

# **Participant Recruitment and Program Marketing Best Practices**

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# Introduction

One of the most important jobs of a self-help agency is the recruitment of families. Without families, the program builds no houses and benefits no one. For many programs this is also one of the most challenging tasks. It is important not to get discouraged. An agency may talk to 300 families to find six that qualify for a group or it may be difficult to convince anyone that they can actually build their own home.

No matter what happens, there are three important rules to follow:

- Do not get discouraged.
- Try something new.
- Plan ahead.

## Review What Has Been Done

If some work has already gone into recruitment, investigate what has been done in the past and find out what worked and what did not. This information will help a great deal when looking for the next group of families.

Also, if it has already been completed, review the Affirmative Fair Housing Marketing Plan that is required to be completed and turned in with the Final Application. The strategies laid out in this document, such as where to advertise and who to contact, need to be carried out for the remainder of the program. Rural Development may conduct a review at the end of the program to ensure that this was followed.

## Motivation / Doing Good is Not Enough!

The March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005 edition of “Fortune” magazine included an article entitled “The Best Advice I Ever Got,” which included some very interesting and inspirational stories. One captivating story was from Vivek Paul, the President and CEO of Wipro Technologies. He said, “The best advice I ever got was from an elephant trainer in the jungle outside Bangalore. I was doing a hike through the jungle as a tourist. I saw these large elephants tethered to a small stake.

I asked him, ‘How can you keep such a large elephant tethered to such a small stake?’ He said, ‘When the elephants are small they try to pull out the stake and they fail. When they grow large, they never try to pull the stake out again.’ That parable is a reminder that we have to go for what we think we are fully capable of, not limit ourselves by what we’ve been in the past. When I took over Wipro in 1999, we were the first to articulate that an Indian company could be in the global top ten of technology services firms. As of 2004 we were.”

This tale really speaks to how we are, as nonprofit employees, with regards to marketing this program. The tether represents our expectations, our small budgets, our inexperience and our lack of having other local nonprofits that really raise the bar in marketing.

As nonprofit employees we tend to go at this the wrong way. We know we have a great product, right? Families that couldn’t afford it any other way, get a home of their own. That sounds great! We tend to just put out some information about our program and sit back and let interested persons come to us. We think that the people who need housing will come. Those agencies that have tried this know it doesn’t work so well. Doing good is NOT ENOUGH!! It isn’t enough to run a good program. We have to make them WANT to contact us and WANT to join our program.

Thinking about this in other terms might be helpful, for example, going to a doctor. Shouldn’t we all get regular check ups from a doctor? Probably. But how many people do that? Not many. We usually call for an appointment with a doctor when there is a problem. We call when we are motivated by being very sick and requiring help.

How about in terms of going to the dentist? How many people think that it is fun going to the dentist? Probably not many adults love it, but surprisingly these days, kids do. Dentists seem to have motivated them to want to go back. They probably don’t care too much about having their teeth cleaned. They want to go because they get floss, toothbrushes, they get to pick the flavor of rinse and paste that they use and at the end of the appointment they get to pick out a prize from a basket. That sounds like fun, doesn’t it?

We are not suggesting that self-help groups need a prize basket on the way in or out of their offices, but we do need to figure out what will make people **WANT** to get involved in a self-help housing program. What will inspire them enough to put themselves through all of the work and dedication that it takes to be involved with this program?

Telling someone they need our product/behavior is not as effective as finding out what they need and showing how our product meets that need. It's the difference between taking an educational approach -- laying out all the facts and hoping that people make a rational decision -- and a marketing approach -- persuading people to choose our product because it helps them to be the kind of person they want to be (e.g., a wealth-building homeowner, a self-sufficient individual, a good parent, a good provider for their family, etc.).

This will take a little work on our part.

# Develop a Recruitment Plan

In order to successfully recruit a group of families, there needs to be a plan. This is crucial. The rest of this manual is dedicated to breaking down these steps and providing ideas. Be sure to allow enough time to accomplish each step. After plan is finished ask... "Am I getting the most effective message to the most potential families in the most economical way?"

## I. What do you want to accomplish with your marketing?

(If your answer is just that you want two families to complete your next group that is supposed to go to closing next week, than you are in trouble.)

**Write down three goals. What are the absolute best results you could hope for?**

**(There are blank sample pages at the end of this manual.)**

**Sample, assuming we're a new group.**

- Have 10 families approved for the first group before submitting the Final Application. By November 2009.
- Have 10 families approved for the rest of the grant. By November 2010.
- Have 20 families on the waiting list for the next grant. By September 20011.

**Go through the factors working for and against each goal.** What outside factors might help or hinder your ability to achieve these goals?

### *Goal #1*

Have 10 families approved for the first group before submitting the Final Application in November 2009.

Outside factors working FOR you:

Not much available housing for  
low income families

New program – new opportunity

Supportive agencies

\_\_\_\_\_

Outside factors working AGAINST you:

New program – no one has heard of  
it – can it be done?

Not much funding

No experienced staff

\_\_\_\_\_

**Goal #2**

Have 10 families approved for the rest of the grant in November 2010.

Outside factors working FOR you:

Outside factors working AGAINST you:

Prospectives can see it is possible  
Input from 1<sup>st</sup> group on how to improve  
Funding

Families in first group may not be cheerful  
Community may put stigma on low income  
housing

**Goal #3**

Have 20 families on the waiting list for the next grant by September 2011.

Outside factors working FOR you:

Outside factors working AGAINST you:

Can show finished homes and  
proud families

First grant may have had problems  
Keep an eye on family availability

Can be done  
Community may have heard

**Revise your goals, if necessary, to make them more realistic.**

**Goal**

**By When**

1. Have 8 families approved for the  
first group before submitting the  
Final Application.

November 2009

2. Have 10 families approved for the  
rest of the grant.

January 2010

3. Have 22 families on the waiting  
list for the next grant.

September 2011

**II. Who is your target market?**

Describe them as much as possible. Write down whatever you know about them. Include their values and motivation, their places of employment, where they live now, where they shop, eat, what they listen to and read... Where is the self-help program's target market located so you

can reach them? Are they at work, church, home, clubs, PTA, etc. What radio stations do they listen to? What programs, what time of day? What papers do they read? What are their favorite sections to read and on what days do they read them? What stores do they go to and when? (Laundromats, car shops, grocery stores, restaurants, etc.) In order to get this information:

- ❖ Ask the people who respond to recruitment efforts
- ❖ Ask social service agencies -- maybe they will assist in surveying the market
  - Low income family (single or married) with children
  - Paying rent
  - Not much savings
  - Works for local factory, store, business....
  - Shops at Super Fresh, 7-11, Wal-Mart
  - Reads local weekly paper
  - Listens to local talk radio/country music/Top 40
  - Watches local news
  - Goes bowling
  - Belongs to the local Moose lodge
  - Attends church
  - Has kids in Little League, attend local schools

(Make a list appropriate for your own area.) (To get more and accurate information talk to some of the clients in your agency's other programs.)

