

Your Mission is Your Message

“So, tell me – what does your group do?”

HINT:

Don't tell people what your group **is**, tell them what you **do**.

For example:

“Our program promotes learning and citizenship by engaging middle school students in applying what they've learned in their science classes to real community environmental problems. Students implement solutions that benefit the community.”

Your message:

Creating a clear message about what your program does, and what you need in order to continue doing it, is at the heart of “making the ask” to collaboration partners, volunteers, the media, and funding sources.



Telling Your Story

Your project is rolling along, and you are clear about its purpose, its value, your clients, and the impact that it has. But how clear are these things to your customers/clients? Partners? Donors? Potential donors? The community-at-large?

To advance your efforts and sustain your initiative, you need to tell your story.

Your story needs to:

- Be told over and over again, to the same audience, in many different formats that attract and keep attention.
- Be told over and over again, to different audiences through different communication channels.
- Highlight your success and vision for how to address community concerns.
- Address your stakeholders' and prospects' interests.

Your story should be told using:

- Language and symbols
- Concepts and concrete examples
- Facts and feelings

Your story should also:

- Highlight accomplishments and challenges.
- Be inspiring and informative.
- Generate feelings of hope and optimism.
- Capture hearts and minds.
- Be clear and to-the-point.
- Build bridges.
- Motivate a response.

Your story should help to:

- Interpret events and convey information.
- Transmit core values and beliefs.
- Establish status and credibility.
- Generate support.



Ways to Get the Word Out

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A short response from a reader is a very low cost method of getting your message across to your audience while building your public profile. Your letter to the editor should:

- Be short and specific - maximum of 250 words, 150 words is ideal.
- Be timely - respond in 2-3 days once an event occurred.
- Be about a single subject.
- Not be mean or abusive, although it may be passionate.
- Start with a statement about a specific position, followed by evidence using facts and figures when possible.
- Include contact information.
- Make reference to the newspaper (the name of the article and the date published) **Note:** while some papers print general comments, others will only print letters that refer to a specific article in its publication.

PUBLIC SPEAKING AND ARTICLE WRITING

Have staff, board members or volunteers speak at various community events, or write articles; these are great ways of spreading your message, while establishing your organization as an expert in the field.

GUEST OPINIONS

Commonly known as Op/Ed pieces, these articles can be submitted by the public to give an opinion “opposite of the editorial page.” These articles can be longer than letters to the editor. Op/Ed articles should:

- Not exceed 750 words.
- Show a local angle.
- Not be sent to multiple newspapers in the same market.
- Use the same style recommendations as a letter to the editor.



COMMUNITY CALENDARS

Community calendars are a great tool to publicize upcoming events or specific needs (i.e., a call for volunteers). Calendars can be found on television and radio, in the newspapers and on the World Wide Web. Calendar submissions should include specifics of the event/request - time, date, cost, location, type of volunteers needed, items to be donated. You can use media advisory format, changing the title of the page to “Event Notice” or “Calendar Listing.”

GET TO KNOW REPORTERS

By being active in the community, responsible in your communications, concise in your message delivery and persistent (not pesky), you establish relationships with reporters to set yourself up as an expert when an opinion or insight is needed in your field. They will then come to you seeking stories. Remember: they need stories as much as you need to get your story out.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS (PSAS)

PSAs are free “commercials” for non-profits offered by television and radio stations. PSAs can be used to bring awareness to an organization’s work or for a special event. Contact the stations for specific requirements, though in general a PSA should:

- Be brief, concise and catchy.
- Be submitted as a script for 10-, 15-, or 30-second spots.
- Be typed, double-spaced, and in ALL CAPS.
- Be in the correct format. Check to see if a pre-recorded PSA is necessary, or if the station accepts live-copy scripts they will then produce.



Other Ways to Get the Word Out That Co\$t You

Advertising: Traditional method of getting your message to others. Best used when you research to make sure the most cost-effective method and most compelling message to reach the audience is used.

TELEVISION

- Reaches large masses of people.
- Allows your message to leave an active, visual impression.
- Some stations have affordable time slots (late-night, mid-day).
- Cost is associated with production quality.

RADIO

- Can reach large masses of people (talk shows during “drive-times” reach the most).
- Allows your message to be heard in personal voice.
- Less expensive than television spots.
- Many local independent stations give airtime to local non-profits.

NEWSPAPER

- Can reach large masses of people.
- Potentially has a longer life span in the minds of the audience in that they can clip an advertisement.
- Can be affordable by type of newspaper publication and the placement of the ad (in a neighborhood journal).

Others: Don't forget day-to-day spots such as public bulletin boards for posting information, or paid advertising on or in buses, on bus benches, on top of taxi cabs, or signs on the side of the road. Anywhere that's legal, you benefit from exposure to people's everyday routines.



PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Promotional materials can be an effective means of getting your message across to your audience. With today's technology, many items can be produced in-house to keep cost down.

BROCHURES

Great for useful information in a succinct and portable medium.

E-NEWSLETTER

Keeps stakeholders informed, updates your "ask" for volunteers and in-kind resources.

POSTERS

Attention grabbers can be used to draw attention to the organization, especially for a special event.

ANNUAL REPORTS

A wonderful tool to highlight the organization's accomplishments over the past year while acknowledging donors.

T-SHIRTS

Serve as a walking billboard to get your message across.

MAGNETS, PENS, MUGS AND MORE

Can be a very cheap method to get a specific item or idea across to the reader such as a slogan or a phone number. These items are effective because they can actually be used in the day-to-day lives of the audience.

