Public education and outreach involves using effective mechanisms and programs, guided by a detailed outreach strategy, to engage the public's interest your issue. A key factor to consider when developing a strategy is that the public has varying levels of background knowledge of your issue, which could range from casual knowledge to "Never heard of it." So you will need to take a multi-pronged approach to effectively communicate your message and achieve the desired public response.

PE TIP SHEET NO. 25:

Developing a Public Outreach Program

BY

John A. Giachino
Chair, FWEA Public Education Committee

The goals of effective public education and outreach programs are to:

- Generate basic awareness of your issue,
- Educate at a more sophisticated level using more substantive content, and
- Build on existing recognition of the issue to prompt behavior changes that achieve the objectives of your initiative.

Fabricating Your Strategy

Once you have appropriately framed your issue, construct a strategy that identifies and maps needed actions. The value of laying out a comprehensive outreach strategy is that the people implementing the program can use it to focus on actions that will provide the biggest bang. The strategy will aid them in recognizing opportunities to leverage other programs or partner with community organizations and invest in new program efforts for maximum effect.

Developing an Operating Plan

Your operating plan should show how outreach is integral to accomplishing your initiative's goals. Take advantage of cross-linkages with other outreach programs that support your initiative and create efficiencies in your overall program and the value of your outreach effort.

A written operating plan will become the guide for implementing your initiative. When structuring your plan, include sections that discuss the purpose and goals your initiative including background, objectives, and the detailed plan of public education and outreach activities. Other elements of a good plan include:

- A list of all partners that participated in developing the strategy
- An executive summary
- A glossary that includes definitions of any potentially unfamiliar terms and acronyms used in the strategy

Plan Components

To develop an operating plan, take into account these five components (1) Goals (2) Target Audiences (3) Messages (4) Format and Distribution (5) Evaluation.

Goals

Multiple goals are common for an outreach strategy. With specific goals you can more efficiently spend dollars to achieve your mission. For example, consider a non-point source pollution management public outreach program. When addressing the public's gardening practices, an example of an outreach goal might be: "Increase residential awareness of nutrient runoff and encourage behaviors that will reduce nutrient pollution in local streams and lakes."

You should consider how the public is affected and why they would care, as you develop outreach goals. Again using the non-point source pollution management public outreach program example, another goal might be to increase the public's awareness of the connection between protecting their rivers and lakes and improving their quality of life, recreational opportunities, scenic amenities, community value, property value, and public health.

Some other goals should address creating more institutional and community linkages to solutions to your issue. Other groups with similar interests can help you communicate your messages and influence public perception.

Target Audiences

While broad education on your initiative can be helpful, you may want the strategy to identify segments of the population who play decision-making roles. Other examples of target audiences might educators, elected officials, civic organizations and community service groups. Understand their behavior motivations and communication patterns. Be aware of their commonly used methods of communication (e.g., newspapers/radio stations). Seek feedback from small focus groups of the target audience with whose help you can better understand them. Research can tell you where the audience needs help to overcome barriers that block you from achieving initiative goals (for example, all initiative messages are in English, but a large section of the audience speaks Spanish). It is worth getting to know the target audiences specifically to develop outreach messages that both resonate with, and more importantly, reach them.

Some audiences need more technical and substantive messages. This aspect of outreach could involve more substantive education, possibly short training courses, live presentations and slideshows, handbooks, posters with educational content and captioned illustrations, and Web-based training modules, or identifying websites that promote common goals. All messages should include clear information on where to get additional resources, for example, a non-point source pollution management program web site or a non-point source pollution hotline phone number.

Messages

Communication is a two-way street. The value of pitching a message that the targeted audience responds to is very important. To do so, use the techniques perfected by the mega-advertising firms that effectively get people to believe in, and purchase their client's products. Incorporate the following points in your message.

- Tell the audience how they will benefit by taking actions your are asking them to take.
- Address specific action steps that the audience should - don't be vague.
- Give the audience incentives to accept suggested actions or behaviors.
- Use humor.
- Use a variety of media.
- Engage different senses using color and creative design, catchy music and dialog, and great visuals. Visuals and graphics are especially important for audiences who speak different languages.
- Use trusted, recognized, and popular community figures as messengers.

The message may need to be completely different from the goal. Take a water conservation public outreach program for example. One goal would be to reduce the amount of water applied to lawns in the community. A message like "Reduce the amount of water that you apply to your lawn" is not likely to get the same interest or response as one that makes the audience want to understand your issue like, "Does your lawn have a drinking problem?"

Consider short training courses if your message is more substantive and targeted to specific groups. With our water conservation example, you may need a short training course geared specifically to horticulturists and landscapers on plants and shrubs that require minimal amounts of watering. The training course might be delivered live by trained volunteers and complemented by a web-available slideshow, or a poster, or a reference handbook given to training session attendees with illustrative photos and instructive captions showing water-wise landscaping techniques and less thirsty plant species.

