

Transportation Outreach Planner

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Public Outreach Strategies

Public Information Materials

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Recommended Target Groups

Education

College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language

Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability

Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income

Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership

Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity

Age

Seniors

Working Age Adults

Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Educational

Description

Public information materials are any printed documents, displays, audio/video formats, or electronic means of communication that are used to convey information to the public. They are an essential component of any public involvement process in that they provide a way of communicating complex information in a concise and clear way, and have the potential of reaching a large audience.

Special Uses

Public information materials can be used to: ¹

- Summarize a process or communicate complex information
- Create awareness regarding a project, policy, issue, or organization
- Present factual information or a point of view
- Promote action or change
- Provide updates
- Explain legal requirements or policies
- Educate the public
- Generate media coverage

When to Use

Public information materials provide a relatively cost-effective method of providing information to a large group of people within a short amount of time. They can be used to inform the public of a new project, policy, or special event, or to provide on-going updates and information. They are also used for targeted communication with specific groups. For example, an agency may prepare a special publication for a community affected by a new transportation project. In addition, public information materials provide an effective method of reaching people who have trouble reading, including non-English speaking persons, people with low reading proficiency, and small children, since it is possible to use images and other forms of non-written communication to convey a message. ²

Cost

**** Moderate (\$1000 to \$9999)**

The cost of producing and disseminating public information materials can be high. Although some material can be relatively inexpensive to produce, the cost of designing and distributing most professionally produced work to a large target market is generally no less than \$10,000. For television advertising, billboards, and other types of public information material, the cost of production and placement can be even higher. Variables that affect pricing include the type of material that is produced, the volume, and the method of distribution or placement.

Costs can be reduced if the work is performed by in-house staff. However, developing and designing such work can be time consuming and requires investment in software and equipment. It is also possible for agencies to partner with other organizations in the production of public information material in order to help defray some of the expenses. Examples include local high schools and colleges.

Low (up to \$999)

*

Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)

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High (\$10,000 to \$50,000)

Disclaimer: The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.

Very High (Above \$50,000)

* * * *

Time

* 1 to 3 months

Most public information material can be produced within three months. Depending on the complexity of the project, some material may take longer to complete. For example, a video may take several months to film and produce. Print publications can be produced in less than a month, depending on the content and length of the piece.

1 to 3 months

*

6 months to a year

**

Multiyear

Disclaimer: The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for preparing and disseminating public information material:

- **Conduct an information needs analysis.** Prior to investing resources in developing public information material, agencies should determine the purpose of the material and whether there is a need to produce it. If the information is already available in some other forms, there may not be a need for new material, unless the information is dated or needs to be revised. Agencies should avoid producing materials on a regular basis without first assessing the need. Below is a list of useful questions to ask when determining the need for developing public information material:³

- What does the public need to know?
- What do they already know?
- Are there other resources that provide the same information?
- Will the public be interested in learning more?

- **Identify the target audience.** Identifying the target audience will help to determine how best to convey and disseminate the information. This will enable agencies to target and customize materials to different groups.
- **Use a mix of formats to present the information in order to ensure maximum reach.** Agencies should not rely on one marketing method to reach their target audience. They should select a mix of marketing formats in order to maximize exposure. They also need to determine which formats will most likely to be noticed and understood by the target audience. Most public information materials can be categorized into five areas: print, graphic products, audio/visual products, electronic communication, and promotional items, such as pins and t-shirts. The following is a list of the variety of materials that can be used by category:⁵

Print: Print materials include paid advertisement and informational pieces. Informational pieces, such as brochures and newsletters, should be used when the audience needs background information to better understand the message; however, the method of distribution must be planned carefully to ensure the pieces reach the target audience. Print advertisement include newspaper and magazine ads. They offer a way of reaching a wide audience without the cost of printing or mailing; however, they can be expensive. Print materials include:

- Brochures
- Fliers
- Newsletters
- Reports
- News and magazine advertisement
- Inserts in newspapers, utility bills, etc.

Graphic Products: Graphic products are useful for establishing a theme or promoting a message. To be effective, they must be displayed in high traffic areas where people will see them. The message needs to be simple and memorable; preferably limited to one sentence. Images should be used whenever possible to reinforce the message, and the text should be readable from six feet. The key to a good graphic display is simplicity. Graphic products include:

- Billboards
- Posters
- Display boards
- Maps

Audio/Visual Products: Visual and audio products are effective for conveying information in a short amount of time. They are also useful for educational purposes and offer a dynamic and engaging alternative to static text. Videos can be expensive to produce and place on television. However, YouTube offers an inexpensive means of making videos available to the general public. Audio products, such as radio announcements, are less expensive to produce than video, but are also effective mediums for generating interest. Audio/Visual products include:

- Videos
- Audio Recordings
- Television/Radio Commercials
- Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- PowerPoint Presentations

Electronic Communication: As social media and the internet become more accessible to the general public, agencies may be able to reduce the cost of print material by relying more on electronic communication to disseminate information quickly and cost effectively to their target audience. Electronic communication includes:

- Websites
- Email Newsletters or Notices
- Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, You-Tube, etc.)

