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### **Project and Responsibilities**

During the Summer of 2021, I spent 8 weeks doing a remote internship with a public interest collective called Solid Waste Management Roundtable (SWMRT) in Bangalore, India. SMWRT works to increase awareness about solid waste management strategies by hosting campaigns, doing interactive sessions, and compiling an online repertoire.

My project was primarily creating content for their website ([swachagraha.in](http://swachagraha.in)). They wanted their website to be a one-stop location for urban dwellers who wanted to implement sustainable waste management strategies at their homes. The website aimed to accomplish this in two ways. First, I had to make 7 modules to teach beginners how to start gardens at their homes. Second, I had to create content about composting methods that could be adapted for residences as composting is an effective way to manage organic waste and transform it into a vital resource for home-gardening. Since the project had 2 main components, I spent 4 weeks working on each.

For the home-gardening section, my responsibilities included the following. To create the content for the modules, I had to conduct interviews with subject-matter experts who were identified by SMWRT. Their input during our meetings formed the backbone of each module. To compile frequently-asked-questions for each module, I reached out to beginner gardeners on multiple social media platforms. After collecting their questions, I went back to the experts to answer them. Additionally, I had to do independent secondary research to ensure that the website addressed nuanced concerns that may not have been initially broached by my mentors within SWMRT. I also had to collaborate with an illustrator who created visuals for the written content to breakdown processes and make them easier to grasp. A large amount of my time was spent combing through previously made-videos, transcribing them, and adapting them for the website.

For the composting section, my tasks were largely similar to the home-gardening section. I had to summarise various types of composting methods such as anaerobic (which occurs without the presence of oxygen), aerobic (which requires the presence of oxygen), and vermicomposting (which requires earthworms). I also had to create basic tutorials for people who would like to start composting at home. Additionally, I had to compose the script for a video about the tank-method of composting which is an example of community composting.

## **Challenges**

The nature of my internship allowed me to develop multiple leadership skills simultaneously. These included but were not limited to the SMART goals I had initially set for myself. All in all, I found my learning curve to be rather steep because I was working remotely and independently.

The biggest challenge I faced was deciding what to include in the modules. Since I was doing a lot of secondary research, I needed to make sure that I was not flooding the website with unnecessary content that might confuse viewers. To make sure I was being succinct and clear, I had my family members read the content before I added it to the templates.

An awkward challenge I encountered was not knowing what to do when I reached out to people but they did not get back to me. On a few occasions, I had to contact various people to plan sections for the modules. Despite my messaging them, I would often not hear back. In such situations, I decided not to contact them repeatedly and just tell my mentors that I was unable to connect with them. Eventually, I recognise that I will need to learn how to contact them, get the tasks done, and avoid feeling like I am pestering them for their time.

## **SMART Goals**

At the beginning of the internship, the three SMART goals I had set for myself were self-knowledge and awareness, effective communication, and resilience and determination to achieve. The first goal was self-knowledge and awareness. This internship allowed me to objectively assess my own knowledge about sustainable waste management strategies in urban areas. Since I was creating modules to teach others how to manage waste, I had to do a significant amount of research to enhance my own understanding and make sure I convey accurate and reliable information to viewers of the website. As the internship progressed, I understood how little I knew about home-gardening and home-composting. The weekly feedback sessions with my mentors helped me learn continuously and ensured that I incorporated their feedback so that the end product met all their requirements and specifications. Such sessions were useful because I got input from my mentors who are themselves experts in the field, and they pointed me towards the right resources to enhance my understanding.

The second goal was effective communication. Since the internship was entirely remote, effective communication was a particularly vital goal that I accomplished. For example, my weekly meetings with my mentors were via video call where I would present my work in a presentation

format. This helped me work on my presentation skills, voice modulation, and confidence in my abilities to communicate the knowledge I was accumulating. Meetings with the experts were done over voice call which allowed me to work on slow and clear communication. Lastly, I had to ensure that my final deliverable (which was the website content) was communicated in a way that taught viewers about home-gardening and home-composting. In a way, the experience of being accountable for completing tasks for my mentors who were people I had never met before was similar to doing online classes during the peak of the pandemic. Initially, the fact that the internship was entirely remote was quite daunting but I am glad that I adapted quickly to this new system of communication.

The third goal was resilience and determination to achieve. A large portion of the internship was independent work. This helped me work on my stamina and resilience when it came to ensuring that my weekly deadlines were met. A big responsibility of my project was writing content that was accessible and communicated the basics without intellectualising the basic facts. This was vital to make sure that the website enabled viewers to start living more sustainably. I feel that the latter part of the goal- determination to achieve- will not be immediately known because the website is not up and running yet. However, during my last conversation with my mentors, they sounded confident that the website that I helping create would help a large proportion of urban residents in Bangalore learn how to live more sustainably.

### **Community Impact**

In terms of community impact, I hope that people realize the contribution they are making by segregating and subsequently composting their organic waste at the source. I perceive the community impact of this internship to be long-term as urban dwellers are actively trying to tackle the problem of mismanaged waste. From a solid waste management perspective, solutions such as the ones that Swacha Graha are promoting are increasingly worthwhile and particularly effective. I hope the information that the website provides makes people feel a little less helpless when it comes to the garbage crises in their cities.