

Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

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Definitions

Communication—The process of transmitting ideas and information about the nature of your organization and the issues it deals with. An ongoing, core activity that is key to sustaining an organization.

Marketing—The overall processes and activities that contribute to your organization's public image, that, when developed effectively—and reinforced by the good work of your staff—helps earn the trust and confidence of beneficiaries, local leaders and donors.

Promotion—A tactic other than paid advertising (for example, special events, posters, T-shirts, flyers) used by a marketer (for example, a CSO) to increase the awareness of a product, service or idea among specific target audiences.

Stakeholder—Anyone, individual or group, that has an interest in your CSO and is affected by it. This usually includes people directly involved such as Board members, people you serve, donors or foundations that give you grants. Other individuals or groups can be stakeholders too, even if they are indirectly involved, such as vendors where you purchase supplies or services.

References

Nonprofit Communication Plan Template

Upleaf

Developing a Communications Strategy

Knowhow Nonprofit

Developing a Marketing Communication Plan

Q. Why does our Civil Society Organization (CSO) need a marketing communication plan?

A. The key to your organization's ability to attract the support it needs to survive and thrive is its ability to communicate with and maintain effective relationships with beneficiaries, donors, potential partners, other stakeholders and the public. Many organizations do great work but struggle to disseminate their results to stakeholders. That is why a CSO needs a framework—that is, a marketing communication plan—to tell its story effectively and thus reinforce its value to its stakeholders.

Marketing Connects You to the Community

When we think of “marketing,” we often think of promotion and advertising products for sale. But marketing is much more than that. Whenever you are trying to connect with a group of people outside your organization, it can be considered marketing.

Marketing ranges from making client service more responsive, to street theater, to posting banners and applying logos. It is everything that contributes to your organization's public image, which, when developed effectively—and reinforced by the good work of your staff—helps earn the trust and confidence of beneficiaries, local leaders and donors. Effective marketing can improve your organization's ability to attract funding, serve more beneficiaries and advance your mission. It can help enhance your CSO's sustainability.

Developing Your Marketing Communication Plan

A marketing communication plan is a road map that provides direction on how to shape your image, create demand for your services and build relationships with key target audiences.

Putting communication in the context of marketing helps enlarge your thinking and opens up new possibilities. Like a project workplan, a marketing communication plan lays out:

- strategic objectives,
- activities or tactics to achieve those objectives,
- how these objectives and activities are supported, and
- expected outcomes (“targets”) against which you can measure the success of each activity.

Evaluate Your Plan

Once you establish a marketing communication plan, review it every six months to evaluate how well you are meeting objectives. Talk with staff responsible for each activity and revise your strategy and tactics as needed.

During your review, consider the following questions:

- Have we been communicating effectively with all targeted groups? Are there additional groups with whom we should be communicating?
- Are we meeting donor needs and/or requirements with our communication efforts?
- Is our overall communication effort enhancing our work as an organization?

Developing a marketing communication plan for your organization should involve a cross section of staff who participate in various activities, including program and financial managers. From the start, look beyond the beneficiaries of a single program and include communication with other groups, such as donors, other CSOs and potential volunteers.

The plan defines what you want from your communication and what you need to do to get it. As with any planning process, it starts with answering some basic questions:

- Why do we want to communicate with our community? (goals)
- What do we hope to achieve? (outcomes)
- Whom do we want to communicate it to? (audience)
- What do we want to communicate? (message)
- Who will communicate the message? (messengers)
- How do we want to communicate it? (channels)

The answers to these questions become your action plan. The next steps involve developing effective materials, disseminating the message, evaluating your efforts, adjusting as needed and sustaining the effort.

Defining Your Communication Objectives

When you create a program, the first thing you do is learn about the people and the problem your program is targeting. Similarly, in marketing, you also start by thinking about stakeholders with whom you wish to communicate, such as:

- beneficiaries (existing and potential),
- donors (existing and potential), or
- volunteers (existing and potential).

Take a hard look at your existing communication efforts, if any, and how you engage with your target audiences by talking with them. Learn what has worked and what has not. Next, write out in the simplest terms exactly what you want to communicate to each group. For example:

- what services we offer,
- why they need these services, especially how they will benefit from them, and
- who is making this work possible (that is, recognizing the donor(s)).

These statements help define your communication goals. Much like the “strategic objectives” in your workplan, you will next want to develop one or more “activities” aimed at achieving each objective.

Every action taken, proposal written, sign posted, idea floated, word uttered, event attended or meeting held is an opportunity for you to communicate and an opportunity for others to judge the value and worth of your information, knowledge, values and goals.

- *The Blue Book: A Hands on Approach to Advocating for the MDGs*

Creating Communication Activities

When thinking about each objective, consider how you can best get your message to the targeted group.

- What language(s) do they speak?
- Where and how can you communicate with them—in other words, what is the best way to “get in front of them” with your message?
- What cultural considerations should you be aware of?

Then, just as you do when creating a workplan, design “SMART” communication activities—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound. Do not forget to include budget considerations, sufficient staff to be effective, best practices and regulations in your plan.

Expected Outcome

Much like creating “targets” in your workplan, be sure your plan includes expected outcomes with specific timelines. In addition, for each activity, assign responsibility for monitoring its execution and outcomes to a specific staff member.

Examples of expected outcomes:

- New beneficiary enrollment in our program will increase by 25% over the year as a result of our Services Promotion activity. Responsible person: Technical Lead.
- All donor-funded commodities will be marked according to the marking plan within one business day of receipt. Responsible person: Procurement Manager.

Next Steps

Once complete, share the marketing communication plan with your entire staff, walking them through the specific aspects related to their jobs. Giving each the means to communicate effectively about your organization will help reinforce your value to beneficiaries and other target audiences.

For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit www.NGOConnect.net. The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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Six Essential Laws of Communication*

From experience, you may have concluded that the communication process can be simple or very complex. There are, however, six fundamental laws of communication that apply across the board:

* Adapted from *The Blue Book: A Hands-On Approach to Advocating for the Millennium Development Goals*. UNDP. 2004.

Law #1: Everything speaks.

Every action taken, proposal written, sign posted, idea floated, word uttered, event attended or meeting held is an opportunity to communicate and an opportunity for others to judge the value and worth of your information, knowledge, values and goals.

Law #2: Everything must speak the same message.

The only way to raise your organization's voice above the noise of others' is to sing in unison. Signs, posters, brochures, advertising, websites, proposals, staff, should all sing the same song.

Law #3: Everything must be repeated.

Effective communication is about persistence and repetition. Your message must be everywhere, coming from all directions (channels) and from a variety of sources (vehicles) to gain attention and make an impact.

Law #4: Everything must speak in turn.

Effective communication depends on effective orchestration. Planning, coordinating and prioritizing messages and training messengers brings the power of a symphony to what would otherwise be a collection of individuals playing whatever they please on their instruments.

Law #5: The message is everything, everything is the message.

Effective communication depends on clear messaging.

Law #6: Stay on message until the message gains power and influence.

This is especially important because you and the staff may grow tired or bored repeating your message, but research shows that a message must be repeated over and over, often via different channels and vehicles, before a target audience absorbs it. (See Law #3.)



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