

University of Kansas

Work Group for Community Health and Development



<http://ctb.ku.edu/en>

Communications to Promote Interest

Developing a Plan for Communication

Developing a communication plan can help focus your message and reach your target audience. A plan can also influence the efficiency and simplicity of your communication methods. This section looks at what a communication plan entails, how and when to create one, and how to use a communication plan to raise awareness about your issue or project.

What do we mean by communication?

Communication is the process of transmitting ideas and information. For a grass roots initiative or community based organization, that means conveying the true nature of your organization, the issues it deals with, and its accomplishments to the community.

Communication can take many forms, including:

- Word of mouth
- News stories in both print and broadcast media
- Press releases and press conferences
- Posters, brochures, and fliers
- Outreach and presentations to other health and community service providers and to community groups and organizations
- Special events and open houses that your organization holds

To communicate effectively, it helps to plan out what you want from your communication, and what you need to do to get it.

What is a plan for communication?

Planning is a way to organize actions that will lead to the fulfillment of a goal.

Your goal in this case is to raise awareness about your initiative's long-term benefits to your community.

To [develop a plan for communication](#) of any sort, you have to consider some basic questions:

- Why do you want to communicate with the community? **(What's your purpose?)**
- Whom do you want to communicate it to? **(Who's your audience?)**
- What do you want to communicate? **(What's your message?)**
- How do you want to communicate it? **(What communication channels will you use?)**
- Whom should you contact and what should you do in order to use those channels? **(How will you actually distribute your message?)**

The answers to these questions constitute your action plan, what you need to do in order to communicate successfully with your audience. The remainder of your communication plan, involves three steps:

- **Implement your action plan.** Design your message and distribute it to your intended audience.
- **Evaluate your communication efforts, and adjust your plan accordingly.**
- **Keep at it**

Communication is an ongoing activity for any organization that serves, depends upon, or is in any way connected with the community. The purpose, audience, message, and channels may change, but the need to maintain relationships with the media and with key people in the community remain. As a result, an important part of any communication plan is to continue using and revising your plan, based on your experience, throughout the existence of your organization.

Why should you develop a plan for communication?

- A plan will make it possible to target your communication accurately. It gives you a structure to determine whom you need to reach and how.
- A plan can be long-term, helping you map out how to raise your profile and refine your image in the community over time.

- A plan will make your communication efforts more efficient, effective, and lasting.
- A plan makes everything easier. If you spend some time planning at the beginning of an effort, you can save a great deal of time later on, because you know exactly what you should be doing at any point in the process.

When should you develop a plan for communication?

As soon as your organization begins planning its objectives and activities, you should also begin planning ways to communicate them; successful communication is an ongoing process, not a one-time event.

Communication is useful at all points in your organization's development - it can help get the word out about a new organization, renew interest in a long-standing program, or help attract new funding sources.

How do you develop a plan for communication?

One way to look at planning for communication is as an eight-step process.

The steps are:

1. Identify the purpose of your communication
2. Identify your audience
3. Plan and design your message
4. Consider your resources
5. Plan for obstacles and emergencies
6. Strategize how you'll connect with the media and others who can help you spread your message
7. Create an action plan
8. Decide how you'll evaluate your plan and adjust it, based on the results of carrying it out

1. Identify your purpose.

What you might want to say depends on what you're trying to accomplish with your communication strategy. You might be concerned with one or a combination of the following:

- Becoming known, or better known, in the community
- Educating the public about the issue your organization addresses
- Recruiting program participants or beneficiaries
- Recruiting volunteers to help with your work
- Rallying supporters or the general public to action for your cause
- Announcing events
- Celebrating honors or victories
- Raising money to fund your work

- Countering the arguments, mistakes, or, occasionally, the lies or misrepresentations of those opposed to your work.
- Dealing with an organizational crisis that's public knowledge – a staff member who commits a crime, for example, or a lawsuit aimed at the organization.

2. Identify your audience.

Who are you trying to reach? Knowing who your audience is makes it possible to plan your communication logically. You'll need different messages for different groups, and you'll need different channels and methods to reach each of those groups.

There are many different ways to think about your audience and the ways they could best be contacted. First, there's the question of what group(s) you'll focus on. You can group people according to a number of characteristics:

- *Demographics.* Demographics are simply basic statistical information about people, such as gender, age, ethnic and racial background, income, etc.
- *Geography.* You might want to focus on a whole town or region, on one or more neighborhoods, or on people who live near a particular geographic or man-made feature.
- *Employment.* You may be interested in people in a particular line of work, or in people who are unemployed.
- *Health.* Your concern might be with people at risk for or experiencing a particular condition – high blood pressure, perhaps, or diabetes – or you might be leveling a health promotion effort – “Eat healthy, exercise regularly” – at the whole community.
- *Behavior.* You may be targeting your message to smokers, for example, or to youth engaged in violence.
- *Attitudes.* Are you trying to change people's minds, or bring them to the next level of understanding?

Another aspect of the audience to consider is whether you should direct your communication to those whose behavior, knowledge, or condition you hope to affect, or whether your communication needs to be indirect. Sometimes, in order to influence a population, you have to aim your message at those to whom they listen – clergy, community leaders, politicians, etc.

For instance, in the 1970's, advocates wanted to stop Nestle from selling baby formula and paying doctors and nurses to recommend it to parents in the developing world; since most parents couldn't afford formula after the free samples ran out, and many didn't have clean water to mix it with, the practice led to large numbers of unnecessary infant deaths. Rather than target Nestle or the medical professionals who were selling the formula, advocates aimed at Nestle's customers around the world, instituting a boycott of Nestle products that lasted for over ten years. Ultimately, the company agreed to change its practices.

3. The message.

When creating your message, consider content, mood, language, and design.

Content

In the course of a national adult literacy campaign in the 1980's, educators learned that TV ads that profiled proud, excited, successful adult learners attracted new learners to literacy programs. Ads that described the difficulties of adults with poor reading, writing, and math skills attracted potential volunteers. Both ads were meant to make the same points – the importance of basic skills and the need for literacy efforts – but they spoke to different groups.

You should craft your message with your audience in mind; planning the content of your message is necessary to make it effective.

Mood

Consider what emotions you want to appeal to.

The mood of your message will do a good deal to determine how people react to it. In general, if the mood is too extreme – too negative, too frightening, trying to make your audience feel too guilty – people won't pay much attention to it. It may take some experience to learn how to strike the right balance. Keeping your tone positive will usually reach more people than evoking negative feelings such as fear or anger.

Language

There are two aspects to language here: one is the actual language – English, Spanish, Korean, Arabic – that your intended audience speaks; the other is the kind of language you use – formal or informal, simple or complex, referring to popular figures and ideas or to obscure ones.

You can address the language people speak by presenting any printed material in both the official language and the language(s) of the population(s) you're hoping to reach, and by providing translation for spoken or broadcast messages.

The second language issue is more complicated. If your message is too informal, your audience might feel you're talking down to them, or, worse, that you're making an insincere attempt to get close to them by communicating in a way that's clearly not normal for you. If your message is too formal, your audience might feel you're not really talking to them at all. You should use plain, straightforward language that expresses what you want to say simply and clearly.

Channels of communication

What does your intended audience read, listen to, watch, engage in? You have to reach them by [placing your message where they'll see it](#).

- Posters
- [Fliers and brochures](#) - These can be more compelling in places where the issue is already in people's minds (doctors' offices for health issues, supermarkets for nutrition, etc.).
- Newsletters
- Promotional materials - Items such as caps, T-shirts, and mugs can serve as effective channels for your message.
- Comic books or other reading material - Reading matter that is intrinsically interesting to the target audience can be used to deliver a message through a story that readers are eager to follow, or simply through the compelling nature of the medium and its design.
- Internet sites - In addition to your organization's website, interactive sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are effective mediums for communication
- Letters to the Editor
- News stories, columns, and reports
- Press releases and press conferences
- Presentations or presence at local events and local and national conferences, fairs, and other gatherings
- Community outreach
- Community or national events - The Great American Smokeout, National Literacy Day, a community "Take Back the Night" evening against violence, and other community events can serve to convey a message and highlight an issue.
- Public demonstrations
- Word of mouth
- Music
- Exhibits and public art - The AIDS quilt, a huge quilt with squares made by thousands of people, commemorating victims of the HIV epidemic, is a prime example.
- Movies - Since the beginnings of the film industry, movies have carried messages about race, the status of women, adult literacy, homosexuality, mental illness, AIDS, and numerous other social issues.
- TV - TV can both carry straightforward messages – ads and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) – and present news and entertainment programs that deal with your issue or profile your organization.
- Theater and interactive theater - A play or skit, especially one written by people who have experienced what it illustrates, can be a powerful way to present an issue, or to underline the need for services or change.

Several interactive theater groups in New England, by stopping the action and inviting questions and comments, draw audiences into performances dramatizing real incidents in the lives of the actors, all of whom are staff members and learners in adult literacy programs. They

have helped to change attitudes about adult learners, and to bring information about adult literacy and learning into the community

4. Resources.

What do you have the money to do? Do you have the people to make it possible? If you're going to spend money, what are the chances that the results will be worth the expense? Who will lose what, and who will gain what by your use of financial and human resources?

Your plan should include careful determinations of how much you can spend and how much staff and volunteer time it's reasonable to use. You may also be able to [get materials, air time, and other goods and services](#) from individuals, businesses, other organizations, and institutions.

5. Anticipate obstacles and emergencies.

Any number of things can happen in the course of a communication effort. Someone can forget to e-mail a press release, or forget to include a phone number or e-mail address. A crucial word on your posters or in your brochure can be misspelled, or a reporter might get important information wrong. Worse, you might have to deal with a real disaster involving the organization that has the potential to discredit everything you do.

It's important to try to anticipate these kinds of problems, and to [create a plan to deal with them](#). Crisis planning should be part of any communication plan, so you'll know exactly what to do when a problem or crisis occurs. Crisis plans should include who takes responsibility for what – dealing with the media, correcting errors, deciding when something has to be redone rather than fixed, etc. It should cover as many situations, and as many aspects of each situation, as possible.

6. Strategize how you'll connect with the media and others to spread your message.

Establishing relationships with individual media representatives and media outlets is an important part of a communication plan, as is [establishing relationships](#) with influential individuals and institutions in the community and/or the population you're trying to reach. You have to make personal contacts, give the media and others reasons to want to help you, and follow through over time to sustain those relationships in order to keep communication channels open.

The individuals that can help you spread your message can vary from formal community leaders – elected officials, CEOs of important local businesses, clergy, etc. – to community activists and ordinary citizens. Institutions and organizations, such as colleges, hospitals, service clubs, faith communities, and other health and community organizations all have access to groups of community members who might need to hear your message.

7. Create an action plan.

Now the task is to put it all together into a plan that you can act on. By the time you reach this point, your plan will already be essentially done. You know what your purpose is and whom you need to reach to accomplish it, what your message should contain and look like, what you can afford, what problems you might face, what channels can best be used to reach your intended audience, and how to gain access to those channels. Now it's just a matter of putting the details together – actually composing and designing your message (perhaps more than one, in order to use lots of channels), making contact with the people who can help you get your message out, and getting everything in place to start your communication effort. And finally, you'll evaluate your effort so that you can continue to make it better.

8. Evaluation.

If you evaluate your communication plan in terms of both how well you carry it out and how well it works, you'll be able to make changes to improve it. It will keep getting more effective each time you implement it.

And there's really a ninth step to developing a communication plan; as with just about every phase of health and community work, you have to keep up the effort, adjusting your plan and communicating with the community.

Online Resources

[Communications Handbook](#), prepared by Pinnacle Public Relations Training.

[Communications Planning: Getting the Right Messages Across in the Right Way](#), by Mindtools.com, will help you through the preparation steps as well as create an audience-focused communication plan that is sure to get your message heard.

[Developing a Communication Plan](#) will guide the user through the steps of developing a communication plan, starting with figuring out the aim of the communication plan, developing objectives, acknowledging key messages as well as a target audience, planning tasks, and timelines to evaluation of the communication plan.

[Developing a Communication Plan](#), by the Pell Institute and Pathways to College Network, is an excellent, simple resource providing information on how the communication plan should be designed as well as questions to be answered in order to develop a working and effective plan.

[How to Develop a Communication Plan](#)

[Newsworthy elements](#), from the Berkeley Media Studies Group, includes a checklist of questions by category to help you prepare and focus your story.

[Planning for Effective Communication](#)

[Planning Before You Communicate](#). This helpful tool developed by the Public Health Foundation will help you to address and organize essential factors of communications planning, execution, and evaluation. Doing this preparation work before you communicate will save you valuable time and resources when and where they are needed most.

[Strategic Communications Planning](#)

[Worksheet: Crafting your media advocacy plan](#), from the Berkeley Media Studies Group, can help you identify key moments in the political process or opportunities — such as holidays, anniversaries or other key dates — far enough in advance that you can prepare and act effectively.

Using Principles of Persuasion

What is persuasion as a natural process?

Social scientists estimate that each of us is exposed to hundreds, if not thousands, of persuasive messages per day. Media messages play a large part, but aren't the whole story. The messages of daily interaction are equally important.

- A waiter at the restaurant asks, "Is there anything else I can get you?"
- A stranger at a party glances half a second too long.
- A telemarketer starts a pitch on the phone.
- A yard sale flyer catches your eye.

Every day we encounter these small-scale, usually low-stakes persuasive messages, designed to influence our attitudes and behaviors, even though we don't always label them as such. Some of those messages we deflect or ignore. Others get through and are successful, sometimes despite our own best intentions.

But it's not just others who are sending persuasive messages. We are, too. Many of us send out more such messages than we get back.

We persuade our partner to see this movie rather than that one, or our co-worker to knock off a few minutes early, or the service manager to get the oil change done by 3:00 because that's when we need the car. A large percentage of our communication is consciously or unconsciously designed to be persuasive -- that is, to be instrumental in getting something we want. One might say that communication, by its nature, is *supposed* to be persuasive.

If you are in a leadership position, a position of authority and responsibility, you probably send out more persuasive messages than most. In fact, it's your job to send out those messages. If you didn't, your influence would suffer. Your success as a leader, or as a community builder, is directly related to the appropriateness and the effectiveness of the persuasive messages you send out.

If all this is true, if persuasion is a natural and inevitable part of the communication process, we might choose to learn how to get better at it (and we can get better!). This section focuses on understanding principles of persuasion

Why should you learn more about principles of persuasion?

The reason it pays off to learn more about persuasion is that it will help you become more successful at achieving your goals. It's no more complicated than that. There's also an unstated assumption behind this reasoning: there are tested principles of persuasion that can be both learned and put to good use.

It's surely true that all of us already know something about persuasion and how to persuade others; some of us are already quite talented at it. In fact, it would be hard to become a fully functioning adult without knowing how to persuade others at least some of the time. Persuading and being persuaded is part of being a member of society. But, persuasion is also a learned skill. And, like any skill, one can improve with instruction and practice.

It is important to note that there are many long-lived debates regarding the ethics of using principles of persuasion.

At this point, our plan is first to present some tested principles of persuasion. Next, we'll suggest how you might use these and other principles to increase community interest in your topic, and to win people over, fairly and ethically, to your way of thinking. Finally, we'll give a few real-life cases, together with some comments on how a skilled persuader might respond.

Our principles of persuasion will apply to most forms of *written* communication, and will complement most other sections in this chapter on creating community interest in an issue. Those other sections will also introduce additional principles unique to the topics covered within them. Our general principles will also apply to most situations involving oral communication (face-to-face, over the phone, or over radio and television), and will therefore apply to many other Tool Box sections outside this chapter on those subjects. As you read further, it may help you to think of applications to both oral and written persuasion situations you may come across yourself.

Let's start with a basic outline of the principles of persuasion, and then go in to more detail later on in the section. Every persuasive communication situation involves the following: (a) a *communicator*, who uses (b) a *format* to deliver (c) a *message* to (d) an *audience*.

One caution before we continue: persuasion is a large, complex, and subtle subject. Since we have limited space, what follows is summary and cannot possibly contain all the nuances of the principles of persuasion. For further detail, please consult the references given at the end of the section.

What is involved in making a persuasive argument?

The Communicator

A persuasive attempt is more likely to be effective when the communicator (the person communicating the message) is:

Credible, both in general and for the particular issue at hand. In other words, the person or audience receiving the communication must believe you. This trust can depend on the communicator's qualifications, and on his past performance.

When your doctor tells you that no bones were broken, and to take it easy for a few days, you believe that advice. The doctor is qualified (you have no doubt), and perhaps you have also come to trust similar advice in the past. If a fifth-grade child gave you the same message, you would probably be unconvinced. But the doctor is a credible communicator for you, and so you are persuaded.

Knowledgeable, on the particular matter at hand. Expertise makes one a more credible communicator, but that expertise must be perceived as relevant to the particular setting and the particular topic under consideration.

Your doctor may be credible and persuasive when it comes to your health care, but not much more credible than anyone else when it comes to choosing a new car. On the other hand, the refrigerator repairman may know very little about cars or medicine, but when it comes to diagnosing and fixing your leaky refrigerator, that is his area of expertise. For refrigerators, he is a persuasive communicator.

Similar to the target person or audience in background and values. Other things equal, people are more likely to be persuaded by those they see as similar to themselves in age, cultural background, and lifestyle, among other characteristics.

In local fund-raising campaigns, the person asking you for a donation is likely to be a friend or acquaintance. Politicians campaigning door-to-door will ring the bell with shirtsleeves rolled up. Advertisers marketing vitamin supplements will use attractive and healthy-looking older spokespersons, possibly just like you.

Credibility, knowledgeable, and similarity are interrelated -- that is, someone more similar to the target audience may also seem more credible to them, and so on.

Exhibiting positive or influential *nonverbal characteristics*, which are seemingly irrelevant to the communication.

Other qualities equal, we are more likely to be persuaded by communicators who are physically attractive and who are neatly and appropriately dressed, and by communicators who smile, nod at the right places, and (in most Western cultures) make eye contact. These nonverbal qualities tend to raise our estimate of the communicator, and therefore of the message. We think to ourselves, "She seems like such a nice, sincere, and friendly person. I'm inclined to believe her." We might wish things were otherwise; but they aren't.

The Format

A persuasive message is more likely to be effective if it is:

Delivered face-to-face. Other things equal (once again), personal communication is generally more effective than less personal forms, in large part because it gets the audience's attention.

It's also more difficult to reject an appeal from a credible communicator if that person is standing right in front of you. When face-to-face communication is not possible, person-to-person contact over the phone is probably the next best choice. Both are generally preferable to mailed or other written communications.

Face-to-face and telephone contact, however, are not always possible or feasible, and there are occasions when paper communication can help you to reach your communication goals. The great advantages of print communication are that it can reach more people, and do so with much less expense per person. Written communications are important and necessary in generating interest in an issue.

A tip for written communication: when written communications are mailed, there are factors known to increase the likelihood of a reply. These include:

- First class (and commemorative) stamps
- Use of color in paper and design
- Personalized content (for example, handwritten greetings or signatures)
- Hand-written or typed addressing, as compared to the use of mailing labels
- Perceptual contrast and novelty in the overall mailing package

The Message

A persuasive message is more likely to be effective if it:

Gets the audience's attention. Your audience has to physically hear (or see) the message before being persuaded by it. Otherwise, nothing else can happen. Attention to it must come first.

What attracts the audience's attention to your message? The same factors that attract attention to virtually any physical stimulus:

- Novelty
- Contrast with other stimuli (something that stands out)
- Surprise (something unanticipated or unexpected)
- Aesthetic qualities
- Color
- Size
- Volume
- Duration

These are basic attention-getting qualities used all the time by professional persuaders. While they won't guarantee that your message will be persuasive, they will increase the chances that your message will gain the attention of your audience, so that the content of your message will have a chance.

While these qualities can attract attention, one must use them carefully. Extreme use (too loud, too bright, overuse of novel characteristics) can actually repel your intended audience. For some audiences, the message must be culturally adapted in order to attract attention. A certain ethnic group may react positively to loud music and bright colors, a tactic that may not be effective in the elderly population, for example. Businesspeople may not tune in to a message containing images of teenage celebrities or pop music.

Is repeated. Research strongly suggests that, in most cases, the more often a message is repeated, the more readily it is believed.

The first time you hear an unfamiliar argument (The school year should be 300 days long; Listening to techno music improves your concentration; We need to defend our country against terrorist attack), you may not be inclined to accept it. But the 20th time you hear it, especially if it comes from several different credible sources, its persuasive value tends to increase, over and above the merits of the argument itself. Skilled persuaders of all kinds know and utilize this strategy, even if their motives may sometimes be suspect.

Offers benefits or rewards to your intended audience. In short, people can be persuaded if there's something in it for them. They will get, or believe they will get, some benefit from buying in to the message or acting a certain way.

What kinds of benefits are used by persuaders? A short list would include:

- Physical safety
- Psychological security (self-esteem, confidence)
- Food or drink (free meal for participating in an event)
- Money or material goods (free key-chain or t-shirt for attending, money toward opening a savings account)
- Social approval, status, power, or authority (name in a program for donating to a cause, honorary title)
- Abstract attributes, such as helpfulness, fairness, or justice ("By acting this way, you are helping children in your neighborhood," "Your participation ensures that justice will be done.")

Of course, you won't be able to offer your audience all of these benefits, nor do you need to. Sometimes one benefit alone will suffice. And the benefit does not actually have to be directly provided; it can be promised, or even implied.

What benefits should you offer? This should depend on the audience you are addressing. A skilled persuader will know as much as possible about one's prospective audience in advance, so that benefits can be offered which meet their particular needs.

If you do this activity, your children will be healthier. Your neighbors will approve of you. Your tax rate will go down. You will look years younger. Our community will feel good about itself.

New jobs will be created. You will learn a new money-making skill. These are all examples of benefits, which can, for the right people and under the right circumstances, be very persuasive.

Is paired with something else which is valued or rewarding. Your audience may not perceive much benefit in what you are supporting, or may simply not believe the benefit will occur. But, if your message is linked with something unquestionably rewarding, or someone unquestionably admired, both the benefit value and the persuasive impact will go up. The principle is one of simple pairing.

This is part of the reason why community events are often accompanied by refreshments; food and drink are rewarding. It's also part of the reason why attractive models are so commonly presented together with the persuader's message: "See that appealing professional man or woman whose headache pain vanishes instantly by taking _____? Your headache can vanish in just the same way." (If you know or recognize the model, so much the better.)

Is shown to have low cost attached to it. Cost here means more than money; it can mean time, effort, or more subjective psychological expense. Costs can also involve risks, such as the risk that family members may disapprove, or that the desired action can backfire, leaving you in a worse situation than before.

So, in presenting a message, a persuader will want to minimize the projected costs as well as maximize the benefits: "It won't cost you a cent; there's absolutely no risk to you; it will take just a minute; try it in the privacy of your own home; unconditionally guaranteed." All of these are intended to reduce the perceived costs to the audience member. As before, the persuader will want to know the audience, so that he or she can be most aware of what they perceive as the possible costs, and how they can be minimized.

A message is more likely to be persuasive when it:

- *Is endorsed by others in authority or of high status* in the community and/or in your group.
- *Suggests that a benefit offered is scarce*, as in "we don't have many left," or "seats are going fast," or "first come, first served."
- *Suggests that a benefit has a time limit or deadline*, as in "this is a limited time offer," or "please let us know by the end of the week," or "applications must be received by September 1st."
- *Is consistent with past behavior or expectations of the audience.* People resist believing or acting in ways inconsistent with their previous beliefs or actions. But, if your message can be shown to fit with those prior beliefs or actions, to be a natural extension of them, that gives you a persuasive advantage.
- *Appeals to the norms or your audience or your target group.* Every group has norms -- a set of behavioral and attitudinal standards, sometimes explicit, but often not. If your message appears to violate these group norms (of propriety, of custom, of written or

unwritten rules), it will probably be rejected. If it goes well with those norms, acceptance is more likely.

- *Uses the principle of reciprocity*, suggesting, in effect, that the communicator (or someone else) has helped you in the past and now needs some help in return. Or, as a variation (either directly stated or implied), suggest that if you help out now, you can request and receive help at some later date.

The Audience

Finally, some audience principles. Some of these are related to principles expressed before, and can here be stated briefly, this time from the point of view of the receiver.

A persuasive attempt is more likely to be effective when the target person or audience (the two terms here are used synonymously):

- Knows, likes, and respects the communicator (the communicator is credible).
- Already believes in the message.
- Is predisposed to act on behalf of their beliefs.
- Already has a history of acting (and acting successfully) on behalf of your cause.
- Is further motivated to act by benefits appealing specifically to them.
- Is capable of taking the desired action (the action is feasible).
- Has enough time and resources to take the desired action.

But **note**: The problem for persuaders is that your target audience often does not know you, does not necessarily agree with you, and may know very little or nothing about the issue at all. Yet, these are often precisely the people you need to win over. To do so will require your using the principles of persuasion we have described.

Where do these principles come from?

A good deal of what we know about persuasion comes from ordinary life experience. Such experience has accumulated and has been written about over thousands of years. Aristotle, for one, wrote about persuasive techniques in the **Rhetoric**, (4th century B.C.), a book still very much worth reading.

Much of our formal knowledge about persuasion, however, comes from use of the scientific method, and, in particular, from studies done by social psychologists in the last half of the 20th century. Most of their studies have involved experiments -- varying one factor at a time, and holding other factors constant, so that researchers could be sure that any differences were due to the one factor they varied.

Social-psychological research findings have supplemented daily life experience and have helped us to know more about principles of persuasion than we knew even a generation or two ago.

While such findings are not the last word, nor the only word on the topic, they are considered the most definitive body of evidence by most modern scholars of the field.

How can you put these principles into practice?

How can this long list of principles (and it is only partial) best be translated into practice, and into your own persuasion situation?

To begin, every situation is different. The particular persuasion principles you should use will be determined by the nature of your particular circumstances. More specifically, they will be determined by your particular goal, by your particular audience, and by the persuasive resources you have at your disposal. For example, if you want someone to sign a petition, that may call for one type of persuasive approach, but, if you want the same person to volunteer for your cause, or to write a big check, that may require something else. Similarly, it will make a difference if you want to convince one sympathetic person instead of one hundred indifferent ones; or if your campaign budget is five figures, compared to two figures, or no figures at all.

Since each persuasion situation is truly different, it makes sense to understand each situation well and to analyze it carefully before you plunge in. Then you can plan your effort in advance; that is immeasurably important.

What are principles of persuasion?

While your specific persuasive tactics will almost always vary from occasion to occasion, there are, nevertheless, general guidelines that will apply to a very large number of persuasion situations, both written and oral. Below are some of them. Not everyone will apply to your setting, nor is it necessary to use every one that does, but, more often than not, when these guidelines are used thoughtfully, your persuasive attempt is more likely to be successful:

Know your facts. Better yet, master your facts; have them at the tip of your tongue -- or at least in a notebook close by your side. Be able to document any claims you make in a level-headed, non-condescending, but also not-overly-humble way. You've researched the evidence; others should know what it says. This is key to being a credible communicator.

Know your audience. How many audience members are there? What kinds of people are they? What is their current opinion on the issue? What is the basis for their opinion? Where do they get their information? What are their own needs and interests? What arguments are most likely to persuade them?

Suppose, in one case, your audience was high school athletes; in another, hog farmers; in another, an evangelical church congregation; in another, your camping buddies. Yet, suppose the issue at hand was basically the same (healthy eating habits, for example). Wouldn't the

particulars of your persuasive approach be different? Wouldn't your message be more effective if it were tailored for each particular target group?

You don't have to persuade every single audience member, or even try. But, the more you know about your audience in advance of your persuasive attempt, the better you will be able to design effective arguments specifically for them. Saul Alinsky, the famous community organizer, was once quoted as saying, "Never go outside the experience of your people." We think he was right.

Express the similarities between you and your audience. Bring out your common values, beliefs, and experiences, because similarity between communicator and audience increases persuasiveness. A few broad examples:

- We all want our kids to grow up in a safe community.
- I feel exactly as you do.
- I grew up the hard way, just like you folks here.

The similarities you convey shouldn't be invented; they should be genuine, and stated sincerely.

Utilize opinion leaders. Even if you have mastered your facts and expressed your similarities, you may not be as credible a communicator as others who have more visibility or stature in your community. For most community issues, and probably for your issue too, one can identify opinion leaders -- people who are well-respected and/or well-liked where you live, and whose opinion is likely to matter to your target audience.

These opinion leaders may be ministers, politicians, business executives, newspaper columnists, school principals, agency directors, club presidents, neighborhood activists, coaches, or others without specific titles. Whoever they are, they can sway your intended audience better than you can, so find out who they are for your issues. Try to win their support. (Of course, to do that, you are going to need to know your facts, and to use other principles of persuasion as well.)

Once opinion leaders are on your side, you can ask them for testimonials or endorsements. You can ask one opinion leader to influence another. Most importantly, you can ask them, quite directly, to influence their own constituencies. By doing so, you are using social leverage, a principle as powerful in the social world as mechanical levers are in the physical one.

Make a strong opening. The opening (of a speech, of a letter, of a brochure) is when audience attention is at its highest, and when its opinion is the most flexible. Use your opening to capture attention and shape opinion. In oral persuasion, a good first impression, including a nonverbal one, is essential. In both oral and written persuasion, a starting sentence or two outlining your main argument and stated with confidence will assuredly help. This is also a good place for humor, if you choose to use it. Humor can break down walls more easily than you would expect.

Get to the point. Perhaps not in the very first line, but very soon thereafter. It's a fast-paced world most people live in; your audience doesn't have time to waste. If you wait too long, you can lose people's attention, as well as your credibility. When you lose attention and credibility, few will be persuaded. Even if you are on target, don't fire away too long. Know when to stop. Make your main points concisely, sum things up, and then get out of the way. This is one way of showing respect for your audience; they will appreciate it and you.

Offer a benefit (or a few) supporting your position. Maximize the benefits of your stance as best you can. The benefits should be customized to your audience -- that same audience that you have already studied. If your audience is most motivated by economic security, speak to dollars and cents. If they are most spurred by community pride, or crime in the streets, or (fill in the blank), speak to that.

In a nutshell, identify the benefits with the greatest appeal to your audience, and use them accordingly.

Minimize the costs

Inoculate your audience against counter-arguments they may hear from the other side or create for themselves. It's often best to anticipate and rebut opposing arguments in advance, unless you believe your audience will never hear other points of view, or there is very little possibility of resistance or opposition. For example:

- "Our opponents will tell you this, that, and the other, but you and I know full well that..."
- "Now I know that you may be thinking such-and-such; I used to think the same way myself. But after a while, I came to realize that..."

Ask for an action step. In community work, it's often not enough that someone is persuaded by your argument; you also want them to act once the argument is presented to them. You want them to join a committee, or give money, or vote, or answer the survey, or do something else. Now is the best time to make that action request.

Researchers studying volunteering have asked people this question: "What led you to volunteer for (X)?" The response most commonly given is "Somebody asked me." In other words, people will help you if you ask.

Make the action step clear. What is it exactly that people are being asked to do? Yes, you want them to support you, but precisely how? Sure, you need their help -- but in what particular way? Make your action request unambiguous and specific.

Make the action step simple. The requested action usually should not require much expense -- of time, money, or psychic energy -- for the doer. (One significant exception is in personalized

fund-raising campaigns with wealthier donors, when it's common to ask for the largest gift the donor can afford.)