### **III. How are you going to market?**

Look at the information that has been collected and determine where and how the most families can be reached. Write a list of methods you could use:

- Hold community meetings
- PSA's - radio and TV
- Newspaper articles
- Newspaper ads
- Speak at local Moose lodge / leave flyers there
- Speak with local employers
- Write letters to put in paychecks
- Flyer/letter to school children
- Speak to churches and other nonprofits
- Signs while building
- Free shoppers
- Groundbreaking ceremony
- Pass out flyers, hang posters

Contact organizations, employers, churches, radio stations, newspapers...etc. Let them know about the program and find out how they can help get the word out. What are the costs and are there other free methods available?

#### **IV. Develop your message**

This area needs to get a lot of your focus. Before the media is contacted or brochures are developed, you need to know what it is you want to say. (Don't forget the equal housing opportunity logo or symbol that must appear in all advertisements.) The message is not and should not be intended to tell them everything about the program. It only needs to interest them enough to take the desired action.

Messages need to be designed to achieve goals. A winning message takes into account what will work with the audience to build support. This does not mean restating your goals. It means making your case in a compelling way. According to Billy Shore of Share Our Strength, "Non profits suffer from literal sclerosis. They are so literal about everything that they don't translate things into language that people can understand."

"Everybody else in communications makes big bold claims for things they don't really know. 'The best part of waking up is Folgers in your cup.' Is that really the best part of waking up?" As a nonprofit we are more likely to argue this last question for weeks, hold a summit on it, and then decide that we can't make that claim without more documentation. We would end up outlining the numerous physical and psychological benefits of caffeine ingestion when trying to get going in the morning, supported by data and charts. One method sells coffee; the other puts people to sleep."

A good example of an effective message can be seen in the Texas anti litter campaign. The goal of the "Don't Mess with Texas" campaign was to "keep Texas beautiful and save tax dollars." The campaign message worked because it hit a chord, one of state pride, with the target population of litterbug macho males 15-24 years old. "Let's put litter in its place!" would not have been as effective as the chosen message.

A great resource for ideas about nonprofit marketing is the book [Why Bad Ads Happen to Good Causes](#) by Andy Goodman. Some of his tips for an effective message are:

1. Capture the reader's attention like a stop sign and direct it like a road map.

2. Make an emotional connection before attempting to convey information.
3. Write a headline that offers a reason to read more
4. Use pictures to attract and convince.
5. If you want people to read your text, make it readable.
6. Test before, measure after.
7. When everyone zigs, its time to zag. (Don't be afraid to try something new and unexpected.)

# WHY BAD ADS *Happen to* GOOD CAUSES

AND HOW TO ENSURE THEY  
WON'T HAPPEN TO YOURS.



*A guide for creating more effective public interest print advertising  
featuring new data from an unprecedented 10-year study by RoperASW.*

Written by  
ANDY GOODMAN

Designed & Published by  
CAUSE COMMUNICATIONS

Some examples of mission based marketing ads that connect with an emotion follow:



Suburban Dallas, Tx.  
15-yr-old female.  
Killed by 10-yr-old  
brother with gun  
found in parents'  
room. Boy thought  
gun was unloaded,  
tried to scare sister  
as she talked on phone.

A gun in the home triples the risk of  
a homicide in the home.

**CEASE  FIRE**

*Think about your family before you think about getting a handgun.*

Cease Fire, Inc. PO Box 33424, Washington, D.C. 20033-0424.



Help Can't Wait



**American Red Cross**

**This is when people need you. Not later. Not eventually. Right now. Please, support the American Red Cross.  
Your donations mean others will get things like food, clothing, and a place to rest...when it matters most.**

**1-800-HELP-NOW.**

He beat her 150 times.  
She only got flowers  
once.



Every 15 seconds, a woman is beaten in this country.  
For as many as four million women, this battering is so severe, they require medical or police attention.  
But for nearly 4,000 women each year, the abuse ends. They die.

**National Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

If you need help or want to help, call 1-303-839-1852. Or write: NCADV, P.O. Box 18749, Denver, CO 80218-0749.

The previous ads definitely make an emotional connection. Try to do something similar in your self-help housing marketing. Following are some more tips to help in developing your message.

The five elements of a message are:

### **1) Attract Attention**

To attract the attention of a passerby or a newspaper reader an “attention getter” is needed to create interest.

- -“Build your dream”
- “We know you care about your family...so do we”
- “Your family deserves a home of your own...we can help”
- -“You can say with pride ‘I did it myself’”
- -“Ask me how to join the \$24,000 club!”
- -“Learn a trade and gain a home at the same time”

### **2) Stress Advantages & Benefits of Self-Help Housing**

The recruitment message should be directed at what the families need and/or want, not just what the program provides. Ask yourself, “What are the qualities and characteristics about the home that make it attractive to the potential families and what do they get out of it personally?” Why would they want this new home??