Promotional Items: Promotional items are used to emphasize a message and create interest. The key to using promotional items is creativity. By placing information in unexpected items, agencies can generate interest and increase visibility. Promotional items include:

- Badges and Buttons
- FastFood Placemats
- Grocery Bags
- Magnets

- **Determine if the production of the public information material should be outsourced.** If the public information material is going to be developed in-house, agencies should assign employees who have strong desktop publishing, graphics, and writing skills to develop the material. However, if the agencies do not have staff with the capabilities of producing professional quality public information material, they should consider outsourcing the project. This is particularly important for highly technical projects, such as a video production. If resources are limited, it may be possible for agencies to partner with other organizations to produce the material, such as local High Schools and colleges.
- **Prepare a timeline.** To develop a timeline, determine when the material will be needed, how long it will take to design, produce, and disseminate, the quantity that will be produced, and how often the material will be used. This type of information will help to ensure that the material is ready and on time when it is needed, whether it is to stock up on existing material or a one-time publication for an event.
- **Develop a strategy for distributing the information.** Prior to developing the public information material, agencies need to have a distribution strategy that outlines the logistics for placement and removal of the items. All arrangements for distribution should be researched before the items are produced to avoid unnecessary costs or delays. This includes obtaining information on any permits that may be needed or making special agreements to display or disseminate materials at events or establishments. The goal should be to place the public information material in areas of high visibility.
- **Present information in an uncluttered way, without a great deal of detail or technical information.** Technical information should be presented in terms that lay people can easily understand. This will help to make the message clearer. More detailed and technical information can be made available upon request to those who want additional information.
- **Obtain feedback from stakeholders and community residents during the preparation of the public information materials.** This will help ensure that the material is conveying the desired message and help to avoid any possible miscommunication.

- **Assess the effectiveness of the public information material after it has been presented to the public.** If the material did not generate the type of results that were expected, agencies should evaluate what did not work. Was it the message, the placement, or the type of format used? This information can be used to inform the development of other material in the future.

Recommended Demographics

Most public information material can be produced within three months. Depending on the complexity of the project, some material may take longer to complete. For example, a video may take several months to film and produce. Print publications can be produced in less than a month, depending on the content and length of the piece.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

- **Make sure public information materials are available to minority, ethnic, and low-income groups.** Such materials can help bring people into the process who might otherwise feel uncomfortable participating. Use of multilingual materials can create goodwill and demonstrate that an agency is trying to reach out to all groups.
- **Maintain a copy of all original files in order to facilitate possible reprints or revisions.** Agencies should maintain the original files for all public information material that is produced. This includes any files related to the production of the material, such as licensing rights that may have been purchased for the use of photographs, music, video, etc. It is also important to maintain information on the company that produced the material, as well as any production specifications related to the work, such as color codes, paper type, etc. This information will help to facilitate future reprints and revisions.
- **Create a library of public information sources.** Maintaining copies of previously produced public information material can serve as an important resource for ideas. It can also help to avoid duplication of work that may already exist. If possible, the library should be made available on the internet, so that the public can have access to the resources that have been produced.
- **Avoid using technical jargon in public information materials.** Information should be written for the lay person to understand. It is generally recommended that material be written at an 8th grade reading level.
- **Avoid statements or images that will date material.** This will help to avoid the need for revisions and reproduction.
- **Encourage private companies and institutions to assist with production costs.** This may involve donating billboard space, paying for printing, producing public service announcements (PSAs), or helping get editorials printed or aired.

Case Studies

R-TRIP, the Redmond Trip Resource & Incentive Program, has created a website that serves as a one-stop site for information related to alternative means of transportation. The site shows how the internet can be used as a powerful public information source. It includes information on bicycling, carpooling, vanpooling, walking, and transit use. Users can also find information on rewards, incentives, commute subsidies, and other online resources. With the support of Microsoft, R-TRIP also provides a free application that enables smartphone users to scan the R-TRIP tag to obtain promotional information (<https://www.gortrip.com/home/home.aspx>).⁶

The City of Santa Barbara, in partnership with Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, Choose to Reuse, and the California Grocers Association show how public information material can be used to enhance awareness and promote change. Through the “Where’s Your Bag?” campaign, they have used several forms of public information material to promote the use of reusable shopping bags. They provide signage and educational material to participating stores free of charge to remind customers to bring back their bags. The materials include parking lot signs, in-store posters with the Where’s Your Bag? message, information cards for customers, buttons for employees, and windshield decals for baggers to give to customers. In addition, they have developed a television documentary and provide regular media releases to keep the public informed and engaged (http://www.santabarbaraca.gov/recycling-trash/Reuse_bags.htm).⁷

For Further Information

The Community Tool Box: The site provides a practical, step-by-step guide for:⁸

- Creating Posters and Flyers: http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1069.aspx
- Creating Brochures: http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1071.aspx
- Creating Newsletters: http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1068.aspx

- Preparing Public Service Announcements: http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1065.aspx

Sources

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- ² FHWA, “ Information Materials .”
- ³ United States Environmental Protection Agency, “ Tips on Developing Effective Transportation Air Quality Public Outreach Materials,” Office of Mobile Sources, Michigan, 1997, < <http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/pdf/r97005.pdf> >.
- ⁴ FHWA, “ Information Materials .”
- ⁵ United States Environmental Protection Agency Office, 4.
- ⁶ R-TRIP, “R edmond Trip Resource & Incentive Program ,” R-TRIP, 11 August 2011, < <https://www.gortrip.com/home/home.aspx> >.
- ⁷ City of Santa Barbara Environmental Services, “Recycling and Trash Information: Where’s Your Bag,” City of Santa Barbara 11 August 2011, < http://www.santabarbaraca.gov/recycling-trash/Reuse_bags.htm >.
- ⁸ Rabinowitz, Phil, “Chapter 6, Promoting Interest in Community Issues ,” The Community Tool Box, 11 August 2011, < http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter_1005.aspx >.