A corollary is that the action step should be feasible. Sending in a coupon may be easily doable, but calling one's legislator may be difficult for those with no background in politics, and hosting a neighborhood coffee may pose problems for someone working the night shift.

Have a variety of action steps available. What is sometimes called an action menu. If the target person hesitates to accept a larger portion, offer a smaller one. If someone cannot attend meetings, could they write a short letter, or drop a few leaflets on the block, or even just stay on the mailing list?

You might want to request the largest action first, which suggests that the different menu items need not all be displayed at the same time. But in any case, be sure to:

Obtain a commitment to take the step. If someone makes a commitment, effectively saying "Yes, I will do it," that increases the likelihood that the action step will indeed be taken.

Commitments tend to be more effective when they are made publicly, in the presence of others; the person making the commitment feels more accountable. But even private commitments -- especially if written, as in a pledge -- are usually better than no commitments at all. What's more, those making and fulfilling smaller commitments are more likely to make larger commitments later on, compared to those who have committed nothing. This supports the desirability of obtaining even modest commitments when you can.

Use models, in addition to opinion leaders. Models, in this sense, are people who have taken the desired action, have benefited from it, and are willing to say so publicly. An effective model need not be an opinion leader; she can be a family member, a co-worker, a neighbor down the street, or anyone else the target person knows, likes, and respects. Models are peers working with you to influence your target audience. If that model publicly performs the desired action, or says that she has gained from it, that is likely to have positive persuasive impact.

Repeat the message as necessary. Especially if the content of the message is unfamiliar or new. The idea is not to overkill, or to make a nuisance of oneself -- repetition can be overdone -- but to make sure that the message and the requested action have fully registered. Persuasion can take time. Your audience members may not be prepared to respond on the first, second, or third exposure; they may need to see or hear your message on many more occasions before it sinks in and they are ready to act. Repeat as needed, be patient, and make repetition your ally.

In the world of government, political consultants frequently employ a similar three-part strategy for winning local elections and campaigns: (a) target your likely voters; (b) give them your message; and (c) give it to them again.

Thank the target person. "That's great! We really appreciate it!" Even if no commitment is made, thank the person for listening, and for the consideration given. Verbal approval, even a 'thank you' is reinforcing; it strengthens the likelihood that more commitments (both first-time commitments and subsequent ones) will be made and actions will be taken in the future.

Follow up. Ensure the committed action has in fact been taken. Did the voter show up at the polls? Was the check received? This can be done in a friendly and polite way: "Have you been able to...?"; "Did you have a chance to...?" For human beings, there is a natural distance between intention and action; your role here is to help bridge it. When the action has been taken, thank the target person once again.

Keep the target person informed. "Your support meant that a new program can be developed for youth in our community," "Because of you, we were able to feed three additional families this holiday season." People like to know that their actions have made a positive difference.

When applying these guidelines, here are three more thoughts to keep in mind:

- Persuasive technique helps, but it helps more when it's not applied mechanically, by the numbers. You don't want to get so caught up in technique that you shut off your own human nature.

Know good technique, and use it. But, unless the situation is very formal (a legal proceeding; a technical report), some expression of your natural self is likely to strengthen your position. Cool and remote perfection is neither expected nor desired.. Quite the contrary; in your audience's eyes, a certain amount of admitted imperfection, combined with sincerity of conviction and demonstration of natural feeling, will often count for more than dry persuasion technique.

- Keep aware of the humanity of the people with whom you are working. They are also humans, with strengths and flaws. In community persuasion situations, when you are relating to people you know and may have continuing relationships with, it's especially important to treat your target group with caring and respect.

This doesn't mean you can't argue strongly, making full use of the principles we have described. But it does mean you should normally minimize disparaging comment or personal attack. Such approaches are pragmatically questionable, but particularly so on a local level. You may have to deal with the same people in your community again, and, if you have insulted them or alienated them or distanced them, they will be less likely to want to work together with you in another situation, even when you may agree with and need each other.

- Moral values may also come into play. Consider that your possible opponents are also your neighbors. You might ask, "How would I feel if someone used these persuasive tactics on me?", and be guided accordingly. Never use persuasion to manipulate your audience without integrity.

In Summary

To reflect on the principles of persuasion, try visualizing a bridge on which your target person or audience stands. The left side of the bridge represents no knowledge of or interest in your issue; the right side represents the desired action -- that is, your goal. Some intermediate markers along the bridge are attention, understanding, and intent.

Your target person may be anywhere on the bridge. Your task as persuader is to move that person along the bridge toward your goal -- gradually if needed, but no slower than necessary. You may want to move them from no knowledge to attention, or from attention to understanding, or from understanding to intent, or from intent to action; whatever the case may be.

Using principles of persuasion effectively and with integrity can accomplish your goals to create and maintain healthy communities.

Contributor
Bill Berkowitz

Online Resources

[3 Tips for Telling Stories That Move People to Action](#), from the Chronicle of Philanthropy, presents research on how to frame stories about social issues and trains advocates to create change based on that research.

[Storytelling](#), from Frameworks Institute, is designed to help advocates distinguish between more and less effective ways of establishing a narrative that sets up policy thinking.

Print Resources

Berkowitz, B. (In press). *Community and neighborhood organization*. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of community psychology*. New York, NY: Plenum.

Cialdini, R. (1993). *Influence: Science and practice* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Karlins, M., & Abelson, H. (1970). *Persuasion: How opinions and attitudes are changed*. New York, NY: Springer.

Oskamp, S., & Schultz, P. (1998). *Applied social psychology* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Petty, R., & Wegener, D. (1998). *Attitude change: Multiple roles for persuasion variables*. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 323-390). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Petty, R., Wegener, D., & Fabrigar, L. (1997). *Attitudes and attitude change*. Annual Review of Psychology, 48, 609-647.

Pratkanis, A., & Aronson, E. (1992). *Age of propaganda: The everyday use and abuse of persuasion*. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman.

Preparing Press Releases

Press releases are an effective way to communicate information about upcoming events or important news. Press releases allow you or your organization to communicate directly with the community, show your perspective on events or recent developments, and gain publicity for your cause. In this section, we'll look at what a press release is, when to use a press release to communicate with the public, and how to create a press release that effectively communicates your message.

What is a press release?

The bare bones answer to this is: A press release is a brief written summary or update, alerting the local media about your group's news and activities. However, we've found that press releases are much more exciting than that!

Press releases are similar to news articles in that they inform the public, but they're usually prepared by people like you who are working in specialized fields, like community development or public health. You probably know by now that it can be difficult to tell the community what you're doing, and what you're about. A press release is one way for you to reach out and tell the community (for example) "Hey, we're the Howardsville Healthcare Workers for Healthy Hispanic Children; and we're trying to develop a scholarship fund to help low income Hispanic children go to college."

Like a news story, press releases *are*:

- Created either to preview an upcoming event or to inform the public about something that has already occurred
- Written in a clear, concise manner that easily and quickly conveys its message to the reader
- Written with the most current and pertinent information in the first two paragraphs
- Subject to editing for content and space or time requirements, depending on the media

Unlike a news story, press releases *are not*:

- Always a high priority for media producers to cover
- Written by professional journalists

In the following section we'll give you some helpful tips for preparing your press release to help get your story out to the community.

Why do you need a press release?

Your press release will help your group in a number of ways. It can:

- Announce an event, schedule, study, campaign, workshop, or election of new leaders
- Tell people *why* you think this development is news
- Show your perspective on the development
- Increase the visibility of your leaders (if quoted in the release)
- Remind people of what your group does and how active in the community you are
- Allow you to highlight or summarize a report

Before you start thinking a press release is going to solve all your publicity woes, now is a good time to note that by itself, a press release isn't going to get you a lot of media attention. The average reporter or editor gets more press releases than he or she could possibly use. Your press release should be just one part of your media campaign.

When should you prepare a press release?

You and your group should consider press releases only when you have news that you want the public to share, for example:

- News of upcoming public events
- Reports of recent public events
- Reports of organizational changes that may be of interest to the general public (i.e. a merger of two organizations; launching of a new teen chapter)
- Reports of awards, prizes, grants or publications connected with your cause
- Reports of hiring or promotions of staff members, particularly top managers
- Announcements of recruiting drives for volunteers
- Announcement of the start-up of your next season of classes, training sessions, services, etc.

If you have no hard news, you and your group could create some. For example, if a national organization announces facts that are relevant to your cause, you could make a good story by asking local experts for their reactions.

How do you prepare a press release?

So what do you need to write your press release? To start, you'll need a computer on which to type your story and send it to the media. Almost all newspapers, as well as TV and radio stations – even the smallest ones – prefer to receive material electronically. That makes it easy for them to edit, and also means that they don't have to do anything to set it up to go into print or be read on the air. (If you're submitting to a website, you have no choice but to do it electronically.)

Next, you need to have a story to tell your community. The story should focus on what your group is currently doing or on a future event, not something you did last month.

There are some exceptions here. If you were at a conference and received an award, for instance, you'll want to let the community know about it after you get back.

Here are some general guidelines for preparing press releases:

Make them read like news article – Study news articles in your local paper. News articles will have the five Ws and the H in their beginning paragraph. This is called the lead. These basic elements are:

- What happened
- Who did it
- Why it happened
- Where it happened
- When it happened
- How it happened

Maplewood area banks loaned less than \$1 to people in the primarily minority neighborhoods of Maplewood for every \$5 they loaned to people in wealthier neighborhoods [what], according to a study released yesterday [when] at a press conference [how] held in front of a downtown bank [where] by the Maplewood Community Reinvestment Coalition [who].

The coalition called this lending pattern lamentable, saying it is why many of Maplewood minority and low-income neighborhoods have a much lower rate of home ownership [why].

Emphasize what makes your release important – What in your release is going to grab people's attention? Why is it important to the community? Why should they care? Emphasize one or two of the basic elements above. For instance, if the mayor is going to speak on the issue at your event, it would be a good idea to emphasize the "who". If your event is the first charity fund raiser at the new recreation center, the "where" would be emphasized.

Be as provocative as you can – Most media, especially in large cities, get tons of releases every week, so you want to make yours stand out. Find an eye-opening aspect to your release, or at least make sure your points are strongly emphasized. For example, perhaps pro-life and pro-choice activist groups are working together on teen pregnancy prevention, or real estate groups and housing activists are working together on a housing initiative. In both these cases, the organizations involved might use their unusual situations to create press releases the media would snap up.

Make the headline and lead as clear as possible – They need to hook the reader quickly or the release will be skimmed over and forgotten.

Here's how strong and clear leads can help you and weak leads can break you.

Strong: “Work Group for Community Development Reform releases study critical of housing and community development program.”

Weak: “Study says \$4 billion community development program is failing.”

Strong: “Eastside Middle School teachers protest violence in the schools following release of shocking report.”

Weak: “Report released on school violence.”

The strong leads are more specific, refer to actions rather than events, and imply or describe a conflict. All of these elements are attention-grabbers. The more of them (and others – celebrity names, human interest) you can include in a headline, the more likely people are to read your release.

Make your release look professional – Credibility is very important in an editor’s decision as to read or pass over your release. Letterhead and formatting should look professional, and no typos!

The release should also have short, easily readable sentences and paragraphs, as news articles do.

Consider sending other materials with your release – If you already have contact with a reporter or editor, you may want to send a short cover letter reminding him or her of your previous conversation. Maybe you know this reporter has a personal interest in your issue. The key is to try and personalize the release so it gets the editor’s attention.

Format and technical guidelines for your press release

Here are some common formatting and technical guidelines we’ve gathered from experts in the field. There are a number of possible formats, but these are some of the more widely accepted.

A dateline – like in many newspaper articles (for instance “Washington, D.C., Oct 15”).

To double space or not to double space – it’s probably not necessary as most editing these days is done on computer, as long as your release *is easy to read*. Short paragraphs with a space between each and slightly wider than normal margins are helpful.

Your release should be relatively short – two or three pages, max. Keeping the release to one page does not necessarily improve readability, which is what you’re aiming for. Subheads are also useful to grab the reader’s attention.

While brevity doesn’t necessarily improve readability, it may nonetheless improve your chances of getting your release published, depending on the space needs of the paper in

question. Many papers have limitations on the number of pages they can print, and therefore anything they publish has to be short enough to fit into their format. Others try to fill as much space as possible, and thus will be happy to publish longer pieces. It helps to know the constraints of the media outlets you're approaching. (The same restrictions – or lack of them – might apply to broadcast media.)

Attachments – a summary of the key points can help the reporter write an article, if the paper decides that would be more appropriate than a press release for the story you have to tell.

Several full quotes should also be included – try to make the quotes sound like they were spoken, not written. For example, “The critical finding of the report is that many banks...” is not as effective as “This report shows that our banks are ignoring the needs of...”

Avoid using jargon or acronyms (such as “Section 8 subsidies,” CDC, GAO) – this can be difficult: as you grow accustomed to them you may not even realize you're using them. Instead, spell out the names of any organizations that normally go by acronyms, for example, “NAACP” is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. You can certainly refer to them by the acronym later on in the story, but the first reference should always be by name.

Use active verbs rather than passive verbs to keep the reader interested in your story – Active verbs are words that show that someone or something takes an action, such as, “State delegates from the National Organization of Women marched on Capitol Hill today demanding better health care for single mothers.” In this sentence, marched is an active verb showing movement. Passive verbs show that someone or something is being acted upon: “Capitol Hill was besieged by unicyclists on Saturday.”

If you have to include numbers or statistics in your article, **spell out numbers and percentages less than ten**. Numbers or percentages above ten can be written as numerals.

When you quote someone you interviewed for your release, put the attribution – the name of the person you're quoting – at the end of the quote.

“We've been especially pleased with the help and involvement of our parent-teacher organizations in collecting signatures for the petition,” Joyce Temple, director of Minneapolis Families against Violence

Double-check your sources – the people who gave you information you used in the release -- for accurate quotes, correct professional titles, and correctly spelled names.

Edit and re-edit your press release before you send it out to reporters.

Computers and people are imperfect, so it's a good idea to follow up any distribution of a press release with a phone call to your contact to ensure your release hasn't been lost or forgotten.

How do you get your press release out to the media?

The following are methods you may want to try to get your group covered by the media.

Mailing lists

Extensive mailing lists are the key to good media coverage. You may be able to get a media guide from your local public relations association which will list all media and appropriate reporters in the area. Organizations you work with may also be able to provide you with contacts.

Here are some important tips for mailing lists:

- Read newspapers and follow the radio and television news to decide who the most logical contacts would be for your release. Also, call the media, explain who you are and what your group is about, to find out who should get your releases.
- Develop personal contacts with sympathetic reporters (e.g. a journalist who specializes in women's movement news if your organization deals with women's issues) They will appreciate being kept posted, and may get you coverage even if they personally cannot cover your release. (See Chapter 34, Media Advocacy, for more on establishing personal relationships with folks from the media.)
- Never send a release to more than one person at the same newspaper

The Daybook

The Associated Press and United Press International wire services both put out complete listings of upcoming events to all their television, radio and print media subscribers. You can telephone your release in without mailing a release, if necessary. You can do this as late as 12 hours before the event.

Timing

As with many things in life, timing is crucial when sending your press release. Three to five days in advance is usually the right amount of time to ensure the editors can put someone on your story. Mailing a release too early is just as bad as mailing it too late – it will be put aside and forgotten. At least if your story is last minute, you may be able to telephone it in. Deadlines do vary depending on the type of media, so be sure and check with them in advance.

In Summary

Because people aren't perfect, telephone everyone to whom you sent releases to increase your chances of getting covered. Call your personal contacts and reporters you have worked with in

the past in advance so they have more time to be free to cover you. When you follow up with the reporter, be sure to include any last minute news that was not added in your release.

Contributor
Eric Wadud

Online Resources

[Tips on Preparing a Press Release](#) is a simple yet useful resource from Journalists for Democracy & Human Rights (JDHR) that provides a step-by-step guide to preparing a press release.

[Writing Great Online News Releases: How to release your news across the web to get the best results](#), geared toward creating online releases, from PR Web.

Print Resources

Aspen Reference Group. (1997). *Community health education and promotion: A guide to program design and evaluation*. (C. Schust, ed.) Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers, Inc.

Breitrose, P. (1993) *Writing and sending press releases*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University School of Medicine, Health Promotion Resource Center.

Center for Community Change. (1996). *How to tell and sell your story*, Washington, DC.

The Grantsmanship Center. (1979). *Guide to public relations for nonprofit organizations and public agencies*, Los Angeles, CA: Martinez, B.F.

League of Women Voters of the United States. (no date). *Getting into print*, Washington, DC.

Media Alliance Community Media Project. (1987). *Media how to notebook*. San Francisco, CA: Julia Rosenbaum.

Wallack, L. (1993). *Media advocacy and public health*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications

Arranging News and Feature Stories

Strategically arranging news and feature stories in local and national publications can significantly influence the efficiency of your communicated message. Typically, newspaper readers follow similar patterns regarding which stories they read first and how long they spend on each story. Understanding these patterns can help you arrange information in a way that most effectively raises awareness, generates support, or attracts the attention of the public. This section looks at the differences between news and feature stories, which format may be the most helpful to your cause, and how to arrange a story to efficiently communicate a message.

What does it mean to arrange news and feature stories?

They say that when a dog bites a man, that's nothing new. But if a man bites a dog, that's news. Our communities produce a lot of news, and lots of it doesn't even get in the newspapers. But you don't have to bite a dog to get in the newspaper. This section will help you to attract the media to what you do and to get your story in the news.

You can use *news stories* and *feature stories* to highlight your initiative in the media. Before we go any further, let's establish the difference. Feature stories don't necessarily have to have a hot-news aspect -- although they are often based on red-hot news. They usually have special layout treatment (color pictures, illustrations, front page of sections, box around them, etc.) and are lengthier than average news stories.

News stories, on the other hand, are more straightforward. They try to address the issue quickly and objectively. An ideal news story answers six basic questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. For example, the following is the lead (first paragraph) of a story. Can you identify those elements here?

"A professor at the University of Kansas, claiming lack of environmental awareness on campus, started a recycling campaign yesterday with his students' help at the Ecology and Biology Department."

Who -- a professor at the University of Kansas

What -- started a recycling campaign

When -- yesterday

Where -- at the Ecology and Biology Department

Why -- lack of environmental awareness on campus

How -- using his students' help

Feature stories are longer than hard-news stories, so the reporter can go more in depth about how things come to be the way they are. For example, you can have a hard-news story on the new alcohol-abuse program you're starting, or have a feature story on the people you've

helped, with pictures, a profile of your initiative, its reason for being, and its plans for the future. It's usually up to the editor or the reporter to decide in which format your story will be published, but if you think your initiative will benefit more from a feature story than from a hard-news blurb, advocate your cause.

What is news?

Usually, news is what you see. What you know is background and what you feel is opinion. Don't try to arrange a story based on your opinions. If you feel strongly about something, or have strong opinions about a subject, [write to the editor](#) or [write an opinion editorial \(op-ed piece\)](#). If your opinion is interesting enough, the publication may choose to do a story based on it. For example, suppose you're organizing a local blood drive and for some reason it is receiving poor or no coverage. It's in your best interest to write a letter or op-ed so that your community is informed about it. You may also want to try writing the story yourself and trying to get it published.

However, don't feel bad if reporters reject your idea at first, or propose a different angle for it. Sometimes, a little adjusting will work wonders for you and the way your initiative will be portrayed. Sometimes you may be put off repeatedly for months and then reporters suddenly are on deadline and want to talk to you at 1:00 in the morning. Be patient and you'll be rewarded. Of course, if you're being put off indefinitely and it just feels like you're in a continual holding pattern, move on, because your time is precious. Address your contacts more aggressively if you think that will work, or take your story to another contact. Whatever you do, be tactful; you don't want to make enemies out of your contacts.

Why should you arrange news and feature stories?

Why do you want to get your initiative's story in the paper or on TV? There are several good reasons. For example:

- **To gain increased publicity.** A story in the newspaper or in the local news is a free way of [getting advertisement](#). You will be amazed at the number of people who will be interested in your activities after they read your story in the newspapers, watch it on TV, hear it on the radio, or see it on the web. Besides, a story has more credibility than paid publicity.
- **To promote community awareness of your overall initiative.** News stories are a vital part of the "conversation" on which communities thrive. By [making sure your activities are well-represented](#) in the local media, you ensure that your organization maintains a role in this "conversation."

An example of how your initiative can benefit from a well-placed interview:

A local newspaper ran an interview with the director of The Literacy Project, an adult literacy project in Massachusetts. As a direct result, the organization heard from a number of potential

students and volunteers, and also received a number of contributions. Eventually, with other stories in the paper, the organization was recognized as a community resource. The project also placed a number of adult literacy stories and an editorial into a large statewide newspaper. All this together contributed to an increase in state funding for the field.

- **To attract attention -- and possibly funding -- from policy makers and other "movers and shakers" in your community.** And that's what you want all along -- people to know what you do and offer some sort of support, recognition and participation. Other initiatives may identify with you and join forces, some organization may sympathize with your cause and make a donation, the state health bureau may want to work with you. With a well-placed story, the sky is the limit for you.

How should you arrange news and feature stories?

So, what does arranging news and feature stories involve? Simply put, it includes getting the media interested in what you're doing so that you get space in publications and on the air. Arranging news and feature stories involves contacting the media, nurturing a relationship with your media contacts, and keeping your contacts informed about what you're doing. It involves knowing the issue inside and out, and it involves believing in -- and convincing others of -- its importance to the community.

When should you arrange your news or feature story?

When is the best time to contact the editor of that weekly magazine, the program manager of that radio station or the producer of that newscast? As soon as have your act together! Try not to contact the media until you have most of the details organized.

If your story is well timed, that's even better. Remember that timing is very important when trying to arrange a news or feature story. Take advantage of national dates and seasonal activities. You may try to arrange a story to coincide with an event, an initiative, or a special day or week related to your issue and your organization. For instance, what day would be better for the Forest Fire Prevention group to launch their new program than Earth Day? National AIDS Awareness Day is probably a great occasion to let people know about a project going on at your county's AIDS prevention group. If you look into it, you may discover a day or an event that might just match what you do. Find out about it and plan accordingly.

Who should you contact?

Reporters are always looking for news. If what you do is unique, interesting and new, it's probably fit to print. But don't give up if you're not involved in any red-hot news at the moment. Especially in small communities, newspapers will often print anything of community interest. They're always looking for local news and a fresh angle. If you're in a larger market

that is covered by state or national media, it may be tougher to get your story in, but if you can explore the human aspect of it, you may catch the media's attention.

As a general rule, you want to contact the people with decision power to give your story a go. These people are probably a phone call away and you can take advantage of that. You can also contact the media outlet you chose and ask which reporter covers the subject under which your story would fall.

Most of the time you'll be directed to the reporter who will cover your story. It's hard to generalize how reporters are and how they work, because just like people in general, they vary a great deal. Typically, they want the story done as much as you do, so you share a common interest. Be polite, clear and helpful when you are put in contact with a reporter. Be ready to answer all questions and have additional background information at hand. For instance, if your initiative is throwing a fund-raising ball, the reporter will probably want to know how much it will cost to throw the ball, how much money you expect to raise, how much money you raised on previous balls, what the attractions there are going to be (Band? Prizes?), how many people you're expecting, etc.

But arranging your story is not only about contacting people. It's about contacting the *right* people. You have to consider which publication or medium fits your interest better. Chances are that *Guns and Ammo* magazine will not be interested in a gun-control campaign story. On the other hand, it's likely that the *On Health* web magazine will be interested in a anti-lung cancer initiative. When targeting media for your story, bear in mind also the number of people that may read, watch or hear that publication or show. You want to reach the broadest number of people possible.

How can you "sell" yourself?

Once you decide where you want your story to be published or aired, you have to be ready to "sell" your story -- to convince the reporter that your story is something people will care about. When presenting your story for potential publication, don't tell them; show them. That is, don't only tell the reporter what your story is about, but show to him or her how it affects audiences in general. Show you have knowledge about your community. If you are starting an initiative on disability rights, give the reporter statistics about how many people in the community could benefit from your services, give names of people involved with your project that can be interviewed, suggest an angle for the story, and offer names of people who might provide endorsement to your initiative. Maybe your initiative is something new in town, or is setting a new trend -- don't just tell them that; show them!

While planning to pitch your story, "So what?" is a question that you must bear in mind at all times. Assume that people are constantly asking "So what?" while reading a story on your work. Give a sense of purpose to what you want published or aired. The best way to answer that is presenting human interest in your story. Offer something that people can relate to.

Stories that fail to answer the "So what?" questions will not attract readers' attention, will not be read to the end, or will simply be skipped altogether. You don't want that to happen to your story, so keep yourself in constant check. Ask yourself if you're being clear enough, how relevant what you're doing is, if your point is coming across. If your story is about organizing an effort to contribute to a memorial fund, ask yourself why the average reader should care. Is it because of the nature of the fund? Is it because it's a community effort? [What is the human factor](#) you are going to focus on?

Here are some other things that make what you're doing potentially newsworthy:

- *Human interest* -- People want to read about other people and what they do and say. This is an element that relates to our natural curiosity. Stories with this ingredient are sure to capture attention. Focus on a particular person's story or on a human angle.
- *Affect* -- If what you're reporting has an impact on your readers' lives, you can be sure it's news. It doesn't have to happen locally to affect you. Stories about environmental welfare are as important as stories about your local city dump's sanitary conditions.
- *Proximity* -- Usually, people are more interested in what happens close to them. Local stories are most likely to grab attention. However, with the globalization of the world, people are becoming more and more interested in what happens in distant places.
- *Timeliness* -- Generally speaking, the fresher the news, the better. People want to know what is going on right now. Of course, there are timeless stories that can be written at any time; these are most likely to be feature stories.
- *Prominence* -- Famous people, places and institutions always have a place in the news. If you throw a party, your friends will know. If a famous actor throws a party, it'll be in every magazine.

A very common way of getting your story out is to [prepare a press release](#). A press release is a brief written summary or update alerting the media about your group's news and activities. In it, you should provide all the basic information about your story, some background information, and a way to contact you. However, writing a press release doesn't guarantee that your story will be picked up. Press releases are not always a priority on the reporter's list, and you should contact reporters personally to make sure they didn't put yours at the bottom of a drawer.

You can also consider [holding a press conference](#) to get your news out and have somebody write about it. Press conferences are generally geared toward hard news, so before you consider arranging a press conference, make sure your story is timely, significant, prominent, and relevant.

If you're dealing with print media you may try to get your picture in the press. Pictures can work wonders for your story. Suggest pictures, graphics and illustrations to go with your story. Features will benefit the most from visual elements. Illustrations and photos can and should be

used as creatively as possible. It helps if you provide the pictures, but sometimes newspapers prefer to send their own photographers. In some communities, newspapers rely on local amateur photographers to provide pictures for their stories. Keep in mind that illustrations and pictures in a feature must tell the story. If you think a picture is fundamental to your story and you don't have one, remember to mention that to the reporter.

Finally, depending on the size of your group or initiative, you may not have time to do all the media contacts by yourself. Your best bet, then, is to hire a public relations person to do the job, if that's an affordable option for your initiative. Competition to get a story in the news can be tough, and hiring a professional to do the job may help your cause. A public relation person can create a specialized marketing program designed to fit the needs of your initiative. A PR person can also help you with creatively structuring your message, packaging your information, targeting media selection, and customizing and personalizing media presentation.

The art of being interviewed

Once you spark the reporter's interest in your story, it's likely that he or she will want to interview you. Interviews are strange animals, and no two are alike. They depend on the rapport you establish with the reporter, on the subject, and on how newsworthy your story is. Here, we'll give you some tips on what to do -- and what not to do -- during an interview with the media.

First, make sure that you know what you're talking about. Be helpful and articulate. Decide on key points you want to get across and try to work them in every chance you have. Be courteous, explain what you need, what you're expecting to see in the story, and what you are about. Don't be too aggressive or demanding.

Be prepared to answer all possible questions on your event or initiative. The information you need to have ready includes:

- Dates and times
- Names of the people involved
- Your objective
- Prices
- Locations
- Contact information

It will also help if you have a couple of quotes "ready." That is, some remark to which you gave some thought beforehand, so that if the reporter asks you for a statement, you are not caught stuttering on the phone.

Here are some pointers for you to keep in mind before and during the interview:

- Prepare yourself for the questions in advance. If possible, ask for a sample.

- Be familiar with the topic of the interview.
- Dress appropriately.
- Don't be afraid of sounding ignorant by asking to repeat questions.
- Never answer rudeness with rudeness.
- Before wrapping the interview, make sure you made your point clear. Recap with the interviewer if necessary.
- Watch and listen.
- Stay relaxed and be yourself while watching what you say.
- If you cite names, occupations and addresses, get them right.
- Think about ideas for pictures.
- Try not to use jargon; readers understand simple English better.
- Prepare some catchy responses that address things you particularly want to highlight, and look for opportunities to throw them in.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, just admit it and offer to find it out.
- Be sure to steer clear from stereotypes and biases --being offensive is rarely effective.
- Be attentive to all the parts of the interview. At times, the most important question for the story may be buried in the interview.

The reporter is probably going to use a tape recorder to enhance the accuracy of the story. Reporters will usually ask for permission to use a tape recorder and once you grant the permission, be extra careful with what you say. Behave as if you're being recorded, whether you are or not. Don't be frightened and silenced by a tape recorder, though. Speak naturally, and give it a break when it's necessary to change tape sides.

Remember that what you want is to grab the readers' or spectators' attention. To do that, the simplest ways are the best. Keep your sentences short, your introduction brief and to the point, and your approach straightforward. Don't bore the listener and don't digress too much.

A word of caution: Don't say anything you don't want to hear on the news or read in the paper tomorrow morning. Quotes can be taken out of context, jokes can end up in the headline, and a badly placed word can tarnish your organization for a long time. Watch out for any libelous and offensive statements. If you want to be off the record (that is, say something that is not official part of the interview), you have to say so before you start talking, not after. Off-the-records statement might still be used, although not attributed to you. You'll be on the safe side if you assume that everything you say is on the record and could be used by the media.

What should you do if you're misquoted?

Sometimes, reporters will take the liberty of editing your interview. That's quite a usual practice, aimed at making you sound better. However, sometimes this editing can cause you harm. If your edited quote captures the gist of what you said, let it go. However, if what you read doesn't sound like you, or was flat-out fabricated, you should take action. Treat everyone with respect, apologize for whatever is your fault, but [take steps to correct the error](#) right away and restate your initiative's real intentions and ideas. Such steps might include sending a

request for a correction on the next issue, writing a letter to the editor, or writing a column explaining that what was attributed to you doesn't reflect your actual views.

What should you do after the story has run?

Your work isn't done after your story is out. You'll want to maintain your relationship with the reporter that you worked with, so send a thank-you note to him or her if appropriate. Ask when the story will run, and then get clippings of the story when it's out for your own records (or a tape, if it aired on television or on the radio.) In the future, keep the reporter updated on what you're up to and on upcoming events. Maybe you'll even get a follow-up story on your original story!

In Summary

Now that you're reading your story on the paper, watching it on TV, or listening to it on the radio, it's time to congratulate yourself. It's also time to think about what you learned. What did you learn that would make it easier or more effective the next time? Is there a better way of getting your story out? Can you build on the contacts and relationships you developed with the media? Hopefully, now you have a better sense of how this works, what people want to read, and how to focus on what really matters to your community. It's time to get ready for the next story!

