

EXTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

PURPOSES & BENEFITS

This tool assists the collaborative group in considering, developing and implementing strategies to optimize the external communication components of their community organizing strategic plan. This tool outlines multiple tools commonly used by collaborative groups to effectively communicate their message among stakeholders, target audiences and the larger community.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The collaborative group can use this tool to help:

- Understand common external communication strategies used by collaborative groups and in doing community organizing work.
- Help to implement the external communication components of the collaborative group's strategic plan.

Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence



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EXTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

External strategic communication helps to promote a group's work in the larger community to enhance support, increase community involvement and participation, and promote successful change facilitated by building a "buzz" around the collaborative group's community organizing work.

The external communication tools in this document outline various techniques and strategies for effectively optimizing communication efforts to the larger community and enhancing the performance of the group's community organizing work.

Grassroots Marketing

Grassroots marketing uses non-traditional, flexible, cost-effective methods aimed at building strong and lasting relationships using a word of mouth approach. Advantages of grassroots marketing include:

- Gaining loyalty and involvement
- Fostering consistent and repeat business
- Creating a potentially positive impact on the community
- "Doing well by doing good"
- Protecting initiatives and collaborative partnerships against external economic factors

Common types of grassroots marketing include:

- **Press Releases** – Press releases are an inexpensive way to alert local media and other stakeholders of newsworthy events. Press releases can be sent via email, fax or regular mail. A press release is designed to gain media interest and give local press preliminary information on which to base a larger story. Developing relationships with local media can help to pique interest when a press release is distributed. Tips for writing an effective press release:
 - Hook the reader early. Lead with your most interesting information.
 - When possible, relate your story to pre-existing ones.
 - Be selective about issuing press releases.
 - Target your audience.
 - Target the press release's recipients.
 - Don't inflate the truth.
 - Build relationships with the media.The format includes:
 - Placing the "for immediate release," contact person, organization, telephone number, fax number, email address and website address
 - Next, create a bolded headline and underneath it the city, state, date, followed by the opening paragraph (include who, what, when, where, why and how).
 - Underneath the opening paragraph, include the body text, which is 2 – 3 paragraphs outlining the key points of the issue, supported by data and quotes from spokespersons.
 - At the bottom, list the "for additional information or a sample copy contact information," summarize the issue once more, and include the collaborative group's historical information.
- **News Conferences** – Like press releases, plan a news conference around a newsworthy event. Tips for having a successful news conference include:
 - Identifying spokespersons who would provide authentic and diverse comments
 - Develop talking points (see "Scripted Communication" below)
 - Identify visuals you could use

- Develop and distribute a media advisory in advance of the press conference (see the tips for writing an effective press release above, as many of those ideas are relevant for the media advisory)
- Create a media kit, including a press release (see the “Press Release” information above), photos (don’t forget to obtain written permission from subjects as necessary), key quotes from spokespersons and contact information.
- **Public Service Announcements** – Public service announcements (PSAs) can be sent to local radio stations, especially public radio stations that put an emphasis on spotlighting community events and partnerships. Tips for writing an effective PSA:
 - Write in a conversational tone, exactly as you want it to be read.
 - Develop varying lengths. You can read it out loud, timing it to determine the length.
 - The format includes:
 - Placing the time length in the top left corner
 - Typing the message contents in all caps
 - Placing the name of the group, a contact name, telephone number and range of dates for the PSA to air at the bottom of the page.
- **Letters to the Editor or an Op-Ed Column** – Op-Eds are opinion pieces that run in the editorial section of the newspaper. Letters to the editor are also run in the editorial section of the newspaper. These pieces should include current and strong facts, be brief, and be straightforward but attention grabbing. Meeting with the editorial board to get their support and encourage them to develop an editorial letter are also useful approaches.
- **E-Communications** – This can include communicating with a target audience through emails, a website and/or listserv. These mediums can be used to distribute announcements, press releases or newsletters.

Scripted Communication

The benefits of scripted communication:

- Creating marketing messages that are delivered in a consistent manner by collaborative partners and community stakeholders; this helps to literally and figuratively keep everyone on the same page, minimizing confusion and increasing the likelihood of recall by message deliverers and recipients.
- Because the content is already composed, it increases the confidence of the message deliverer, thus increasing the likelihood of message promotion, including actively seeking opportunities to deliver the message when they arise.

Scripted communication includes:

- **Elevator Speech** – An elevator speech is a fifteen-second monologue that sums up a collaborative partnership, project, event, initiative, etc. A good elevator speech explains who you are and what you do. While the partnership or initiative might have a more in-depth explanation, an elevator speech can help increase the understanding of someone who is completely unfamiliar with your collaborative group and community organizing work.
- **Talking Points** – Talking points are not necessarily intended to be shared in one sitting, but rather, are more like a list of answers to frequently asked questions. Talking points can be used by anyone, such as a collaborative partner, stakeholder or community partner, who communicates your message to others in an effort to increase public understanding of your collaborative partnership and community organizing efforts.

Social Marketing and Public Relations

- **Social Marketing** – Social marketing uses marketing principles to sell behaviors and attitudes to influence a targeted audience to make positive change; it is intended to benefit a targeted audience or a community rather than the marketer. For example, a tire or insurance company ad might include a general message in support of non-violence or about hotline or

shelter services; these social marketing messages can even be inserted into already running business ads in order to minimize marketing and advertising costs.

- **Public Relations** – Public relations includes ongoing activities that help the community understand and thus build a strong public image for a collaborative partnership. Important questions to consider for public relations activities:
 - What group(s) of stakeholders do you want to appeal to? How do you want to appeal to each group?
 - What messages are most appealing to each stakeholder group?
 - What impressions do you want each of your stakeholders to have?
 - What communications media do they see or prefer the most?
 - What media is most practical for you to use in terms of access and affordability?

Maximizing Resources

Most of the time, community organizing groups will need to conduct external communications with little or no funds. There are a number of possibilities for low or no cost publicity. In addition to some of those discussed previously (such as press releases or a public service announcement), look for community partners who may be willing to help publicize your message. The possibilities will vary for each community, but could include:

- Including your message on the receipts printed at local businesses
- Placing copies of your promotional materials in grocery or other bags at local businesses
- Placing fliers or posters on community bulletin boards around town
- Asking local businesses to hang a flier or poster in their store window
- Asking local businesses to include your key message in paid advertising they are already doing
- Attaching promotional materials to pizza boxes or other food delivery containers
- Asking local restaurants to include your messaging on disposable placemats or napkins
- Placing public services announcements in school or university newspapers
- Asking local businesses to include a logo and link to your website on their websites
- Including promotional materials with paychecks or bills issued by local businesses.

Free or low cost assistance may also be available for the development of professional-looking materials from local sources. For example, some of these might include:

- School or university clubs or classes working on graphic design, video or web design
- Local printing businesses that provide layout and design services
- Local advertising agencies or web design companies
- Businesses with in-house communications or advertising specialists
- Photography clubs within the community, schools or universities.

Even if you can't secure free publicity, some businesses may be willing to provide printing or other services at cost or at a discounted rate.