- -Product - the home itself
- -Price - the low cost of the home, the low interest rate and the money they save
- -Self -learning skills, improving their life

Make a list and prioritize it according to the most important to the potential families. *See the benefits on the next page for some ideas.*

## ***Benefits of Self-Help Housing***

*Self-help housing is different things to different people. Decide which aspects are important to those being recruited and incorporate these aspects into the message. To incorporate too many benefits tends to confuse people and reduces the impact of the message. Concentrate on the strongest appeal for each individual group.*

### **Product -- Stress advantages**

*If the message stresses the aspect of the home itself, detail its advantages.*

Examples:

- -Modern, convenient, well built
- -Energy-efficient
- Quality materials
- Maintenance free
- Designed to meet your needs
- Fully inspected and approved by Rural Development
- Modern appliances (insulated windows, wall-to-wall carpeting, energy saving appliances)
- The appeal of the houses themselves - feature photographs of finished subdivisions and floor plans

### **Price -- Stress value**

*If the message discusses the cost stress affordability, not that it is for “very low income” or that they are subsidized, this negatively categorizes people.*

Examples:

- House payments based on applicant’s ability to pay
- No down payment
- Save money by self-help
- The investment benefits of home ownership, and the appeal of earning your “down-payment”
- Invest in your own home - invest in your future
- -Cost savings of owning a modern, energy-efficient home
- Own a home without breaking the household budget
- Affordable financing enables home ownership now
- Best financing for new construction in the country

### **Self -- Stress Improvement**

Examples:

- A sense of accomplishment
- Independence and self-reliance
- Making a good home
- Improving yourself
- Doing better for yourself
- Being happy and secure
- Being proud of yourself
- The appeal of working in a group and really “knowing your neighbors”
- Providing a better, safer environment for your family
- Satisfaction of “doing it yourself”, along with developing construction skills
- The homeowner’s dream come true: getting out of the “perpetual renter” trap

### **3) Prove what you say is true**

There are different ways of proving that your message is truthful. Four tactics that can be used are testimonials, comparative quality, reputation and successful performance. Testimonials are created when someone that has gone through the program in the past speaks of its benefits. Comparative quality could be used, comparing the homes that will be built with the homes that another builder has put up. If the organization has a good name in the community, use its reputation to get interested applicants to believe in the program. Successful performance is another strategy that can be tried after the first group has been completed. People can then be shown how well a self-help program works and how nice the homes are.

### **4) Persuade**

Get potential families to grasp the idea that they too can enjoy the benefits and rewards of becoming a homeowner. This is a large task because many never thought that homeownership was a possibility for them. It is with Self-Help Housing!

What difficulties will your message have to meet and overcome? Considering this and trying to address it in the message will strengthen the message.

- Believing that they can actually become homeowners.
- Believing they can build their own home.
- Waiting for “the catch.”

### **5) Ask for action**

What specific action do you want people to take as a result of your message? Ask the people that see an ad, read a flyer, or hear about it on a TV segment or radio announcement, to make a decision and act on it. Whatever action it is that you want them to take, ask them to do so: call today, come by the office, attend a community meeting, mail in a coupon, make an appointment, come to an Open House...etc. Make it easy for them

to do this, so there is no excuse not to if they are interested. Have a pocket of informational cards on a poster, tear off numbers on a flyer, the phone number on a TV ad, or the date, time and location of an informational meeting.

**6) What is your message?**

- Affordable new homes you can own.
- Own your own home and pay less than you can in rent.
- Achieve your dream by building your own home.
- Building Independence

## **V. Implement the plan**

Implementing the plan involves the basic questions of What, Who, When, How Much \$.

### **1. Budget**

Before determining exactly how to carry out this marketing plan that you have worked on, decide how much money you have to spend on marketing and recruitment. **Cost** is an important factor; how much is in the budget for marketing and advertising? Remember, free advertising may not always be the best way to get your message to families, but the same may also be true for costly methods. It costs more to mail 200 flyers than to advertise in local paper...but with the right mailing list you may directly reach more very low-income families than through advertising in the paper.

### **2. Assign Responsibility**

Determine who is responsible for insuring that each step of the plan is carried out. It is also important to note that the task of marketing should not just fall on the shoulders of the groupworker, or the project director. This is a gigantic job that is essential to your organization and should be shared amongst all staff.

Maybe the agency will decide that the Executive Director will be a good person to make speeches to local organizations, the Group Worker will do a lot of one on one talking with possible families in the community and the Project Director will write news releases and layout ads for the paper. These decisions are

made on a case by case basis depending on many factors, such as time staff has available and personal strengths and weaknesses. Even the staff not responsible for specific marketing tasks should be aware of how important their attitude about the organization is and how the community perceives that.

**3. Set deadlines**

What are the **time frames** and dates for program objectives? How much time is available to locate these families?

**4. Plan and Make Decisions**

After all of the factors have been considered, decide how the program can most effectively be promoted. If advertising is a viable option, decide where and when the advertisements should be placed and how long they should run. There are many ways to promote the program. See “Recruitment Methods” for some ideas.

# Recruitment Methods

There are many ways to get the message out once it has been defined. There is no such thing as one method being superior to another at this point. Find the methods that are best suited to getting the message to potential self-help families. What works in one area may or may not work in another. Try many different ways until you find several that work well in your area. The following is a list of some methods to try.

## Website

Creating an agency website is an important marketing step in this age of technology. Agencies get to control the message on their own website. This is a safe way potential clients can look up info about your program and agency once they discover it. This can be a valuable resource for potential self-help participants as well as clients from other agency programs. Be sure to include:

- Photos and testimonials
- Brochures that can be printed
- Plenty of contact information

## Newspapers

Both daily papers, community weeklies, and weekly shoppers should be evaluated as to their ability to reach the target market. Keep in mind that both have ways to offer paid and free advertising methods.

Feature articles provide full coverage at no cost. See if the paper will do a public interest story on potential builders, actual builders or previous builders to give the program positive press. (How owning a home has or will change a family's life.)

Advertisements -- Positioning is critical in newspaper advertising, because most people do not read the entire paper. There is no chance of families seeing the ad if it is in the wrong place. The sports section might be great, but the real estate section could be bad, simply because many very low income families do not believe they can be homeowners.

Classified ads work great in some areas.

Activities announcement can be used to announce community meetings

### **Radio**

Ask the station for its target audience and segmentation according to time. The morning programs usually have a larger target listening area. Radio station's also have paid and free advertising available. Free talk shows, interview shows, classified ad shows, public service announcements (PSA), spot radio ads are all possibilities. Local radio stations may have talk shows where you and/or Rural Development personnel could be the guest.

### **Television**

The self-help program could be featured on the local news, local community forum type programs, or mentioned through a public service announcement.

### **Flyers, posters, handouts**

Develop simple, easy to read, attractive flyers for public distribution. Rural Development offices, stores, laundromats, CAP agencies, social service agencies, community bulletin boards, post offices, and utility offices are all good options of places to display information. They should be simple, attractive, and informative. NCALL is available to assist grantees in developing these materials. Contact [jlordan@ncall.org](mailto:jlordan@ncall.org) for more information and assistance in this area. Also see the chapter, "Developing Marketing Materials" for more tips.