Contributor
Marcelo Vilela

Online Resources

[Newsworthy elements](#), from the Berkeley Media Studies Group, includes a checklist of questions by category to help you prepare and focus your story.

[Newswriting Basics](#), by McGraw Hill, is a comprehensive guide introducing the concepts and formulas to writing a news story.

[Worksheet: Crafting your media advocacy plan](#), from the Berkeley Media Studies Group, can help you identify key moments in the political process or opportunities — such as holidays, anniversaries or other key dates — far enough in advance that you can prepare and act effectively.

Print Resources

Anderson et al. (1994). *The conversation of journalism: Communication, community, and news*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Bagnall, N. (1993). *Newspaper Language*. Oxford: Focal Press.

Dary, D. (1973). *How to write news for broadcast and print media*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: G/L Tab Books.

Rich, C. (1997). *Writing and reporting news: A coaching method*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Preparing Guest Columns and Editorials

Writing a guest column or an editorial for your local newspaper is an effective way to raise awareness about a community problem, defend your position, or move the community to action. This section explains what guest columns and editorials are, helps you decide whether and how writing one can help your organization or cause, and takes you through the steps of writing a guest column or editorial.

What are guest columns and editorials?

Guest columns and editorials are newspaper or magazine opinion pieces, usually 400 to 800 words long, that are written by someone who isn't part of the publication's normal staff and that appear in the Opinion & Editorial (op-ed) section. There really isn't much difference between a guest editorial and a guest column -- the two terms are generally used interchangeably, although if someone is allowed to write for the publication more than once, it's more likely to be called a column.

Guest columns and editorials differ from regular columns and editorials in only a few ways:

- A regular editorial is an opinion piece written by the publication's editorial board, a group that discusses issues and makes decisions as to what the publication's official position will be. Editorials often run without naming the author; instead they are usually attributed to the entire editorial board. If the author is named, it usually will say something like "Pete Bumstead for the Valley Times Editorial Board."
- A regular column is a regularly-appearing piece written by a single author, often run with the writer's photograph, that stresses the writer's opinion. Here are a few columnists:

Nationally syndicated columnists

The following writers are all well-known American opinion columnists. A wide range of styles are represented here -- from the liberal to the conservative, as well as the humorous. If you'd like to get a firmer idea of what columns are like, you may want to check out a few of these authors' works.

- [Ellen Goodman](#) is a Pulitzer Prize winner who writes for the [Boston Globe](#) about family, politics, generation gaps, ethics, abortion, and the ever-changing status of women.
- [David S. Broder](#) writes news analysis and opinion page commentary on national politics for the *Washington Post*.
- [Nat Hentoff](#) writes commentary about free speech issues for the *Village Voice*.
- [Molly Ivins](#), the late columnist for the [Fort Worth Star-Telegram](#), was a Pulitzer Prize finalist three times.

- [William J. Raspberry](#), urban affairs columnist for the *Washington Post*, won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 1994 for his writing on such topics as crime, AIDS, the Nation of Islam and violent rap lyrics
- [Liz Balmaseda](#) of the *Miami Herald* won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 1993 for her columns about life in Miami and issues relating to Cuban Americans and other immigrant communities.
- **George F. Will** writes commentary about national politics for the [Washington Post](#) and [Newsweek](#).
- [Dave Barry](#) was for many years a humor columnist for the *Miami Herald*.

Why should you consider using guest columns and editorials?

Guest columns and editorials, if written well, can be important in swaying public opinion, especially on current "hot-button" issues in your community. Here are some of the reasons you might consider using a guest column or editorial as part of your strategy:

To bring more of the public over to your way of thinking: If public opinion is against you, an impassioned and eloquent guest piece in the local paper can do a lot to explain your position and persuade people to come around to support your stance.

To show your side of controversial issues: When you're working on a public initiative that is being hotly contested, a guest column or editorial can give you a chance to explain the reasoning behind your view and win over supporters.

To re-open public dialogue on issues that have fallen out of the public mind: If your initiative is lagging and public interest has waned, you can use a guest column or editorial to remind people why the topic is still relevant, add any new information to what people already know, and spark public discourse on the topic.

To counter your opponents' arguments against your group or initiative: This is probably the most common way that guest columns or editorials are used. Newspapers will also sometimes allow representatives of both sides of a hotly-contested issue to do "pro and con" pieces, in which both sides have their columns or editorials printed side by side on the opinion page.

When should you consider using guest columns and editorials?

Any time that you want to express an opinion on events and activities of concern to you as a community organizer, you should consider submitting a guest column or editorial. You can also time the appearance of your guest column to your advantage:

Tie it to the start of an initiative, organization, or program: If you're just getting started, the local paper might let you write a guest column or editorial to announce your existence and explain what you're all about.

Tie it to a season: Many issues can be brought up that are connected to the time of year. For example, if winter is setting in, this might be a good time to appeal to the public for donations for the area homeless shelter. In the spring, a recycling education program can point out the connection between the renewal of the season and the renewal of natural resources that recycling offers.

Tie it to an upcoming or current event: Finding a way to connect your group or initiative to some event that is a good way to tap in on things that the public is already thinking about. For example, if you work with an environmental group and a local election is coming up, you might write about candidates who have a good record on environmental issues. Or, if you work with a physical education program and want to address the need for fitness, timing your guest column or editorial to run the day before a big city-wide sports event might be a good idea.

Tie it to an upcoming holiday: Another idea might be to time your guest column or editorial to coincide with a holiday, for example, Martin Luther King, Jr. day if you work with a civil rights group, or Valentine's Day for a healthy heart initiative.

Whom can you target with your guest column or editorial?

Your target audience will depend quite a bit on who reads the publication in which your guest column or editorial appears. Newspapers generally tend to reach a wide local audience, although if your town has more than one paper the demographics of each one's readership may be quite different. Magazines and specialty newsletters tend to have smaller, more specialized audiences.

Things to find out about the readership of the publication you're going to write for:

- Gender makeup -- Are there more men than women or vice versa?
- Average age -- Is it a younger audience, a more mature one, or a mixture?
- Where they live -- Keep in mind where the readers are. For example, if you're trying to make a shoreline preservation project appealing to an inland community, you may need to come up with an angle that's more relevant to their lives.
- Income level -- As with their location, the readers' income level is important to keep in mind. For example, if there is a high percentage of low income citizens, appeals for financial donations might not be the best idea.
- Education level -- Again, be sure that your audience is able to relate to what you're writing. Try to write in a way that's understandable to those who are less educated, but take care not to patronize or condescend.

- Knowledge or skill level -- For example, if your guest column is appearing in a publication aimed at people who work in engineering, you can use a lot of terminology that you might not use in a regular community newspaper.
- Ethnic/racial background -- What, if any, effect will this have on your audience's views on your issue?
- Attitude/community values -- This is particularly important if your issue is controversial or involves thorny moral questions, such as anything having to do with sexuality.

How do you prepare guest columns and editorials?

Find out in advance what the publication's policy is on guest editorials and columns.

Call the publication's editorial office ahead of time to find out what their guest editorial policy is and what their formatting requirements are.

You may need to explain why your views are important and why the publication should grant you this space. Space is limited and competition is fierce for guest editorials, so be prepared to try to persuade the paper to let you write.

If a phone call isn't enough, send out a "pitch letter". Most papers have an op-ed review process that takes a day to a week. Many larger papers will require an exclusive -- an agreement that you won't print your piece in other papers.

Guest Column Pitch Letter

February 11, 2001

Wendy O. Williams
Opinion Page Editor
The Brownville Bugle
123 Smith Street
Brownville, NY 12345

Dear Ms. Williams:

Thank you for taking the time to explain your publication's policies and requirements on submitting guest editorials to the Bugle when I spoke with you on Tuesday.

I understand the reasons that the Bugle is unable to publish all of the many guest pieces that are submitted during a public controversy like the current one over condom distribution in school health clinics. I also understand why you normally encourage readers to send in letters to the editor instead. I hope that you will make an exception in this case, as I feel an editorial

from our coalition would be particularly crucial to any public debate on the matter of teen pregnancy.

Our point of view is needed in order to have a balanced public debate on what is clearly a controversial and sensitive topic. Councilman A. B. Stinence, in his admirable efforts to discourage teens from having unprotected sex, has specifically (and, we feel, mistakenly) attacked the Brownville Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition repeatedly in his remarks to the press, on his weekly radio program, and to readers of the Bugle.

If there is to be an informed and logical public discussion of the issues being raised by Councilman Stinence, our coalition needs to have a chance to explain our position clearly, calmly, and in detail. While we greatly appreciate the news coverage that the Bugle has done so far on this issue, we feel that the best way to lay out our entire argument for the public's consideration would be through a guest editorial in your paper. We hope that with the Bugle's agreement to allow us to explain our side of the issues, we can have a much more open and informed public when everyone goes to the polls in two weeks.

Again, thank you very much for your assistance and guidance, and I hope to hear from you soon regarding our request to air our message.

Sincerely,

Alicia Rodriguez
Director
Brownville Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition

Select a writer for the piece.

If possible, find a known public figure who is involved with or sympathizes with your cause. People DO notice who the author is. If you can't get a well-known "name" to write the piece, it won't be disastrous, but it always helps.

More importantly, find someone who is a good writer! Even if your author isn't that well known in the community, a guest column or editorial can be very effective if it is well written. If necessary, your organization may have to have others help in writing the piece, but they will have to agree to be unsung heroes in this case.

Know the format requirements for guest columns and editorials.

These requirements vary -- be sure to find out the requirements of the specific publication you're writing for. Most of the time, newspapers require the following of guest columns and editorials:

Submissions must be typed, double-spaced

Title and author should be listed at the top

The piece should be 400 to 800 words long

At the end, the author, title, organization, and a one-line description of the mission and membership base should be listed. For example:

Joe Schmoe

Director

Greater Whoville Citizens Against Smoking

GWCAS is a 200-member nonprofit organization dedicated to educating Whovillians about the health risks of smoking.

Start writing!

Decide on the main message of your piece and keep it in mind while you're writing. For example, your main message might be "Whoville residents should take part in the Great American Smokeout"

Start off by stating the subject of the controversy or issue. Put it in simple terms, and be as clear as possible. For example, if the controversy is over an initiative to fund sex education in the public schools, go ahead and say so. "Here's what people are disagreeing over," you're saying. Then you can go on to explain why your side of the disagreement is right.

Be persuasive! Use documented facts to back up your case as much as possible, and make sure your arguments are clear, logical, and easy to follow. If you're not very experienced with logic and making good arguments, you may want to do some reading on the subject. Books on communication and debate are a good place to start.

If you have vocal opposition, [present a counter-argument](#) to your opponent's position. Refute their statements with factual evidence, and don't stoop to name-calling. The web sites mentioned above can be helpful in forming your counter-arguments.

If possible, ask the reader to **Do** something -- register to vote, attend a meeting, write a letter, protest. Appeals that ask readers to take some sort of action are more likely to stick in their minds.

Review your work and get feedback.

Check carefully for errors first, then get additional, objective opinions from as many people as you possibly can, including people from outside your group. Get their honest opinions and use their feedback to help you decide on the final version of your guest column or editorial.

Submit your piece for publication.

You're now ready to send it in. Double-check to make sure that you've met all submission and format guidelines, and get it in before the deadline. Be sure to follow up with a letter to the newspaper thanking them for letting you write your piece!

Tips for writing:

- Be creative, but to the point. Don't get so involved in composing your piece that you forget to present information clearly and simply.
- Focus on local angles; this makes your message more relevant to the reader. You can focus on the experience of a local person, for instance, to make your point.
- Stay focused -- deliver a clear message with facts to back it up.
- You can't just say ANYTHING in editorials! Your assertions must be based in fact. Controversial ideas MUST be backed with evidence.
- Consider how your opinions fit the goals of your group.
- Don't use words or phrases that turn your audience off unnecessarily. Try to stay away from loaded language – words that identify you as being on the extreme end of an argument, or accuse people of thoughts or intentions they may not have. Particularly avoid words that lead to the next suggestion.
- Don't resort to name-calling. Use a professional tone, and be respectful, even to those who may not be respectful to you. In addition to being the right way to proceed, that will cast you in a better light than your opponents, and help people see your side as the more reasonable one.
- Know when a light-hearted approach or humor is appropriate and when it isn't.

Things that can be used to make your writing more interesting:

- Startling or eye-opening facts.
- Intriguing questions.
- Exploring common myths.
- Interesting or amusing anecdotes.
- Presenting new information on the subject – use the most recent scientific/sociological/ whatever info available (especially if your topic is viewed as "old news").
- Slice-of-life examples.
- Interesting comparisons.
- [Real-life testimonials](#)
- Practical tips on what the reader can do to make a difference.

Following these guidelines can get you space in the local newspaper – or air time on local radio or TV – that can serve you well as a platform from which to raise the profile of your effort, counter the arguments and misinformation of your opposition, and gain support for your cause and your work. Once you write an editorial or column, you may be able to continue the practice, if not regularly, at least from time to time. Gaining a foothold with the local media in this way could mean a great deal to your organization or initiative.

In Summary

Whether you're trying to sway public opinion on a controversial issue, raise awareness on a health risk in your community, or motivate people to take some sort of action, guest columns or editorials can be a great way to get your message out to a lot of people at once. When used in combination with other media methods like public service announcements, brochures, posters, advertising, or fact sheets, guest columns and editorials can be an integral part of an overall media campaign to help you influence public opinion and make things happen.

Online Resources

[Activity: Letter to the editor](#), from the Berkeley Media Studies Group, offers a sample letter to the editor format to help you organize your ideas.

[Newswriting Basics](#), by McGraw Hill, is a comprehensive guide introducing the concepts and formulas to writing a news story.

[Tips for writing effective letters to the editor](#), from the Berkeley Media Studies Group, offers guidelines for what makes a compelling letter, and how can advocates increase their chances of getting published.

Print Resources

Adler, E. W. (1991). *Print that works: The first step-by-step guide that integrates writing, design, and marketing*. Palo Alto, CA: Bull Publishing Company.

Brigham, N., Catalfo, M., & Cluster, D. (1991). *How to do leaflets, newsletters, and newspapers*. Detroit, MI: PEP Publishers.

National Education Goals Panel Members: 1993-94. (1994). *Guide to getting out your message*. 1994. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Rosenbaum, J. (1987). *Media how to notebook*. (H. Leone, Ed.). San Francisco, CA : Media Alliance Community Media Project.

Weiner, L. (1989). *Gaining access to media resources*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University School of Medicine, Health Promotion Resource Center.

"This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?"

"A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

"Friends don't let friends drive drunk."

"You could learn a lot from a dummy."

How many of these phrases ring a bell? These widely recognized slogans from national public service announcement campaigns by the Ad Council have become a part of our culture.

While the above examples were all big-budget campaigns, your own organization's public service announcements (also known as PSA's) -- even if they're a small, locally-produced campaign -- can be a great inexpensive way to get your message out to the public.

What is a public service announcement?

Public service announcements, or PSA's, are short messages produced on film, videotape, DVD, CD, audiotape, or as a computer file and given to radio and television stations. Generally, PSA's are sent as ready-to-air audio or video tapes, although radio stations (especially community or public stations, such as campus radio or National Public Radio affiliates) sometimes prefer a script that their announcers can read live on the air. They can be done very simply with a single actor reading or performing a message, or they can be elaborate, slickly-produced messages with music, dramatic story-lines, and sound or visual effects.

Broadcast media -- radio and television -- are required by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to serve "in the public interest." Most stations use PSA's as one of the ways they meet this requirement. While they aren't required to donate a fixed percentage of air time per day to PSA's, stations do have to state in their licensing and renewal applications how much air time they plan to devote to PSA's. Most stations donate about a third of their commercial spots to non-commercial causes; in other words, if a station has 18 minutes of commercials in a given hour, six minutes of that will probably be devoted to PSA's.

Advantages of PSA's

- PSA's are generally inexpensive. Since the airtime is donated, your only cost is production. If you keep to a tight budget, you can make PSA's very cheaply.
- Most stations will allow you to include a telephone number for more information in your PSA.
- PSA's tend to be really effective at encouraging the audience to do something -- for example, call a phone number for more information, use condoms, or have your pet spayed or neutered.
- PSA's can raise awareness of your issue.

Limitations of PSA's

- Because PSA's depend on donated time, you'll often find you're not able to get them run on all the media outlets you'd like to, or you may find yourself at the mercy of station staff members who may be overworked, arbitrary, or personally opposed to your group's work. PSA's are often run as "filler" in the middle of the night or during other times when only a few people are listening or watching.
- The competition among non-profit groups for free air time is very stiff -- depending on the market, there could be hundreds of other groups vying for time on any given station. You may not be able to count on getting a lot of air time for your PSA's.
- Stations tend to shy away from "controversial" PSA's. If your group focuses on an issue that is the subject of heated public debate -- anti-abortion advocacy or gay rights, for example -- you may have a hard time convincing stations to run your PSA.
- Stations may not track and report when your PSA's have been played, but they will do this for paid advertising.
- PSA's do require a bit of work on your part, and they tend to be ineffective at influencing policy. Consider them more when you have a specific action you want the viewer or listener to take, or coordinate with other activities designed to influence people's behavior.

When should you consider using PSA's?

Here are some guidelines for deciding when you might want to incorporate PSA's into your media campaign. Keep in mind that you don't necessarily have to meet all of these criteria -- this is just a list of times that PSA's may be a good idea for your group:

- When your group is a nonprofit organization
- When you have a specific announcement to make (for example, the time and place of a meeting or event).
- When you have a clear and easy-to-understand issue
- When you're requesting a very specific action
- When you have good contacts for getting your PSA on the air
- When you have good writing and production skills
- When you've previously used PSA's with success
- When it's going to be part of a larger media campaign

How do you write a PSA?

Decide upon and clarify the purpose of your PSA. What are your goals here? What do you want to accomplish by putting a PSA on the air? And for that matter, why use a PSA instead of other publicity outlets?

- Target your audience. What type of people are you hoping to reach through your PSA? This will help you focus in both your desired media outlets, and also upon your PSA content.
- Survey your media outlets to best reach that audience. That means that you need to know what media outlets are available in your particular geographic area.
- Prioritize your media outlets. That is, you need to know which outlets your target audience is most likely to prefer. For example, is your audience more likely to tune in to the 24-hour country music station than to the one that plays mostly golden oldies? If so, then you point toward the country music outlet.

Also, when does your audience tend to tune in to these outlets? For example, is your desired audience a bunch of early risers? Then you'd probably want to reach them early in the morning, as opposed to late at night, if you possibly can. However, don't count on being able to pick the time of day for your PSA to run. That's why getting to know your media personnel is so important -- it's easier to ask a favor of someone you know.

[Approach your preferred media outlets](#). Here you want to [make a personal contact](#), as best you can, directly with the station manager in small markets, or with the person who's responsible for choosing PSA's for broadcast. A phone call is good; a personal meeting is better. Find out a bit about their requirements for PSA's -- what format they want to receive them in, preferred length, when to submit them, etc. See "How do you get your PSA on the air?" later on in this section for more detailed information on how to go about this.

Write your PSA. The actual writing waits until this point, because you first need to know your audience, your markets, and their policies.

Key points to remember about the writing:

- Because you've only got a few seconds to reach your audience (often 30 seconds or less), the language should be simple and vivid. Take your time and make every word count. Make your message crystal clear.
- The content of the writing should have the right "hooks" -- words or phrases that grab attention -- to attract your audience (again, you need to know who your audience is). For example, starting your PSA off with something like, "If you're between the ages of 25 and 44, you're more likely to die from AIDS than from any other disease."
- The PSA should usually (though maybe not 100% of the time) request a specific action, such as calling a specific number to get more information. You ordinarily want listeners to do something as a result of having heard the PSA.

Getting ready to write your PSA:

Choose points to focus on. Don't overload the viewer or listener with too many different messages. List all the possible messages you'd like to get into the public mind, and then decide on the one or two most vital points. For example, if your group educates people about asthma,

you might narrow it down to a simple focus point like, "If you have asthma, you shouldn't smoke."

Brainstorm. This is also a good time to look at the PSA's that others have done for ideas. Get together with your colleagues to toss around ideas about ways you can illustrate the main point(s) you've chosen. If possible, include members of your target group in this process. If you're aiming your PSA at African-American youth, for example, be sure to invite some African-American youth to take part in brainstorming.

Check your facts. It's extremely important for your PSA to be accurate. Any facts should be checked and verified before sending the PSA in. Is the information up to date? If there are any demonstrations included in the PSA, are they done clearly and correctly?

Identify a "hook". A hook is whatever you use to grab the listener or viewer's attention. How are you going to keep them from changing the channel or leaving the room or letting their attention drift when your PSA comes on? A hook can be something funny, it can be catchy music, it can be a shocking statistic, it can be an emotional appeal -- whatever makes the listener or viewer interested enough to watch or listen to the rest of your PSA. For example, if you're aiming for Hispanic listeners, your hook might be to have your PSA use Tejano or salsa background music.

Now you're ready to write your script!

Basic guidelines for PSA format:

Most stations prefer 30-second spots. If you're writing a television PSA, you'll want to keep the announcer's copy 2 or 3 seconds shorter than the entire length of the PSA. Television stations run on a much tighter, more rigid schedule than radio stations, and you may find that if your PSA runs exactly 30 seconds, for example, the station may sometimes cut off the end.

Length of PSA	10 seconds	15 seconds	20 seconds	30 seconds
Number of words	20-25 words	30-35 words	40-50 words	60-75 words

Your copy should be typed, double or triple-spaced.

You can put more than one spot per page for the shorter ones, but with 30 and 60 second spots, put them on separate pages.

The top of the sheet should list:

- how long the PSA should run (i.e., "FOR USE: November 18 - December 20" or "Immediate: TFN" [til further notice])
- length of the PSA

- what agency or group the PSA is for, and
- title of the PSA.

The script itself should be split into two columns; the left column will list all directions, camera angles, sound effects, etc. and the right column lists all dialogue.

Don't use hyphenations or abbreviations.

The bottom of the sheet should be marked with "###", the standard ending used in releases to the media to let the media outlet know there are no further pages to the script or story.

Your script can be sent as "live copy"-- a simple script that's ready to be read by a live on-air announcer -- or as a pre-recorded tape. While live copy is inexpensive and is used extensively in radio, television stations rarely use live copy scripts.

Below is an example of a live copy PSA script for radio. Two longer scripts -- one for radio and one for television -- are shown with the other examples at the end of this section.

Sample radio PSA script -- live copy

Use: Immediate: TFN

Time: 20 seconds

Agency: Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

Title: "Day of Compassion"

Main Point: Day of Compassion will be held June 20 Fifteen years ago, most people thought it couldn't happen to them. Today we know better. AIDS has taken more than 320,000 lives nationwide. It could happen to someone you love. Turn on your radio or TV on June 20th and experience a Day of Compassion. It could save lives. Be aware. Be safe. Be compassionate.

###

If you can get help from an outside professional or somebody who has radio/television experience, this is a good time to do so. He or she can review your work for you and offer suggestions. It won't take much time, since PSA's are so short.

Pretesting your script is always a good idea. Find some people who are members of your target audience, show them or let them read the script for the PSA, and ask them for critical feedback. In addition to members of your target audience, you might also want to ask health professionals and activists, teachers, and religious leaders to take part in pretesting. It doesn't have to be a big, hairy, formal process. Whatever amount of time you spend pretesting will almost always pay off in greater effectiveness of your PSA.

Now you have a script that's ready to go! If you're just making live copy scripts, you can skip the next part ("How do you produce a PSA?") and go directly on to "How do you get your PSA on the air?" If you're going to be sending in a pre-recorded tape, read on!

How do you produce a PSA?

If you're planning on sending in a pre-recorded PSA, decide whether you should produce it yourself or bring in outside help at this point. Generally, it's not a good idea to produce it yourself unless you're sure you can do a professional-quality job. Everyone has seen or heard at least a few badly produced local PSA's in their time; you know it can negatively affect your opinion of an organization. If you can't be certain you can do a genuinely good job of it, you shouldn't attempt to produce your own PSA.

But don't despair! You can have a well-made PSA without going to the expense of paying a professional television or radio production company. Find out if anyone in your group has broadcasting experience. Approach area advertising agencies and production companies to see if any of them would donate personnel, studio time, or equipment for your PSA. Consider tapping into broadcasting students at any area universities. They're hungry for the experience and most upperclassmen will have had some formal training and experience.

As a last resort, you can pay a professional production or advertising company to produce your script. You may be able to get a reduced rate for nonprofit agencies, so be sure to ask about that possibility.

Tips for radio:

- Finding professional announcers is helpful but not vital. Volunteers at community or campus radio stations, people who read for the blind, and storytellers are all experienced in doing voiceover work. Just keep your target group in mind when choosing actors. People tend to respond better to those who sound like they might be their approximate age and background.
- In radio, your audience is usually doing at least one other thing in addition to listening; driving, reading, partying, studying, working, gardening, cleaning, etc. It's important to grab the audience's attention quickly and hold it.
- Try to use short, arresting sentences aimed directly at the listener at the beginning of the PSA to help grab their attention. For example: "Your heart could be a ticking time bomb. Has one or both of your parents had heart disease? If so, your chances of developing heart disease later in life are a lot higher than for most people."

Tips for television:

- You have to tell the TV staff exactly what you want them to film. You must describe each shot in writing, and give the correct dialogue to go with that shot.

- Drama clubs, community theater groups, and the drama departments at your local high schools and universities are great places to find talent, and most of the members are eager for experience.
- Consider using slide/announcer spots, because they're cheap and easy to produce. In a slide/announcer spot, an announcer reads the script while 35-mm slides are used for the visual portion of the PSA.
- If you're producing a television spot yourself, make up a storyboard for your script before you begin shooting. A storyboard shows sketches or photos of each individual spot in a television piece. It helps the director figure out how the entire piece will flow and what sort of camera angles and staging need to be set up.
- Avoid special effects. They're generally costly, and usually only distract viewers from the message.

Chances are good that you can get help from your local community access cable TV station. Many of them also offer free production courses, which could be useful to you if you might be producing videos on a regular basis.

Many local cable TV stations also do "scrolls," or community-calendar type announcements. Your message might also be included as one of these. The announcement is often 25-50 words of copy, sometimes even less, and is often written similarly to a radio PSA. Check with your cable TV station for details.

Overall tips

If you can afford to, make multiple PSA's so that the same one doesn't play over and over. You don't want your audience to get sick of your message, so having different versions of the same message, or several different PSA's with different messages, is one way to mix things up and keep their attention. Keep it brief and simple! Focus what you want the viewer to do or remember after they see or hear your PSA. Stick to having only two or three main characters in the PSA to help your audience focus on the message. Let the actors give you feedback and make suggestions on the script. They will appreciate that you take their input seriously, and they often have great ideas. When information changes (for example, with AIDS PSA's, where new treatments are being developed all the time), change your PSA's as soon as possible. Contact the station(s) playing it and get them to stop running old material, and produce new PSA's with updated information as quickly as you can. Talk with your actors and production staff about payment or donated time, and have a written agreement in place before production begins.

How do you get your PSA on the air?

Different stations have different policies for PSA's. For example, in some small communities, you can just call in your PSA by telephone. Other stations require the PSA script, while others require a fully produced, ready-to-air version. Find out ahead of time what their requirements

are -- never send a PSA without knowing the rules and guidelines of the station first. Stations also vary around maximum PSA length and minimum advance notice. In other words, you want to know what the local ground rules are before you take to the field.

Radio

It's generally a lot easier to get a PSA run on the radio than on television. Once you're familiar with submission requirements, send your PSA, following station guidelines. This will normally include a cover letter, along with any specific requests or instructions.

Even if you've already talked to your contact on the phone or in person you should take care to write a good cover letter when you send your PSA in. Mention previous conversations with the contact, and any specific air times you've discussed. Be sure to list any and all enclosed items or additional pages. And, most importantly, be appreciative!

PSA Cover Letter

Anytown Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition
789 Walnut Drive, Suite 88 * Anytown, PA 12345 * (215) 555-5678

October 10, 1998

Mai-Lin Huang
Public Affairs Director
KPSA 98.6 Radio
1234 Broadcast Lane
Anytown, PA 12345

Dear Ms. Huang:

As per our telephone conversation on October 8, enclosed please find three index cards with ready-to-read announcer PSA's for our teen parents speaker's bureau program, as well as four cassette tapes with the following:

- Five 10-second spots
- Three 15-second spots
- Three 30-second spots
- Two 60-second spots

As per your request, all of the 10-second spots are on a single tape, all the 15-second spots are on another, and so on. For your reference, I have also enclosed copies of the scripts for the taped spots.

Thank you for taking the time to explain KPSA's policies and requirements on submitting public service announcements when I spoke with you on Tuesday. I look forward to hearing the first of our PSA's during Jammin' Jeska's Morning Madhouse on October 22,. If I'm mistaken about this date, please let me know.

We feel confident that with KPSA's support we'll have a significant impact on teen pregnancy in our community. Again, thank you very much for your assistance and guidance in getting these important messages on the air.

Sincerely,

Alicia Rodriguez
Director

Anytown Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalition

Enclosures:

- *Index cards (3)*
- *Cassette tapes (4)*
- *PSA scripts (4 pages)*

Make sure you keep your own copies of everything! Media outlets receive a lot of PSA's; misplacing or losing them is common, so be prepared to provide a new copy if necessary. Follow up with a phone call a few days later.

Television

Getting a PSA shown on television is highly competitive. It helps to make a personal contact with someone on the station's staff. Call to find out who is in charge of selecting which PSA's are run. Depending on the size of the market and the structure of the particular station you're dealing with, your best contact person could be the public affairs director, traffic director, program director, promotions manager, or even the station manager.

Once you know who your contact should be, call and ask if you can make an appointment to talk about the possibility of airing your PSA. Be on time, and bring an air-ready copy of the PSA and the script as well as information on your organization or initiative. It might help to bring proof of your group's tax exempt status as well. If your contact is unfamiliar with your group, you may have to spend the first few minutes explaining who you are and what you do.

Explain how the PSA fits into your overall media campaign, the goals of the campaign, and how running it at the times you're asking for will help the campaign be more effective. And of course, be gracious and professional at all times -- any station that runs your PSA is doing you a

favor, and if you come off as too pushy or unappreciative it only hurts your chances of getting your PSA on the air.

Once you've gotten approval for your PSA

After you've gotten an agreement to run your PSA from a radio or television station, find out the day and time that it will start playing. Your contact may not be the same person who actually schedules the spots, so if necessary ask him or her who is in charge of scheduling and then contact that person.

Listen to or watch the station for the first airing to make sure your PSA is shown (and that it is shown correctly). Follow up by sending a thank you note and, if you can, some small token of your gratitude, such as a certificate of appreciation or an invitation to one of your group's events.

Do keep in mind that your spot might not run exactly at the time that your contact says it will. PSA schedules are always subject to change.

How can you tell if your PSA was effective?

The best way to judge effectiveness is to request a specific action, and then to monitor the actions taken. For example, if you're requesting listeners to call a number, then you measure the number of calls received before the PSA aired. The same applies if you're asking for postcards.

Alternatively, if you were asking for attendance at an event, you could both measure attendance and also ask those attending how they heard about the event, and note the percent mentioning PSA's.

Once it's on the air, see if you can use the PSA to get more extensive media coverage, such as a media story on your work, or being a guest on a panel show, or possibly -- depending on the station and the media market -- being able to do a radio editorial or getting editorial reply time. This is using the principal of leverage, a very powerful principle in doing community work.