Format and Distribution

You should consider the receiving audience to help determine message formats and plan the distribution. The outreach strategy should ideally employ a variety of complementary formats to help reach diverse audiences. For broad audiences, media such as radio or television, or movie theater slides, might be appropriate. Messages can refer to a web site for more information. Example formats for targeted audiences can include:

- Paper-based educational/curriculum exercise packets for school programs
- Fridge magnets and calendars for home-owners
- Billboards or posters for public transportation users
- A kiosk to showcase the program at county fairs, farmers markets and public gatherings
- A web-based training module for educators, with an incentive like a "certificate of completion" from your group

As previously mentioned, you should also take into account partnership opportunities with local agencies and businesses as you plan format and distribution. Using our non-point source pollution

management public outreach program example, messages on storm drain pollution prevention could be distributed on yard-waste bags distributed by the municipality or sold at the local hardware store. Partnering with local cinemas, newspapers, local festivals, and local sporting events are all ways you can use the power of public gatherings and media to take your messages to ever-wider audiences.

A program web site is highly advantageous. It should provide information for more detailed education on your issue and links to other topic related web sites. It should address different audiences, such as "homeowners," "kids," or "businesses" and also address different activities, such as "what you can do," and "how to get involved."

Evaluation

All successful programs incorporate methods of evaluation, to help them see what works and discard what does not. Evaluation can involve administrative indicators (e.g., were timeframes of planned activities met?) and social indicators (e.g., the number of media impressions or the number of people who have been reached by the program).

Evaluation can help you allocate resources. For example, initiative managers can better estimate the time staff or volunteers will need for an activity or product or evaluate whether available financial, human and other resources match continued operating plan requirements. Evaluation will also help justify future funding or if the scope of the activity or product must be expanded or scaled down.

An easy way to evaluate your outreach strategy is to lay out activities and projects in a table that includes time frame, responsible party, resources needed, and evaluation. For our non-point source pollution management public outreach program example, consider the following sample operating plan evaluation matrix.

Sample Operating Plan Matrix

Goal: Increase awareness of residential nutrient runoff and encourage behaviors that will reduce nutrient pollution in local streams and lakes.

Objective: Post educational posters in Greater Herndon/Carlisle Metropolitan Transit Authority subway stations.

Activity/ Product	Evaluation Indicators	Time Frame/Due Date	Responsible Party	Resources Needed		Status/Comments
Develop 5 posters for 7 subway stations and post them.	• Number of posters hung • Number of hits on county Web site before and after posters are hung • Post-project random phone survey to measure impact of posters	• Contact subway authority: February 1 • Develop text/theme for each poster: February 15 • Develop layout: March 17 • Send to printer: March 24 • Hang posters: April 1 (prior to Earth Day)	Communications director of county Water Division in Public Works Department	**Staff time** 40 hours	**Dollars** • Printing: $2,000 ($1,000 to be donated by Trout Unlimited) • Subway ad fee: $300 for 6 months (possibly donated by transit authority)	Communications director will contact Greater Herndon/Carlisle Metropolitan Transit Authority director to inquire about procedural requirements and whether they might be willing to waive subway fee for 6 months.

Objective: Educate local businesses about proper nutrient management by developing and implementing a speakers bureau.

Activity/ Product	Evaluation Indicators	Time Frame/Due Date	Responsible Party	Resources Needed		Status/Comments
Develop slide show, handout materials, and evaluation form	• Based on evaluation forms collected, how well the materials were received	• Develop draft slide show text: January 17 • Identify appropriate photos: January 17 • Develop 1-page evaluation form: January 21 • Submit materials to reviewers: January 22 • Finalize all materials and make copies: January 31	Public affairs assistant	**Staff time** 60 hours	**Dollars** Handouts: $10 Name tags: $5	Try to have a good mix of business types in each presentation.
Conduct three 2-hour presentations	• Number of attendees at presentations • How many presentations were made • How many follow-up phone calls were received because of information presented • Based on evaluations, whether attendees benefited from the presentations	• Make initial calls to businesses to gauge interest: January 10 • Secure meeting locations: January 20 • Send invitations: January 27 • Conduct presentations: February 19–21	Public affairs assistant to schedule presentations Community liaison to give presentations	**Staff time** Schedule presentations: 15 hours Presentations: three 2-hour presentations (6 hours)	**Dollars** Meeting facility (donated by local businesses) Pizza and soft drinks for meeting: $50	At presentations, look for attendees that could be potential presenters for future presentations.

Reach Out and Touch Someone

Mark Twain wrote, ""They did not know it was impossible, so they did it!" Don't let not knowing how to plan and implement an education and outreach program scare you away from communicating your issue to gain support. Using a resourceful strategy, a functional operating plan and effective evaluation techniques, you can achieve what once seemed impossible to you. So Mr. Phelps, should you decide to accept the public outreach mission "possible", do so with confidence and the assurance that you can change people's attitudes and behaviors.

John Giachino is a principal with Boyle Engineering Corporation and serves as regional director, client services for the firm. He is based in Orlando, FL.

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