where we conduct interviews with the community's nonprofit organizations to increase and improve society's awareness of the community's well-doing when changes are being made during unusual times like COVID-19. Unfortunately, putting stories together is taking much longer than anticipated therefore, we face the challenge of not being sure when we're actually going to kick off the showcase. Along with expanding the outreach of Community Builders for Monterey County specifically towards South County by identifying community organizations and neighborhood groups that we possibly haven't been involved with beforehand.

The deliverable of this project was conducting interviews with organizations and collecting a total of five stories as a team. However, I had the opportunity to conduct and be part of three of those interviews. After finalizing the stories of the resiliency project I would like to share that I was able to gain knowledge about many non-profit organizations I was not familiar with prior to doing outreach. Community Builders for Monterey County strives to meet its mission and connect to the community with its strong ethic staff team. My advice to CBMC would be to keep doing what they are doing to bring out special events that can possibly help recruit volunteers to help us come together as a community.

Personal Reflection

As a result of my capstone project, I would like to say that although I had quite different plan results for it I still found it to be very successful. I was able to connect with different people and organizations within the Monterey County community. Some of the agencies that I made connections with were very new to me and surprising to hear the challenges they have had to face during the pandemic. Some individuals went out of their way to ensure their community wasn't going through a hard patch and did anything possible to maintain providing their

resources. Whether that was getting creative with social media or delivering little things to keep the community aware and entertained.

I had a lot of research to do behind this project. There were times of frustration because not all organizations I was personally interested in wanting to be involved in. My main focus at first was getting information from non-profit organizations who resided in Monterey County, but not many were up for the project. As I kept doing research I was able to find some agencies who were still very eye-opening and set up interviews with. Although I was only able to collect a total of three interview stories I found it to be very exciting and interesting to take on the valuable knowledge they have to provide to the community.

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