Finally, as noted before, pre-testing should help you [figure out how effective a PSA may or may not be](#).

Contributor
Chris Hampton

Online Resource

[Family Health Institute](#) (1997). Behavior change through mass communication.

[How to Use Public Service Announcements](#), prepared by aspencsg.org.

[How to Write a Public Service Announcement that is Worth Airing, Worth Hearing and Worth Writing](#), by Kansas Association of Broadcasters, contains helpful examples and is written in a friendly, conversational tone.

[Tips for Creating a Public Service Announcement](#), by preventionlinks.org, includes information on graphics, and on how to make a storyboard.

Print Resources

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (1993). *You can increase your media coverage*. In Technical assistance bulletin. Rockville, MD: *National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information*.

Duncan, C., Rivlin, D., & Williams, M. (1990). *An advocate's guide to the media*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.

League of Women Voters of the U.S. (1978). *Breaking into broadcasting*. Washington, DC: League of Women Voters of the U.S.

New York State Department of Health. (1997). *Writing public service announcements*.

Pertschuk, M. & Wilbur, P. (1991). *Media advocacy: Reframing public debate*. Washington, DC: Benton Foundation.

Arranging a Press Conference

Holding a press conference is a simple, effective way to communicate your message with the media. Holding a successful press conference can generate news about your cause and awareness about your project. This section looks at the elements of planning a successful press conference, when to hold a press conference, and how best to communicate with the media and the public at a press conference.

What is a press conference?

You and your group members have probably seen them on television before or after a major local or national event. On the evening news there's a short television clip of a speaker surrounded by a crowd of reporters asking questions. So, you may know what press conferences look like, in general.

But what exactly is a press conference? A press conference is a tool designed to generate news – in particular, hard news that can advance the cause of your organization. Hard news is defined as a story in the print or electronic media which is timely, significant, prominent, and relevant.

Imagine a flock of media reporters coming to an event that you have organized. This can be exciting stuff, and an important opportunity for your organization. If you've never done it before, holding a press conference can be intimidating, even frightening. But the material in this section will guide you through the process, and you'll see that it's not all that hard.

Why should you hold a press conference?

Press releases, interviews, and informal media contacts are excellent ways of getting your message across. They are the bread and butter of your media relations, and often of your entire outreach effort. A press conference is an additional media technique, for special occasions, when you really want to make an impression. More specifically, why hold a press conference? Because:

- You can give more information than in a press release.
- A press conference is interactive; you can answer questions from the press, and emphasize points you might not otherwise have a chance to make.
- You can announce an important development, and explain its significant local and wider implications.
- You can set the record straight if your group received negative publicity.
- You can often generate the kind of notice or publicity – a spot on the 6:00 TV news, for instance – that you'd otherwise have to pay a large amount for.
- When many media representatives are present, it makes your conference seem really newsworthy -- the media presence itself adds to the importance.

- A successful media conference can not only generate news, but can also boost the morale of your own group -- that is, your group can take pride in knowing that the press will really turn out to hear what you have to say.

When should you hold a press conference?

You and your organization could hold a press conference whenever there is an event your organization wants to inform the community about. However, in some cases, you will want to hold a press conference for fast breaking news. For example, if an education funding bill were introduced in the state legislature, you might want to convene a press conference that same morning to react to the bill's implications. This will leave little time for elaborate preparations-- you should just phone the press at a few hours notice.

Remember, you don't want to hold a press conference too often. It is a special event, and should be treated as such. But here are some cases when a press conference might be a good idea:

- When the event includes a prominent individual to whom the media should have access.
- When you have significant announcements to make, such as a campaign start-up or a lobbying victory.
- When there is an emergency or crisis centered around your group or the issues it deals with.
- When a number of groups are participating in an action, and the show of support will emphasize that this action is news.
- When you want to react to a related event; for example, when a national report relevant to your issue is released.

How do you hold a press conference?

Before the press conference:

As we've discussed, you may have to schedule a press conference on short notice. If you do have lead time, however, you and your group will want to start planning at least a week or two before the press conference is to take place. The following steps should help you plan for your press conference:

Define the message.

Define the key message(s) that you and your group are trying to get out to the community. Your goal may be to introduce or shed more light on your issue, to announce a new program or event, to react to a news story or to a criticism of or attack on your effort, or to draw attention to an honor or award your effort has earned. Whatever the message, it should be summarized in clear 3-5 key points to the press. If a date, a time, an address or phone number, or other

specific information is part of the message – if the purpose of the press conference is to announce an upcoming event, for example – make sure to give it more than once, and to have it displayed prominently in your press kit (see #7 below.) Double- or triple-check any such information to make sure you have it right, both in speech and in print.

Schedule the date and time.

You and your group will need to determine a date and time for the press conference, and make sure it doesn't conflict with other press events or media deadlines. One way to find this out is to check with the local media and the wire services, who will know if your press conference conflicts with another. Here are some other tips for scheduling your press conference:

- Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays are the best days for press conferences, as they are considered slower news days. Try to have your press conference on one of these days if at all possible.
- The best time to schedule your press conference is between 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m, to ensure maximum coverage by the media. If you schedule it later, you risk missing the afternoon paper or evening news.
- Remember, you are competing with all the other news of the day; so don't be too worried if everyone doesn't show up.

Pick the site.

Make sure you pick a location for the press conference that has adequate parking and is not too far away for reporters to travel. Also, pick a site that provides visual interest and relationship to each topic--such as the state capitol building, city courthouse, or a local clinic or other site where the activities you're talking about are actually going on. Other considerations include picking a location relatively free from high levels of background noise (e.g., traffic, telephones, aircraft), and one which has adequate electrical outlets and extension cords for lighting, etc.

Select and train your participants.

At this stage of your planning process, you probably won't want to have just anyone from your group participate in the press conference. You will want your participants to be knowledgeable and articulate about the issue. They should be able to handle press questioning and scrutiny as well. People with high credibility, such as local politicians, the director of a local health promotion organization, or a physician may make effective spokespeople. Firsthand testimony from people from the community affected by the issue can be extremely powerful and convincing.

Here are a few tips for participants:

- Be clear and concise – avoid using jargon, rhetoric, or inflammatory language, and stifle "ums" and "ahs." You want to draw attention to the issue, not distract the audience with your words.
- Assume the audience is intelligent – avoid sounding patronizing.
- Don't fiddle with or clutch anything -- it's distracting and makes you appear nervous.
- Appearance counts – participants should be dressed neatly and appropriately for the occasion.
- Always tell the truth. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Don't exaggerate or give figures that aren't backed up by evidence, and don't state opinions as fact, or make charges that can't be proven.

In addition to the press conference participants, you will need to find a moderator who is experienced with the press and the issue. He or she will be in charge of convening the press conference by introducing the issue and participants. The moderator also answers questions or directs them to the appropriate participants.

If you and your group are new at this, you may want to attend at least one other press conference to get a feeling for what they are like. Even if you are very experienced in this area, it may be a good idea to conduct a dress rehearsal. Speakers should have scripts to memorize the 3-5 key points, and to make sure to speak no longer than 3-5 minutes each. A dress rehearsal is very helpful in training new participants, and a good time to try to anticipate tough or hostile questions. Have someone from your group play devil's advocate and see how participants respond.

For example, a suitable response to a tough or misguided question might be, "That's a good question, but it is not within the scope of this press conference. Our focus today is on..." If the question is legitimate but you don't know the answer to it, it's okay to call on someone else from your group who might know, or check out the answer and get back to that reporter later.

Contact the media.

The first step in contacting the media is to create a comprehensive mailing list of assignment editors at television stations, news directors at radio stations, and at major newspapers, and editors at weekly newspapers. You may even want to include the wire services (AP, UPI). Others you'll want to be sure to include on your list are reporters you have worked with before, contacts in the media you may have, and reporters who may have covered the issue in recent months.

If your organization has had occasion to work with the media before, you should have personal contacts with a number of media people. If you haven't made those contacts, this is a good time to start. The media aren't things – they're made up of human beings doing their jobs. If you can [make human contact with those folks](#), and especially if you can make their jobs easier, they'll return the favor.

You will also want to have a press advisory prepared and mailed about one week ahead of time to inform the media about the press conference. A press advisory is similar to a press release, with the difference being that press advisories can be used for background information to your media contacts. The format is basically the same as that of a press release. For an example of a press advisory, see the Tools section.

Follow up with the media.

After you and your group have mailed the press advisories to the media, you will want to follow up your press advisory with phone contact to the major media outlets. Give your press advisory three days to arrive, then begin your telephone follow-ups with the people you sent your press advisory to (if they say they never got one, offer to bring or FAX one to them). Also, follow up a second time the morning of the press conference.

Develop a press kit.

A press kit is a folder of information to give reporters background information about your issue or program. Press kits are very useful, if your group can afford it. If a press kit is beyond your budget, a press advisory will do. Your press kit should contain the following:

- A list of press conference participants.
- A press release, which should state your group's position on the issue, highlights of the press conference, and a few quotes from participants (for more, see Preparing Press Releases).
- Background information about the issue (i.e., statistics, historical background, case histories, or reprints of news stories).
- A few black & white glossy photographs (action photos are most interesting).
- Short (less than a page) biographies of participants.
- Related news stories from prestigious national publications (e.g., New York Times, Wall Street Journal, etc.).

Putting the kit together: The press release goes in the right side of the folder, and the other information goes in the left side of the folder.

Prepare the room.

There are a number of things you can do to prepare the room you're holding the press conference in. Here are some tips:

- Check the location of electrical outlets for microphones and lights.
- Set up the room with a table long enough to seat all your spokespeople, with name cards.
- Provide enough seating in the room for reporters, and enough room for their supporting equipment (e.g., cameras, microphone).

- Display visuals as a backdrop to your speaker's table: charts, posters, etc.
- Have a sign-in pad for attendance.
- Provide a podium for the moderator, perhaps with your organization's logo on it.
- Have coffee, tea, water, and any other refreshments set up.

At the Press Conference:

When the big day finally arrives, there are a number of things you and your group can do to help your press conference run as smoothly as possible. We will go through these, step by step:

- Welcome members of the press as they arrive.
- Have members of the press sign in, with their affiliation, and give each of them a press kit.
- Seat the press conference participants behind the table facing the seated reporters.
- Check the sign in pad to see which media outlets are represented. You may also want to make personal contact with major media representatives before or after the press conference.
- Start approximately on time -- no later than 5 minutes after the scheduled time.
- Tape record the event, for your own records, and for possible media use.
- Have the moderator welcome the press, and introduce the issue and participants.
- Each participant should present for no more than 3-5 minutes, making his/her 3-5 key points.
- After all the presentations, the moderator should entertain any questions from the press, and direct questions to the appropriate participants.
- After about 45 minutes, bring the formal conference to an end. Thank the participants for presenting, and the media for attending. In many cases, you may want to encourage the media to stay for further informal conversation with the participants.

After the Press Conference

To the extent that you can, make personal contact with representatives at least of the major media outlets represented. In a small town, this could mean one or two people; in a big city, there might be 20 or more. If you can have a short, pleasant conversation with these folks and make a good impression, they'll remember you when they need information or a story about your issue, and they'll respond when you contact them.

By looking through your attendance register, you should be able to determine which major media were not represented. Not everyone may arrive, as your conference may be preempted by some late breaking news story elsewhere. You may want to hand deliver a press release and press packet to these people, send a tape feed, or, try to schedule an interview with a reporter and one of the press conference participants.

You might also review the press conference with others from your organization that attended. What went well? What could you have done better? And how will you improve the next press conference you hold?

Contributor

Eric Wadud

Online Resources

[How to Hold a Press Conference](#), from the Western Organization of Resource Councils, is a comprehensive guide to help you prepare for a press conference. It includes 10 steps for a successful press conference as well as other related checklists (e.g., setting up a press conference).

Print Resources

Center for Community Change. (1996) *How to tell and sell your story*, Washington, DC.

League of Women Voters of the United States (1997) *Getting into print*. Washington, DC: League of Women Voters.

Martinez, B.F. (1979). *Guide to public relations for nonprofit organizations and public agencies*. The Grantsmanship Center. Los Angeles, CA.

Taplin, S. (1993) *Holding press conferences: Why, when, and how*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University School of Medicine, Health Promotion Resource Center.

Wallack, L.(1993) *Media advocacy and public health*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Using Paid Advertising

Let's say that you're getting the word out about your initiative and its activities, but the word isn't getting out quickly enough. You've already used public service announcements and whatever other free or cheap methods of publicizing your methods you could think of. Perhaps now it's time to think about using paid advertising.

Can advertising work for you? If done with care and planning, it certainly can. Let's look at how advertising worked in one public health campaign:

In 1989 and 1990, the Advertising Research Foundation conducted a study of the effectiveness of a four-city colon cancer awareness ad campaign. They found that, among men who saw the ads, only 6% had spoken to their doctors about the risk of colon cancer before the ads ran; after seeing the ads, 35% of the men spoke to their doctors. The researchers concluded that if television ads on the subject had been shown across the United States, over 2.7 million men would have taken the important step of talking to their doctors about their risk for colon cancer. Clearly, advertising can be a very effective health promotion tool!

What is advertising?

Paid advertising represents the purchase of "air time" on a radio or television channel, or page space in a newspaper or magazine. Printed media and broadcast media help pay for the costs of running their businesses by charging other businesses to advertise during their television or radio programs or in their newspapers. While advertising can include any sort of public promotion done by your group that must be paid for, we'll mainly focus on broadcast (radio and television) and print advertising (newspaper, magazines) in this section.

Broadcast advertising

Advertising time is offered in standard blocks on all commercial television and radio stations. Generally, 10-, 20-, 30-, and 60-second spots. Rates are somewhat negotiable-- you might be able to talk the station down a bit on the price --and vary widely depending on when your ad is run. Most radio and television stations offer production services, so they can also produce your ad --which means doing everything needed, such as writing, finding actors or announcers, filming or recording, and editing --for an additional fee.

Print advertising

Most newspapers and magazines measure ads in inches. Rates vary according to the publication's size; many papers give discounts to nonprofit organizations. Ad sizes are referred to in terms of the page layout --¼ page, ½ page, full page, and so on.

Newspaper advertising used to be much more difficult for advertisers wishing to run ads in more than one publication before 1984, when newspapers across the U.S. adopted the Standard Advertising Unit. Before this, the shapes and sizes of newspaper ads varied widely from one paper to another, making a confusing time for all advertisers. The change reduced production costs for display ads by making it easier for advertisers to come up with designs that could be used in more than one newspaper without being altered.

Other media

There are many less traditional media used for advertising. While we will focus on broadcast and print media in this section, here are a few other possibilities you might want to look into:

- Web advertising: There are a number of different types of web advertising (banner ads, sidebar ads, animation, videos, floaters, pop-up windows, etc.) and a number of ways to use and pay for them. Some are surprisingly affordable. Although they're generally not as effective as print and broadcast ads, in some circumstances and with some audiences, they may be just what you need.
- Outdoor advertising: billboards, ads on public transportation (such as buses and bus benches), rooftop balloons, etc. Check with local transportation agencies for the name of agency that handles the negotiations for public transit ads --these are often handled by an outside contractor.
- Bumper stickers: These are great for promotions anywhere that there are a lot of drivers --but, of course, aren't so productive in rural areas or in cities so large that many people rely on mass transit to get around.
- Phone card advertising is a relatively new type of specialty advertising; it's generally best only for large campaigns.
- Ads in elevators, public restrooms, automated teller machines, etc. are becoming common. These can reach surprisingly large numbers of people; check with specialty advertising agencies in your area for more information.
- [Direct mail advertising](#) is often used in local campaigns.

What About Freebies?

Before we delve too deeply into the subject of paid advertising, it is important to remember that you can often get the same or similar effects from free or cheap sources.

Most radio and television stations, as a condition of their licenses, are required to broadcast a certain number of [public service announcements](#) per week. With PSA's, you have less (or no) control over when your message airs, but there is no charge for airing it, and the station may be willing to help you out with production as well.

If you're hoping to do print advertising, you may be able to find an advertising agency or graphic design firm that is willing to do pro bono (free of charge) work for you. Another possibility is to get a local corporation or business to [pay for your advertising](#).

Why would you pay to advertise?

Many of the reasons for using paid advertising are the same as reasons you might have for seeking other types of publicity: to increase awareness about your organization or initiative, or to broaden the number of people your message reaches, for example.

However, since advertising can be more expensive than other types of promotion, there are some other reasons you may want to explore paid advertising:

- To further increase your organization's name recognition by letting people see and hear your name on TV, in the newspaper, or on the radio.
- To adequately reach the audience you want when you can't do so through more inexpensive means. If your message just can't reach enough people through less costly methods, it may be time to think about sinking some money into paid advertising.
- To have a higher level of control over what sort of message is being conveyed by or about your organization or initiative or its programs. With PSA's and other types of pro bono promotional work, you have less decision making power over how your message is being presented. Paid advertising can help you tell your stories your way. You can create an ad that looks at the issues the way you want.
- To have control over when and how often your message is broadcast or printed. If your message is being run for free, you have little or no say as to what hour it is played (for broadcast) or what section of the publication it appears in (for print). When you pay, you can have your ad run when and how you want it to. For example, you could have your television ad be played the day before the legislature debates important policies that will affect your initiative. Or you could run an ad for your nutrition awareness campaign in the Health and Living section of the newspaper.
- To turn back the claims or [criticism of your opponents](#) and businesses that affect public health, such as the alcohol and tobacco industries, or industries that ignore the health and safety of the people who buy their products. Advertisements can reframe your issues and help you [expose industry "white lies,"](#) "half-truths," or hypocrisies.

What are some of the benefits of using paid advertising?

- Enormous control over your media message, because you've paid for your ad. You can make your ad effective and creative.
- The right to decide on what days the advertisement will show and how often.
- The ability to target an ad's content to a certain audience, using a specific message. A paid advertisement can tell a story or present a "What if?" situation that aims to change the public's understanding of a problem.
- Unexpected publicity from sources who either picked up or reported on your effective ad because it's worthy of news coverage in and of itself.
- The chance at long-term name recognition.

When should you advertise?

There are some steps you can take to decide whether this is a good time for you to advertise.

First, **consider what you want to accomplish with your ad.** Depending on your purpose, you might decide that this is a better time to try to go with freebies. For example, ads asking for donations often don't raise enough to pay for the cost of advertising. Instead of relying solely on ads to raise money, it's better to use advertising to bolster a direct mail or telephone campaign, attract attendance for a fundraising event, or reinforce a PR campaign.

Next, **consider whether you can afford to do enough advertising to accomplish what you want.** For example, if you only have enough in your budget for a single television spot, that's not going to reach a lot of people. Perhaps a series of less expensive newspaper display ads would be more in order. Advertising can be expensive (due to fierce competition for space and the high cost of producing an ad), but ads in some media outlets can be affordable, and if your ad is eye-catching and well-written it can often pay for itself in the end by generating additional publicity and action on behalf of your cause.

Consider whether you can use your advertising to react and respond to attacks --to show commitment to your issues, turn away your opponents' criticism, or correct misconceptions about your organization's mission. If you're working on a particularly "hot" issue that's causing a lot of controversy in your community, you might try [advertising to respond to your opponents](#). However, you may well be able to [find cheaper or free ways of doing this](#).

Consider whether you can use your ad to respond to current events by relating your issues to late-breaking issues, as in the following example.

Timing an ad to tie in to a current event.

The federal government once halted imports of fruit from Chile because traces of cyanide were found on two grapes. Anti-tobacco activists in several communities seized on this announcement to inform the public that the amount of cyanide found in one cigarette is more than that found on a bushel of grapes.

Advertising can also be used to act quickly when an opportunity arises.

Using advertising to jump on an opportunity.

Anytown Citizens Against Alcohol is a community group that has been fighting for alcohol legislation that is being voted on tomorrow. ACAA's Director, Dante Shakira, takes out an ad reminding the community of the high percentage of teenagers who report drinking. Then Dante tips off a local journalist to a state legislator's acceptance of large campaign contributions from

the local alcohol industry. Publicity like this can influence policymakers to reconsider their votes.

Extra, unexpected publicity that you get from a paid ad or a specific story you lined up is called *earned* publicity. For example, the controversy created by a condom ad you bought might earn you a story in tomorrow's newspaper. And that publicity is free! In light of the high cost of advertisement and the speed with which news changes these days, earned publicity becomes extremely valuable. If you have a chance to create some, do it!

Consider whether you can use advertising to present dull, boring facts in a more interesting way. Compare, contrast, and put into context -- rewrite dry, incomprehensible statistics that don't impress people anymore into eye-catching messages that make a consumer sit up and think.

Making statistics interesting with advertising

Rocio Mundoz has been put in charge of writing a print ad that highlights the number of deaths per year related to smoking. She came up with the following intro line to her ad:

"Each year tobacco kills more people than AIDS, cocaine, heroin, alcohol, fires, car crashes, homicide and suicide combined."

Talk about effective numbers!

Consider whether you can use your advertising to publicly thank your supporters, which lends your organization credibility and brings prestige to those who help you. This can make helping your organization look much more attractive to those who might support you in the future.

As you can see, the potential uses for paid advertising are many and varied. Despite the money you may spend, advertising often creates endless opportunities for good publicity and the creation of positive media relations.

How do you advertise?

Decide whether to work with an agency.

First, give some thought to whether you want to work with an advertising agency or public relations company on your ad campaign. Whether or not you choose to work with an agency will depend on your budget and how involved you want to be with the fine points of the campaign. If you decide to use an ad agency or public relations firm, you will have fewer details to worry about, but you will have to pay the agency for its work -- and they can get expensive. However, you may be able to find an agency that will work for free or at a reduced rate (see the box on "What about freebies?" earlier in this section). Depending on your staff, volunteers, and

other non-financial resources, working with an agency may turn out to be less of a drain on your resources in the long run than doing it yourself -- weigh your options!

Decide on your target audience.

Think about who you want to hear or see your message, and how best to approach that audience. This is one area that advertising agencies and public relations firms definitely have a lot of expertise with, and you can also get lots of demographic information from the media outlets you approach about who watches their television station or who reads their newspaper.

Here are a few things to take into consideration:

- Gender
- Average age
- Place of residence
- Income level
- Education level
- Ethnic/racial background
- Attitude/community values
- How do they spend their time?

Decide what medium you should use.

You may also decide to use some combination of two or more media.

Radio

- Radio tends to be most effective at encouraging the audience to do something -- for example, calling a phone number for more information or attending a rally for human rights.
- As we mentioned earlier, almost all radio stations will produce your commercials for you, although pre-produced ads from an advertising agency are accepted.
- Check with the station's advertising department for details on their services and requirements.

Television

- According to a 1995 survey comparing the use of various types of media, American adults spend more time watching TV than following all other major media combined. This means that with television ads you will have more captive attention, but television is more expensive and producing television commercials costs more.
- Most local television stations can produce your commercials for you, but bringing in pre-produced commercials from an advertising agency is perfectly acceptable as well.

- Check with the station's advertising department for details on their services and requirements.

Print

- When it comes to print advertising -- newspapers and magazines -- you have two choices: display ads or classified ads. Larger newspapers usually have separate staffs for the two types of advertising.
- Display ads are the regular ads found throughout the paper.
- Classifieds are the text-only "want ads" found only in their own section towards the back of the paper; they are sorted by type and are sometimes free. Classified ads are commonly used to advertise job openings and announce meetings.
- You may wish to choose specialty publications (church publications, newsletters for community organizations, etc.) to reach specifically targeted groups.
- Check with the paper or magazine's advertising department for details on their services and requirements.

For print ads (or any ads, for that matter), you'll also need to decide how often and when the ad should run.

For events:

- In a weekly paper: try three weeks prior to the event and again during the week of an event
- In a daily paper: try twice a week for two weeks prior to the event, and again the day of the event.

For recruitment:

- A "blitz" may work best; try three times a week for two weeks in print. If you're using radio or television ads for recruitment, try several 30- or 60-second spots per day for a week in radio or television.

Whatever media you decide on, find out the submission requirements for their ads ahead of time -- deadlines, in what form they want to receive your materials, and so on.

Come up with a budget.

This is a crucial step. You need to plan out how much your advertisement -- whether it's a single ad or an entire campaign -- will cost. Things to include in your budget:

- The expense of any sort of market research or testing you might do to figure out how to proceed.
- The expense of creating the ad.

- The expense of running the advertisement. Some media outlets have a special discount rate for public service or non-profit ads first. Try to get it for free first! If you're using an ad agency, you might get a break on fees. Ad agencies get a 15% agency discount or commission, from the TV stations where they place your advertising.
- Any donations toward the cost of your advertising. The media might be willing to donate time, or at least give you a break on the cost. Again, see the "What About Freebies?" box earlier in this section.

Produce your ad.

Now you're ready to make your actual advertisement--or have your advertising agency do it. Producing your ad will work similarly to producing a [public service announcement](#) or [poster](#).

Give careful consideration to how you want to present yourself in your advertising. For example, if you work with an adult literacy group, you will need to make sure the grammar and spelling are absolutely correct and that everything is coherent and clear in all of your advertising. Or, for another example, if you work with an environmental organization, you may want to be sure that you only advertise in publications that use recycled paper and environmentally responsible inks and dyes.

Know -- and meet -- the deadlines to get your ad placed when you want it to.

Now it's time to submit your ad to whatever media outlets you want it to be placed in. At this point in the process, it's absolutely essential that you meet whatever deadlines there are for those outlets. In advertising, deadlines are rarely flexible. If you miss the deadline, you miss getting your ad to appear when you want it to. It's important to find out ahead of time when the deadlines are and then to meet them.

With radio and television, deadlines depend on whether your ads are pre-produced (i.e., ready to go on the air) or need to be worked on by the station. Deadlines vary widely, so check with each station you're interested in using. With newspapers, the deadline is usually two or three days before the ad is run. Lead time (the amount of time between when an ad is submitted and when it appears) is often much longer for magazines -- up to 3 months or even more in advance of the publication date.

Follow up!

Once your ad starts appearing, track its appearance and try to gauge how effective it's been. This will tell you how efficiently your money has been spent and give you ideas on how to improve your advertising strategies in the future.

In Summary

Publicizing your initiative or program is an important step in making sure that your services or message reach the widest number of people whom you can help, or who can help you. Many free or less expensive methods of doing this exist, but sometimes you may find you simply have to resort to using paid advertising in order to get the word out. With proper planning and timing, paid advertising can be a vital method of promoting what you stand for.

Contributor
Chris Hampton

Online Resources

[NGO Media Outreach: Using the Media as an Advocacy Tool](#) is a very good resource produced by the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, September 2003.

[Six Things Nonprofits Should Know About Facebook Ads](#), by Taryn Degnan, is an interesting and useful article that gives insights about nonprofits and Facebook advertising.

[Wheeling Walks: A Community Campaign Using Paid Media to Encourage Walking Among Sedentary Older Adults](#). Preventative Medicine 35, 285-292. Reger B., Cooper, L., Booth-Butterfield, S., Smith, H., Bauman, A., Wootan, M., Middlestadt, S., Marcus, B. and Greer, F. (2002). This is a research study designed to investigate the role of paid media.

Print Resources

Ad Council (1998). *Impact of public service advertising campaigns*.

Adler, E. A. (1988). *Placing newspaper ads*. Palo Alto, CA: Health Promotion Resource Center.

Booth, M. & Associates. (1995). *Promoting issues & ideas: A guide to public relations for nonprofit organizations*. New York, NY: The Foundation Center.

Daniel, L. (1989) *Print production: Dealing with vendors*. Palo Alto, CA: Health Promotion Resource Center.

Floyd, E. and Wilson, L. (1994). *Advertising from the desktop*. Scottsdale, AZ: Ventana Press.

Television Bureau of Advertising & Bruskin/Goldring Research, Inc. (1995). *1995 media comparisons survey*. Edison, NJ: Bruskin/Goldring Research, Inc.

Creating Newsletters

You're thinking about starting a newsletter, but you don't know where to begin, or how to decide what type is best for your organization. This section is for anyone -- directors, outreach staff, fund-raisers and others -- who wants to learn how to create the best newsletter for his or her group or coalition.

What is a newsletter?

A newsletter is a printed report of information and ideas that is distributed on a regular basis (e.g., monthly or semi-annually) to a group of interested people. Newsletters are typically from two to eight pages in length. They vary considerably in cost, quality and content.

Why should you create a newsletter?

- To keep your members up to date about what's going on.
- To keep the public informed as well.
- To educate all readers about issues and ideas that concern your group.
- To build cohesion and a sense of pride among your members.
- To spark new interest in, and increase recognition of, your agency.
- To offer a format for information exchange that doesn't yet exist in the community.
- To reduce the amount of time spent on information sharing at your group meetings.
- To announce your regular meeting.
- To replace meeting minutes by creating a section in the newsletter devoted to meeting summaries.

When should you create a newsletter?

A newsletter may be started at any time during the life of a group or organization (although earlier is usually better!), and especially when:

- You need to get a lot of information to a lot of people on a regular basis.
- You want to educate or inform the community on important issues.
- You want to attract new members.
- You want to build a sense of common purpose, or motivation -- or both -- among members.
- You want to get feedback *from* your members.
- You want to increase recognition for your organization or belief in its cause.
- You want the public to view you as a credible and significant group.

These are all good reasons, but creating a good newsletter, and keeping it going, takes a lot of time and effort. You should also consider how often you'll publish. Newsletters are usually

published monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly. Your choice here will depend on the size of your organization and its available resources. Are you ready to make this commitment? If you are, check out the "How to do it: starting questions" and "Next steps!" sections.

How do you start a newsletter?

Your group is unique. Your newsletter will be, too. There are many ways to produce a good newsletter. Before you start, here are some basic questions to ask yourself. When you answer them, you'll be better able to create a newsletter best suits you and your group.

- What is the primary purpose of the newsletter?
- What are the other purposes?
- Who is the audience?
- How frequently do you want the newsletter to appear?
- How many copies do you want to produce for each issue?
- How much will this cost?
- How much can you afford?
- Who will design and edit the newsletter?
- Who will write the articles?
- How will you distribute the newsletter to its audience?
- How will you know if you have been successful?

What are the steps in producing a newsletter?

After answering the questions in the last section, there are some important next steps to take.

Decide whether you will publish the newsletter yourself or use professionals. This will depend on the time, money, and skill you have available. You should also consider the impression your newsletter will make on your audience and the image you want to project when deciding whether or not to do it yourself. Outside help doesn't have to cost a lot. On the other hand, getting a newsletter out may require you do it yourself.

If you want to produce the newsletter yourself, make sure you have the necessary tools at your disposal:

- A typewriter and access to a copier;
- If you are using a computer, software that includes a capacity for word processing, page design, and graphics;
- A high quality printer;
- A sense of humor and a lot of patience!

If you want to have the newsletter done by a professional:

- Get your copy shop, professional printer, or graphic artist involved before going beyond the planning stage. Don't be afraid to talk to professionals; they may be willing to contribute their services or offer them at a reduced rate.
- You might use a copy shop if you are cutting and pasting from typewritten material.
- Computers that make layout and printing easier can be found there, too.
- Graphic artists can make layout and printing more attractive and interesting, and help convey information better.
- You can take camera-ready copy (everything is finished) to a professional for final printing.
- Confirm every aspect of the printing process at this time, including cost, time, what color is to be used, grade of paper, etc.

