Getting the Word Out

Your organization may have great plans or services - but you can't make much progress if no one knows about you! Check out these tools to learn ways to make sure you reach your target audience and get noticed!
E-COMMUNICATION

With today’s ever increasing technology, there are multiple ways a neighborhood organization can communicate with its members and the surrounding community. Using a variety of social media and online tools will help spread the word and reach a diverse audience.

Email and Listservs - used by organizations to:
- Reach a wide range of people quickly.
- Promote upcoming meetings, events, classes, etc.
- Distribute newsletters.
- Collect feedback.

Make sure to:
- Only add people to your list if they have attended an event or requested to be put on the list.
- Include a link to unsubscribe at the bottom of every sent email – give people the option to stop receiving email from you.
- Segment listservs based on interests to target specific groups for different needs.
- Monitor your frequency of contact – too much and people won’t like that you are filling their inbox, too little and they will not know how to be involved.
- Keep it brief and skimmable!
- Make it personal and relevant to your audience.

Web Sites and Blogs - used by organizations to:
- Increase your organization’s chance of being found through online searches.
- Make your organization personal and show its impact.
- Recruit volunteers and members.
- Recognize volunteers with “spotlights” or profiles.
- Post annual reports, newsletters and updates.
- Promote the community or organization to a wider audience.

Make sure to:
- Keep stories scannable to grab interest quickly. Put the most important points in your first few sentences.
- Keep your text bite-sized: break up long paragraphs and use bullet points whenever possible.
- Only create a blog if your organization has time to maintain it – outdated blogs and websites make your organization appear stale and unproductive.

Use an Email Service Provider
This type of service can be found at a competitive price and allows your organization to comply with spam laws, easily manage your mailing lists with little administrative time, and analyze who opens your emails. Try Constant Contact, MailChimp or Network for Good’s EmailNow.
E-COMMUNICATION

Social Media – used by organizations to:
⇒ Create dialogue with individuals and other non-profit organizations.
⇒ Stay current on local, regional, and national trends and keep ideas fresh and relevant.
⇒ Promote upcoming events and meetings.
⇒ Reach a large number of people quickly through visual content.
⇒ Examples: Twitter (City of St. Louis 17th Ward) and Facebook (Community Builder’s Network of Metropolitan St. Louis)
⇒ Recruit volunteers.

Make sure to:
⇒ Get permission before sharing someone’s picture or specific story.
⇒ Be a useful resource, entertaining, and informative rather than only promoting your events. People will be more interested in getting involved if they enjoy your organization’s online presence.
⇒ Be consistent with social media instead of using it only before and during events.
⇒ Use visuals more than text-only content.
⇒ Interact actively with individuals and other organizations.
⇒ Make it personal and filled with upbeat, interesting stories.

Here’s How:
Define the Audience
Prior to establishing an e-communication strategy, think about your target audience. Depending on the e-communication tool, you will reach different groups of people. For example, if your goal is to reach teenagers about an afterschool program, using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube will work better than distributing flyers or even standard email.

Content
If your organization is using a variety of e-communication tools, ensure that you are using a consistent style and look across each. This also applies to any of your regularly printed pieces too.

Maintenance is Key
All e-communication tools need regular maintenance and updating. Such maintenance can vary from updating email addresses on an organization’s listserv to uploading new photos and video.

Are people deleting your emails?
Focus on your microcontent!
⇒ Subject Line—Make it specific and captivating.
⇒ “From” Field—Keep it familiar and consistent.
⇒ Headings—Write with active verbs and vivid nouns.
Using the web is fast, easy, and becoming the norm; yet it is important to remember that not everyone uses email or the Internet. Don’t forget that other methods of communication are important to get information out about your organization to those who would rather see a hard copy or just haven’t discovered you online yet. Try out the following methods to draw in a greater variety of people.

**Flyers and Posters**

Flyers and posters are a great option to draw residents’ attention to upcoming public meetings, recruit volunteers for your organization, and spread the word on what your organization has been doing in the community. They are typically inexpensive to make and can be an easy way to connect with individuals who have never heard of the organization.

