MODULE 7

Visibility and Communication

2nd EDITION 2019
Acknowledgments

This module is part of a series of modules in the Professional Association Strengthening Project. The project has been completed under the auspices of the Survive and Thrive Global Development Alliance, which includes a partnership of professional associations and the private sector with support from the United States Agency for International Development. The mandate of Survive and Thrive includes working to strengthen health professional associations in nations so they become vocal and effective advocates for professional education, clinical excellence, and evidenced-based practice in maternal, newborn and child health.

Contributors

Edits to the 2nd edition were made by Carla Eckhardt, Senior Director, Global Women’s Health & Special Issues in Women’s Health, and Elizabeth O’Connell, Director of Development, Underserved and International Women’s Health Programs, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Authors for the first edition included Kayla Woodward, Global Initiatives Specialist, and Cynthia Vlasich, Director of Global Initiatives, from Sigma Theta Tau International.

Overall project management for the Professional Association Strengthening Project was provided by Kate McHugh, American College of Nurse-Midwives, Director of Global Outreach.

Special thanks to the Contributors and Reviewers on this entire project which include professionals from the following health professional associations:

Sponsorship

The Survive and Thrive Global Development Alliance is a project supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Special funding for this project came from the Laerdal Foundation of Norway. For this we give thanks to Tore Laerdal for his commitment to strengthening professional associations and his leadership within the Survive and Thrive partners community.

Where to find the complete the Professional Association Strengthening manual:

The complete set of Professional Association Strengthening modules can be downloaded for no fee at: www.StrongProfAssoc.org.

Copyright ©2019, American College of Nurse-Midwives.
Table of Contents

Why Do Professional Associations Need Visibility and Communications Efforts? .................................................. 1

What is a Visibility and Communications Plan? ........................................................................................................ 1

Steps to Creating a Visibility/Communications Plan ................................................................................................. 2
  1. Perform an Organization Self-Assessment ........................................................................................................ 2
  2. Set Goals and Strategies ..................................................................................................................................... 2
  3. Determine Your Unique Value .......................................................................................................................... 3
  4. Craft Your Message ........................................................................................................................................... 3
    Put the Audience First ......................................................................................................................................... 3
    Create a Call to Action ...................................................................................................................................... 4
    Engage Your Audience ..................................................................................................................................... 4
  5. Choose your Tools ............................................................................................................................................. 4
    Decide your Online and Offline Visibility and Communications Mix ................................................................. 4
  6. Define Budget, Timeline, and Resources ........................................................................................................... 5
    Determine Your Budget ...................................................................................................................................... 5
    Develop a Calendar and Assign Roles ............................................................................................................... 5
  7. Measure and Track Your Results ...................................................................................................................... 5

References .................................................................................................................................................................. 6
Why Do Professional Associations Need Visibility and Communications Efforts?

Professional associations (PAs) do not sell goods and services, such as clothing, cars, or phones. Their products are not tangible items that can be purchased with money. As noted in Module 4: Functions of a Professional Association, the products of a PA are visibility, influence and program implementation.

A well-known and well-respected PA provides the following:

- A unified voice for the members of the profession that strengthens the reputation of the profession and increases professional opportunities for members,
- Advocacy for high-quality clinical services for the populations served, and
- Advocacy for health policy and educational standards.

In order to perform these roles, the PA must be known to its members, other PAs, the government and other organizations working in the sector. Visibility is the key to success because an association that is known and recognized can have a more significant effect.

Efforts to enhance visibility for a PA will focus on many of the traditional components of marketing. However, the goal of the plan is not to sell a product but rather to increase membership, member commitment, and member activity. This leads to an increased sphere of influence for the PA.

Members will pay their membership dues when they see a value added by becoming a member. The clear identification of the value of membership is at the heart of any visibility and communication plan.

Objectives

- To discuss 4 components of a plan to increase visibility.
- To describe the steps in the development of a visibility and communication plan for members and outside stakeholders.
- To help a PA describe the value of membership.
- To provide case studies that represent simple and effective strategies to engage members and recruit new members.