Steps for all newsletters

- Decide what will be in the issue and how much of each will be included -- for example, articles, features, news notes, and opinion pieces.
- Design the layout for the newsletter.
- Write the articles for the newsletter -- or have them written.
- Edit the articles -- for content, for style, and for space.
- Edit them again -- mistakes are very expensive, and they don't look good. Ask someone else to help you with proofreading. (On the other hand, one of the ways you will know people are reading your newsletter is when they call you about typos!)
- If you are having your newsletter professionally printed, take the final copy to the printer.
- Check the final copy one last time for any errors in printing or editing.
- Mail or otherwise distribute the newsletter.
- Get as much feedback as you can about the issue.
- Bask in the sun for a while, and then take a deep breath, and repeat the process over again!

How do you get others to contribute?

Remember, there is no need to be the Lone Ranger when it comes to writing articles or distributing information. Others can -- and should -- help you; it not only decreases your workload, but it also gives others in your group a sense of ownership and pride in the newsletter. Here are some tips for encouraging participation.

- Find other members to help plan the newsletter with you.
- Invite member articles, features, and columns; an occasional guest columnist can add luster.
- Pass around a sheet for written announcements and story ideas at your group meetings.
- Replace minutes with task force summaries in the newsletter.
- Reprint news coverage of the coalition.

- Borrow from other materials people send to you.

What else should you know about newsletters?

Now it's time to learn how to put the newsletter together to create an attractive and informational final product. The following offers more specific information about design and layout basics, cost saving tips, and production.

Words and graphics

The **masthead** is the title on the front page of every newsletter.

- Keep the name of your newsletter short and catchy.
- Consider using your organization's logo or symbol as part of the title.
- Consider having a professional design this part of the newsletter, even if the rest is done in-house. The masthead is the first thing that people will notice: make it memorable.

The **font** is the style of typeface you use.

- For the text of your articles, using **serif (or "hooked") fonts** instead of **sans serif fonts** make your text easier to read. Serifs are small strokes at the ends of the main strokes of a letter (examples that are appropriate for newsletters include Times New Roman, Bookman, and Palatino) are easier to read.
- The **sans serif** fonts -- those that don't have serifs -- (Arial, Helvetica, and Avant Garde, for example) are more appropriate for headlines.
- Whatever fonts you do decide to use, be consistent. The use of only two or three different fonts will give your newsletter a sleeker, more professional appearance. Using a bunch of different fonts might be really tempting, but it can make a page look really tacky. Exercise some restraint!
- Use *italics* sparingly -- words in italics are difficult to read.
- When you have two or more columns, justifying your type makes it more readable.

The **headline** is the short title or introduction summarizing the main ideas of an article.

- Print them in the same color as the article for easier reading.
- Set them like sentences without periods (i.e., capitalize only the first letter of each sentence).

The **articles** are the stories and text that explain the different events, issues and plans that are important to your group.

- Except for technical newsletters, articles should be written at approximately an eighth-grade reading level. (Some computerized grammar checkers can help with this.)
- Typically, font size in articles is at 10 to 12 points.

- Choose a topic that's interesting to you and that others might enjoy. Ask around; find out what others want to know about.
- Ask yourself these two questions before you start writing: 1) who is my audience? and 2) what main ideas do I want them to understand? Keeping the answers to these in mind should prove helpful to you in your writing.
- Organize your ideas before you begin; consider making an outline.
- Avoid complicated words and lengthy sentences.
- Using examples to back up your ideas helps others understand you better.
- Always proofread your article for spelling and grammar errors as well as overall understanding.
- Whenever possible, have another person look over it before you turn in your final draft.

Layout basics

- Use two to three columns per 8 1/2" x 11" page for easy reading.
- Limit each page to no more than three to four articles.
- Don't be afraid of white space! It gives the reader a place to rest his or her eyes. A page with very little white space is less readable than one that has a moderate amount. Keep white space at the edges of the page, not the center.
- Take a couple of steps back and look at each page. Does it look balanced? Generally, lighter items should be towards the top of the page and darker ones should be towards the bottom.
- Use graphics, clip art, or photographs to break up the text and give your newsletter a more polished appearance. Photographs will give your newsletter a professional look, if you can afford them.
- Consider keeping your newsletter at six pages or under (four is often ideal). This will keep costs down and make readers less likely to feel that there is too much to read.
- Consider using a consistent layout that will make your newsletter more familiar to your readers.

Production

Depending on your budget, you may choose to have your newsletter printed professionally. This may be as simple as saying "photocopy this" or may be more complex for a more professional look. A professional printer has the added advantages (and costs) of the use of a wider variety of colors and papers, as well as the ability to print photographs with clarity. If you have the resources, you should consider using professional services to produce the highest quality newsletter possible. When working with a professional printer, consider the following:

- Involve the printer from the very beginning. Talk to the printer about every detail of your goals, your dreams, your budget, and your timeline.
- When choosing paper, stick with neutral colors such as white, tan, or light gray that are not jarring to the eye. Paper that has been recycled or has a slightly "grainy" look is appropriate as well.

- Request a second "spot color" to add life to your newsletter without adding too much cost.
- Ask for the standard paper size that the print shop typically uses for other orders; it's usually the cheapest.
- Learn some of the vocabulary of printing so there will be no confusion when you speak with your printer.
- Listen carefully to the printer's advice; but remember, it's your newsletter, so it's up to you to make the final decisions.

Cost saving tips

- Consider selling "advertising" to help cover the cost of your newsletter. This can be as easy as photocopying someone's business card.
- Determine if you qualify for non-profit status to lower your postage rates. Check into bulk mailing and bar codes. Your post office can help here.
- Consider other means of distributing your newsletter besides using the mail. For example, place the newsletter where it might be picked up and read (in health clinics, in churches, in teen centers, hospitals, the grocery store, etc.) Be creative!
- Decide how often you really need the newsletter to go out. Does your organization have enough to say that you need to have a monthly letter; or will a semimonthly or even a quarterly newsletter do the job?
- Move through every step of the process of creating your newsletter carefully, and make sure to edit as you go along. Mistakes are expensive! Have another person take a final look with you.
- Ask your printer or other newsletter editors how your newsletter can be done for less.

Contributor

Jenette Nagy

Online Resources

[Creating a Community Newsletter: Start Small](#), prepared by First Nations Health Council. If this is your first venture into creating a community newsletter, this is a simple and brief but useful resource providing you with some tips on creating newsletters.

[Creating a Neighborhood Newsletter](#), by the city of Iowa City, Iowa, is a comprehensive guide containing much detail, with examples.

Print Resources

Adler, E. (1991). *Print that works*. Palo Alto, CA: Bull Publishing Company.

Beach, M. (1993). *Newsletter sourcebook*. Cincinnati: North Light Books.

Brigham, N., et al. (1991). How to do leaflets, newsletters, and newspapers. 2d ed. Detroit: PEP Publishers.

The Clipper Creative Art Service, available from Dynamic Graphics, Inc., 6000 North Forest Park Drive, P.O. Box 1901, Peoria, IL 61614-9990

Editors Only: The Newsletter for Editorial Achievement, Editors Only Publications, P.O. Box 17108, Fountain Hills, AZ 85269-7108

Hudson, H. (1982). Publishing Newsletters. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Lynders, J. (1993). Journal and Newsletter editing, Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.

Swann, A. (1987). How to understand and use design and layout. Cincinnati: North Light Books.

Monthly, bimonthly, or quartely publications.

Newsletter Desing, The Newsletter Clearinghouse, 44 W. Market Street P.O. Box 311 Rhinebeck, N.J. 12572.

Personal Publishing, P.O. Box 3240, Harlan, IA 51537. (800) 727-6937.

Publish!, 501 Second Street, San Francisco, CA 94107.

Organizations

The National Association of Desktop Publishers, P.O. Box 1410, Boston, MA 02205.

Newsletter Design Critique Service, 1955 Pauline Boulevard, Suite 100-A, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

Creating Posters and Flyers

Posters and flyers can be a remarkably effective way of getting your message out to the public. Whether you want to generate support for a project, raise awareness about an event, or inform the public about a community issue, posters and flyers help you communicate with community members. This section discusses how you can make and use posters and flyers as part of your organization's [communications plan](#).

What are posters and flyers?

You probably already know what posters and flyers are: printed sheets meant to be posted in a public place or private workplace. Posters tend to be fairly large and professionally printed, and almost always feature an illustration, while flyers (also known as miniposters) are usually 8 ½" x 11" or so, might be simply photocopied or e-mailed, and often rely solely on words to get their point across. Posters and flyers are usually informational in nature. They can also be used to affirm positive behaviors or draw people to an event.

What are the advantages of posters and flyers

Posters and flyers can be displayed almost anywhere. However, places where you have a "captive audience" are the best:

- school classrooms (particularly when you're targeting younger children)
- examination and waiting rooms at dental and medical clinics
- buses or other public transit
- community service organization offices
- community bulletin boards in markets and laundromats
- windows of downtown businesses
- any place where people will be standing in line

A good poster can have staying power for years. You probably won't want to use the exact same content for years at a time, but using a coherent theme, the same artist, or other elements to make your group's posters recognizable is a good idea. For example, posters of Uncle Sam pointing his finger and saying "I want you!" have been used as a recruitment tool for the military since World War I.

Flyers can easily be mailed to almost anyone. It's simple to fold, staple, and slap a stamp and an address label on an eye-catching flyer about an upcoming event.

Flyers are cheap. You can create a simple flyer on the computer in a few minutes, and either print the copies you need yourself or have them photocopied inexpensively (1000 for \$50 or so -- compared to print advertisements and most other media, that's pretty good.) You could also

e-mail your flyer to a list of hundreds or thousands of people for free with one keystroke, and/or post it on your and others' websites.

Flyers can be projected from the computer or photocopied onto transparencies for use as overheads. This is convenient if you're using flyers to supplement a more formal education or public awareness campaign that involves presentations.

How to create your poster or flyer

Decide on your communication objective.

While you may want to jump ahead and start working on a cool image or a catchy slogan, we can't emphasize enough how important it is to clearly identify your communication objective from the start. If you ignore this step, your entire campaign could be rendered ineffective. Take the time to define a communication objective first and foremost.

Ask "What event or benefit are we promoting?" or "What attitudes or behaviors do we want to change or promote?" This is the essence of your message (e.g., "Smoking can cause cancer," or "Breastfeeding is good for your baby").

Examine what benefits the communication objective holds for your target audience. For example, for "Breastfeeding is good for your baby," some benefits would include: breastfed babies are less likely to develop respiratory infections, childhood diabetes, and childhood lymphoma; they have fewer learning disabilities; they're 1/3 less likely to die of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome; and they have fewer ear and diarrheal infections.

Use these answers to come up with benefit statements -- the reasons why your audience should want to do whatever it is you're trying to get them to do. Make sure that your benefit statements are accurate too -- otherwise, you risk undercutting your message with false or misleading information.

Decide on your target audience.

This is essential. You will probably need to [do some pretesting](#) with that audience as well. This will help you decide how the entire message will be conveyed. Make sure your benefit statements are understandable to that audience. If a statement like "Breastfed babies are less likely to develop respiratory infections, childhood diabetes, and childhood lymphoma" is too complicated for your audience, try something like "Breastfed babies are less likely to get sick" instead.

Develop your concept.

- Sketch out some ideas. Don't get caught up in making it look perfect at this point -- that comes much later. Just use lots of paper and let your imagination run wild.
- Look at what you have and play with other words. Puns, double meanings, and other types of word play often work very well in poster campaigns. Try to think of ways that the visual elements of the poster or flyer could play on the words as well.
- Let your mind make associations freely with the words, without criticizing yourself and without worrying about neatness. Get others involved with the brainstorming process. Keep in mind that whatever you come up with needs to be something that can fit well in the amount of space you have for your poster or flyer. For example, for a detailed explanation of the health benefits of breastfeeding, you might want to make up brochures instead.
- At this point it's a good time to toss ideas around with friends. If you know anyone who's a graphics pro, here's where that person can step up to the plate. Also, check out what other groups have done.
- Leave it for a day or two and come back to it later. Once you have it in the back of your mind, you could find the perfect idea comes to you at an unexpected time.

Consider what pictures or other graphics you might want to use (if any).

It's not absolutely essential that your poster or flyer even have graphics. Generally, it's more important for a poster to have a graphic than for a flyer, simply because it grabs your audience's attention.

If you do decide to use a graphic, your choice of image is very important. According to [Adbusters](#), a magazine run by a media activist organization called The Media Foundation, 70% of people only look at the graphic when viewing a print ad or poster, while 30% only read the headline. Therefore, the image you use is going to be the most important part of the process in making a poster.

Some thoughts to consider about images you might use:

- People often respond to pictures of people like themselves engaged in the activity you want to promote or encourage. If you're going to use that kind of image, the people involved should be people the target audience can identify with. If you want to reach African-American youth, for instance, a picture of white middle-aged adults is probably not going to grab them.
- Celebrities – especially those who, again, the target audience can identify with – can often command attention. Think of the “Got milk?” posters with famous faces wearing white milk mustaches.
- Bright colors leap out at viewers. One of the reasons the psychedelic posters of the sixties and seventies were so successful was their neon color scheme.
- In most cases, the image should fit the message. You may have a clever idea about using a picture of a flower to promote smoking cessation, but no one will understand your idea unless they stop and read your poster. You usually have to make your

message clear from the image, because that's what people will see when they first look at your poster, and if it's not arresting, they won't look any further. If, on the other hand, they see that image everywhere, even if they don't stop to read the rest, it will begin to make an impression. Do you want them to think about flowers, or about trying to quit smoking?

Types of graphics:

Clip art is "canned" artwork designed for use in publications or web pages; using it is usually free or very inexpensive, although you may be required to credit the creator somewhere on your poster. Using clip art can save time for artists and makes art both possible and affordable for non-artists. Clip art can be purchased in CD-ROM or book form, it is often packaged with computer software (Microsoft Word, for example, comes with a sizable collection of clip art images), and it can be found at a variety of web sites (see Resources at the end of this section for a list of web sites offering free clip art).

Photos can be extremely effective, but they can be cost-prohibitive. Don't use photos unless your group can afford to pay for a good photographer and quality printing to make it look right. (On the other hand, there are literally millions of images on the web that can be used, with or – often – without permission, that might fit your needs perfectly. It's worth a search to see what you might turn up.)

Original artwork can also be very effective, but like photography, it can get expensive. Ask around -- it's possible that someone within your organization has artistic talent and would love to design your poster. You might think also about holding a community-wide contest, if your area offers a large enough pool of talented artists to do so.

Other graphics you might want to use include calligraphy, abstract and background designs, graphs and charts, and maps.

Write your headline and, if using any, text.

- The headline should be short, snappy, connected somehow to the reader's life, and should affect the reader emotionally.
- Make your case for the communication objective in the copy. Make compelling arguments and state strong facts. It's better to have one or two very strong statements than to try to rattle off a long list and risk diluting the message.
- Decide on what type of lettering to use. Here are a handful of tips:
 - Remember, if this is a poster, it will need to be easily readable from a distance -- so big, clear lettering is the best.
 - Whenever possible, use a serif typeface for the body text -- most typography experts feel they're easier to read for most folks. A serif typeface is one in which a stroke added to the beginning or end of one of the main strokes of a letter, such as Times New Roman, Bookman Old Style, or Courier New. A sans serif

typeface is simply one without serifs, generally with a straightforward, geometric appearance, such as Helvetica, Arial, or Impact. Sans serif fonts are very effective in headlines.

- Although these days of computers and word processing might make it tempting, don't go too crazy with the fonts -- use no more than 3 or 4 fonts at the most, and the fewer the better. (In general, one, or at most two, is fine.)
- If you have a lot of copy, break it up with smaller subheadings within. This keeps it from all blending together in the viewer's eye and makes it easier to read.

Lay out your final poster or flyer.

There are many different ways you can lay out your poster or flyer. Again, this is a good time to check out posters and flyers done by other groups and to get suggestions and feedback from others.

Include your group's name, logo, address, and phone number. Your group's name and logo should be prominent enough for people to remember who it was that put this poster or flyer out. The address and phone number can be printed very small, but it should appear somewhere on the final piece. If, in fact, there's a number you want people to call, it should be in large type -- large enough to see from a few meters away.

If you're just doing an informational flyer to send out to a mailing list, it can be done very simply and plainly, as in the example below.

It's almost here...The Neighborhood Hunt...will begin!

Are you ready to play?

Watch for details on your doorstep next week!

Sponsored by the Eastern Whoville Neighborhood Alliance

Questions? Call Rakim at 555-9876

Later in this section, you'll find some more tips on poster design and mistakes to avoid.

Circulate drafts and get feedback from others.

Be sure to have several other people -- including people from outside your group -- look over your finished photocopy or flyer. Get their honest opinions and use their feedback to help you decide on the final version.

Have it printed or photocopied.

It's possible to avoid, or at least reduce, the expense of paying a professional printer. Find out if anyone in your group works for a printing company or knows anyone who does. Approach area printers to see if any of them would donate or offer reduced fees for their services.

Distribute your final product.

This may seem like a no-brainer, but it's an unfortunate fact that community groups often go to a great deal of effort and expense to print out stacks and stacks of flyers, and then they end up just sitting forever in a box or on someone's desk. Have distribution be a part of your communications plan before you even start.

Form a committee, if necessary, and make a list of the places you want to distribute your posters and flyers. Find out for each place on your list whether you should just send the posters and flyers for them to post or if you'll be expected to come in and put them up yourself. If possible, try to arrange to put them up yourself anyway, so that you can pick highly visible spots. And finally, assign specific individual volunteers or staff members to be responsible for getting the posters and flyers out by a set deadline.

A method that many groups use for distributing flyers is to send them by e-mail to a number of core group members – a board of directors, for instance, or a group of volunteers – who then print out a number of copies and post them in their neighborhoods or at pre-assigned locations. They might also hand them out to individuals, put them on car windshields in parking lots, or send them on to people in their e-mail address books.

A few basic tips on poster design

- Simplicity is key -- try not to have too many different elements vying for the reader's or viewer's attention.
- Large, colorful images will grab your viewer's attention. Lots of contrast helps too.
- A novel image is another good way to catch your audience's eye.
- Your poster should be easy to read from a distance. Colors that can be easily read from a distance include white on red, black on yellow, dark blue on white, green on white, and the ever-popular black on white.
- Colors can have different effects: greens, blues, and purples tend to be soothing and calming; red, orange, and yellow tend to excite and attract attention.

Mistakes to avoid

- Visual clutter -- it's okay to have a lot of different elements on it, but not so many that it looks junky or chaotic. Be sure that you can look at it from a distance and get at least a general idea of what it's about.

- Unclear or easily misunderstood wording or images -- again, you want the audience to at least get the general idea on a first glance. If they have to think too hard about it, they may not take a second look.
- Typos or spelling errors -- as with any of your printed materials, you should strive for accuracy and professionalism.
- Bad art, photography, or production values -- if your poster looks cheap or shoddy, it's bad for your group's public image. Don't do posters if you can't afford to do them right!

In Summary

Posters or flyers can be remarkably effective in getting your organization's message across. Try distributing a poster or flyer with a simple message, an eye-catching image, and a catchy slogan -- see how many people you can reach!

Contributor
Chris Hampton

Online Resources

[Adbusters](#) is an organization working to change the way information flows, making it more democratic and less directed by corporate and other powerful interests.

[Flyer/Poster Guidelines](#), by Three Rivers College, helps you keep track of the dos and don'ts when creating your own flyer/poster. It has a number of specific positive and negative layout examples.

[Microsoft Design Gallery](#)

[Tips for creating posters, fliers, and stickers](#) from the Rainforest Action Network

[Vandelay Design](#) Tutorials on poster design using Photoshop, for users of that program.

Developing Creative Promotions

If planned and executed well, creative promotions can be an effective way to draw attention, generate support, or raise money for an issue. Promotions can be difficult to manage, and tend to be a large commitment. However, the benefits to your organization or cause that promotions can generate could make a huge difference in community support and awareness. This section discusses when and how to develop creative promotions for a community initiative.

What is a creative promotion?

A creative promotion is one that draws attention to your organization or initiative, to the services you offer, to an event or campaign you're running, or to a particular issue or cause you sponsor, and does it in a positive way that people will notice and remember.

People have probably tried to find creative ways to influence others since the dawn of time. On the well-preserved walls of the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, buried by an eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in the first century A.D., there are ads for various merchants ("Shop at Marius's best deals, not like that robber Publius down the block."). Political slogans meant to promote candidates have been found in ancient Athens, and American politics has always been livened up by jingles and slogans ("Van [Buren], Van, he's a used-up man!" "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too!") that were often put on banners or on hats or pins that people could wear. Only in our century, however, have publicists and advertising agencies actually been paid to come up with creative promotions and occasionally they do.

There are ads and catch phrases and slogans that all of us remember, depending upon our ages: "I like Ike," "The Great Society," "I can't believe I ate the whole thing," Speedy (the Alka-Seltzer man), the Ajax Cleanser jingle ("Use Ajax, bum, bum, the foaming cleanser"), Nike's "Just Do It," even (more to the point) Tommy Tooth and Mr. Tooth Decay, from the American Dental Association. These were all ways to get a message across, and they worked: even though some of them haven't been seen or heard for over forty years, they're still immediately recognizable to anyone who was exposed to them.

There's a lot more to creative promotion than advertising slogans and memorable characters, however. We are in fact drowning in bumper stickers and T-shirts with logos and slogans on them. Baseball caps proclaim the virtues of everything from chicken feed to drug companies, and there's hardly a personal or household item that hasn't been used as a promotional item at some time. In some ways, these promotional items have become the wallpaper of our lives and we really don't notice them at all. How can you generate new ways to get people to recognize and become involved in what your organization or initiative does? How can you use familiar promotional methods in creative ways that fit your message? This section is meant to help you find answers to these questions.

In a sense this section is titled incorrectly. Any promotion you do should be creative, regardless of how "normal" its form or intent is. A newspaper ad for an event you're running should be as eye-catching and memorable as possible. A radio spot advertising your services or promoting your issue should be different and entertaining enough to catch and hold listeners' attention. Otherwise, you might as well not have bothered: all promotion depends on creativity. With that understanding, the focus in this section will be on imaginative and different ways to present your organization and your message, ways that mirror your purposes and stick in people's minds.

Why should you develop promotions?

Although promotion is the stock in trade of advocacy organizations or initiatives that work to gain the acceptance of a particular cause or behavior, many grass roots and community based organizations and initiatives believe that promotion is somehow contrary to what they're trying to accomplish. The reality, however, is that non-profit organizations, especially those that provide needed services, are businesses, and like any other businesses, they need to advertise so that the public will be aware of what they offer and will take advantage of it. For any type of non-profit organization, creative promotion is a means to survival and growth.

Some specific reasons for developing truly creative promotions:

- *They spread your message and reputation faster and more effectively.* The more interesting and different the way in which your message is presented, the more likely people are to remember it and the organization that created it.
- *They build a positive image of your organization.* If people are entertained or moved or enlightened by the presentation of your message, rather than hammered with it, they're more apt to think well of your organization and what it does.
- *They can be tied to your message or mission in interesting ways.* You could draw attention to a day care center by handing out copies of children's art made there, for instance, or by playing in a public place (with permission, of course) a recording of the children singing.
- *They don't have to cost a lot of money.* Part of your creativity can go into figuring out how promotions can be carried out with materials at hand, or through free media. The suggestions about the day care center, for instance, would be nearly free. The only expenses would be copying costs or the cost of a tape; the sound system could easily be someone's home boom box, with an extra speaker or two also loaned plugged into it.
- *They can bring in money for your organization,* often from new sources.
- *They can bring in more membership for your organization,* again perhaps from new sources.
- *They can increase participation by your target population.* The more people know about your organization and what it does, the more likely you are to attract those who need its services or can benefit from its activities.
- *They can increase your support and cement your position in the community.*

Be careful not to let creativity interfere either with the meaning of what you're trying to say or the connection to your organization or purpose. During the 1992 Olympics, a well-known beer company ran a highly-regarded series of TV ads about fictional Olympic competitors. The ads were photographed beautifully, and featured a vision of America that brought tears to the eyes. Their only reference to the beer was in the familiar cans in the hands of the plain folks who supported and cared about the local Olympic heroes. Unfortunately, surveys showed that while almost everyone loved and remembered the ads, very few viewers had any idea what product they sponsored.

What are some tips for creative thinking?

Unless you hire someone to do your promotions for you an option that's usually out of the question for all but the largest non-profits you're going to have to come up with some creative ideas yourself. Just about every organization has at least one staff member who's really clever at promotion (or who could be if given the opportunity), and *everyone* is creative at least some of the time.

In fact, thinking creatively is at least partially the result of people *believing* they can be creative. Sometimes just giving people permission to be creative can have results. A college professor regularly demonstrates this principle in his class, dividing his students at random into two groups. One group is merely given a test of creativity, while the other given the same test is also given special instructions to the effect that they can be wonderfully creative if they just relax and let their minds run free. This second group invariably comes up with many more ideas in the activities on the test. So give yourself and others permission to play with ideas, and you may get surprising results.

Even if you're a small organization without much money, there is the possibility that you can convince an advertising or publicity firm to do some work for you *pro bono*. Loosely translated, *pro bono* means "for the general good," and is the way such firms describe work they do for free for worthy causes. Many firms have a policy of taking a certain amount of pro bono work a year (usually one or two percent of their total business), and you may be able to take advantage of such a policy to receive some high quality consulting or promotion development. Finding innovative ways to get professional help counts as creativity, too.

Some ways to get people thinking and to pull out creative ideas:

Involve as many people as possible. Your organization's staff may be small, but it probably has friends, supporters, a Board of Directors. Pull as many of them together as possible (perhaps in more than one group, so everyone can be heard) to throw around ways to get the word out. Not only do more people bring more ideas to the table, but a larger group also increases the chances that one person's idea will fertilize another's, and lead to something really interesting.

Be inclusive. People with education have no monopoly on creativity, nor do people of a particular gender or ethnic background or age. Pull in staff, participants, community members

whoever's willing to work on the promotion or campaign. The more different points of view are represented, the more likely that an unusual or interesting plan will result.

If the ideas aren't flowing or even if they are try some techniques to get at things you might not otherwise think of. Brainstorming, making lists (of objects related to your service or cause, of celebrities who have some connection to it, of the different things the organization actually does, of neat promotions you've seen or heard about, etc.), drawing pictures, acting out scenarios related to the organization's purpose any or all of these can help an individual or a group of people to come up with new thoughts and connections.

Brainstorming: Perhaps the most familiar of all ways of generating ideas in a group, brainstorming consists of everyone simply calling out ideas as they come up, with someone writing everything down so everyone can see it. Ideas can be silly or outrageous or seemingly unrelated to the topic, as long as they have some connection in the mind of the person who comes up with them. A brainstorming session usually lasts about ten minutes or so, until the flow of ideas has run down. Then the group considers the suggestions sometimes defining categories for similar ideas, or grouping ideas by some other system; sometimes just taking each idea separately. Even if the process doesn't result in anything concrete, it may lead to something later, or serve to shake loose a totally different idea that can become the basis for action.

Look at what others have done. While you're trying to come up with something that will stand out because it's different, don't scorn something just because it's already been done. It may not have been done in the way you'd like to do it, or may be unexpected if it's applied to your particular needs, rather than the way it's been used in the past. A good idea remains a good idea, especially if you can put a slightly different spin on it. In addition, someone else's promotion may give you a totally new inspiration

[Try to think "outside the box".](#) You often hear this phrase in connection with creativity, and in fact it's the kind of thinking that brainstorming and most other techniques are trying to get at. It means letting go of what you know, or believe you know, and thinking about things in a different way. Some of the greatest creative discoveries in history came about because someone was able to step back from his assumptions or preconceptions and look at things in a new way. Because Copernicus was able to ignore what he "knew" that the earth was the center of the universe we now understand the structure of the Solar System. Einstein thought about what would happen if he could ride on a beam of light and developed the theory of relativity.

How do you plan an effective and creative promotion or promotional campaign?

There are a number of elements to planning a creative promotion. The fact that you have a creative idea doesn't necessarily mean that it's appropriate for what you want to do. You need to consider what you want to say; to whom you want to say it; how much money you have to

spend; the timing of your promotion; and whether the medium you choose and the promotion itself fit your message and the mission and philosophy of your organization.

There are a few elements of successful promotions, some of them tied to psychological factors, that you might consider as you plan what you're going to do. These include:

- **Novelty.** Responding to new things has survival value for living things, including people. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but cats wouldn't be curious if it didn't benefit more of them than it killed. Lacing your promotion with the new or unexpected will attract more attention than simply repeating what people have seen a thousand times before.
- **Vividness.** Strong or unusual visual or auditory images tend to stay in the mind longer than more conventional ones. That's why we use logos, slogans, and those horrible advertising jingles that you can't get out of your mind.
- **Repetition.** We're all constantly bombarded with information. The more times your message is repeated, the more likely it is to make its way through all the other messages flying around and into people's consciousness.
- **Providing a benefit for the target of the promotion.** If you can find a way to reward people for responding to your message, they're much more likely to do so. Examples of rewards include the donated premiums that public radio stations distribute in return for pledges; free refreshments at a meeting or rally; T-shirts or other signs that someone helped or took part in a promotion or activity; etc.
- **Pairing the promotion with something people might want anyway** -- food, entertainment, etc. (See "A Piece of the Pie" below.)

Choose your message

What exactly is the reason for this promotion? The nature of your message is an important piece of how you can best frame and deliver it.

- Are you trying to make sure that the public knows your organization exists?
- Are you advertising your services?
- Are you trying to raise money?
- Are you trying to get the word out about a particular event you're sponsoring?
- Do you want to call attention to the larger issue your organization deals with?
- Are you trying to convince the public to take some specific action (write to Congress in support of a bill)?
- Are you trying to change people's behavior?

The ultimate effectiveness of your promotion will be judged on whether it accomplishes its purpose, not on how creative or artistic or clever it is.

Identify your audience

Who are you trying to reach?

- The general public, or the community at large (usually the case if you're trying to raise money).
- Potential participants or beneficiaries of your organization.
- Potential volunteers or Board members.
- Policy makers or the media.
- Specific groups involved in your issue (medical personnel, social workers, environmentalists, etc.)

Once you've identified your prospective audience, you can think how to reach that audience most effectively. For instance,

- Are there language issues to be addressed? In some cases, your target audience may need to be approached in a language other than English. In all cases, your language needs to be understandable and clear, and shouldn't offend those you hope will respond to it.
- Where and how can your target audience be reached? No matter how creative your promotion is, it's useless if people don't see or hear it. What medium are the folks you're aiming at most likely to pay attention to? TV? Radio? A professional journal? Bumper stickers? The answer can vary tremendously, depending upon who you're trying to reach.
- What will your target audience respond to? Humor? The unexpected? Something absolutely straightforward? It's important to understand what interpretation your audience will put on your promotion, and important, therefore, to know something about the culture of that audience. What do they consider funny, what do they consider offensive, what are they likely to remember?

Consider your budget

Your budget enters into your promotion in two ways. First, it obviously dictates how much you can spend, and therefore controls to some extent what kind of a promotion you can attempt. But second, the budget for your promotion also makes a statement about your organization. If the promotion is too obviously expensive (unless doing major promotions is what your organization is about), you may be seen as wasting money that could have been spent on services or organizational activities. When you think about how much you're going to spend, you need to take both of these issues into account. The trick is not to spend the most money possible, but the right amount of money, so that the promotion both has enough resources to be effective and sends the right message.

