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The Home Project: Zillow's Signature Social Impact Program

Jennifer Butler has been the Manager of Government Relations and Public Affairs at the Zillow Group for about the last year and a half. In that time, she has been busy developing the company's signature CSR program: The Home Project. Throught this program, the company has committed $5 million over the next five years to address challenges around housing insecurity through the following initiatives:

- **Community Partnerships** – Zillow Group is partnering with local nonprofit organizations in each of the nine communities where they have offices: Seattle (headquarters), San Francisco, Denver, Irvine, New York, Cincinnati, Lincoln, Atlanta, and Vancouver, BC
- **Neighborhood Ambassadors** – Purpose-driven employees, who are passionate about supporting their communities, can nominate a nonprofit for a $2,000 contribution and coordinate a volunteer project.
- **In-Kind Services and Product Contributions** – As a technology company in the real estate space, Zillow Group is in a unique position to leverage its expertise — from product development, to economic research, to public affairs and marketing support — to raise awareness of and create solutions to address the needs of those who are housing vulnerable.

Portfolio Brands
Zillow Group is a relatively young company; only 12 years old in February 2018. With ~3,100 employees in 9 locations (~1,300 in Seattle), the company's brands focus on all stages of the home lifecycle: renting, buying, selling, financing and home improvement, with the goal of empowering consumers with data, inspiration and knowledge around homes, and connecting them with the right local professionals to help. With 7 consumer brands: Zillow, Trulia, StreetEasy, Hotpads, Naked Apartments, and RealEstate.com, and 3 Business brands: Bridge Interactive, Dot Loop, and Mortech, Zillow Group has made a significant impact on the availability of information in the Real Estate market. "According to Google Trends, the term "Zillow" is now searched more frequently than "Real Estate" in the U.S."

Industry Disruptor
In a marketplace that, prior to the free flow of real estate pricing data, relied heavily on the concentration of information in the hands of a few, Zillow has been a market and industry disruptor. Prior to Zillow, a seller had to rely on a market analysis provided by an agent, and a buyer had to trust an agent that the price was truly "market" priced. The internet has changed the markets for cars, books, food - virtually everything, and in each market there have been winners and there have been losers. The markets have had to shift to

accommodate the changed dynamics created by the free availability of pricing information and product availability.

Housing Insecurity

Housing insecurity bookends homelessness, ranging from being a paycheck or a medical event away from losing your home, to experiencing homelessness but on the cusp of getting back into a home. Zillow Group wants to provide the tools and networks that will help them get consumers to a place of stability.

As rents rise, more people face housing insecurity. Last year, Zillow published groundbreaking research on rising rents in U.S. metros and its direct link to increased homelessness. In LA, for example, if rent goes up just 5 percent, that means 2,000 more people will be homeless. The number jumps to 3,000 in New York. In Seattle, that increase would add 258 people to the homeless population for a total of 12,498. Zillow's forecasts show rent will increase next year by 3 and 5 percent in NY and LA metros respectively. Nationally, at least 550,000 people experienced homelessness for at least one night in 2016.

Ramping up Impact

Zillow Group's three primary strategies of The Home Project as listed above (Partners, Ambassadors, and In-Kind) are significant ways to make an impact on the issue of housing insecurity. The success of the project, however, will depend upon the tactical implementation within each market that engages significant stakeholders in leveraging Zillow's resources to create maximum impact.

Just as engaging employees is a good business strategy (link), Zillow has a business interest in engaging real estate agents as a significant leverage point to amplify the impact of The Home Project. This constituency has been slow to accept Zillow as a partner, (see disruptor above) so engagement could pose a challenge.

Jennifer has asked your team to study Zillow Group, The Home Project, the US Real Estate market, and the issue of homelessness and housing insecurity to identify tactical applications of their three primary strategies that will create the most community impact. What opportunities exist to leverage Zillow's assets and expertise to significantly affect the lives of people who are on the verge of being homeless? How can Zillow best engage with their different stakeholder groups (e.g. agents) to amplify the impact of this signature CSR program?

Jennifer has asked you to consider the risks, rewards, and implications for stakeholder constituencies involved in your recommendations as well as the potential impact on the Zillow Group brands and reputation.

You have the next 72 hours to develop your presentation for the panel of judges who will represent the leadership of Zillow Group. You will have 15 minutes to make your presentation and to convince the panel that your team's recommendations represent the best course of action at this time. The judges will then have 10 minutes to ask you questions about your recommendations. Be prepared to defend your position in a professional manner. You may use any publicly available information about Zillow Group and its brands, homelessness and housing insecurity, CSR strategy, employee engagement, and trends in corporate social responsibility, community relations and philanthropy. You may not contact any organizations for additional information nor consult anyone outside your team.

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