What is a Visibility and Communications Plan?

Effective organizations use a range of strategies that work together to create awareness, produce a positive image, and communicate effectively with a targeted audience. A visibility and communication plan provides the structure for associations to demonstrate their value and grow and retain their membership.

The terms visibility and communications cannot be used interchangeably. Promotion of the association occurs through a purposeful plan to be visible in the health system and society at large. Visibility occurs through presence at events, at meetings, and through outreach and activities. Individual members assist to increase visibility through attendance at events and meetings on behalf of the association.

Communications represents the institutional perspective, established position statement, and connects that statement to the interests of the target audience. Best practice combines the most effective strategies to increase visibility with the most effective communications approaches.
Professional associations that use a formal visibility and communications plan hold a distinct advantage over those that take a less structured and thought out approach. A well-organized plan serves as a roadmap that provides guidance and ensures that associations gain the credibility and loyalty they need to succeed in their missions. This module provides the necessary tools to create and implement a visibility and communications plan.

**Steps to Creating a Visibility/Communications Plan**

The steps outlined below are taken from the Network for Good (7 Steps to Creating Your Best Nonprofit Marketing Plan Ever). This information is used with permission from the Network for Good.

1. **Perform an Organization Self-Assessment**
   
   The first step in creating an effective visibility and communications plan is to assess what activities are currently taking place at the association. Follow the recommendations below to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of current outreach to members and the society at large:
   
   - **Define your audience(s).** Who is your audience? How do you treat them? How often do you contact them?
   - **Map your messages.** What have you been saying to your audience? Are these messages effective and consistent?
   - **Define your channels.** What communication methods do you use and how often? Do you define different messages to different audiences?

2. **Set Goals and Strategies**

   A properly organized plan supports itself like a pyramid and is interlinked from top to bottom. Start at the top! Set goals. For each goal, create objectives; for each objective, create strategies; and for each strategy, create tactics.
3. **Determine Your Unique Value**

What makes your association the only one of its kind? Determine your unique value proposition by breaking down the five Ws and an H:

- **Who** are your constituents?
- **What** is your issue area?
- **Where** are your constituents located?
- **When** do they need you?
- **Why** are you important?
- **How** are you different?

Think about what happens at the intersection of what’s important to your audience, what your organization is good at, and what are you doing that no one else is.

4. **Craft Your Message**

**Put the Audience First**

Now that you know where you’d like to go, you must determine how to get there by appealing to the values of the target audience. Instead of creating communications about the organization, focus on what matters to your audience. Referred to as “Me marketing”, this approach forces you to find the benefits of what you offer to the individuals you target.
To focus outreach, ensure that messages meet the following criteria:

**Connecting**
- Connect to things your audience cares about, such as education, issues relevant to their profession, saving time, feeling good about themselves, feeling powerful, etc.

**Rewarding**
- Identify and offer a compelling reward for taking action. Remember that good rewards are immediate, personal, credible, and reflective of your audience’s values.

**Actionable**
- Have a clear call to action. Good actions are specific, feasible, and easy to visualize. They should advance your mission.

**Memorable**
- It’s memorable if it’s different, catchy, personal, tangible, and desirable.

**Create a Call to Action**

A call to action is an instruction to the audience to provoke an immediate response. An effective call to action has five necessary attributes.

- **It is specific.** Focus on a precise, specific action.
- **It is feasible.** Your action needs to be easy and not overwhelming to potential supporters.
- **It is prioritized.** Keep in mind that your audience can’t do everything.
- **It is free of barriers.** Honor your audience’s time by being as straightforward as possible. Remove unnecessary steps.
- **It is filmable.** Help the audience visualize what they will be doing.