- Post flyers in a variety of locations like the public library, the community center, schools and universities, grocery stores, bus stops and the corner coffee shop. Get creative, but remember to ask for permission to use the space.
- Keep the content simple. If you are advertising a meeting, give the title, time, location, and a brief description of the event. If you want to raise awareness of your organization, use attractive visuals, a one-line description of the organization, and contact information.
- Use bright colors or contrast to make images noticeable and text easy to read.
- The image is most important! While black and white flyers cost less and can include more information, the Media Foundation found that 70% of people will look at an image on a poster, while only 30% will read the headline.

**Banners and Yard Signs**

Banners and yard signs can be helpful for informing people of an event, even if they don’t get out of their car! Also, if your banner is placed in front of the meeting or event location, it will be easy for people to know immediately where it will be held.

- Keep yard signs and outdoor banners very simple — people will likely only look at it for two or three seconds.
- Place them where they will be most visible to many people, whether it’s car traffic or foot traffic.
- Design the banner with the most critical information in the center, which draws the eyes most.

Connect your offline audience to your online presence! Make sure to include your website, blog or social media information on printed material, and encourage people to connect with you. The more integrated your online and offline communities, the easier it will be to mobilize and involve your neighborhood.

**MARKETING AND PROMOTION**

**Calling all neighbors!**

Block Watch Meeting
Thursday @ 7pm
Williams Middle School

Creating Whole Communities
A partnership of University of Missouri-St. Louis, University of Missouri Extension and our region’s neighborhoods
Newsletters are tools that allow neighborhood organizations to share updates on a large scale. Newsletters highlight upcoming events, hot topics, volunteer needs, and important issues. A well-designed newsletter with interesting articles and graphics helps the reader become informed and more involved with community activities.

Before starting a newsletter, ask yourself the following questions to determine if it is the right tool for your organization.

- What is the purpose of the newsletter?
- Is there an ongoing need to share detailed information, updates, and announcements?
- Is there a target audience in a defined area?
- Is there someone to serve as the editor and main coordinator of the newsletter?
- What is the budget for the newsletter? Based on funds available, what will be your distribution method?

Once you have determined that a newsletter would be a valuable tool for your organization, it is time to begin laying out your first one. Below are a few tips to get you started.

Here’s How:

Content

Neighborhood associations and organizations typically publish newsletters on a monthly or quarterly basis. Therefore, stories will not be late-breaking news, but rather more general items or announcements. Generally, people like to read:

- Success stories—personal stories of the impact of your organization
- Behind the scenes details of your organization
- Upcoming events—what’s coming up in the next week or two?
- Empowering “how-to’s”
- Direct action alerts—share a petition that they can sign or how to serve as a volunteer for an upcoming event.

Design/Layout

In order to make a newsletter easy to read, be sure to follow these design tips:

- Use only two or three different fonts, or typefaces, in the entire newsletter.
- Make sure the font size is easy to read (usually 11 or 12 point size). If you make the font too small in order to fit in more text, it makes the newsletter hard to read and appear cluttered. It is better to shorten stories or add more pages.
- Reserve plenty of white space (areas with no pictures or text).

Use your newsletter to:

- Announce an upcoming meeting and share the agenda
- Recruit volunteers for an event
- Announce an important issue to be voted on at the next meeting
- Share good news about your organization (e.g. recent funding, new partners)
- Spotlight a member of your organization
- Offer tips on various topics (e.g. “keeping cool in the summer heat”)
- Advertise a new business to the neighborhood
- Share news from city hall
- Conduct a survey
NEWSLETTERS CON’T

⇒ Create your own style. Use a logo that represents your organization so it is easily recognizable by members and neighbors.
⇒ Be consistent from issue to issue by placing reappearing sections, articles, and calendars in the same location.
⇒ Be creative with the number of columns used or the use of bullet statements.
⇒ Consider looking for free e-newsletter templates, such as mailchimp.com or myemma.com

Images
Images attract people to the information in your newsletter. They also help enhance the reader’s understanding of an article. When using photographs or graphics, be sure to select quality images. Remember to add captions underneath each picture.