Time your promotion

Is this promotion meant to last a long time, or is it aimed at a specific event or action? If you're trying to improve your organization's profile and name recognition in the community, you might want to consider a promotion that puts your name on the streets over a long period of time. Articles of clothing hats, T-shirts, or something less expectable (reflective safety vests,

perhaps) bearing your organization's name are one possibility; a recognizable or unusual organizational vehicle could be another.

A day care center in a small town used a van painted with scenes of children playing to pick up and drop off its young charges. The van quickly became totally recognizable to everyone in town, and not only served as an ongoing advertisement for the center, but also improved safety for the children: other drivers would automatically stop when they saw the van stopped, because they knew it was the day care center transport.

If the promotion has a more specific purpose, a performance or some other one-time event might serve just as well. The timing of this event has to be thought through carefully, however, so it will catch the largest number of people, and be close enough to the time when you want people to do something that they'll be moved to take action.

Another way to approach the issue of extending a promotion over a long period of time is to create an event or situation that recurs at regular intervals. For most organizations, that means an annual event often linked to or focused on fundraising that is identified with the particular organization. Such an event, and its regularity, can serve many purposes: it can call attention to the organization; add to its status; raise money for it; and raise consciousness about its issue. Furthermore, each time the event runs, the community comes to expect it more and more, and to automatically associate it with the organization and its mission.

In the Pioneer Valley of western Massachusetts, for many years there has been a fall event called "A Piece of the Pie." Hundreds of restaurants, the total has grown year by year, donate a part of their profits over the course of a given week to the local food bank. Not only has this provided the food bank with a considerable source of income, but it has served, because of the name and nature of the promotion, to draw attention to the problem of hunger in the area. (The timing of "A Piece of the Pie" is particularly important: it takes place close to Thanksgiving, a time when food is in everyone's mind, and when the problem of hunger becomes particularly poignant.)

The event which was conceived by the food bank's director has increased both the status and the potential of the food bank, and has made the public far more responsive to its appeals. This promotion also gains a great deal of favorable publicity for the restaurants involved. People who care deeply about hunger often decide to patronize only participating restaurants, no matter what the time of year.

If your promotion involves items for sale or give-away, think about how they connect to what you want people to remember.

- For adult literacy: Pens, bookmarks, pads of paper, books of writings by learners, other literature.

- For child nutrition: Samples of appropriate (non-junk) snack or regular foods for children at different stages of development; pocket-size charts of foods children at different stages particularly need, or of what nutrients can be found in what foods.
- For recycling: Recycling bins (especially made of recycled materials); plans for building a set of recycling bins from recycled materials; composters.
- For a designated-driver campaign: key chains with an attached plastic or vinyl flap printed with the numbers of local cab companies; bumper stickers ("I'm a designated driver: Friends don't let friends drive drunk." "Designated driver on board")
- For a "Take Back the Night" anti-violence campaign: flashlights, whistles.

In general, as with "A Piece of the Pie," it makes sense to connect your promotion directly to the issue it's meant to affect. An event that highlights the rights of the disabled, for instance, needs itself to be 100% accessible and trouble-free to anyone with a disability. That might mean providing sign language interpreters for all gatherings, making sure every venue and restroom is physically accessible, making all announcements and information in both visible and audible forms, etc. The point of all this is not merely consistency (although that is important), but a demonstration of how an event can address and respect the rights and needs of the disabled.

How you conduct the promotion will both influence people's reactions to your organization and its issues, and also tell people a great deal about the organization and its priorities and philosophy. An event, for instance, may be inclusive, participatory, and casual (A \$1.00 donation gets you three square feet of the art wall to paint anything you want!), or it may be exclusive, hierarchical, and formal (Come to the \$1,000.00 a person Charity Ball!). In either case, it will say a great deal about the world view of the organization that runs it. If you want your organization to be seen in a particular light as, for example, empowering and democratic then your promotion or campaign should reflect that in the way it is conducted. It should be open to all (or almost all), should allow participants to have some effect on what goes on, should be relatively informal, etc. It's hard to maintain your credibility as a grass roots group if you're charging \$500.00 a plate for a black-tie rubber chicken dinner.

Another point to consider here is the organization's overall media strategy and relationship with the media. If you have particularly close ties to particular media outlets or individuals, you might consider incorporating that into whatever you do. If you have agreements with particular media outlets or individuals, those should be considered when you run a promotion as well. Your relations with the media and how they portray you are important to your organization, and can really help or hurt your promotion.

What are some tips for following up on a promotion?

Once a promotion is over, there's a natural tendency to let down, and to assume that your promotion was great because of the time and energy you put into it. Friends and colleagues will generally try to be positive regardless of what they really thought

The final step in a creative promotion is to assess whether it's been successful. Some questions you might ask after the promotion ends:

- Most important, did the promotion accomplish its purpose, and how well? If the purpose was to raise the profile of your issue, it might even be worth it to ask people on the street what they know about it. If the purpose was to raise money, how much did you raise, and how did that compare with what you've raised in the past from other methods? If the purpose was to get people to participate in an event, how many people showed up? An analysis of the effectiveness of what you've done will tell you more than anything else about how successful you've really been, and whether you should repeat this particular effort.
- What could you have done better? Are there obvious improvements you could have made in the quality of the item you sold or gave away, for instance? If you gave people T-shirts that disintegrated after the first washing, that's not likely to improve the image of your organization.
- Should you try this, or something similar, again?
- If it's an event, should it become a regular part of what your organization does? Does it have the potential to become a tradition, or at least something that people look for on a regular basis?
- How was it perceived by the target audience? Do you hear a positive "buzz" about what you did? Do people understand why you did it? Is there more sympathy for, or understanding of your issue as a result?
- How well did it represent the organization its mission, its issues, its purpose, its philosophy?
- Did it get any positive press, either because it was interesting enough so that you could convince the media to run stories about it, or because it was so compelling that they ran stories without any urging on your part?

If the answers to most or all of these questions are positive, then you've run a successful creative promotion, and you might consider doing it, or something similar again. If your reviews are mixed or negative, then it's important to understand why. What did you do that people didn't like, or that may have misrepresented the message you wanted to send? The answer to that question is a lesson learned, and will help you tremendously in planning your next promotion. And there should be a next promotion.

Part of following up on a promotion is making sure people don't forget it. One of the best ways to do that is to launch another one before too much time has passed. The public's memory is notoriously short; the fact that you've developed and run a successful promotion doesn't mean that everyone will still be passionate about your organization or your issue in six months. If you want to have a high profile, or to make sure people remember and pay attention to your message, you have to continue to find creative ways to communicate it.

In Summary

Developing creative promotions is a necessary piece of "selling" your organization, your issue, and your message to the public or to a specific target audience. It will help raise your profile, and will assure that people understand what you're about and why.

In order to develop creative promotions, it's important to

- Think creatively
- Be clear about why you're running this promotion
- Choose your message carefully
- Consider your target audience
- Think about the timing of your promotion
- Try to match the form and character of your promotion to the issues and values of your organization
- Follow up on your promotion, to understand what went right or wrong, and to guide or improve your next effort

If you can do all this, the chances are that your promotions will be both creative and successful, and will accomplish what you want them to.

Contributor
Phil Rabinowitz

Online Resources

[Adventures in Creativity](#), an on-line magazine.

[Creativity Unleashed Limited](#), a creativity consulting firm. Techniques for stimulating creativity, books, software, other resources.

Print Resources

Horowitz, S. *Marketing Without Megabucks: How to Sell Anything on a Shoestring*.

Moore, M. C. (1987). *Group Techniques for Idea Building*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Creating Brochures

It's often very useful to have a readily available document that explains your organization's purpose and services. One format that work well to deliver this information is a brochure. A brochure is a concise, visually appealing document, and if well designed, can grab the attention of viewers. This section looks at why and when to use a brochure, what sort of information to include, and how to design one that works well for your organization.

What is a brochure?

A brochure is an informative paper document often used for sharing promotional material. Brochures are often also referred to as flyers, pamphlets, or leaflets.

What purposes can a brochure serve?

A brochure can explain your organization's purpose and services. Doing a presentation to a group that isn't familiar with your organization? Meeting with a potential funding agency? Interviewing a group of potential volunteers? For almost any situation in which you need to introduce your group to someone new, a brochure can be useful. If you can't tell someone the basic facts about your organization -- what your mission is, what services you provide, who's in charge, how you can be contacted, how your group was formed, etc. -- in two or three sentences, you should definitely consider making up a brochure.

A brochure can answer frequently asked questions about your organization. If you're tired of answering questions like "How do I qualify to receive your services?" or "What do I do if I want to volunteer?" then consider making up a brochure. Of course, a brochure will never stop people from asking all of those questions, but it can give you a quick way to answer them.

A brochure can offer more specific instructional how-to or health information. If there's a specific, step-by-step process that you want to teach people about, a brochure is a very useful way to convey that information. For example, if you want to educate people on how to properly handle raw poultry to avoid salmonella, a brochure might be just the ticket. If you want to explain the various types of sleep disorders, you could do a brochure or, if you want to go into further detail, a series of brochures -- one on insomnia, one on narcolepsy, one on sleep apnea, etc.

A brochure tells the reader how he or she can find out more about your organization. When you're trying to get people interested in doing something -- for example, volunteering or making a contribution -- a brochure can be used as a call to action and can give people more information on how exactly they can get involved. In a brochure, you can include information on the history of your group and how it was formed; you can also direct people to the specific committees or staff members that relate to their interest.

A brochure can educate people about a specific program or event. Are you planning a big annual fundraising event like a walk-a-thon or a concert? Does your group sponsor a speakers' bureau or peer counseling service? You can go into detail about these special programs or events in a brochure.

Who might a brochure target?

A brochure can be directed to a specific group or groups, or it can be made for a broad general audience. Think about the groups that typically are interested in information about your organization as well as groups you'd like to generate more interest from, and consider whether you'd like to have brochures that specifically target each of those groups. Some of the groups you might want to direct a brochure towards include:

- Potential members or volunteers
- Potential clients
- Potential funders
- Potential community partners and supporters
- The press
- The general public

What can you do with brochures?

Brochures are an extremely flexible medium for getting information about your organization out to the public or to targeted groups. Here are a few of the things you can do with your brochures:

- Direct mailings to targeted people (mailing lists, people who call your office requesting information, etc.)
- Attachments to proposals or reports
- Leave-behinds when visiting clients
- Inserts in press kits and presentation folders
- Handouts in classes and workshops
- Materials for prospective employees and volunteers
- Materials to share at meetings, fairs, conferences, seminars

If you go to the trouble of making brochures for your group, be sure to have them available at any function where your group is represented.

How do you plan to make a brochure?

Gather ideas and examples. As with any type of printed material you plan to produce, it's a good idea to start off by collecting samples of brochures you like. Become familiar with styles,

graphics, and ways of wording things that you might like to use or model for your own brochure.

Brainstorm for your own project. First, consider what information the brochure should contain. Because a brochure is relatively short, you may want to limit the information you try to include; for example, you probably will not be able to include detailed descriptions of your organization's full history, mission, goals, fiscal status, five main annual projects, along with a staff directory and bios of the organization leadership! When considering what information to include, ask yourself:

- What will the target audience(s) for the brochure be?
- How big is your budget and how much time do you have to put the brochure together?

Next, decide who in your project should be called upon for advance input, who you'll need to make the brochure happen, and who you'll get feedback from on drafts of the brochure

Write an outline. This will give you the chance to decide how you want the brochure to be organized and what points you want to make. If you're working on a general informational brochure, make sure it contains your organization's goals and purpose.

Arrange your topics in a logical sequence, fitting it to the general layout of the brochure. Think about what order you want the information to be presented in. It may help you to fold up a piece of paper in the way that your brochure will be folded and sketch it out.

How do you write and design your brochure?

General guidelines for writing

Above all, keep it simple! Write concisely and clearly. Here are some tips:

- Keep sentences short. Run-on or overly complicated sentences can be too confusing for your reader.
- Avoid jargon. Don't assume the public will use the same sort of language and terminology as you. For example, more people are likely to understand you when you say something is "required" than if you say it is "mandated."
- Avoid cliches. They're overused and trite. Abandon phrases like 'the eye of the storm' or 'the tip of the iceberg.'
- Avoid redundancy. Try not to repeat the same phrases or ideas over and over, and try not to use a word that's really similar to one that you just used. Saying something like "Gang violence is a community problem that's on the rise" can more easily and less redundantly be phrased "Gang violence is on the rise in our community;" everyone knows it's a problem, so to say so is redundant. Double modifiers like 'true facts?' are also redundant.

- Use correct spelling. Of course you should take care to avoid misspellings and typos, but you should also avoid cutesy, purposeful misspellings. The type of purposeful misspellings you might see in everyday life (such as "Kwik Kleen Kar Wash") can come off making your organization look unprofessional, damaging your credibility and the image you want to present to the community. Avoid using spellings like "nite" or "thru".
- Avoid the passive voice. Using the active voice is usually more direct and easier to comprehend than the passive: "You should always wash your hands after handling raw poultry" is better than "Your hands should be washed after handling raw poultry", for example.

Following these tips, develop a rough draft of the copy. First, space and size you'll need for the text. You may want to type up your text, then cut and paste it onto a piece of paper folded into the size and shape of your brochure -- this can give you a rough idea of the space you have available. Keep in mind that you may have to cut the text to fit to the brochure layout later on!

Tips on designing the brochure yourself

On a typical brochure you'll have six panels, but whatever the number of panels, consider carefully what should go where. The front cover will at least need a title, your organization's name, and possibly a logo.

Here is a typical brochure layout. Please keep in mind that you don't necessarily have to lay yours out the same way; for example, you can have more than three panels -- but you probably should include some of these elements.

Typical layout for a 3-panel brochure:

1 Contact Information (Flap)	2 Mailing Address (back cover)	3 Front Cover
------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	------------------

- *Contact information:* This often ends up being the folded-in flap or the back of the brochure; should contain all the ways your organization can be contacted (names, addresses, phone number, email, web address).
- *Mailing addresses:* One of the outside panels of your brochure should have a return address for your organization and a blank area where you can stick a mailing label or write an address. Saves you the cost of envelopes!

- *Front cover:* This should contain your name, logo, and slogan, but not much more. Keep it from getting too crowded and chaotic, but try to make the reader interested in opening the brochure up and reading on.
- *Features/benefits:* This is usually the inside of the brochure. This part of your brochure should tell a bit about what your program does and what the benefits are to those who become involved.
- *Action:* What can the reader do? This could focus on how the volunteer can pitch in and help your group or coalition, or it could focus on how the volunteer can benefit from the services him/herself. You can include both, if you'd like.
- *Elsewhere, if desired:* a brief history of the organization, directions on how to access or use services provided, how the organization is funded, or information on the staff.

While standard 3-fold brochures are the most common, you can do just about any type of brochure you'd like.

After drafting the text, be sure to review and get feedback. Check for errors first, then get additional, objective opinions from as many people as you possibly can, including people from outside your group. Get their honest opinions and use their feedback to help you decide on the final version.

Now you're ready to take it to the printer!

Have it printed or photocopied: It's possible to avoid, or at least reduce, the expense of paying a professional printer. Find out if anyone in your group works for a printing company or knows anyone who does. Approach area printers to see if any of them would donate or offer reduced fees for their services.

Distribute your final product: This may seem like a no-brainer, but it's an unfortunate fact that community groups often go to a great deal of effort and expense to print out stacks and stacks of brochures, and then they end up just sitting forever in a box or on someone's desk. Have distribution be a part of your communications plan before you even start.

Form a committee, if necessary, and make a list of the places you want to distribute your brochures. Find out for each place on your list whether you should just mail them or if you'll be expected to drop them off yourself. And finally, assign specific individual volunteers or staff members to be responsible for getting the posters and flyers out by a set deadline.

In Summary

Creating a brochure can be hard work, but a brochure can be a valuable tool for explaining what your organization is about, answering questions, educating your audience, or promoting an event. By following the steps given here, your organization can produce professional-looking brochures that will greatly improve your ability to communicate efficiently with a wide variety of audiences.

Online Resources

[Consumer Perspectives: Creating a Brochure for Families of Children with Special Health Care Needs in Your Community's Immigrant and Underserved Populations](#), prepared by Massachusetts Consortium for Children with Special Health Care Needs. This information is based on the experience of the consortium, and is a good example of how to create a brochure for a specially targeted population.

[How to Create an Effective Brochure](#), from the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, has several good illustrations that will help one create a professional eye-catching and valuable brochure.

[How to Design a Simple Brochure](#) by The Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group.

Print Resources

Adler, E. (1991). *Developing and producing brochures*. Palo Alto, CA: Health Promotion Resource Center.

Adler, E. (1991). *Print that works: The first step-by-step guide that integrates writing, design, and marketing*. Palo Alto, CA: Bull Publishing.

Aspen Reference Group. (1997). *Community health education and promotion: A guide to program design and evaluation*. (C. Schust, ed.) Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers, Inc.

Booth & Associates, M. (1995). *Promoting issues and ideas: A guide to public relations for nonprofit organizations*. New York, NY: The Foundation Center.

Brigham, N. (1992). *How to do leaflets & brochures*. *Community change*, Issue 12, Spring 1992.

Homan, M. S. (1994). *Promoting community change: Making it happen in the real world*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Creating Fact Sheets on Local Issues

Getting the facts out to the public about community health issues can be done in a number of ways. One of the simplest and easiest things you can do is make up a fact sheet about the issues you're working on to distribute to the public.

What is a fact sheet?

A fact sheet is a single sheet of paper listing important facts about the issue. Fact sheets can be laid out just about any way you'd like as long as they list the main facts you want to include. You can do one fact sheet with basic information, or you can do a whole series of them.

Why would you make a fact sheet?

Fact sheets are easy to make and easy to understand. No need to come up with a catchy slogan (unless you already have one) or write a lengthy, eloquent essay arguing your case. With a fact sheet, you can just let the facts speak for themselves.

Fact sheets can be made up very quickly. You can crank out a fact sheet in a single day, when a more elaborate method of getting information out (like a public service announcement or a poster) would take much longer.

Fact sheets are cheap! You'll need to photocopy them, of course, and some staff or volunteer time will be spent on distributing them, but these are the only real expenses involved in doing fact sheets.

Who can be targeted with fact sheets?

Fact sheets can be distributed to the general public or to a specific audience. They can be handed out at community events, public meetings, meetings of governing bodies like the city commission, or just about any place where your intended audience will be gathering.

You can aim your fact sheet towards any of these types of audiences:

- Civic organizations
- Business groups
- Grassroots organizations
- School boards
- Labor unions
- Parent-teacher groups
- Church organizations

- The local press (editors, editorial boards, or just the beat reporters that normally cover your group or initiative)
- Health organizations
- Elected and appointed local government officials or entities
- Grantmakers

How do you make a fact sheet?

Think about what message you want the facts to convey.

Do you want to shock people into action? Explain a complicated issue? Provide hard facts for the press or a governmental agency? Think about what the purpose of this fact sheet is and how you might best get your point across. For example, if you're trying to drum up support for a public art project, you could look for facts demonstrating how public art drives up property values and deters crime.

Think about the audience for your fact sheet.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Who will you be giving this fact sheet to?
- What sort of information will most appeal to this group?
- What sort of reaction do you want this audience to have?

For example, business people tend to like numbers. The general public and (since the general public is their audience) the press are more likely to be interested in the human side of the story and with what effect the issue has on people in general.

Find your facts.

Perhaps you already have loads of factual information and just need to sort through it all to decide which ones to include in your sheet. Maybe you have a bunch of facts given to you by another coalition or a national group and need to decide which ones will work best for you. If you don't have your facts gathered already, you'll need to do some research.

These are some possible sources:

- Television and radio reports
- Newspapers and magazines
- Published minutes or papers from meetings and conferences
- Newsletters and publications of other community groups
- National organizations and institutes
- The Internet (web searches, official sites of research groups, etc.)

- Government sources (public records, etc.)

Verify, verify, verify!

This is extremely important. In general, this simply means using good judgment. Be sure to check facts out for accuracy. This means that your facts should come from reputable sources and be up-to-date.

Making sure the fact comes from a reputable source: Don't use facts that don't have a cited source (one that tells you where the information came from). If it doesn't have a cited source, how do you know whether it's true? Know who the source is and whether that source is trustworthy. Is the source likely to have any particular bias that makes the fact questionable? For example, did a suspiciously low figure on teen smoking come from a research institute funded by big tobacco companies? If you find a fact on a website, is the site one of a respected organization or agency, or does it belong to a private citizen or a clearly biased group? If at all possible, find a second source that can verify the fact.

The importance of using a reputable source

Using a disreputable source:

A group of anti-gay activists battling a proposed change in the city human rights code a few years ago in Lawrence, Kansas, cited facts from a researcher named Dr. Paul Cameron in arguing against equal rights based on sexual orientation. However, research by their opponents found that Cameron's statistics have never been accepted by any mainstream psychological, psychiatric, epidemiological or sociological organizations, and that he was expelled from membership of the American Psychological Association in 1983 for employing "unsound methodologies and breaching the code of ethics." Needless to say, the city commission decided to disregard Cameron's research in deciding how to vote on the issue.

Using a reputable source:

Texans Against Gun Violence, a Houston gun control organization, was attempting to prove that an ordinance to cut down on children's access to guns had been effective and should stay on the books. The group cited a long term study comparing a set period before the ordinance was passed with a set period after the ordinance was passed. The combined number of accidental and suicide deaths of children involving guns dropped from 34 to 10. Unintentional deaths alone decreased from 21 to 1. The study was done by four locally respected researchers (three of whom were doctors), and its results were taken very seriously by the public.

Making sure the fact is up-to-date: That figure on breast cancer rates might be interesting enough to include in your fact sheet, but what if it's from 1964? Check the dates and if you have facts from a variety of dates, go with the more recent ones whenever possible.

Narrow it down.

Go through all the factual information you've gathered and decide what's most important or attention-grabbing, then decide which things you're going to use.

The facts you use should be relevant. A fact sheet is worthless if the facts on it aren't fitting or don't drive home the point. Let's say you work with an after-school college prep program for low income high school kids. Your program doesn't work with any particular race; any student whose family meets the income guidelines is eligible. You may find some suitably attention-grabbing statistics on the rate of Hispanic students going on to complete college, for example, but even if you have a lot of Hispanic kids in your program these statistics wouldn't be suitable for you to use. Why? Because not all of your students are Hispanic, and because the central problem your program deals with is poverty, not race. You would be better served to find figures on college graduation rates for low income students, since that is the focus of your program.

Decide how you want to lay your fact sheet out.

Just the facts, ma'am! Fact sheets aren't meant to be lengthy missives. One side of a single 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper is sufficient. To make it more eye-catching, you can use brightly colored paper or even some carefully selected clip art (use it judiciously, though --you want to be taken seriously). A short introductory paragraph can be included if you like, but it's not absolutely necessary, the focus here is the facts themselves.

Find a simple way of presenting your information. You might want to use a "who, what, when, where, why" layout, or you might use a bulleted list. Keep it simple. See the examples at the end of this section for some ideas.

Cite your sources.

Your fact sheet will be more credible if you can tell people what sources your information came from.

Ways to cite sources

Using footnotes:

The average age at which a federal prisoner first fired a gun is 13 years old (1).

(1) Source: Department of Justice

Using parentheses:

The average age at which a federal prisoner first fired a gun is 13 years old (U.S. Department of Justice).

Including in the wording of the fact:

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the average age at which a federal prisoner first fired a gun is 13 years old.

Explain what the facts mean.

Some facts speak clearly for themselves. However, if you have a fact that you want to include that isn't completely clear, be sure to take a sentence or two to explain what it means and how it applies to your issue. For example, the fact used in the above example speaks for itself. However, if your fact was, for example, "Two out of three Pinkerton Valley High School students has tried marijuana," you could follow it up with an additional fact to further drive your point home -- such as, "Only one in three are involved in school sports activities. That means there are more kids who have tried pot than are on our school's football, basketball, volleyball, and softball teams!"

Things to avoid:

- **Don't overdo percentages:** A statistic that comes in the form of a percentage can be confusing to some people. If possible, state it as a fraction instead. For example: "66.2% of adult women in Anytown report that they do not do regular breast self-examinations" can be stated more clearly by saying, "Over two thirds of the adult women in Anytown do not do regular breast self-examinations."
- **Don't stretch the truth:** Exaggerating makes you look dishonest. It's okay to round a figure to the nearest whole number or to use averages, but be sure you do so accurately.
- **Avoid unscientific surveys or polls:** Figures from this sort of source can be very skewed. For example, surveys taken on the World Wide Web aren't representative of the public as a whole because the respondents are only going to be people who have access to computers and enough knowledge and skill about it to navigate their way around the Internet -- which of course leaves out a lot of people who are economically disadvantaged or lack technological savvy. If using results of polls or surveys, stick to the ones that have used sound research methods to guarantee a representative cross-section of people.
- **Don't be repetitive:** The reader of your fact sheet may get bored and stop reading if you do this. You may have drunk driving accident rates from each of the last ten years, but it's better to put a single average or a simple range than to list each year individually.
- **Don't inundate the reader with too many facts:** Keep it down to one side of a sheet of paper, if possible. Including everything you found out might be tempting, but pick out the facts you see as most important and leave out the rest. If you have so many facts

that you can't possibly do that, think about making a series of fact sheets on different topics.

In Summary

Fact sheets can be an easy, important way of getting information out to the public quickly and efficiently. There's no one way to make a fact sheet. Look at the different examples provided below and decide what format might work best for what you're doing. Try not to spend too much time getting bogged down in the details, and have fun!

Contributor
Chris Hampton

Print Resource

Brigham, N., with Catalifo, M., & Cluster, D. (1991). *How to do leaflets, newsletters, and newspapers*. Detroit, MI: PEP Publishers.

Creating a Website

Every year, more and more people worldwide use the Internet as their primary source of information. Because of its speed and simplicity, those who use the Internet regularly often turn to it before other forms of media to gather information, learn about events, or become knowledgeable about a community issue. Because of this, creating a website for your organization or initiative can greatly improve your ability to communicate with the public. This section discusses when and why to set up a website, how to create a website, and how to ensure that your website will be as effective and easy to use as possible.

What is a website?

A website is any collection of one or more web pages -- single files that can be displayed on the web. For example, the Community Tool Box is a website, but the document you're viewing right now is one of the many web pages available at this website. Some web pages are very short, with only a few lines of text, while others are very long.

Almost every major corporation, nonprofit organization, and educational institution uses the web to distribute information, and private citizens have jumped on board with personal sites showing off anything from family photo albums to joke lists to celebrity fan sites. Most local and regional organizations and initiatives have websites, and these vary widely in terms of how elaborate they are, how nicely they are designed, and how much information they contain.

Why should you consider creating a website for your organization?

There are many great reasons to consider creating a website. Here are a few, and you may find that you can think up even more on your own:

- Having a website lends your agency or organization a certain amount of legitimacy and credibility. Websites are now so nearly universal that it has become generally expected for any legitimate agency or organization to have one.
- In developed countries, younger people -- those who've grown up with computers or used them in schools -- turn to the web for almost everything. They read newspapers, college catalogues, and even books online, and use the web for almost all their information-gathering (as well as shopping, travel, and even dating.) Any organization without a website simply doesn't exist for many of them.
- You can put an enormous amount of information up on a website -- far more than can fit into a single brochure or public service announcement. You can include your website address in your brochures, advertisements, or other promotional materials to encourage people to visit it and find out more information.

- Whatever information you put up on your website is immediately available to anyone who wants it --24 hours a day, 7 days a week --no waiting for a fax or an envelope in the mail.
- Your website can be part of an overall media campaign and it can help establish what sort of image or perception you want people to have of your initiative or organization.
- The web is a good way to reach people who have difficulty getting information through more traditional means, such as people who are unable to get out of their homes due to disability, lack of transportation, or illness. It is also a good way to reach people who may be ashamed or embarrassed to pick up a brochure in public or visit your office.
- The web still has some novelty appeal, so some people who might not otherwise look into finding out about your organization may do so if you have a website.
- If you have a website, it can be found easily whenever people search the web for groups or services like your own. This can be helpful to people who live in your area but have never heard of you, or for people who are planning to move to or visit your town.
- Any correction, addition, or revision you make to your website will be immediately available to those who access it. While a misprinted phone number or some other piece of information on some printed material, such as a brochure or flyer, can be a potential disaster, mistakes on your website can be immediately corrected.
- Websites can be used to spur your members, volunteers, supporters, and sympathizers on to action, if necessary.
- A website is an effective way to get information out very quickly, which is great when information is changing rapidly. For example, if you are involved in a local political campaign in which things are happening often that require quick responses, or you just want to keep people up-to-the-minute on what's happening with your fundraising drive, you can post this information on your website.
- Having a website with email links for contacting people in your organization provides an easy, instantaneous way for people to contact you.

When is a good time to create a website?

Any time is a great time to create a website. While it is never too late for your organization or initiative to put up a site, the sooner the better! If you create a website at the beginning of your work, it can help you establish your public image and some level of credibility with the public early on. Adding a website at any point in your organization's development can do -- or at least enhance -- these things as well.

That said, it's important to get a website up as quickly as possible. Especially in North America, many people researching organizations or looking for services don't look anywhere but on the web. If you have no web presence, they won't find you.

How do you create and use a website?

Decide who will actually create the site, whether that's you, a member or volunteer of your agency or organization, or some outside party.

If you know enough about HTML or CSS to do it yourself, or to at least make changes to a page that somebody else has set up for you, this will give you a greater level of control and accessibility when it comes to making quick adjustments and additions to the site. If you decide to have an individual do the site, make sure it's someone who has an adequate know-how of HTML; you might ask him to show you other websites he's designed. Also, make sure it's someone who is able to commit to keeping the site up-to-date. You may wish to add website responsibilities to the job description of one of your staff members, or create an official volunteer position for it. You may also opt to have your web hosting service handle design responsibilities as well; if this is the case, be sure to ask about that when you're shopping around later on.

It may be tempting to just let somebody you know make up a web page for you on his or her own site, but we caution against that for several reasons. First, when your web pages get set up under someone else's control, you will have limited or no control over how they are made and what information they contain. That person may be a truly bad web designer, or have such limited knowledge of the technical language used that he or she can't do everything you want done with the site. You may not be able to get that person to make changes or corrections as promptly as necessary. And finally, you may not be able to get that person to take your web pages down at some point in the future.

Example: Putting Your Web Pages Up on Someone Else's Site

A good example of why you might not want to have someone put your pages up on his or her own site is the experience of one local agency here in Lawrence, Kansas.

The organization agreed to let a university student make a web page for it on his personal site for one of his class projects. It seemed like a good idea at the time -- the agency wouldn't have to expend any effort or expense, and the student would do all the work himself. Unfortunately, after the semester was over, the student abandoned work on the page but never removed it from his site.

While the agency eventually went on to set up its own new site, the student's old page stayed up, with the information on it becoming more and more outdated over time. When people did web searches that should have helped them find the agency's official site, they often ended up finding the outdated site instead. This problem continued for another three years until the student graduated and his entire website was removed from its server.

So you see, it's very important to select a good site administrator if you're going to entrust the job to someone else. For smaller organizations or initiatives that are just starting out or are very local in scale, however, you may just want to do the work on your site yourself.

There are a number of ways that you can put information on a website without having to know HTML/CSS. Many ISPs (Internet Service Providers) give customers a fair amount of free web space to construct websites, and program them so they look like word processors. You type in what you want, and it appears in your website. Software that does essentially the same thing also exists. Within a short time -- perhaps by the time you read this section -- it is likely that setting up a website will be as easy and universally accessible as composing a document in MS Word.