### **Direct mailings**

Direct mailings can be expensive compared to other methods, but with the right list it can be more rewarding than a newspaper ad. Rural Development's waiting list, church mailing lists, or waiting lists for subsidized rental housing could all be used by the self-help agency.

A less expensive method of direct mail could be enlisting the assistance of social service agencies, AFDC agency, local employers and the like, to stuff flyers into their mailings and/or paycheck envelopes.

### **Community meetings**

Holding a community meeting brings a number of people together to explain the self-help program and its requirements. Slide shows and videos can be used to help the potential families visualize what the program entails.

### **Trade shows, human service fairs, and mall exhibits**

Consider having a booth at the local human services fair and other events.

While these may be a good way to see a lot of people, consider the time and effort taken compared to reaching the target market. Are the potential families going to be at the location where you are setting up?

### **Organizations, colleges, trade schools, headstart, and migrant education centers**

Community Action Agencies usually often have the best handle on how to reach the population you hope to serve. Other contacts: local community development block grant programs, housing authority etc. These ideas are all good for getting you directly to the families or for referrals. Pass out newsletters, flyers, or accept speaking engagements to explain the program. Meet with social service agency councils (inter-agency) to share the Rural Development program and explain the process. Write to all social service agencies concerning the availability of funds and income guidelines. Invite their clients to apply.

### **Churches**

Meet with local ministerial associations. Churches are one of the best ways to disseminate information in the community and rural areas. Post announcements in church bulletins, newsletters, or on bulletin boards, talk to congregations, challenge churches to sponsor potentially eligible families within their congregation; all are possibilities of partnering with local churches.

**Local governments**

Local governments may be able to provide leads and referrals of potentially eligible families.

**Local employers**

Find employers that have a pay structure that supports the 502 program's income guidelines. Educate employers whose employees would benefit and ask their assistance in reaching their workers. Post promotional material on bulletin boards or in paycheck envelopes, conduct a special meeting, or set up a table in their lunch/break room.

**Billboards / Outdoor Advertising**

In some areas the cost of putting up a billboard may be prohibitive. It is something worth looking into though. Billboards have become an important part of business marketing. They can be an effective means of advertising an organization's programs and services. Why consider using a billboard? Outdoor advertising is typically available even in towns that are too small to have a radio station or local newspaper. They can provide direct marketing right down to the neighborhood level. Additionally, public service message space may even be available because outdoor advertising companies don't want to have an ugly sign with no message on it staring out at motorists for an extended period of time.

**Other**

Contact members of low-income apartment complexes and arrange to pass out literature and host a tenant's meeting to see if anyone is ready and willing to move on to homeownership. See if letters can be sent to persons on the waiting list for subsidized rental housing. The word of mouth method can be more focused by sending letters to current borrowers, letting them know you are seeking more clients and ask them to spread the word. Meet monthly with a core group of social service representatives and brainstorm on how to reach the people who need the housing you have to offer.

## **Research**

On the following pages are two questionnaires that may help determine the best ways to reach the target market and which methods of recruitment have worked best.

## Market Research

1. What radio stations do you listen to regularly?  
During what hours?
2. What local TV news programs do you watch?
3. What papers / shoppers do you read regularly?  
What days?  
What sections?
4. What grocery stores, laundry facilities and stores do you frequent?  
What locations?  
On what days do you normally do your shopping?
5. Do you mail utility bills or pay at the office?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Mail                      \_\_\_\_\_ Office
6. Do you ride public transportation?
7. What church do you attend?
8. Are you involved in any organizations? Which ones?
9. If you had the opportunity, would you want to be a homeowner? Why?
  
10. Do you have any ideas or suggestions on how a non-profit home ownership organization can reach your friends and neighbors to explain their program?

# Recruitment Survey

1. How did you hear about the program? (Specify)

Radio: \_\_\_\_\_

TV: \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper: \_\_\_\_\_

Shopper: \_\_\_\_\_

Poster: \_\_\_\_\_

Flyer: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Word of mouth: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Date and location of the ad: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which ad did you see?

\_\_\_\_\_ "You can say it with pride, I did it myself."

\_\_\_\_\_ "Learn a trade and gain home ownership at the same time."

\_\_\_\_\_ "Ask me how to join the \$14,000 club."

# Tips for Using Different Media

## The News Release

Although simple in structure and style, the news release serves as a major vehicle for communicating with the media. A better understanding of its purpose, design, and uses, can also improve the chances of getting published.

In order to get the message out to the public, you probably will want to contact the local media. But how? When seeking publicity for an organization, the following guidelines should be useful.

Decide on the message. There may be many things to tell, but the key is to figure out what might be of interest to the public. Is it a new program, a change in location, or a special event?

Select the media. The message and intended audience determines which publication should be contacted. The biggest is not always the best. A community weekly or a special interest publication may be more likely to run the information because of its direct local impact or strong interest by their particular readership.

Put it in writing. Prepare a properly written release. (See Content and Structure sections)

Mail to the right person. The City Editor is appropriate for general news items or if you are unsure of the title or department to which it should be addressed. It is very important to send only one release to a publication. This avoids the possible duplication and a risk of misunderstanding, factors which can result in not getting releases published in the future.

Mail by the deadline. For a daily newspaper, this is usually about a week before the event. Community weeklies, community calendars, and specialized publications will require a longer lead time. It may be two to three weeks, or even longer.

A checkup phone call is not necessary. A daily newspaper receives hundreds of requests similar to yours and space and time considerations alone forbid running everything submitted.

Send a thank you note for any publicity the agency receives.

## **Content of the Release**

Familiarize yourself with publications you may wish to use for publicity. Find out what they print and the kind of audience they reach.

Select information of interest to a large part of the publication's readership. Age, income, geography, activities, etc. of the general public are some characteristics to consider.

Remember the "5 W's" -- who, what, when, where, why, and sometimes how. (see Structure) Be sure they are all in the story.

Keep it brief. Include the important information nearest the beginning of the story and use only the details that are absolutely necessary.

Write in a simple, factual style. Avoid creative, clever or overly wordy sentence structures.

Avoid opinions unless they are attributed to a person mentioned in the article. (i.e. "The effects would be devastating," according to Jane Doe, Executive Director.) As the writer, do not insert your own opinions.

Don't assume what a person would think or say. Contact them directly for an answer.

Be accurate. Make certain of all of your facts, such as dates, times, locations, names or titles. Also be careful when you use figures or statistics.