Frequency
How often you publish a newsletter depends on your organization’s event calendar and budget. Does your neighborhood association or organization have annual or quarterly events that you would like to publicize? Time your newsletter to announce any upcoming meetings or events. Printing and mailing newsletters can become costly. The number of editions you are able to publish will depend on the amount of money your organization has put aside for printing and distribution.

Editing
Always have a person who is not involved in the writing or design of the newsletter edit it before printing. By proofing, you will be able to catch typos, ensure that the articles flow together, and that page numbers are correct, captions are included, and contact information is listed.

Publication & Distribution
Your printing budget will determine the best format for the publication of your organization’s newsletter. With today’s increasing use of technology, newsletters can be shared with people in a variety of ways. If your organization has a limited print budget, you can distribute your newsletter via email, place it on your organization’s web site, or share through Facebook.

Distribution of your newsletter will also be determined by your budget. Many neighborhoods distribute their newsletters door-to-door with volunteers. Other groups mail their newsletters.

Start spreading the news!
Many people fear public speaking and therefore shy away from opportunities to speak about their organization or project. Making a presentation isn’t easy work; it requires research, writing, organization, public speaking skills, and self-confidence. A good presenter has the ability to engage his or her listeners from beginning to end and compel them to take action. Good presentations can tell your organization’s story, increase visibility, and gain public recognition. It may take a little practice, but here are some tips to help you tackle your next public speaking opportunity.

Here’s How:
Presentations can range from speaking in front of a two to three person audience, such as a foundation interview, to speaking in front of the entire city council about an issue. They can range from delivering a talk without any visual aids to a multimedia demonstration. Public speaking takes planning and practice in order to present a project or story in a manner that is coherent, convincing, and energizing. A presentation should be designed to meet a specific need, topic, or request for information.

Defining Your Message
One of the most common pitfalls of presentations is not having a clear message. It is natural to want to share everything you know about your initiative or project, but too often such presentations turn into rambling lectures. At the end of your presentation, what information do you want the audience members to know as they walk away? What are the key points and outcomes? By asking yourself these questions, you will be able to more clearly define your message.

Using Visuals & Technology
Pictures, graphics, and PowerPoint presentations are generally not required, but they can be a powerful addition. Graphics and visuals can help reveal a part of your story that words can’t adequately describe. If you will be using them, just remember that they need to be relevant to your overall message.

Follow these tips to ensure any use of technology or visuals runs smoothly:
⇒ Do not include an image if it is unclear.
⇒ Charts can sometimes be indecipherable from a distance. If possible, break down the chart into easily viewed and understood parts instead of showing the entire chart at once.
⇒ When using PowerPoint slides, resist the urge to read the text on the screen verbatim. The text on the screen should be the “supporting actor” to what you are already saying.
PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS con’t

⇒ Arrive at the location early to ensure that the technology is working. This is especially important if you plan to pull up a website using the location’s Internet.
⇒ Sometimes technology can be a bit finicky and may not work. Have a back-up plan in case the technology doesn’t work. Your presentation may not be as effective without pictures or maps, but the show must go on!

Important Tips for Public Speaking
⇒ Know your material. Know more about the topic than you intend to include in your speech.
⇒ Use humor, personal stories or conversational language if you are comfortable with this format, but make sure it is appropriate for the audience.
⇒ Visualize yourself giving your speech. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud and clear.
⇒ Arrive at the location where you will be speaking early to familiarize yourself with the room and to ensure that the technology is working.
⇒ Know the audience. Introduce yourself to some of the audience members, before you speak, to “break the ice”. It’s easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers.
⇒ Relax. Begin by addressing the audience. It buys you time and calms your nerves.
⇒ Build a rapport with your audience. Engage them by asking them questions about your topic.
⇒ Believe that people want you to succeed. Audiences are looking for you to be interesting, informative and even entertaining. They’re rooting for you.
⇒ Gain experience. Accept any opportunity to speak so you can fine tune your skills and gain more confidence.