Decide roughly how much you can afford to spend.

The cost of setting up a website varies wildly, depending on what web hosting service you use and how elaborate you want the site to be. You probably won't be able to come up with an exact budget at this point, but you should at least have a rough idea before you start looking at web hosting services. Commercial web hosting services can cost anywhere from \$5 to \$100 per month, and they often charge a one-time setup fee of \$10 to \$40 when you first build your site. You may very well be able to find a free service, but keep in mind that these are often limited in terms of how much you can do with your site. Remember -- you don't have to know an exact amount, but having at least an approximate budget will be helpful to you in the next step.

Select a web hosting service.

Unless your organization is part of a university or some other institution that already has web servers available for your use, you will need to find a web service provider. Service providers are businesses that have servers and allow individuals and organizations to set up web pages on those servers. Some charge a fee, and others allow you to set up a website for free in exchange for allowing them to put an advertisement on the pages.

Search for "web hosting" on any major web search engine and you will find hundreds of entries. You may find it easiest to deal with a web hosting service in your own town because you can meet with them face-to-face when necessary, but you might be able to find an affordable service elsewhere. There are also several sites that have directories of web hosting services.

While it may be tempting to use a free web page hosting service, you should at least consider some of the commercial services. Most free web page services are limited in the amount of information you can put up, some of them are extremely limited in design possibilities, and you usually can't get your own domain name (more on these later on). Furthermore, the market for web hosting is very competitive, so you're likely to be able to find affordable rates.

The key thing to remember in searching for a web hosting service is **shop around!** There are many, many companies out there that provide web hosting services, and you should talk to

several before you make a decision. The customer service representatives at these places should be able to ask you questions that can help you get a better idea of what options might be best for you.

It's also a good idea to look at the homepages of other organizations and agencies in your area and then talk to those folks to find out what services they use, how they feel about their web hosting service, and how much it costs them.

Decide whether you want to register a domain name.

A domain name is a unique name that identifies a particular website. Look at the URL for this page. You'll see `ctb.ku.edu` at the beginning. This is our domain name.

A domain name points always to one specific server, although that server can host several domain names. Domain names always have 2 or more parts, separated by dots. On the Internet, domain names typically end with a suffix denoting the type of site: commercial sites generally end with `.com`, military sites end with `.mil`, government sites end with `.gov`, and nonprofit organizations end with `.org`, and educational ones use `.edu`. Since the Community Tool Box is at the University of Kansas, we have an `.edu` suffix.

The fee for registering a new domain name runs from \$10 to \$30 per year, but the cost is often included in the monthly service charge from your web hosting service.

Decide what information you want to include on your website.

Your website can be fairly minimal, if you don't want to expend a whole lot of time and energy, but there are almost no limits to what you can put up on your site if you want to.

Basic information you should have on your website:

- Your group's mission and purpose. These should appear fairly prominently on the main front page of your site, although you may wish to have an additional page with this information in more detail. Good examples of how organizations have displayed their mission statements can be found at the site of [Gilda's Club of Detroit](#) and [Covenant House of New Orleans](#). You may decide to go into further detail with this and list your organization's goals and objectives.
- Contact information. This should be fairly thorough; be sure to include ALL information (address, phone number, fax number, email addresses, etc.). The main contact information should be easy to find on or from the main page of your site, and then you may wish to have an additional contact page for individual staff members, departments, or programs. Good examples of how to display your contact information can be found at the site of the [Kid's Council in North Dakota](#). Note: You should really have some way for people to contact you by e-mail on your website. Your web hosting service can probably

set you up with some e-mail addresses for your organization, so be sure to ask about that.

- Information on your services or programs, including information on qualification requirements and how to apply or find out more. A good example of this sort of page can be found at the site of [San Francisco Suicide Prevention](#).
- "How you can help." [Be sure to have information on how interested parties can volunteer or make donations](#). [You might have an online volunteer application form](#), or an address to which people can send donations.
- News/Calendar/Upcoming Events. Your site should be periodically updated with news about what's going on with your organization. Do you have an important fundraiser coming up? Make information about it available on your website! Do you sponsor regular meetings of support or discussion groups? Have information about those available on your website. An example of how to show your upcoming events can be seen at the site of the [American Lung Association of Hawaii](#) or the [Hayti Heritage Center](#) in Durham, North Carolina.
- Resources and links for further information. It's not a bad idea to send people who visit your site to other sites on the web where they can find out more about things related to your organization's purpose. For example, if you are a local teen pregnancy prevention coalition, you could provide links to informational sites like the [Alan Guttmacher Institute's](#) teen pregnancy information page, to larger regional or national organizations like the [National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy](#), or to online resource sites like the [Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention](#).
- Information on and links to your organization's sponsors, partners, and friends, like at the sites of the [Peace Learning Center of Indianapolis](#) and the [Center for Rural Development](#) in Somerset, Kentucky. This is a nice way to show appreciation to funders and other supporters that help your organization, and it shows that you have nothing to hide about where your funding comes from.

Other considerations for your site:

- A site map can be very helpful to visitors if your site is fairly large or extensive. A site map is a single page that lists everything that can be found at your site so that the user doesn't have to look through page after page to find the information she wants. A good example of a site map can be found at the site for the [Philadelphia Geriatric Center](#) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- A note as to when the site was last updated, or a "What's New?" page like that at the site of the [Community Resource Group](#) in Fayetteville, Arkansas.
- A Frequently Asked Questions page or section (also known as an FAQ). This is a page where you can post the answers to those questions that people ask most often about your organization, activities, or services. Having an FAQ for people to read can protect you from having to answer many of those same questions over and over again. Organizations like Locks of Love in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and the Hospitality Program in Boston, Massachusetts have useful FAQs that can serve as examples.

- A listing of your staff members, board members, or volunteers, like the Pensacola, Florida chapter of [Habitat for Humanity](#).
- A guestbook or feedback section so that people can let you know what they think of your site. You can use a contact form like the [Chicago Asthma Consortium](#) uses, or you can simply have clickable email links like the [American Red Cross St. Louis Bi-State Chapter](#) uses.
- Important statistics about your membership or services, such as the [Junior League of Salt Lake City's](#) statistics page.
- A resource library section, with lots of informational materials related to your organization's focus or cause, such as the one at the site of the [Platte River Endangered Species Partnership](#) in Cheyenne, Wyoming.
- Your organization's history. This includes how your group started, important landmarks in your past, what sort of obstacles and accomplishments have happened along the way, and the general state of things now. This can be in the form of a narrative, like that of [Headquarters Counseling Center](#) in Lawrence, Kansas, or it can be in the form of a timeline.
- An online gallery. This could include photos (like the ones at the site for [Kidd's Kids in Dallas/Fort Worth](#)), artwork, or personal experiences (like those at the site of the [Joy Junction Homeless Shelter](#) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For example, if your group works to prevent domestic violence, you could have a space on your site where survivors of domestic violence could anonymously share their stories. If your organization recently held a talent show as a fundraiser, you could have photos of the event. If you work with children, you could have artwork by children your group has served. An online gallery can serve to inspire as well as to draw people who might not otherwise have visited your site.
- A listing of job opportunities and openings with your project, like that at the site of the [Heifer International](#) in Little Rock, Arkansas.
- Action alerts with information on how people who visit your website can take action on an issue related to your organization. You can see some action alert pages at the sites of the [Forest Conservation Archives](#) and [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals](#).
- A web counter. Web counters are small graphic counters, much like the odometer on a car, that tally up how many times a particular page or site has been "hit" or viewed. Having some idea of how often your page is visited, or what sections of your site get the most hits, can give you insight into how useful and accessible your site is to others. If having a web counter on your site interests you, ask your web hosting service about getting one.

As you can see from the above lists, there's almost no limit to what sort of information you can put on your website. You can always add things that aren't on these two lists as well -- feel free to be creative!

If you're not sure what to include, don't be too concerned. The great thing about having a website is that you can always make changes and additions, so go ahead and put up the

information you're sure about, and you can add other things later. If things don't seem to work out well, you can always remove them later on as well.

Work with your web hosting company and your webmaster to build the actual site.

Depending on how extensive you want your site to be, this can end up being the longest part of the process. The extent to which you will need to be heavily involved with this part of the project can vary as well; you may choose to work closely with your webmaster, looking at the web pages frequently as they're being constructed, or you may simply check in with your webmaster from time to time to ask how things are progressing.

It is at this point in the process that you will decide how complicated your site's graphics will be. While a really snazzy, graphics-intensive site may be eye-catching, you should take care to make sure that the site is still easy to navigate, and you should definitely consider accessibility issues for people with disabilities. People with certain disabilities have to use special equipment to access the World Wide Web, and too many graphics can sometimes cause your site to be unreadable to these folks, but there is a lot of information available on how you can have a nifty-looking site and still be accessible to everyone. Links to several websites that discuss accessibility issues and give pointers on how to make your site more accessible appear in the Tools at the end of this section.

Get feedback from others and make any necessary changes.

Once your site is up and running, have some objective people look at the site and give you their feedback on what works and what doesn't. It will be especially helpful if you get feedback from the type of people that you hope to have visit your site -- potential donors or volunteers, potential participants or members, media representatives, etc.

Here are some questions you should take into consideration when looking for feedback on your site:

- Does your site load into the web browser quickly and easily? This is especially important where many people have only dial-up access. Graphics, videos and sound files can make your site attractive and exciting, but they can take too long to load on a slow connection -- sometimes 20 or 30 minutes -- and they may freeze the connection entirely. That's not a good way to build good will.
- Is information arranged in a logical, easy-to-find manner?
- Is the site attractive and easy to read?
- Does the information on the site make sense?

Publicize your site address.

- You can do this by sending email messages announcing your site to relevant email lists and posting about it on Usenet and other discussion boards.

- Submit your site for inclusion on the major web search engine sites and directories. A list of the URL's for several major search sites is included in the Tools section.
- Let any local "community guide" websites that cover your geographic area know about the site and ask that they include a link to it on their own pages, if possible.
- Let other groups and professionals in your area know about your site.
- Find out which agencies or organizations publish community or social service directories and request that your website be included in the next one.
- Include your site's URL in your regular media campaigns - [posters and flyers](#), [press releases](#), [public service announcements](#), [paid advertisements](#), [your organization's next print newsletter](#).
- Consider using meta tags in your HTML code. Meta tags allow you to provide keywords and descriptions on individual pages within your site that allow certain search engines to easily index your page, along with a description of the site that you yourself get to write. Not all search engines support meta tags, but several of the major ones do. This can greatly increase traffic to your site by pulling people in to look at a specific page and then having them go on to check out the rest of the site.
- Consider purchasing ad banners on some of the major search sites. On Yahoo!, for example, when you do a search on a given topic, the results page that comes up will almost always have an ad banner for a related page at the top. It's sort of along the same lines as those coupons that they print out for you at the grocery store that are for products similar to what you've just purchased -- they check to see what you're interested in first, and then present you with a form of advertising for that item or service.

In Summary

Everyone is on the web these days, and having a web presence is vital for those of us in community development, nonprofit organizations, and other similar work. While this section is only an overview, we hope that the many web links contained within it and the information we've presented will help you get your organization its own home on the World Wide Web.

Contributor
Chris Hampton

Online Resources

European Laboratory for Particle Physics (1998). A CERN invention you are familiar with: The world wide web.

Hurst, Mark. (1997). HTML basics in two minutes.

Hurst, Mark. (1997). What's a webmaster (and why is this important)?

Incite.org. (1998). Take action!: Ways for you to take action online.

[An Introduction to Web Hosting](#). A comprehensive guide that covers the basics of the internet, websites, and creating your own website.

Johnson, K.E. (1998). If you build it, make them come. Presented at **Hot Tips on Web Home Pages - Marketing to Reach New Clients**. TECHSHOW 98, sponsored by the Law Practice Management Section of the American Bar Association, March 27, 1998.

Nua Internet Surveys. (1997). [How many online?: U.S. and Canada](#)

Nua Internet Surveys. (1997). [How many online?](#)

[HTML and CSS Tutorials](#). A website for beginners that gives concise, step-by-step instructions on building web pages.

Krause, A., Stein, M. and Clark, J. (1998). [The virtual activist: A training course](#).

Using Email Lists

In the last few years, the explosion of the Internet has brought about a revolution in how we communicate. About 1.5 billion people worldwide are now online, and almost all of those people use email.

Along with the increase in the number of people who use email, more and more people are also subscribing to email lists, with which they can either periodically receive information or regularly communicate with others who share an interest in just about any topic you can think of. Email lists exist for thousands of topics: Google Groups lists over half a million groups in well over 100 languages.

What is an email list?

With your email client (whatever program you use to access your email – Gmail or Microsoft Outlook, for example), you might already have experience with setting up your own small lists of email addresses. And you've probably already gotten at least one piece of much-forwarded (and usually untrue) chain email – like the one about the kidney snatchers or the one about how Bill Gates wants to give you \$1000 – showing the email addresses of dozens of other people who have also been sent the same message. Well, these are not what we're talking about when we discuss email lists.

An email list – also sometimes called a reflector or listserv – is a group of people who communicate by email with one another through one single address. When people subscribe to (sign up for) a list, their email addresses are added and then, when anyone who is subscribed sends a message to the main email address, a copy of that message goes out to each person on the list. People can respond to the list address, entering into a group discussion, or they may wish to respond off-list or privately by emailing another list member directly without using that mailing list address. Mailing lists vary in size; some are very small, with only a dozen people or so, while others have thousands of subscribers. Sometimes large mailing lists are connected to Usenet newsgroups, so that postings to those mailing lists also show up on the corresponding newsgroups and vice versa.

Email lists are run through mailing list management software; some of the more commonly-used programs are ListProc and Listserv (which is so common that sometimes people refer to an email list as a "listserv" – much like some people call all tissues "Kleenex" or all soda "Coke"). These list management programs allow the list owner or administrator – the person in charge of running the list – to easily add and remove subscribers and change various settings.

Types of email lists

Announcements: Most lists are set up so that everyone who is subscribed can send mail to the list, allowing the subscribers to use the list for discussion. Sometimes, however, lists are

"announcements-only;" in this kind of list, the list owner is the only person who can send mail to the subscribers. An announcement-only list can be a good way to get information out to people who don't want to deal with the large amount of email that some lists can generate, and they give your list manager complete control over what goes out to the list.

In the U.S., announcements-only lists – often with links to a website where users can take action or find out more – have revolutionized political campaigning in the past several years. MoveOn.org was a pioneer in this area, and the 2008 presidential campaigns used email lists to an unprecedented degree, allowing candidates – Barack Obama particularly – not only to get their messages out, but to raise staggering amounts of money.

Moderated lists: With this type of list, the list owner must approve any messages sent to the main address before they are sent on the list. This allows for a great deal of control over what goes out to the list and eliminates irrelevant messages, but it can be time-consuming for the list owner if it's an active list.

Unmoderated lists: In an unmoderated list, any subscriber can send a message to the list address and it will automatically be sent out to the entire subscription list. This makes for less maintenance by the list owner and free communication among list members. Unfortunately, this also means that the list can be something of a free-for-all. Some control can be exercised by the list owner in removing subscribers who don't follow the rules, but he or she should be careful to avoid falling into censorship.

You might find it useful to establish two email lists for your organization: one that is announcements-only for those who don't want to deal with a large volume of email but still want informational updates, and a separate unmoderated list for those who are interested in discussing issues related to your initiative.

Depending on what type of list management software you use, subscribers to your list may be able to choose the option of subscribing to a digest version. In digest mode, the list management software bundles together several messages to the list into a single email, so that the subscriber receives list messages in one or two single emails per day, rather than with individual messages for each email sent to the list.

Where can you find out more?

There are tons of email lists out there on just about every topic you can imagine (and some you probably don't want to imagine). Several web directories list some of them; you might want to look at some of these directories to get an idea of the breadth and variety of topics that mailing lists can address. You might even find one you'd want to try out yourself!

- Tile.net List of Internet Discussion Groups
- Catalist Email
- [Google Groups](#)

- [Yahoo Groups](#)

For lists that focus on topics related to community health and development, you might want to check Public Health List page at Liszt.com

Why should you consider using an email list?

Email lists can serve many functions. They can serve as a way to:

- Quickly and inexpensively get information out to a large number of people: For example, you can use a list to send out a reminder about tomorrow's meeting or an update on some project your initiative has been working on. You can send a message out to 10, 100, or even 1,000 people and not have to buy a single stamp!
- Create a forum for discussion of ideas and issues: For example, you could use an email list to brainstorm online for fundraising ideas.
- Encourage people interested in your cause to offer each other support and assistance: For example, you could use the list to organize a carpool for members attending an out-of-state conference
- Spur people on to political action: For example, you could send out a message with phone numbers for your area's representatives in Congress with an appeal to call about an upcoming vote on a bill related to your cause.
- Raise money for your organization or your issue. Appeals for funding to fill gaps in service or to support advocacy or other initiatives can generate the cash you need to carry out your community work.
- Monitor the interests of your list subscribers. For example, you can start a discussion on your list to see what services people want the most.

...or just about anything else you can think of!

However, when deciding whether to set up an email list, it's obviously important to consider your audience. If most of the people you hope to reach don't have Internet access, then it should go without saying that an email list is unlikely to do your organization any good.

Depending on where you are, the number of people without Internet access keeps shrinking. In the U.S. and Canada, about 75% of the population is active online (with Europe not far behind), and that percentage is probably considerably higher for people under 40. Many people worldwide can and do receive email on their cell phones, at Internet cafes, at their workplaces, at school, or on public computers at libraries and universities. Email at this writing (2008) has gone from being a questionable mode of communication to being the preferred one for over a billion people worldwide. At least in the developed world, an email list is a pretty safe bet for reaching most of your intended audience.

In this section, we're going to talk about how you can use email lists as an organizing tool, and how to set up an email list for your initiative.

When is a good time to use an email list?

Any time is a great time to set up or use an email list. Creating an email list at the beginning of your work can help you communicate with others involved in your work and be a great organizing tool. You might also consider starting one up at the beginning of a specific campaign or project. Adding an email list can enhance your communications at any point in your organization's development.

How do you set up and use an email list?

Decide who will administer your email list -- whether that's you or another staff person, member, or volunteer of your agency or organization.

Your list owner--the person who will actually be running the list – should be someone who is fairly experienced and knowledgeable about email and the Internet, but she doesn't necessarily have to have administered a list before – the software involved is usually pretty easy to learn. It should be someone who knows a good deal about your organization, or at least knows the people towards whom a variety of questions should be directed. Since the list owner will be dealing with a lot of people who may or may not be familiar with your group, it should be someone you feel comfortable permitting to act as a representative of your organization. You may wish to add email list responsibilities to the job description of one of your staff members, or create an official volunteer position for it. Some advocacy or other large organizations may even hire someone specifically to manage an email list, especially if the organization depends on it for advocacy organizing and/or fundraising.

Running an email list can occasionally be time-consuming, but most days it should only take a few minutes of the list owner's time. Keep in mind, however, that the list owner must be able to monitor the list closely, respond to emails promptly, and be around to react if something needs attention. Your list owner should be someone who is punctual and responsible, and who has easy access to his or her email. This may be the most important thing about the person you choose – it must be someone who is able to commit to monitoring the list closely and keeping it up-to-date.

If you don't have one already, work with your list owner to select an Internet service provider and set up an email account to be used ONLY for the mailing list.

We are assuming that if you are looking at this website, your initiative probably already has Internet access. If you do not, however, you will need to select an Internet service provider (commonly called an ISP) – a business that provides Internet services to individuals, businesses, and organizations.

You may find it easiest to deal with an ISP in your own town because you can meet with them face-to-face when necessary, but you might be able to find an affordable service elsewhere. As

with any sort of service, it's very important to shop around – talk to different ISPs to find out what sort of services they offer and what sort of rates they charge. There are many, many companies out there that provide Internet services, and you should talk to several before you make a decision. The customer service representatives at these places should be able to ask you questions that can help you get a better idea of what options might be best for you. Be sure to let them know you're interested in running an email list for your account; they may just be able to do all of the setup work for you.

Given that you're online right now, you probably already have an email address of your own. It is very important, however, that the email address that is used to administer the list is not someone's personal account. It needs to be a separate address. Tell your Internet service provider that you want to set up an email list and need a separate account for it.

It's also a good idea to check with other organizations and agencies in your area that use the Internet, especially any that use email lists in their work, to find out what ISP they use, how they feel about their service, and how much it costs them.

Decide which list management software to use.

This step might be unnecessary, depending on your ISP. Some Internet service providers may have a particular type of list management software that they prefer you use; others may leave that decision up to the individual consumer. There are several types of list management software out there. You can look at the websites for some of them to learn more about them and how they work:

- [ListServ](#)
- [Majordomo](#)
- [Listproc](#)

These are the most commonly-used mailing list managers, but you can find a list of some of the other ones on Vivian Neou's Email List Management Software page online.

Lots of information on how to run these programs is available on their websites, but we've included a few basic commands below to give you a rough idea of what you can do with them.

The Basics of Email Lists

Most email lists have two email addresses: the subscription address, for administrative requests (like subscribing or unsubscribing), and the list address, which is the address to which subscribers send messages to have them distributed to the entire list. The commands below are usually entered by sending an email to the subscription address with the command in the body of the email message.

Please note that the brackets below shouldn't be typed in when you execute the commands yourself; they simply show where you will add in the relevant information for that particular list.

Listserv (this is the most common mailing list manager used for University-based lists)

- To subscribe: subscribe [listname] {firstname lastname}
- To unsubscribe: unsubscribe [listname]
- To receive the digest version: set [listname] digest
- To stop list mail temporarily ("vacation mode"): set [listname] nomail
- To resume mail: set [listname] mail
- To get a list of subscribers: review [listname]
- To receive a copy of your own posts: set [listname] repro
- To receive acknowledgment that your posts have been sent to the list: set [listname] ack

Majordomo

- To subscribe: subscribe [listname] [email-address]
- To unsubscribe: unsubscribe [listname]
- To receive the digest version: subscribe [listname]-digest
- To cancel the digest version: unsubscribe [listname]-digest
- To get a list of subscribers: who [listname]

Note: With Majordomo, a copy of your post is sent to you automatically and there is not a vacation/no mail option.

Listproc

- To subscribe: subscribe [list] {firstname lastname}
- To unsubscribe: unsubscribe [list] {firstname lastname}
- To stop list mail temporarily ("vacation mode"): set [listname] mail postpone
- To resume mail: set [listname] mail ack
- To receive the digest version: set [listname] mail digest
- To cancel the digest version: set [listname] mail ack
- To get a list of subscribers: recipients [listname]
- To receive a copy of your own posts: set [listname] mail ack

There are also several web-based services that automate mailing lists. Some of these are free and some charge a small fee. Be aware that some of these services send advertisement emails out to all people subscribed to their lists. On the Internet, unsolicited advertisement email is considered **spam**, and many people really resent it. (Some people also consider chain mails, virus warnings, and the like to be spam).

Here are a few of the web-based list management services:

- Google
- Yahoo!
- TalkList
- Topica

You might also check out the big directory of Internet Mailing List Providers at Vivian Neou's website.

Whichever type of list management software you use, make sure your list manager has taken time to become familiar with the basic commands needed to run the list: adding new subscribers, removing those that want to leave, setting the list for discussions or announcements-only, etc.

Write a formal policy for your list.

The Internet is, by its very nature, a chaotic place. Given the relative anonymity of being online, even the meekest of milquetoasts can turn into swaggering John Wayne wanna-bes via email. A flame war --in which a simple difference of opinion escalates into a heated and often vicious verbal showdown between two or more people on an email list – can quickly fill other subscribers' in-boxes with dozens of nasty, off-topic bits of vitriol, causing subscribers to leave and the level of the discussion to drop.

Other dangers abound for the novice list owner. Off-topic posts that don't have anything to do with the list's purpose can also annoy and drive away subscribers. Spam, or unsolicited advertising, can be another threat to a mailing list. These irritating by-products of the information age can ruin the email list experience for both the subscribers and the owner. Therefore it's important to have a written, formal policy for your email list explaining the following:

- Basic directions for subscribing and unsubscribing: This will vary depending on what sort of list management software you end up using.
- [A mission statement or statement of purpose](#): This should explain what the list is all about.
- Rules for subscribers: These can be as detailed as you'd like. You might decide to be very specific about what people can and can't do in postings to the list, or you might take a more hands-off approach. Some things to consider here are whether you will require list participants to stick to a particular subject area, whether you wish to make any requirements for subscribers (e.g., is it going to be a list for professionals in a particular field or can laypersons subscribe as well?), and whether you should have a particular policy regarding online advertising for your email list. Keep in mind that some rules can be hard to enforce; it's generally best to establish a few basic rules at the beginning and make changes only if they turn out to be needed.

- If you've decided on an announcements-only list, a description of what sort of announcements will be accepted and sent out to the list.
- Contact information for your organization: This should be fairly thorough; be sure to include ALL information (contact person, address, phone number, fax number, email addresses, etc.).

There are other things that are more or less optional; you might decide to include these in your policy statement, or they might be in separate documents that are also mailed out to new subscribers:

- Information on your services or programs, including information on qualification requirements and how to apply or find out more.
- Resources and links for further information: where people can go to find out more about things related to your organization's purpose, such as suggested websites, other email lists, books, agencies, etc.
- Frequently Asked Questions (also known as an FAQ). An FAQ provides the answers to those questions that people ask most often about your organization, activities, or services. Having an FAQ for people to read can help save you from answering a lot of those same questions over and over again.

Your policy should be sent out to each new subscriber. Most mailing list management software can be set up to do this automatically. Your policy should also be updated every so often. It wouldn't hurt to display a copy of it somewhere on your organization's website, if you have one.

You should have a pretty good idea of what you want your email list to be like before you write your policy. You might also take a look at the policies for some existing email lists for ideas.

Start letting people know about the email list.

- Send email messages announcing your list to relevant email lists and post the information on Usenet and other discussion boards.
- If you [have a web page](#) about your email list on your organization's site, submit your site for inclusion on the major web search engine sites and directories.
- If your list is specific to a particular geographic area, let any local "community guide" websites that cover that area know about the list and ask that they include information on it on their own pages, if possible.
- Let other groups and professionals in your area know about your site.
- Include information about your email list in your regular media campaigns – [posters and flyers](#), [press releases](#), [public service announcements](#), [paid advertisements](#), [your organization's next print newsletter](#).

As people begin subscribing and using the list, be sure that it is well-maintained and that adjustments are made to the policy as necessary.

This step is fairly self-explanatory; this is the point at which you will be trying to make your subscribers feel welcome and keeping information posted to the list relevant and interesting. Your list owner will need to be vigilant about making sure any discussions or announcements are related to your list's topic, and, if it's a discussion list, he should closely monitor the discussions to keep things under control. A good reference on how to keep electronic discussions civil and worthwhile can be found at the Netiquette Home Page. The amount of work that goes into maintaining an email list will depend mostly on how many subscribers you have – the more subscribers, the more work.

If your list is one where discussion is allowed (as opposed to an announcements-only list), you will probably find that the general "feel" of the conversations will change as time goes on.

Use the list for all sorts of things

We talked a bit earlier about some of the many uses for an email list. Now that your email list is up and running, you can start using it for some of these things:

- *Action alerts with information on your list subscribers can [take action on an issue](#) related to your organization.*

The following is a fictional example of an action alert posting to a statewide disability-rights email list.

An email list action alert

Date: Tue, 22 Jun 1999 18:21:31 GMT

From: Annie

Reply-To: My Organization's List

To: ANY-L@listserv.ableny.org

Subject: Call your representatives now!

Dear ABLE-NY Members:

As you may have heard, New York State Bill #123 - the Access Bill - will be voted on tomorrow in the New York State House of Representatives.

If this bill passes, a system will be funded to allow people who use wheelchairs in state districts one through four to file complaints with the state accessibility offices if their employers have not provided accessible restroom facilities.

As we know from the discussion among many members of this list from those districts, this is a big problem. Please take a few minutes to call your district representative and urge him or her to vote FOR New York State Bill #123!

District 1 - Rep. Lisa Winkelstein, (123) 555-0987

District 2 - Rep. Alfred Presley, (123) 555-2345

District 3 - Rep. Patricia Martinez, (123) 555-8778

Thank you,

Annie B. Caldwell

ABLE-NY District 3

1234 West 9th St.

Anytown, NY 09876

Phone: (123) 555-4567

Fax: (123) 555-2968

Do's and Don'ts of Email Action Alerts:

DO:

- Keep the message short and to the point
- Include contact information for your organization in the email
- Include contact information for anyone you're asking people to call or write
- Have someone else look over the alert before you send it

DON'T...

- Ask people to send email to elected officials
- Include a lot of fancy formatting or fonts (not everyone has a sophisticated email client!)
- Leave the subject line blank

Awards that have been given to your organization or its members.

An email about an award

Date: Tue, 22 Jun 1999 18:21:31 GMT

From: Annie

Reply-To: My Organization's List

To: ANY-L@listserv.ableny.org

Subject: ABLE-NY member wins recognition from the WAPD

Dear ABLE-NY Members:

We here in the ABLE-NY office have just learned that ABLE-NY member Latisha Freeman is to be honored by the World Association of People with Disabilities. Latisha, who has been involved with ABLE-NY since it started three years ago, will be honored for her activism and advocacy work at the annual WAPD awards banquet this September.

Everyone involved with ABLE-NY has known for some time what a valuable asset Latisha is to our community, and we are pleased to see her recognized in this manner. Way to go, Latisha!

Thank you,

Annie B. Caldwell

ABLE-NY District 3

Example: An email reminder about an upcoming meeting

Date: Tue, 22 Jun 1999 18:21:31 GMT

From: Annie

Reply-To: My Organization's List

To: ANY-L@listserv.ableny.org

Subject: REMINDER: ABLE-NY monthly meeting this Saturday

Dear ABLE-NY Members:

Don't forget - our monthly meeting will be held this Saturday, June 26 at 2:00 p.m. in the Walnut Room of the Anytown Holiday Inn, located just outside Anytown at Exit #123 off Highway 7.

As you may already know, we will be setting up the new fundraising drive committee, so anyone interested in being involved in this should try to make the meeting. Hope to see you there!

Thank you,

Annie B. Caldwell

ABLE-NY District 3

A quick tip for sending out emails about upcoming events or meetings: while email goes out almost instantly, not everyone checks his or her email daily. Whenever possible, try to send out emails about upcoming events as far ahead of time as possible. Then a day or two before the event you can send out a shorter, simpler reminder.

In Summary

The creation of an email list for your organization is a fairly simple, straightforward, and inexpensive way for your organization to communicate. While not ideal for every situation, email lists are one way for you to harness the power of the Internet to serve your community!

Contributor
Chris Hampton

Online Resources

[Catalist](#), the official catalogue of ListServ groups.

[Cnet Reviews](#) – information on ISPs

[Email list policy](#) of the Environmental and Land Use Law Section of the Florida Bar.

[Google Groups](#) and directory of Google groups.

[ListCast](#) – email marketing.

[ListServ](#) – list hosting

[Listproc](#) – list hosting

[Majordomo](#) – list hosting.

[Netiquette home page](#) – courtesy rules for using e-mail and the web.

[Topica](#) – list hosting, including a [Public Health lists page](#).

[Yahoo groups](#).