Put a hook in your story. This is what makes the article of interest or newsworthy. Is this a new program? Is it the first of its kind? How is it unusual? Are you offering solutions to a problem in the community?

A word about names. The first time a man or woman's name is mentioned use their first and last name. Thereafter, refer to them by their last name.

Photographs help to provide more interest and information to a story. Make sure the photos are clear and high in resolution. Identify any people in them. Do not send a photo you wish to have returned.

## Structure of a News Release

When it's all said and done there are just two simple rules for writing your own news stories:

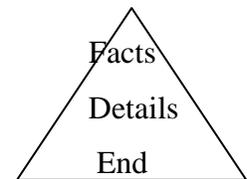
Rule #1 -- Keep sentences and paragraphs short and clear.

Rule #2 -- Place all of the facts at the beginning of the story with quotes, expendable details, and other information in the middle and the end.

The first rule speaks for itself. Ideally, news story sentences should be 16-21 words long. Paragraphs rarely should consist of more than three sentences. Often one sentence constitutes an entire paragraph. Since you are limited in the number of words you can put into a sentence, make every word count. Choose action words that convey a message, describe a situation, or carry weight.

For example: "The Dover Habitat for Humanity will hold its annual Art Auction at Maple Dale Country Club on March 31 at 7 PM." This lead paragraph succinctly tells you who (Dover Habitat for Humanity), what (Art Auction), when (March 31 at 7 PM), and where (Maple Dale Country Club). Subsequent paragraphs detail the mission and works of the Dover Habitat, officers and organizers names, the type of works that will be up for auction, and how the proceeds will be used.

The second rule, placing vital facts in the first paragraph, is called the "inverted pyramid" because news stories can be drawn to look like an upside-down triangle.



When writing a news release, start with a headline and incorporate the two rules.

If the release runs more than one page, be sure to type the word "-MORE-" at the bottom of each continuing page. When you reach the end of the story, sign off with the symbol "-30-" or "-End-". This tells the newspaper's typesetter that the story run is over.

The following is a sample news release to help get you started.

# NEWS RELEASE

**DATE:** June 10, 2009

**CONTACT:** Joan Smith  
Executive Director  
(###) ###-####

## LOCAL NON-PROFIT BREAKS GROUND TO PROMOTE HOMEOWNERSHIP

GEORGETOWN –Dover Housing Development Corporation (DHDC) broke ground today on a new housing development project in Georgetown that promises to make the dream of homeownership obtainable for many families who never thought owning their own home was possible. The project will consist of 16 single-family homes built by the families that are going to live there. The groundbreaking ceremony was held in celebration of National Homeownership Week.

The self-help housing project is the result of a partnership between DHDC and USDA's Rural Development. Other assisting partners are County Bank and NCALL Research. All of those organizations are working together to increase homeownership opportunities.

The Honorable Michael N. Castle, U.S. House of Representatives, shovel in hand, joined with the other partners in the groundbreaking ceremony. Castle noted, "This is a proud day for Georgetown. Sixteen families can look forward to the pride of having built their own homes." Equally happy was future homeowner, Brenda Martin. After building their own home, she and her husband and their two children will move out of a cramped two-bedroom apartment and into their first home. Like other future residents, the Martin's received their loan from Rural Development's loan program and homeownership counseling from DHDC. A joyful Martin remarked, "I never believed we could own a home. Building the homes will be a lot of hard work, but the outcome will be so worthwhile."

###

## When the Media Calls

Most of the time, we seem to be trying to attract the media's attention. But what happens when a reporter contacts us? They may be calling in response to a news story that appeared in the national media, and are seeking a local angle. Or the self-help agency may have been chosen as the focus for a featured social issue (the homeless, child abuse, the elderly, etc.). Whatever the case, it is important to remember that this is a wonderful opportunity for the agency. This can easily be forgotten when suddenly facing the challenge of being an articulate agency spokesperson.

Requests from the media do not often allow much time to prepare and interviews are usually very short. Because of this, saying it right the first time is quite important. Live interviews, or those on tape or film, do not allow for mistakes. And once printed, mistakes can be more permanent since readers can study it, make copies, and distribute it to untold numbers.

These pitfalls can be avoided by being a relaxed and effective representative. Before an interview begins:

- Be certain of the identity and affiliation of the reporter (name, title, station, publication).
- Determine the reason for the interview. Is it to explain the purpose of your agency? Discuss a basic issue or service? Present a positive image to a particular audience? Highlight an upcoming event?
- If you are not the right person to talk with, refer the reporter to someone in the agency who is appropriate. Occasionally an outside source may be recommended. Notify the person you have given as a referral immediately to inform them that the reporter may be calling.
- If you don't know how to answer a particular question, simply say you don't know. Offer to get the information to the interviewer as quickly as possible, and avoid incorrect or rambling uncertainties. If you cannot answer at the time, but will later, explain why and when you expect to address the question.

- If you have time, develop a list of key points you wish to make during the interview. These can be statements, agency positions, facts or arguments that convey your intended messages.
- What if your schedule does not allow you to take the time for an interview when a reporter happens to call? If so, or you feel it is essential to take time to prepare, find out the publication's deadline and arrange to call them back.
- You may refuse to answer certain questions when they violate confidentiality rules, legal restrictions, or agency policy. Don't say "no comment" but explain your refusal clearly and politely.

## **During the Interview**

Regardless of the medium - print, radio, or television - some general guidelines follow.

- Background information. Your interviewer might be a specialist on the topic or may welcome pertinent information or suggested questions and directions you may have to offer. This information might be provided directly before a taped phone interview or for a more in-depth interview scheduled for a later time.
- Work in a "quotable quote". Say something the listeners or readers will remember and that makes an essential point. It can be the agency motto, a memorable phrase, or this year's campaign theme. Try to get it in early, to increase the likelihood the quote will be used.
- Don't hide the truth or attempt to hide problems that are being addressed. Present them as positively as possible. Talk about what is being done to correct shortcomings and stress the plans underway. Avoid "No Comment". If you are not sure of the answer, say you don't know and get back to them as soon as possible.
- Personalize you answers. Use anecdotes, illustrations, and personal accounts where you can. "When I was a teenager..." or "One of our clients said..." or "As a taxpayer myself..."