**Engage Your Audience**

Now that you have a message, you need to engage the target audience to pay attention:

- **Cross-channel promotion.** Give supporters online and offline options, and make the pieces work together.
- **Make marketing a conversation.** Enable a two-way conversation with your supporters.
- **Be accessible, easy, encouraging, and intimate.**
- **Show accountability.**
- **Make it easy for people to find you.** Publish your office location and phone number. Create a website.
- **Segment your way to success.** Talk to your supporters differently depending on who they are.
- **Test!**
- **Make your supporters your messengers.** Ask them to spread the word among their colleagues and friends.

PAs have two audiences: Members and External Audiences

Targeting messages to each depends on what you want to share and what you want the audience to know or do. Be clear about which audience you are talking to with each message.

**EXAMPLE OF A VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION EFFORT**

Sierra Leone: A radio station played short jingles in various local languages with pregnancy health messages from the Midwives Association.

5. Choose your Tools

**Decide your Online and Offline Visibility and Communications Mix**

When it comes to deciding on a marketing mix, there is no single recipe for success. It will depend on what makes most sense for your audience. Consider the following tools:

**Online**
- Website
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)
- Paid advertising
- Public relations placements on websites/blogs
- Special events pages
- Email outreach (e-newsletter, fundraising appeals)

**EXAMPLE OF A VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION EFFORT**

An obstetric society promoted early recognition of preterm labor through billboards and radio ads.
Offline

- Printed collateral (brochures, annual reports)
- Direct mail
- Newsletter
- Paid advertising (outdoor, print)
- Public relations placements (TV, magazines, newspapers)
- Special events

EXAMPLE

The Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI) has Twitter accounts for both the association and the Manyata program

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) uses Blogs, Twitter, and Member Emails including headlines and calls-to-action

The Office of Global Health at ACOG distributes opportunities through its listserv to subscribed members and interested parties

La Federación Latinoamericana de Sociedades de Obstetricia y Ginecología (FASOG) and the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) have Twitter accounts

6. Define Budget, Timeline, and Resources
Determine Your Budget

Now that you’ve determined the right mix for outreach, it’s important to decide how much money you need to produce materials; email; offline outreach expenses; and paid media, such as advertising or search engine marketing. Track your budget depending on the level of detail you need.

Develop a Calendar and Assign Roles

A calendar is one of the best ways to coordinate efforts to increase visibility and communication. Start by listing major priorities and any regularly occurring outreach and fill in the tasks to make them happen. The calendar may be organized by audience, channel, or specific program.

Clearly outline who on the team will be responsible for managing and completing each action item. Board, leaders and volunteers can amplify messages through their own communications channels, including Twitter, their organization’s website and publications materials and at in-person meetings and events. Be sure that leadership has talking points and knows what you want to say!

EXAMPLE OF A VISIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION EFFORT

Georgia: Midwives were little known and little recognized in the health system. With a small grant from a non-governmental organization, a pamphlet was made and widely distributed throughout the country.

When to Communicate:

- Announcing a new program
- Hitting milestones for the organization (ex: number of members) or program
- Event
- End of program with results and impact

7. Measure and Track Your Results

Regularly review results to verify that goals have been met and to determine if new strategies are in order. Carefully measuring and tracking results allows the proper allocation of funds and best return for each dollar spent. Include the following items to round out the evaluation plan.

- Timeline. Determine how often you will review your plans: monthly, quarterly, annually?
- Measure success. Measure success by what you want to accomplish. Consider items such as website analytics, email open rates, and number of volunteers signed up.
- Evaluate. Revisit Step 1 and perform an organization self-assessment to determine how visibility and communications activities have changed and/or improved your association’s situation.
REFERENCES


Useful Resources

- American Society of Association Executives
  https://www.asaecenter.org/resources/topics/marketing-and-communications

- Network for Good
  www.networkforgood.com/resources

- Nonprofit Marketing Guide
  www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/resources

- Nonprofit Marketing/Promotion/Social Media Resources
  https://www.thebalancesmb.com/starting-a-nonprofit-4161500