Using Direct Mail

Many of us get direct mail every week at home -- translation: "junk" mail. If someone asked, "What do you do with your junk mail?" -- many would reply, "Oh, I don't even look at it. I just throw it away." But research shows that more people than you think look at "good" junk mail and respond to it. Well-designed and well-written direct mail sent to the right people gets a one-percent response. Even though this sounds very low, it's far higher than any other way of reaching large numbers of people who don't know about your group or initiative. That one-percent response can bring enough participants and donors to your initiative to make it effective and ensure that it is ongoing.

Even though we may have been annoyed by it at times, direct mailing is a strategy that is here to stay and one that organizations can and should use effectively. This section will define "direct mail," explain why you should use it, describe how to produce direct mail that people will read, outline the steps to set up a direct mail program, and explain how to test a program's effectiveness.

What is "direct mail"?

"Direct mail" is the term used to describe impersonal letters sent by bulk mail. The U.S. Postal Service no longer uses the term "bulk mail;" now it is called "Standard Mail A." For better understanding we will call it "bulk mail" for the most part in this section, since that is still the common practice.

Direct mail is not advertising; the role of advertising is to convey a message from the advertiser to a wide population. Advertising rarely targets individuals; its message is usually intended to build awareness or to create demand for a product. The goal of direct mail is exactly the opposite -- the goal is to obtain information or a donation from the prospect. And instead of a variety of media, there is just one opportunity to reach the target audience with a direct mail package.

Letters addressed to an individual (e.g., "Dear Ms. Alvarez") or sent first class are not technically called direct mail, although these more personalized letters may have direct mail qualities in their look or style of writing. Direct mail is involved in two fundraising steps: acquisition of new donors and retention of previous ones. A third step (upgrading -- increasing individual donations) is done through more personalized mail and personal contact.

Bulk mail (a mailing of 200 or more identical pieces) is pre-sorted by zip code for the post office and receives last-priority processing. It is a relatively recent strategy used for fundraising. It was first used on a large scale in 1964 in the U.S. presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater. Through the following decade direct mail became a popular fundraising strategy that brought in the bulk of funding for many organizations.

Due to saturation of the market and people becoming used to it, bulk mail is considered less effective than it once was, but it certainly isn't going away. Forty percent of U.S. mail deliveries are direct mail; the U.S. Postal Service delivered 63 billion pieces of direct mail in 1988 alone. The effectiveness of direct mail as a fundraising strategy has been questioned over the years, but it remains the least expensive way for an organization to reach the most people with a message that people can read at their leisure. It can be very effective because it is focused, personal, and immediate.

Direct mail is one type of direct marketing. The other types are direct sales (e.g., going door-to-door to sell vacuum cleaners) or telemarketing (e.g., selling long distance service, health club memberships, credit card services, or aluminum siding). There are seven reasons to use direct marketing:

- Selling a product or idea
- Conducting market research
- Image building
- Creating awareness
- Generating and qualifying leads (to build sales or donations)
- Introducing new products or ideas
- Presenting special offers or pleas

Direct mail is part of ["social marketing."](#) Social marketing is defined as the application of commercial marketing techniques to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of a group of people in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society. The goal is to make the desired behavior fun, easy, and popular. In contrast to the way products are sometimes sold to the public, social marketing doesn't involve devious manipulation or high-pressure selling of your "product" -- your group and its goals. It doesn't involve compromising the ethics, services, or budget of your organization -- but it does help reach the desired audience and encourage the necessary support -- financial and otherwise.

Along with special events, direct mail is one of the best strategies an organization can use to develop closer relationships with its donors. Closer relationships with donors means more emotional investment in the organization's work, which means they will be more likely to establish or increase their financial investment in the organization.

Why should you use direct mail?

Today people are bombarded with advertising messages from TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, and the Internet -- so it can be difficult to get their attention. Direct mail is a way to do that. Direct mail can help build relationships that result in ongoing financial support, resulting in long-term change in your community.

Following are some reasons to use direct mail for your project. These reasons often refer to "sales," but don't let that confuse you. Remember that your organization or project is a type of "product" that you are trying to sell to past and potential donors.

- *It is cost efficient.* Studies show that, on average, every dollar spent on direct mail brings in 10 times that in donations or sales of a product. It brings a return of more than twice that generated by a TV ad.
- *You reach prospects that WANT to hear from you.* Surprising but true, more than half of American households say they would actually like to receive more direct mail or that they would enjoy receiving some.
- *Consumers are receptive to direct mail.* Americans spent more than \$244 billion in response to direct mail in 1996.
- *Businesses are receptive to direct mail.* Over \$145 billion in business-to-business sales were attributed to direct mail in 1997.
- *It is a powerful revenue-building tool with a growing potential.* By using direct mail to reach out to consumers, businesses can expect sales to increase more than 7 percent between the years 2000 and 2002.
- *It works.* In 1996, nearly 57 percent of the adult U.S. population placed an order by mail for a product or service.
- *It is flexible.* You can mail anyone your message at any time, using any format. You can send postcards, letters, or brochures -- depending upon what your organization wants to use and the budget.
- *It can be focused.* Mass media is more of a shotgun approach to a large, diverse universe of potential consumers. Direct mail, on the other hand, can be targeted to a single individual, at a single address. You know exactly whom you are speaking to. You can choose precisely the audience you want to reach and speak to them one-to-one. You aren't wasting postage on people not wanting to hear your message.
- *It has predictability and measurability.* There's no guesswork. By carefully testing and tracking your mailings on a small scale you can effectively predict the revenues that will result from a large campaign. Additionally, the results of a direct mail campaign can be measured with precision. You know exactly how many pieces were sent out, who got them, how much each piece cost to send, and how many people responded. This information makes it easy to calculate cost-per-response. You can also track how many repeat donations were made, and how much was generated by mailings over a longer time period.
- *It is a unique, private message that the consumer can hold and think about.* It gives them a message they can read at their leisure and think about for more than a few seconds. By reaching them through their personal mailboxes and not through more "public" environments like the airwaves or the Internet, it offers a unique message that speaks to them "in private." Other messages that aren't in print can be fleeting -- and much more expensive. If the message doesn't get across, the consumer will not respond to it.

What goes into a direct-mail package?

There are five components of the classic direct-mail package. These items will be described more fully later in this section. They are:

- *The Envelope* -- it determines whether or not the letter inside is read. The objective is to make it look as though it contains a personal letter.
- *The Letter* -- There are some simple principles involved in composing an effective direct mail letter.
- *The Reply Device* -- This is usually a card that the donor can send in with their check. It has space for the donor to write their name, address, and indicate the amount they are giving.
- *The Return Envelope* -- Use either a business reply envelope or a plain self-addressed envelope to add convenience to a potential donor.
- *Other Enclosures* -- These can include a lift-out note, an article, a memo, a fact sheet, or a brochure.

How do you put together a direct-mail package?

Following are the steps to produce a direct mail package. It's a good idea to walk yourself through all of the steps before beginning the planning process. You may need to work on some of the steps simultaneously before you can finalize the complete program. For example, the strategy, format, and budget all may weigh upon one another. A four-color brochure and an oversized yellow letter enclosed in a red envelope may be more appealing than a letter on white paper in a white, standard envelope. But that and the postage could put you way over budget, so you may need a strategy and format adjustment. Here are the planning steps:

Compile or buy a mailing list.

You can compile a mailing list or you can buy one. Many lists are rented from a list broker for a specific period of time, usually one year, with a limited number of uses. The list can be as broad as a phone book, or as narrow as a listing of couples 25-39 years old, who both work in blue-collar jobs, belong to Brand X political party, drive a six-year-old car that needed a fuel pump last year, have two children who go to inner city schools, and live on the east side of the street. The most important thing to keep in mind when you begin to compile your list is exactly *whom* you're trying to target.

There are several list brokers who will sell or rent lists of names. Other brokers can be found in the yellow pages of the phone book or through ads in direct marketing magazines. In some cases the brokers have compiled the list, but usually they are acting as the seller's agent.

Here are some tips to remember when buying a mailing list:

- *Always check references when selecting a list broker.* Some brokers and list makers try to sell you lists that make them the most profit and do not pertain to your needs. Avoid them.
- *Do not save a list that you buy or rent (if you are authorized to use it more than one time) unless your organization maintains it.* Any list more than three months old will be seven percent inaccurate.
- *Use a list only twice.* You have gotten 90 percent of the responses you are going to get from it. Throw away the names of people who have not responded, and concentrate on getting new names for your "hot" list. The "hot" list is crucial to your direct-mail success.
- *Keep the list clean.* If the addresses are inaccurate, it will cost you in more ways than one -- your package won't reach your potential donors (so no money will come in) and you will have wasted money on the mailer and the postage. The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) offers the National Change of Address (NCOA) service through a network of individual businesses licensed by the USPS. The cost generally ranges from \$2 to \$5 per thousand addresses checked. On a regularly scheduled basis NCOA licensees receive current change-of-address information that is used to update the NCOA database provided by the USPS. Check with your post office for the latest information on address correction services. For details go to the USPS website (<http://www.usps.com>) and use the search feature; enter "NCOA" to take you to the information.
- *Audit your list at least once a year.* If you use it more frequently, check it more often. This maintains your "good" list of names, which cuts down on wasted postage and increases your likelihood of getting responses to your mail.

Lists can also be compiled from public records that are easily accessible, such as the telephone book or the Department of Motor Vehicles. You can find out such things as who just bought a new house, who just had a baby, or who just opened a business. Brokers can provide you with lists compiled by other companies that are very specific, such as who purchased what from which catalogs and how much was spent. Another source is the subscription list of a magazine that publishes articles on issues of interest to your organization; such lists are often for sale.

According to the Direct Marketing Association, about half of U.S. companies make their lists of customers and subscribers available. General interest magazines on news, sports, and entertainment usually have larger lists than special-interest magazines, but the lists will probably be less focused to your concerns. Trade and professional associations and local organizations sometimes make membership lists available. These are the most focused lists of all, which makes them the most useful to an organization trying to gain support on a certain issue or issues.

The main ingredient for a successful direct mail campaign is the list of people it is sent to. Compile or choose your list carefully. Be sure each person's name is spelled correctly and the addresses and zip codes are correct. A misspelled name can irritate a potential donor and cause them to send their money elsewhere -- or nowhere at all. An incorrect address or zip code can make the mailing undeliverable, and a waste of your organization's money.

Some organizations with lists of 5,000 or more names use list rental as a way to raise income. Many organizations are concerned that their donors will be angry if their names are sold. To ensure that this does not happen simply include this line in your newsletter: "From time to time we make our mailing list available to other organizations that we feel would be of interest to our members. If you prefer that we do not include your name, please let us know and we will make sure you do not receive any of these mailings." Be aware that some organizations do not sell their mailing lists. Also, do NOT steal or use mailing lists that are marked "Members Only." The names may be coded (e.g., "dummy" middle initials such as Bill X. Jones) so a member can figure out which list their name was sold from originally. Such a situation can become unpleasant and unproductive to your efforts -- avoid it. Besides being unethical, it could start a campaign against your group!

Lists are divided into three categories relating to the likelihood of people on the list to make a donation or react to your plea. The categories are **Hot List, Warm List, and Cold List.**

A **Hot List** consists of people who have made a commitment to your organization. In decreasing levels of "heat," the lists include: Current Donors (expect a 10 - 66 percent response), Lapsed Donors from the past two years (5 - 10 percent expected response), Volunteers and Board Members who haven't yet donated (a widely varied 5 - 100 percent expected response), and Close Friends and Associates of all of the above who are not yet donors (2 - 5 percent expected response).

Current Donors is an organization's hottest list; the second hottest is the *Friends of Current Donors*. A successful tactic for increasing the size of your list is to ask current donors to send you names and addresses of their friends. Some people will send in one or two names, most won't send any, and a few will send dozens. With a mailing list of 1,000 donors, you can figure on getting 200 names with such an appeal. For example, you might include a coupon in your newsletter that asks for new names for the mailing list. Some statisticians say that everyone knows 250 people; of these people 10 - 20 percent will be suitable prospects for your project.

A **Warm List** consists of people who have supported or heard of your services or initiative or similar ones but have not heard of your group. Expect a 1 - 3 percent response from them. If your organization gives advice or referrals over the phone or through the mail, it is a good idea to maintain a log of people served. If possible keep a log of names and addresses of these people; when they call, ask if you can send them more information about your organization. People that don't want it will decline to give their name. Each time you acquire 200 names you can send an appeal by bulk mail. Include in these mailings the names of people who previously donated but no longer do, if you know the address is still correct. If you conduct a special event always pass out a sign-up sheet (or have a door prize drawing if it seems appropriate) to get names and addresses. Another type of warm list is one from an organization like yours. Many organizations will "rent" their lists to you for one mailing.

A **Cold List** is any list that is more than a year old or includes people about whom you know little or nothing. An example of this is the phone book. This is the least useful of lists, so focus on the Hot and Warm lists.

Plan the goals and strategy for your direct mail package.

It's important to have specific goals in mind before you start production of the package. Consider these questions in planning the goals and strategy. Remember that they tie in closely with the format and budget.

- *Is your goal to raise money, to generate interest in working on your project, to generate awareness on an issue, or all of the above?*
- *Who will the package go to and what do you want the reader to do in response?*
- Will it go to prospective or current members that you want to convince to make a donation? Do you want them to come to a meeting? Do you want them to help on a project or event?
- *What is your objective?* Don't send a brochure if a postcard will do. Don't send a letter if a brochure is necessary to convey the message.
- *Does your message require more space, more detail, and a larger format than you anticipated?* If so, you might consider reducing your mail quantity. Consider that sending an incomplete message to more people, rather than a complete message to fewer people, may lead to disappointing results.
- *What type of mailing would interest your target audience?* If you know they receive lots of "business mail," consider sending a larger envelope or a colored envelope rather than the standard #10.
- *Is the mailing going to their home or business?* Is it screened by an administrative assistant or family member before it reaches your target?
- *What is the product, cause, service, or event?* The piece should fit the project and the prospective donors. For example, you might not want to mail Fortune 500 executives a one-color flier, and likewise you don't want to solicit funds for a charity with a tight budget by sending an expensive-looking, glossy, six-color brochure.
- *What can you afford?* The budget will affect all other aspects of the package, so it must be considered carefully -- and early in the process.

Decide on a format.

There are a number of formats for a direct mail package. The format dictates how artwork and copy will come into play. The copywriter (and art director, if your organization is large enough to have one) will need to know exactly what format you are using, since it affects how much room they have to get your message across. Each piece you include in the package should clearly state the offer or appeal.

Each successive step adds cost, but also effectiveness in increasing the number of readers who respond to the package. Deciding on format can be done simultaneously with the next step of

determining the budget; these steps work hand-in-hand. Increasingly, many direct mail pieces (regardless of format) refer target audiences to Internet websites for special announcements and additional information.

A big problem in creating and reviewing a direct mail package can come if you do it by committee. (Author William Bly asks, "Do you know what a moose is? It's a cow designed by a committee.") If you don't use a professional to create the package, there is the risk of using a committee composed of people who (a) don't know what direct mail is, (b) don't know how it works, or (c) don't know what it can and cannot do. For example, a committee might decide to cut a three-page letter to one page because someone thinks the target reader "won't read long letters." Decisions like this usually come from assumptions based on personal prejudices and reading habits -- *and not facts*. Be careful here. If you unknowingly (or knowingly) challenge the research of direct mail pros, you could waste a lot of time and money.

Following are format choices for your mailing:

- *Postcard* -- inexpensive and a "fast read," although it's not as private to the reader.
- *Letter* -- allows more space for the message, but it adds expense.
- *Envelope* -- they come in all sizes and flavors, the most common being the #10 (an 8 1/2 inch by 11 inch sheet folded twice fits nicely in it), 6 inch by 9 inch, 6 1/2 by 9 1/2, and 9 inch by 12 inch, among others).

Types of Envelopes

- Envelopes come in white, manila, rainbow colors, and/or with a clasp. Research shows that a brightly-colored, over-sized envelope with a first-class stamp gets more responses than a plain, standard envelope with a bulk mail stamp. Many mailers routinely use custom-sized and designed (and costlier) envelopes to gain immediate attention and prompt opening.
- It may be worth a test to see if a custom envelope with a premium price justifies its cost, versus a standard-sized envelope with the same message. A cost-to-benefit analysis is necessary in making your decision. In any case, any size envelope gives you the option of a personal, more costly "closed-face" carrier with the prospect's name/address on the surface.
- A "window" carrier with the name/address appearing on a piece inside the window and showing through is another option. A window envelope saves the expense and time of printing and sticking labels.
- *Self-Mailer* -- a less expensive option with the letter forming the envelope when folded and secured closed. Additional pieces can be inserted in the self-mailer.
- *Brochure* -- include this with a letter to further tell your story in pictures and/or drawings to accompany the words in the letter. Four-color printing (very expensive) is often not necessary; one or two colors with crisp photos and clean copy is usually satisfactory.

- *Lift-out Note* -- include this with a letter (additional expense), or a letter/brochure combination. A lift-out note or letter is enclosed with, or stuck on the letter. It can be written by a board member, a key person in the project, or someone who has already been helped by the work of your project. It can have a handwritten look to it, and should be in a different style and/or color from the letter or brochure. For example, you could print the lift-out note in a handwriting-style font on a pink sticky note and attach it to the letter. Or the note could be on a folded, colored sheet of paper with a "teaser" message on the outside to encourage the reader to open and read it. The purpose of the lift-out note is a further inducement (with information not given elsewhere in the package) to donate money or time to your initiative. It is considered an additional influence for people who are "on the fence" about participating.
- *Response (or "Order") Card* -- important in continuing the "selling" process. It states the benefits of the donation and suggested levels of membership. It makes it easy for donors to join or donate by filling in the spaces for name, address, phone number, and amount of donation or credit card information (whichever is applicable to your organization). Then all they have to do is put the card in the reply envelope, stamp it, and drop it in the mail.
- *Return Envelope* -- adds convenience to a potential donor with a negligible cost to the organization. There are two styles: business reply envelopes (BRE) and plain self-addressed envelopes. The BRE includes return postage to make it most convenient for the reader to send a donation; the organization pays the postage (which is about twice as much as first-class postage), but it is only paid on those envelopes that are returned. The donor pays postage on a self-addressed envelope, which is slightly less convenient for the donor. The percentage of responses to a mailing declines significantly if a self-addressed envelope is not enclosed. For low-budget organizations, BREs are not necessary; fewer organizations use them as consumers have become aware of the cost.

Determine the budget.

Format, color, packaging, and postage are the budget factors for your direct mail package. A general rule to use in budget planning is that the donations you receive in response should at least equal the cost of the mailing. Experts say you are doing well if you get a 1- percent response; it may be as low as .025 percent or it may be higher than 1 percent.

- *Format* -- if you have a lengthy, extensive story to tell (the cost and benefits of your program) you may want to send a 4-color brochure that gets the message across. If it is a reminder to your current donors that you want additional donations, a postcard could be enough. You might decide that a simple business letter with a #10 envelope is appropriate. The business letter costs less than the brochure, but you must match the format to the goals you set. Cheap doesn't mean cost-efficient. Most experts say that using a business letter in a plain envelope just because you already have the stationery is not a good justification for your strategy, and can leave you with an unsuccessful mailing -- which means low response. So, the appropriate format should guide your budget, but not be dictated by it.

- *Color* -- even a postcard is enhanced by it. Most experts have concluded that color increases effectiveness. But it also increases costs by a long shot. Carefully consider the cost of a jump from one to two to four or more colors.
- *Packaging* -- anything other than standard envelopes can be a costly item. This is an important part of budget planning.
- *Postage* -- size, shape, and weight of the mail piece will determine the postal cost. Ask your post office about the options or go online to their [website](#). Computerized bar-coding and other cost-saving processes are worth asking about. See their website for details. Remember to factor in the cost of the reply card included in the mailing and envelope postage.

Create the package.

Some organizations do the creative part in-house, and others use agencies. But there are other ways to make this project work within your budget. For example, an organization member might have a daughter or a nephew who just started art or journalism school and would like the experience of designing a direct mail package. An agency usually costs more, but professionals may be able to bring a level of quality to the job that can't be matched. You may have a member or a friend of a member who is a professional willing to donate his or her skills and time to design and write the pieces.

Answer these questions as you plan the design of your mailing:

- *How elaborate or complex do you want the message to be?* For example, how many pieces will go into the mailing? Will any of the pieces be printed in color? Will you have a message printed on the outside of the envelope to "tease" the customer?
- *Is there a corporate or organizational image or logo that needs to be considered?*
- *What should be the tone of the copy?* For example, do you want it to formal or more casual and friendly? Slick or more down-to-earth?
- *Does the style of the package look obviously computer generated?* If it screams "mass mailing," it's likely to go unread. Personal touches as simple as a rubber stamp by hand, or addressing a letter to "Mr. Jorge Ortiz" rather than "Resident" go a long way.
- *Do all of the pieces fit the envelope?* The envelope may fit postal specifications -- but do all of the pieces (letter, reply card, lift note) fit inside? Is the reply envelope too small for a check to fit inside without being folded? (For example, if the recipient has to fold a check to fit it in the reply envelope and you use an automatic envelope opener -- it could slice the check in half. The same goes for an order form or reply card.)
- *If you send out 10 mailings each year, do they have an established, well-received look or brand identity that needs to be maintained?* (For example, is there a logo, a certain color or print style, a layout style, a photo that is always included, a type of paper the piece is printed on that is readily recognizable?)
- *Have several people proofread all of pieces in the package -- several times?* Proofreading the piece cannot be overemphasized. Often the person who writes the copy is not the

right one to proofread it. Think of it this way -- the writer knows what was meant, and will "see" what was supposed to be there. But that may not be what is really there.

Remember that the later you get in the design process, the more it will cost to correct an error or make a change. Copy and photo changes are easy and inexpensive in the creative stage, but are increasingly expensive the closer you get to the print stage; it could destroy your budget.

Pre-press set-up costs will vary based on color or black and white, size, the degree of detail in the package design, use of artwork, and the format in which it is received by the people doing the work. For example, a completed, high-resolution document on a computer disc is in a virtual "ready-to-go" condition and saves you money. Art, copy, and layout pieces needing assembly will cost a lot more to put together.

Be sure to double check reply phone numbers, zip codes, and website URLs (the website address that begins with "www" or "http"), as well as spelling and grammar. In phone numbers or URLs, one digit wrong is the same as every digit wrong. If you use photos or illustrations be sure you have permission to use them; you may have to buy full rights from a stock photo house, the photographer, or illustrator. Arrangements may also need to be made with models and their agents.

Print it.

The printer will estimate printing costs for you based on four factors:

- *Platemaking* -- This is a basic cost in offset printing. It will not vary much from printer to printer and will not be a significant factor unless you are printing a small number of pieces.
- *Press time* -- Most printers have many presses that can accommodate all sorts of jobs. They vary in quality, so ask to see examples of their work before deciding on a printer. Prices may vary based on labor cost and the volume and size of the print run. The more lead-time you can give the printer, the more flexibility the printer will have in scheduling. (Translation: If you're presenting a job at the last minute that you need tomorrow -- you probably won't get it. If the printer's schedule is full there's nothing he can do to help you.)
- *Paper* -- This is a cost variable that you can control to a certain extent. Paper is expensive, but there are choices you can make that are appropriate to your project. There is a correct paper stock for most print jobs; this should be part of the overall considerations made in the budgeting process. For example, a 4-color brochure is usually printed on cover stock, which has a firm feel that lends substance to the message. A letter should be printed on good stationery, but a fact sheet can be on lighter stock. Recycled paper is an option to investigate. When you state "printed on recycled paper" on your mail piece, you're helping the environment and showing what you stand for. It is cheaper than other stock papers, but consider that not all presses or

inks will run well on recycled paper. Ask your printer for advice on this decision and look at work samples.

- *Minor alterations, major costs* -- As mentioned previously, changes in art or copy at the creative stage are usually easy to do and relatively inexpensive. At the prepress level, they are costly because new film and plates have to be made and reproofed. At the print shop level the cost is much higher because all of the above must be done, and you may be charged for press down time that was reserved for your project. A general printer's rule is the "50-500-5000" Rule. Figure that each change at the creative level will cost about \$50. At the prepress level, figure \$500, and at the press level, plan on \$5,000. These startling numbers should "impress" upon you that it's best to finalize early in the process.

Mail it.

Mailing costs are determined by how you mail your item. First-class mail usually has a higher level of response, but it costs much more than bulk mail. The cost for mailing services is affected by the volume of the mailing, the number of steps involved, and the difficulty in handling. Budget considerations that go into your mailing are:

- cost of the mailing list
- merging and purging of the mailing list
- coding and running mailing labels
- inserting letters into envelopes, labeling, sorting, and packaging
- postage

Costs can be cut as much as 6 cents per piece by buying an annual bulk mail permit, presorting mail, bar-coding, and maintaining your mailing list. The savings add up very quickly particularly if you do several mailings per year.

Also, don't be "postally ignorant." Your direct mail package may look great, but if it doesn't comply with postal regulations with regard to size and weight, it's a waste of your money and time. Get the guidelines from your local postmaster before you begin designing.

Follow up.

Always thank the donor immediately after you receive their donation. Besides being courteous, it lets them know you received it. This also opens the door for them to ask questions about your initiative or even make another donation of time or money.

How do you know if the mailing was effective?

If you plan to construct a building, you should test the soil where you plan to build. In direct mail, you can't build a successful campaign before sampling the potential supporters of your

initiative. There are two reasons to test: (a) to save you from disaster by assessing viability at a minimal expense and (b) to improve your average response rate and thus maximize your financial return. You know if your direct mail package is effective if you test it and then track the results.

When you test a mailing (whether you test the offer, the mailing list, or the package itself), you have a great opportunity to learn a lot. What sets direct mail apart from more traditional media is its ability to be tested. You know exactly who the mailing is going to; this is different from advertising that goes to a broad market. In a relatively short period of time, testing helps you determine if your mailing is effective before you spend your whole direct mail budget. Testing gives you a better indication of what works, what doesn't, and valuable insight into creating a better and more successful direct mail campaign.

Let's say you have been mailing postcards to potential members from time to time and they have brought in a number of donations. What would happen if you sent them a brochure instead? With direct mail you can test both and find out. Do a sample mailing and send half of the people on your list the postcard and the other half a new brochure. By testing a small group now, you can avoid costly mistakes later. In this example, the postcard is the "control." The control refers to the mail piece that's been the most successful for you. If the brochure brings in even greater response, then that becomes the new control -- against which all your other direct mail pieces will be measured.

Why test?

Basically, to save you from making costly mistakes. When you do a test mailing and it does well, you can then "safely" mail it in greater quantities because you'll have a good idea how it will do. Being able to predict how it will do is a valuable tool that makes a significant difference.

What do you test?

If something can be mailed, it can be tested. The best factors to test are those elements that will have the greatest impact on your response rate. Maybe you've been mailing a postcard and decide to test an offer and a letter. If you get a huge response, how do you figure out which was the responsible factor? Was it the offer or the letter? Test one element at a time and you'll always know.

6 key things to test are:

1. *Offer* (if you give, you get this benefit)
2. *Cost* (or donation level -- \$25, \$100, \$500)
3. *Package* (how it looks -- color, type of paper, size, pieces included)
4. *Copy* (the words you use)
5. *Timing* (Is Summer better than Spring? Is Fall better than Winter?)
6. *Mailing List* (who the package goes to)

When should you test?

- When you want to fine-tune a successful mailing for even greater results
- When your return-per-mailer isn't as high as you had hoped
- When you have new creative ideas that you think could do well, but you need further justification for them
- When you want to expand your market with a wider list
- When something in your package changes, such as cost, offer, or types of payment accepted (check, credit card)

Identifying your variables

It is crucial to carefully identify the variable in each test. Select the names randomly that you're testing to maintain your control of variables; this helps you get valid results. For help in setting up testing, check with list brokers or other professionals who already have systems set up. Basic rules for testing include:

- Code the mail pieces to identify them. (This can be done with a unique letter or number code on each piece.)
- Test only one variable at a time.
- Keep track of the names used.
- Use sufficient test quantities.
- Mail the test lists at the same time.
- Don't accept test results blindly.
- Repeated mailings succeed in the long run, single shots don't.
- Use a statistically significant number of samples so the test is valid.

Since all variables cannot be controlled, keep your testing and tracking methods as simple as possible. By testing only one element at a time, you'll make things much easier for yourself and get more reliable results.

Test a statistically significant number based on the size of the overall mailing you have planned to produce valid results. The larger the test sample, the more reliable the results. A general rule in testing is that in order for a test to be "analyzable," you should receive a minimum of 50 responses to the mailing. On a 5,000-piece mailing, this represents a 1- percent response rate, which is very respectable.

Examples of format variables to test:

- postcard vs. self-mailer
- standard envelope vs. larger envelope
- postage stamp vs. bulk imprint
- window vs. closed-face envelope
- lift-out note vs. no lift-out note

- return card vs. no return card
- brochure enclosed vs. no brochure

Examples of copy variables to test:

- headlines vs. no headlines in the letter
- bullet items under the headlines vs. no bulleted items
- personalized salutation vs. not personalized
- teaser on envelope vs. no teaser
- decide who signs the letter
- handwriting in the letter margins vs. no handwriting
- testimonials vs. no testimonials

Testing Don'ts:

- Don't send a mailer to someone who already got it in the final rollout test.
- Don't make major decisions based on minor results; if there's no clear cause and effect, don't assume one exists.
- Don't read non-tested factors into the results. If you didn't test a variable, don't assume it contributed to the final result. For example, if you didn't test the copy, and results were disappointing, don't blame the copy. Stick with the results and make improvement where necessary depending on tested variables and results.

Tracking the results

To ensure your direct mail program is achieving your objectives, you must track the results. This means tabulating how many responses you get and determining whether different classes of targets behave differently.

Track whether your target recipients donate or not, how much they donate, and how much you have to spend to get them to donate. Don't forget to follow up quickly. Timing may affect response, so roll out the package quickly after the results are analyzed. If you don't understand how to do testing and tracking, get a professional to help you do it. It could be well worth the money, and help you avoid disaster.

In Summary

Research shows that well-designed, well-written direct mail sent to the right people gets a one-percent response. That one-percent response can be more than sufficient to bring in enough participants and donors to your initiative to make it effective and ongoing. A one-percent response is higher than the response received by any other media. Direct mail is a strategy that is here to stay and one that organizations can and should use effectively.

Direct mail is not like advertising sent to a wide population, because it targets individuals to obtain information or donations of time and money. Direct mail is part of "social marketing" -- the application of commercial marketing techniques to programs designed to influence people's behavior and improve the world. In contrast to the way products are sometimes sold, social marketing doesn't involve manipulation or high-pressure selling. It doesn't compromise the ethics, services, or budget of your organization.

By following the steps and pointers discussed in this section (mailing, strategy, format, budget planning, follow-up, testing, and tracking), a direct mail program can significantly help build relationships -- resulting in ongoing financial support and long-term change in your community and our world.

Contributor
Tim Brownlee

Online Resources

[FundRaiser Family of Donor Management Software](#)

[Nomm de Plume](#)

[Smartbiz.com: The How-To Resource for Business](#)

Print Resources

Andreasen, A. (1995). *Marketing social change: Changing behavior to promote health, social development, and the environment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Klein, K. (1996). *Fundraising for social change. Chapter 6: Using direct mail and Chapter 7: Variations on the mail appeal package*. Berkeley, CA: Chardon.

Stern, G. (1996). *Marketing workbook for nonprofit organizations*. St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.