- Avoid agency jargon. Don't assume your listening and reading audience has the same familiarity with the subject as you do. Don't refer to agencies or programs by their initials (RHS, WIC, MSSH, etc.) unless they are well known by the general public.
- Only state your agency's position since everything you say will be considered just that. Use phrases like "Our agency believes..." and "We feel ...", rather than "I think..." Be sure what you say reflects official agency policy or guidelines.
- Rephrase any negative or objectionable questions the interviewer may ask. Always reply positively and use your own words, rather than repeating the words in question.

## **On the Radio**

Radio, since it is a voice only, electronic medium, has some special considerations.

- Your voice projects your entire image. The listening audience therefore assumes a great deal from it. Your voice can lend credibility and interest by listeners to what you say or it can turn them away.
- Your appearance is still important, even though the audience won't see you. Your confidence is increased when you look your best.
- Good posture aids your voice as well as your appearance. On radio, sitting straight allows you to speak using your diaphragm, which in turn allows you to speak longer without your voice becoming hoarse, high, and thin.
- The microphone. This may intimidate you, but it is very similar to a telephone. It merely lets you speak with others who are far away. Radio is a personal medium, so speak into it as if you were talking with one person.
- Vocal problems like a hissing "S" or popping "P's" may be accented by talking directly into a directional tabletop mike. Speaking slightly above it or off to one side will reduce these problems.
- Live call-in programs are becoming more popular, particularly on radio. If you are invited to appear on one, inform your family, friends and co-

workers so they can phone in relevant questions which point to your agency's desired message.

## **The Television Appearance**

- Your appearance is important since television is primarily a visual medium. It does not permit overly broad gestures or a loud speaking voice commonly associated with public speaking. Moderate gestures used for emphasis are best. Always remember to keep them within camera range.
- Your attire helps project the image you want. Your attire should be selected with regard to the audience and the host. You may consider wearing your most conservative business outfit. Going with an appearance that clearly says “professional” will usually work best.
- Avoid certain colors and color combinations, such as white and prints with small dots, thin white strips or busy patterns. Their bright images will prove distracting to the viewer.
- Color opposites such as red/green, blue/orange, or yellow/purple should be avoided.
- Check your appearance before your television interview, dress in the outfit you plan to wear, and sit before a full-length mirror. See how it looks. Is it flattering, or does it ride up or bulge? If you are not happy with your choice, change it. Ask the opinion of others if you are not sure.
- In the studio the microphone is usually attached to your blouse or jacket (lapel mike), or suspended overhead by a boom or pipe (boom mike). Speak conversationally, without taking any special considerations.
- A guest editorial is where you appear alone to present an opinion. Speak directly to the camera as if you are talking to your audience. The camera is your viewing perspective and this gives you more involvement with them.
- A group appearance means your attention is toward the host and the other guests on the show. In this situation, direct your conversation to them rather than the camera.

- Filming on location which will usually mean at your agency, requires a quiet room with enough space for a camera crew as well as the interviewer and yourself. Also, sufficient electrical outlets and capacity is needed for the camera and lighting equipment.
- A copy of the program may be possible from the station.

## **10 Tips to Getting an Article Published**

Sometimes it seems like a daunting task to try to get a self-help housing story published in the local newspaper. It definitely does not have to be so intimidating! Here are 10 tips that may help to get a story in a newspaper near you:

1. Be proactive in submitting material for publication. Assign someone to get your news out!
2. Do your homework. Review the newspaper's website or other printed brochures. Many newspapers share information on how to get published and whom to contact. (*Your ad representative may know who.*)
3. Build a relationship with the appropriate contact.
4. Find out how the paper prefers to receive material (i.e., fax or email, file formats for photos).
5. Understand the non-traditional or niche publications put out by the paper.
6. Put contact information on press releases and check spelling and accuracy.
7. Remember to be timely. Find out how much notice is needed.
8. Persevere. If you don't get published the first time, keep trying!
9. Consider using the Opinion Editorial forum to convey news.
10. Have a good idea and know why the paper should cover it!

In one local area, the newspaper actually holds two meetings per year for nonprofits and community organizations specifically to help train them on how to get published in their paper. The meetings' attendees are able to ask any questions they have about the paper and are introduced to the reporters that cover the types of stories the organizations want to get published. Instead of being intimidated, the attendees are able to see the personal side of the newspaper. Check with your local paper to see if they have a similar

program.

Getting the word out about our nonprofit organizations and programs is an important task that needs our focus. It can be done with some dedication!

# Developing Marketing Materials

In order to properly publicize your Mutual Self-Help Housing Program, certain marketing materials will be needed. NCALL recommends having the following:

- A good quality brochure that briefly explains both the organization and the self-help program.
- A cheap flyer for mass distribution. (Mail it, hand it out, hang it up, leave it wherever prospects congregate – a flyer, printed on one side of a letter-sized sheet is among the least expensive, easiest to produce, and hardest working marketing tools.)
- Posters, these can be similar to the flyers, but will be larger, on heavier paper, maybe have a tear off phone number.
- A few starter sample ads.

No matter the size difference. All of these items should look professional and carry the branding and message of your agency and the self-help program. Most times this branding will consist of a company logo, using certain fonts or colors and a tag line.

This section of the manual will cover the mechanics of the marketing materials. That is, the graphic layout and design of the materials. Several elements of good design are contrast, repetition, alignment and proximity. These are discussed in more depth below.

- **Contrast** – Contrast not only adds visual interest to a page so a reader’s eye is drawn in, but it helps create the hierarchy of information so the reader can scan the important points and understand what the brochure is about. Use contrast in the typefaces, colors, spacing, size of the elements, etc. Remember, that the only way contrast is effective is if it is strong.
- **Repetition** – Repeat various elements in the design to create a unified look to the piece. Some elements to repeat are colors, typefaces, spatial arrangements, and bullets.

- **Alignment** – Alignment is very important and the lack of it is consistently a problem. Strong, sharp edges create a strong, sharp impression. A combination of alignments (using centered, flush left and flush right) can sometimes create a sloppy or weak impression.
- **Proximity** – The design principle of proximity, or grouping similar items close together, is especially important in a project such as a brochure where you have a variety of subtopics within one main topic. How close and how far away items are from each other communicates the relationships of the items. To create spatial arrangements effectively, you must know how to use your software to create space between the paragraphs.