Practice Makes Perfect
Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural. Too much nervous energy could be detrimental. Practicing your presentation is the key to decreasing your nervousness and to building self-confidence. Rehearse out loud with a timer. If you are using PowerPoint, be sure to practice timing your speech so you can pause while you are advancing to the next slide. Practice, pause, and breath. And practice some more!

Source: University of Nevada Cooperative Extension & Toastmasters
WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

A press release is a prepared statement or announcement about something that has already happened that is distributed to the news media. It is written just like a news article. A media advisory is an announcement about an upcoming event. All press releases and media advisories should give the basics: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Below are a few tips on how to put together a catchy release or advisory so your story will get the spotlight!

Here’s How:

Media Contact List
To start, develop a strong media contact list. Follow the local newspapers or blogs and build a rapport with the reporters that cover neighborhood events or write feature stories on neighborhoods or neighborhood organizations. Write the release so it addresses their interests and audiences. Be sure to also build a rapport with local television news reporters.

Identify a Newsworthy Event or Story
Think about any upcoming events your organization may have. Examples of newsworthy items may include: a major public event such as a rally or community festival; ground breaking for a new community garden; a new grant awarded to your organization or group; or receiving a major award.

Get Noticed

⇒ Write your press release or advisory on letterhead. If your organization or group doesn’t have a formal letterhead, create one to show you can format your release like a pro.
⇒ Include the date of issue and time of release (usually is “immediate”).
⇒ Write a descriptive headline that will capture the reader’s attention.
⇒ Summarize what is most important — called the lead — in the first paragraph. This paragraph should capture the most essential information and tempt the reader to continue on.
⇒ The body of the press release or media advisory should answer the who, what, where, when, why, and how related to your newsworthy item.
⇒ Include quotes from your organization’s leaders, volunteers, or from someone who will benefit from your event or program.
⇒ At the end of the release, briefly and clearly state your organization’s name and purpose.
⇒ If you have a good photo that illustrates the project that you are announcing, include it with a descriptive caption.
WORKING WITH THE MEDIA CON’T

If your press release is only one page, type three number signs (###), centered at the bottom of the page, to indicate it is complete. However, if your press release goes on to a second page, be sure to type “-more-” at the bottom of the first page. This should be centered on the bottom of the page as well. Keep media advisories to one page.

Timing is Everything
The best time to send out a press release or advisory to a daily paper or online publication is three to five days before you want the story to be run. If you are sending the advisory to a weekly paper, consider sending it two weeks prior to the event. Monday mornings are generally the best for news organizations to receive news releases. Fridays are the worst days for most news organizations. Press releases and media advisories can be sent via mail, fax, or email.

Follow Up
Don’t sit back and wait to see if the story appears. Follow up with a telephone call or email to your media contact. Do not be discouraged if your press releases are not always used. Reporters may save them for a future story or pass them on to other writers they think may be interested.

Sample Press Release

Date:
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:
Name, phone number, email address

Headline
City, Date— Body of release.

Body continued.

For more information: www.website.com or contact@website.org

###
(or)
- more -

Sample Media Advisory

Date:

Contact: Name, phone number, email address

MEDIA ADVISORY

Headline

Who: Sponsors, noteworthy people involved

What: Event description

When: Date and time

Where: Specific location

Why: Purpose of event

Details: Pertinent background info

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(keep to one page)

Source: University of Missouri Extension Stock Healthy, Shop Healthy
For more tips on getting the word out in your community, check out the resources listed below.

Kansas University Community Toolbox
http://ctb.ku.edu

Toastmasters
www.toastmasters.org

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension
Speaking with Confidence

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Office of Quality Improvement
How to Write a Press Release