

Getting the Word Out

Park & Trail Leadership Guide #1 • January 2005



Building membership, marketing an event or securing financial support for your organization and its programs and goals require you to get the word out! You've got worthy goals, projects that will benefit the community and enthusiastic volunteers, but to be successful you need to get the word out! How do you do that?

You need a communications and marketing plan. Wow! That sounds impressive and difficult to do... its not. Here are a few key steps and strategies of an effective communications and marketing plan.

Steps

1. Identify your communications goals

Do you want to let people know about your organization to increase membership? How do you want to keep your members informed? Do you have special activities you want to publicize so people will attend? Do you have a project you need to raise money for?

2. Identify your audience

Generally your audience will be people in your community who are interested in supporting your efforts. These may be individuals or businesses that will benefit as a result of your work. There may be times when you will want to target a select portion of your community – elementary school children, teachers, local business owners or elected officials.

Strategies

1. Membership Brochure

This is the who, what, where and why for your organization. It should not only include who you are and why you exist, but what you've accomplished, what your goals are and why should the individual, family or business join your efforts – don't be afraid to ask for a nominal membership fee.

2. Member Newsletter

An effective membership newsletter doesn't have to be fancy. It should include information about who is in charge of the group, an interesting story about your park or trail that people wouldn't otherwise be aware of, what you've accomplished, upcoming event information and volunteer opportunities with your organization, park or trail. It can be two pages, four or more! It can be done on Microsoft word and copied or it can be professionally designed and printed. The most important thing is that you do it and communicate with your members – these are the folks who support you and you want their continued support!

3. Fact Sheets

Fact Sheets are an effective tool when you want to communicate about something very specific (and they can be incorporated into your member newsletter too!). The key to an effective Fact Sheet is that it is only one page, it should not only include the key information you want them to know, but charts, graphs and photos should supplement your text.

- over -

PEOPLE SAVING MINNESOTA'S SPECIAL PLACES

PARKS & TRAILS COUNCIL OF MINNESOTA

275 E. 4TH STREET; SUITE #642; ST. PAUL, MN 55101-1651 651-726-2457 OR 1-800-944-0707 FAX: 651-726-2458

www.parksandtrails.org

4. Working with the Media

See also *Working With the Media, Leadership Guide #2*

Besides the communications pieces you prepare and distribute, you also want to have your local newspaper, radio and TV station cover your work.

- **Press Releases**

A short, one page announcement that includes who, what, where and when and is sent to your local newspaper, radio station newsroom and TV station newsroom. Be sure to include contact information so they can follow up with you on the story

- **Media Visits**

Arrange to meet a local reporter at your park and trail to educate them on who you are and provide information about your park or trail. This is a good opportunity to develop a relationship with local reporters so when there is a story of interest they know something about the issue and the organization. You shouldn't invite the newspaper reporter; the radio station reporter and the TV reporter to the same meeting...do them one at a time. Building a positive relationship with your local media is a critical link to getting good coverage when you have a story.

- **Feature Stories**

Many newspapers in greater Minnesota will be happy to include feature stories on your park and trail. A feature story is different from a news story in that it is more of a human-interest story and not about a specific event or issue. A feature story can be written by a staff reporter or by one of your members and submitted to the local paper – don't forget a photo.

- **Photos**

At the very minimum, when you have an event, make sure to snap one or two good photos and send them to your local paper with a caption.

- **Letters to the Editor**

Letters to the editor are a good way to communicate to your community about a specific issue and position you've taken on the issue. It is also the best way to say thank you to all those who contribute or provide support for a specific event or project.

The long-term success to an organization, its events, projects and goals is consistent communication. It doesn't take a great deal of effort, you just have to sit down and do it! *What are you waiting for?*