### **Some other tips**

- Use photographs to tell your story - Show the benefit or the result of using your product, service or program in a photograph. Photos make it easier for potential participants to imagine what it would be like for them.
- Use a delicate hand – People new to design tend to make text and graphics too big and/or too bold. Keep your layout simple. Limit yourself to two fonts to minimize the visual confusion. Use illustrations that build on your message.
- Organize your page with boxes and borders – You can include several different levels of information on a single page by enclosing separate material in a box or border.
- Establish a center of attention – Decide which idea or image is most important on the page and make it the single most dominant visual element by playing up its size, position, or density.
- White space is your friend – Just because there is only a certain amount of space to convey a message, do not feel the need to fill the entire page. The message can get lost in clutter if it is too busy.
- Stick with it – It is easy to get bored with your marketing message and your visual identity. If your story is clearly and effectively told, don't change it for change's sake. To a new prospect, it is every bit as fresh as the first day you

created it. To repeat viewers, your message becomes increasingly familiar in their minds.

Contact NCALL for samples or assistance creating some promotional items.

# Developing a Marketing Plan

## I. What do you want to accomplish with your marketing?

Write down three goals. What are the absolute best results you could hope for?

**Goal**

**By When**

1. _____	_____
_____	_____
2. _____	_____
_____	_____
3. _____	_____
_____	_____

What outside factors might help or hinder your ability to achieve these goals?

### *Goal #1*

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Outside factors working FOR you:

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Outside factors working AGAINST you:

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### *Goal #2*

Outside factors working FOR you:

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Outside factors working AGAINST you:

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In order of importance to your target audience, what are the top three benefits and features you offer?

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Features</b>
<hr/>	<hr/>

**(Don't forget – the message should:** Capture their attention; make an emotional connection before trying to convey information; write headlines that offer a reason to read more; use pictures to attract and convince; be readable; test before, measure after.)

***What would make people WANT to join your program? What would inspire them?***

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***What is your message?***

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## V. Implement the Plan

Step	Responsibility	Deadline	Budget

## **Best Practice (Develop a Plan) ---**

### **Sample Marketing Plan – Mutual Self-Help Housing**

#### **I. Executive Summary**

\_\_\_\_\_ is a tax-exempt private non-profit corporation, funded by Federal, State and local funds. The primary purpose of the agency is to aid economically disadvantaged residents of \_\_\_\_\_ County to become self-sufficient through the various programs operated, including Self-Help Housing. The agency is governed by a \_\_\_\_\_-member Governing Board. The board has three equally represented sectors – public officials, private groups and representatives of service recipients. Board officers are the chairman, vice-chairman, secretary and treasurer.

Self-Help Housing continues to be the premier provider of affordable housing experiences, and seeks to make this experience affordable and available for all interested participants. This is accomplished through successful funding opportunities, the partnership of the United States Department of Agriculture/Rural Development, and a solid financial approach to managing these resources. \_\_\_\_\_ Mutual Self-Help Housing offers services to more than \_\_\_\_\_ participants throughout the \_\_\_\_\_ County area with additional funding available on an out-of-county basis. Ongoing efforts are in place to continue to improve the quality and integrity of the program. The success of these efforts has been documented through tracking mechanisms that confirm the positive perception of the program within the \_\_\_\_\_ County area.

Major challenges face Mutual Self-Help Housing for the future. These include the uncertainties brought on by property tax changes, facility and capital requirements, the impact of alternative programs, and federal/state funding needs, to name a few. The Board of Directors and staff continue to work toward providing a quality experience in the most effective and efficient manner possible with optimism for the future of this exceptional organization.

## II. Business Overview

The need for affordable housing programs is validated and magnified by information that attributes long-term value to participants in these programs. Numerous studies document the direct value of homeownership. These studies indicate a direct correlation demonstrating that homeownership results in reducing the potential to become involved in drugs, sex, crime, and gang-related behaviors. Research indicates the economic, social and personal value of "homeownership" avoids the unemployment and public assistance costs that may later result. To meet this need, Mutual Self-Help Housing offers an experience that serves as a permanent housing situation for participants throughout their lives. These important benefits continue to validate the Mutual Self-Help concept.

We serve households whose adjusted income does not exceed the applicable low-income limit for the area. **Best Practice---**We not only provide access to affordable loan packages but we also provide free credit counseling and home buyer education classes. The main environmental factor affecting our operation is the lack of adequate credit to qualify for a mortgage loan.

The agency strengths are that we have been in existence for over \_\_\_\_ years and our community is very aware of the various programs and services that we offer. **Best Practice---**We have strong partnerships with other local agencies and service providers within our community which are an invaluable asset to our agency. We receive referrals almost daily from these partners.

**Best Practice---**Our future plans include our own website to serve a significant technological solution for low income persons in our community for effective communication and information delivery. A website would also reduce the need for printed materials, voice mail communication equipment and staff payroll time.

The agency weakness is that additional funds are needed to maintain the quality of the experiences offered and meet future program demands. **Best Practice---**The future depends on resources and revenues from both state and federal funding allocations and

money recaptured as program income. Our goal is to become less reliant on government funding and focus more on agency self sufficiency.

Individuals often have their first homeownership experience with Mutual Self-Help Housing and this presents the need to adequately train these individuals to enable them to better understand the responsibilities, liabilities and investment of owning property. A more positive experience for homeowners with an increased awareness of responsibilities is one of the goals. The Mutual Self-Help staff experiences tremendous pressure due to workloads, dealing with credit issues, and marketing, planning, recruiting and addressing the issues of the program. This does not even consider the construction aspect of scheduling, weather, subcontractors and participation of the homeowners.

The major challenges we currently face are the impact of property taxes, inflation and jobs to provide adequate income for the homeowners in an effort to avoid default. **Best Practice---**Plans are being implemented to educate and train homeowners about budgeting for positive outcomes and financial management to avoid foreclosure. The precise ramifications of this measure may not be known for months, but all potential outcomes must be considered as plans are made for the coming years.

### **III. Target Market**

Mutual Self-Help Housing provides valuable housing experiences for the increasing population of renters. We offer individuals the opportunity to participate in building their own home which provides valuable teamwork in groups of 4-6. These teambuilding experiences provide a source of valuable construction training and simultaneously improve building techniques as they offer experiences in the homebuilding trades that will save them money in repairs in the future. **Best Practice (skill-building) ---**Increased self confidence to make basic home repairs is just one of the many tangible benefits this program offers.

