Networking & Marketing

Effective networking and a proactive marketing campaign are essential to informing the community about your program, particularly when it’s new. Spreading the word also helps to build a referral network and make inroads into new service realms. You may choose to create an aggressive marketing campaign utilizing all of the following tips or you may pick and choose based upon what makes sense for your agency’s staffing capacity and skill-set. Either way, below are a variety of simple, low-cost marketing and networking tips.

Issue a Press Release

- Your press release should include the following in objective, conversational language: a clear description of your program’s goals and activities, agency partners, how the social issues you are addressing impact your community, and how people can learn more. Check out this press release template.

- Determine the appropriate media contact to receive your press release by identifying local journalists who typically cover similar issues.

- Send the press release via email with a brief pitch on why the journalist should highlight your story, what makes your project unique, and how dispatch of this press release will benefit the community. Linking your press release to current news stories, the time of year, or national holidays is a good way to add a news angle to your press release. If available, attach photos of your team or recent program events.

- After you send the email, follow up with a phone call.

- Send your announcement to local politicians or leaders, such as town mayors, county board of supervisors, and district representatives. Let them know what is happening in their jurisdiction. Take the time to review their websites so you can comment on how your program’s goals are aligned with their priorities.

Be as Visible as Possible

- Build a website and include a link to your website in all your materials and emails.

- Identify potential media opportunities by staying informed of news stories about which your organization has expertise. Reach out to local newspapers, radio stations, and/or TV stations to comment on the story.

- Research upcoming speaking opportunities at conferences, community events and webinars to present on a topic related to your program.

- Contribute “bylined” articles (that include your name and the name of your organization). Research magazines, newspapers and websites to find outlets open to such articles. Then, write a pitch letter to the editor or most relevant person proposing your topic.

- Similarly, consider writing a pitch letter to local radio or television programs to propose a topic and appear as a guest.

- Link to community venues such as churches, hospitals, schools, libraries, recreation venues and retail establishments by distributing flyers and networking with members who can provide referrals.
Use Social Media

- Create a Facebook page and a Twitter account. See “Social Media: Taking the First Step” for an introduction.
- Start a blog with a specific niche or focus relevant to your organization, hosted on your website with wordpress.org. See “How to Start a Blog” for more details.
- Create a clear set of social media guidelines and share pertinent content regularly in your social media outlets.
- Encourage staff to share information about your new program in online communities and message boards. Make sure your message is relevant to the conversation and of genuine value to the members.
- Consider creating a Wikipedia page. Wikipedia offers nonprofits visibility. Here’s an example of a page for a Philadelphia nonprofit, Project H.O.M.E.
- Ensure that social media memberships (e.g., Twitter and Facebook logos) are included in all of your materials, website and emails.

Connect with People via Email

- Create an email listserv, including providers and potential partners in your service realm, and email an announcement describing your project’s goals and activities with information about how people can learn more. Make your email messages brief, easy to read, and visually stimulating.
- Offer an online sign-up form for your email listserv in order to expand your audience. Place sign-up forms on your website, blog, social media sites and personal email signature.
- Include a short blurb about your new program with the website link at the bottom of each email you send out.

Build a Referral Network

Networking and marketing can assist you with gathering referrals of potential clients for your new program. Here are some steps to build relationships with referral sources using networking and marketing.

- Design a standardized referral form and consent for services/discoer of information form. Include a link to your referral form on your website, as well as your social media sites, and disseminate referral forms, in addition to brochures, to partnering agencies at community events or meetings you attend.
- Designate a referral person for your program, who is responsible for processing referrals efficiently, managing core referral activities, and tracking and documenting referrals.
- As a program staff, generate a list of all relevant organizations and facilities within the geographic area that may provide referrals. Reach out personally to directors and supervisors either in person, or through Facebook, email or mail with a spirit of collaboration. Include information about your new program, how your program can assist the referring agency in their mission, and how practitioners can refer to your program. Consider following up with a phone call.
- Design a system for informing the agency that initiated the referral that the requested service has been offered or delivered.
- Track referrals with a referral register and document outcomes.
- Strategically make referrals for your clients as referrals often flow in both directions with partnering organizations.

Spreading the word about your new program requires strategy and planning. Choosing from the suggested tools, it is important to devise a marketing plan that matches your unique goals and values as an organization. We’ve compiled a list of websites to assist you further with developing effective marketing and networking plans in order to expand your audience, inform the community and communicate with potential partners.
RESOURCES

- 22 High-Impact, Low Cost Social Media Opportunities for Nonprofits
  [link]

- The Nonprofit Social Media Decision Guide
  [link]

- Free Management Library: All About Marketing
  [link]

- National Council of Nonprofits: Communications, Marketing and Planning
  [link]

- Network for Good: Nonprofit Marketing
  [link]

- Nonprofit Marketing Guide.com: Training and tips for do-it-yourself nonprofit marketers
  [link]

- Cause Communications: Nonprofit Communications, Advocacy and Marketing Tools
  [link]