Mutual Self-Help Housing serves the \_\_\_\_\_ County area with a total population in excess of \_\_\_\_\_ people. With a majority of the homebuyers from the City of \_\_\_\_\_, the program also has homeowners from surrounding communities.

Target Audience(s):

- Local residents and surrounding communities;
- Funding sources, to increase awareness of our program;
- Local government officials, to solicit their support for our programs;
- Potential and current clients;
- Others.

Our options for reaching those audiences include local television, radio stations, local newspapers, local newsletters, the Internet, Chamber of Commerce publications and word of mouth. Best Practice---Our community will be having a grand opening of a new \_\_\_\_\_ and we are eager to partner with them to support featured housing stories that showcase their products for our ongoing housing construction.

**Best Practice (identify the profile) ---**A typical profile of families interested in this type of housing program can be described by the following:

- Single parents working a traditional 8-5 schedule
- Older single non-parent working individuals
- Young parents with 2 or more children - both parents working
- Households of other Ethnicity
- Elderly and disabled

Market Behaviors – Mutual Self-Help Housing continues to enjoy a positive perception within the community. \_\_\_\_\_ housing demographics indicate that \_\_\_% of the population is living in renter-occupied units and \_\_\_% is living in owner-occupied units, leaving \_\_\_% living in other types of housing units. This indicates that there is a total of \_\_\_% available for homeownership. In \_\_\_\_\_, the per capita personal income in \_\_\_\_\_ County was \$\_\_\_\_\_. **Best Practice (market this)---**Because we are a rural county and all applicants are eligible to apply for USDA/RD funding which offers

interest rates as low as 1% for up to 38 years, this is one of the primary reasons people continue to apply for self-help housing.

**Best Practice (identify the market) ---**The initial reasons for Mutual Self-Help Housing remain constant. Affordable housing programs are severely limited in terms of price and funding. Although \_\_\_\_\_ County has an adequate number of rental units available, it's the size and cost of those units that are not desirable by most. The current trend we are seeing is that most households have children and are requiring at least 2-3 bedroom units and at the same time needing them to remain affordable. Rental units with 2 or more bedrooms often cost more monthly than owning a self-help home funded by USDA/RD. Therefore, more families with children have the desire to become homeowners. Mutual Self-Help Housing seeks to serve all interested individuals from various housing situations regardless of their size. The Mutual Self-Help Housing program is orchestrated to make this experience as accessible and affordable as possible to the market we serve.

This program has experienced an average participation growth rate of \_\_%. This is indicative of the growing needs of the market we serve. Based on past participation, we expect to experience increased participation growth between \_\_% and \_\_% annually over the next \_\_\_\_\_ years. These trends are monitored, and to the best degree possible, used to help predict future program demands.

#### **IV. Best Practice (set goals) ---Goals**

- Continue to offer affordable housing that is energy efficient and perceived to be a positive alternative to renting
- Attract clients on a regular basis through various types of outreach & marketing
- Be perceived by public, private and other service providers as a valuable resource that compliments the housing stock of our community
- To develop an effective and user friendly website

**V. Marketing Strategies**

**Best Practice (develop a strategy) ---**The marketing strategy attempts to successfully communicate the unique value the program offers clients. This strategy redirects the focus from the “cost” issue to the benefits that clients and their families experience from ownership. The marketing strategy will continue to identify the needs of the market and communicate with this audience the most effective and positive manner possible.

Ongoing efforts continually attempt to understand our market and maintain the quality and integrity of the program. This challenge is increasing, as costs continue to escalate in a number of areas. Mutual Self-Help Housing is constantly working to enhance the program through improvements and adding new staff in its structure to concentrate on specific areas such as marketing and recruitment. The growth strategy is based on continued attention to the quality of the experience in conjunction with identifying opportunities to expand the participation of the program where possible.

**VI. Implementation Tactics**

Tasks required to implement and monitor each strategy are listed in this section. With each task, the person responsible for the task, and the target dates are indicated. Best Practice---Having a plan of action with specific tasks ensures that the details are clear and that specific persons are accountable.

TASK	Description	Person Responsible	Date
a.	Submission of applicable housing grants		Varies
b.	Various outreach/marketing		Monthly/Quarterly
c.	Provide community awareness	All Staff	Daily
d.	Research website design		
e.	Review on Quarterly Basis	All Staff	

Increase the number of applicants by \_\_\_% over the course of the year.

TASK	Description	Person Responsible	Date
a.	Launch Website		
b.	Launch Quarterly Minority		

	Advertising		
c.	Launch Weekly Radio Advertising		
d.	Launch Quarterly Newspaper Advertising		
e.	Launch Quarterly Community Outreach		
f.	Participate in Community Functions & Events		Ongoing
g.	Launch Outdoor Advertising		
h.	Launch Direct Mailing		
i.	Launch Flyer Distribution		Ongoing

**VII. Best Practice (prepare a budget) ---Budget**

These are projected costs for the tasks listed above for this 2 year plan to include

\_\_\_\_\_ County and surrounding areas.

TASK	DESCRIPTION	PROJECTED COSTS	TOTAL COST	PROJECTED DATE
Print Ad	Local and surrounding area newspapers including Minority Papers			Quarterly
Radio Ad	_____ (4 spots @\$__ each) Including Minority Ads			Weekly
Direct Mail	Info postcards mailed to residents of selected apt. units			Annually
_____ Event	Annual _____ in the Park, candy & flyer distribution approx. _____ pieces			Annually
Speaking Engagements & Distribution	_____ flyers/brochures distributed to area agencies/groups/businesses			Distribute _____ per year
Printed Postcards	Two-sided info postcards from _____ (_____)			Print _____ per year
Peak Outdoor Advertising	Billboards @ \$____ per mo. With Printing			Monthly
Misc. Booth Rental	Festivals/Fairs (_____ Co Fair, _____)			___ Booths per year
Web design	Create a Self-Help Website			

& updates	with contact information			
		2 YEAR TOTAL		

### VIII. Evaluation of Results

**Best Practice**--A tracking spreadsheet will document what means of marketing our applicants are generated from. This will allow us to evaluate the most effective means of marketing. We will also track the exact dates of each marketing strategy to determine which time of year is the most effective. By monitoring progress, we can judge the success of the marketing plan. If some of the strategies are not working out, we will try to determine why and make adjustments accordingly. Monitoring and evaluations will occur on a regular basis to allow us to make modifications where necessary.