
MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS, END HUNGER NOW AND CITY FOOD BANK
FROM: STACEY RAY ROTH
SUBJECT: MERGER COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
DATE: 11/8/2015
CC:

MERGER COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

End Hunger Now and City Food Bank have worked closely for decades utilizing complementary approaches toward a shared common goal. The integration of the organizations will provide many benefits, including a stronger brand presence, greater efficiency and effectiveness in serving increasing need, and more. At this time it is important to develop a consistent communications strategy to ensure that we effectively communicate the message of this transition in a way that establishes the merger as a positive collaboration and step towards better serving the needs of the hungry in the community. The messaging will be targeted at two main audience groups: donors and partner agencies, which includes businesses and organizations.

Objectives of the communications plan include creating awareness of the transition (emphasizing collaboration and partnership), re-focusing and reinforcing the updated brand identity (and establishing the new consolidated organization as a food security leader in the community), and engaging the community with food and hunger issues. Specific strategies to achieve these objectives are outlined below.

Audience

It is important to keep a mindset focused on target audiences to systematically focus communications towards audience values, needs, wants, and perceptions (Worth, 2014). Our audience focus for the purposes of these communications is primarily donors and partner agencies, which includes food distributors and partnering businesses and organizations. These are individuals, groups, businesses, agencies and organizations that contribute funds, supplies, or food donations, and are our main constituents. Donors are generally middle to upper class classes and working class. According to the *2013 Giving USA* study, people between 49 and 67 years old account for 43% of charitable giving. The study found that 63% of Baby Boomers donated clothing and other goods to charities, 52% gave to local social service providers and 46% gave to places of worship. Americans age 68 and older give more than Baby Boomers but there are fewer of those individuals to give.

Highest priority is communicating to current and prospective organizational, business and agency partners as these groups are often the greatest contributors and are the most sustainable partnerships. This includes food distributors, growers, packers, retailers, manufacturers, hospitals and health related businesses, grocery stores, schools, food-service businesses, libraries and churches. Second is targeting an older, medium to high income demographic who are more likely to donate, typically over age 50, including all current donors and supports, and especially those affiliated with religious or

community organizations. Lastly, reaching out to younger individuals and families, especially those associated with religious, community and health organizations.

Strategies and Messaging

A variety of communication strategies and specific messaging should be employed to create awareness of the transition among the above audiences, while also refocusing and reinforcing the organization's brand, and engaging the community with food and hunger issues.

The first step will be to develop specific messaging to clearly communicate the intentions and results of the organizational merge concisely, honestly and in such a way as to portray the positive and professional nature of the decision. I recommend developing specific talking points, an elevator pitch and specific lexicon that can then be utilized in media trainings with staff and volunteers to ensure consistency of messaging at all levels of the organization. An official press release would then be disseminated, media interviews arranged and a press conference organized for consistency and efficiency of messaging to media. In addition to the press release, the press package should also include curated images, and possibly a very brief video highlighting the positive transition, focus on partnership, and the new status of the consolidated organization as a leader in the community, now more prepared than ever to tackle issues vital to the health and wellbeing of our community.

The messaging materials, media trainings and press package will provide the foundation for communications about the transition. From there we will be able to extend communications into other areas, referring back to these materials for consistency. An important part of the communications strategy will be updating websites, blogs and social media for both organizations, while also developing external communications to the existing and potential constituencies of both End Hunger Now and City Food Bank, such as a formalized email, and inclusion in the e-newsletter. This is an ideal time to strengthen the social media presence of City Food Bank, establishing a more robust blog as well as increasing activity and experimentation through platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media strategies might include content creation and curation, inclusion of diverse media (video, images, links), calls to action, relating the organization to the broader field and issues, creating relationships and two-way dialogue, encouraging interaction and response, providing opportunities for audience participation and feedback, encouraging contribution of stories and ideas, and "media-catching" or providing content for the media (Briones, 2010).

In the meantime, it would be in the best interest of the consolidated organization to have a positive and active presence at related community events and conferences around food, health, nutrition, and community wellbeing, which would provide an opportunity to generate awareness of the transition, updated brand, as well as possible public speaking opportunities. I recommend implementing strategies to directly engage organizations and individuals, hosting open forums for collaborative partners and agencies, and eventually organizing a specific fundraising and food-drive event to bring together constituencies and celebrate the renewed momentum of City Food Bank.

These strategic communications will also provide an opportunity to renew focus around food and hunger issues in the community, refocus and reinforce the brand and establish the new, consolidated organization as a leader in the community. Together we can take advantage of this opportunity by implementing social marketing strategies to influence behavior, or encourage action through donations and involvement (Worth, 2014). An effective way of doing this, while also communicating the transition, would be to share stories of hunger, personalizing the work of the organization, amplifying the voices of those experiencing hunger, and creating an emotional connection to the audience.

Messaging should focus on the positive reasons and outcomes of the organizational merge, emphasizing the effect that the transition will have in the face of increasing need. Such focus should emphasize the strong partnership between the two organizations, shared goals and complementary approaches, related programs and services, and the strong sense in coming together to strengthen impact while lowering costs to better serve the need in the community. Messaging should also include future organizational strategies and goals, and how the organization is now better able to meet community need, positioning City Food Bank as a leader in food security within the community. Lastly, messaging should generate awareness around the issues, utilizing stories of hunger, especially through web and social media, to create an emotional connection and encourage action. In essence, messaging will 1) create awareness of the transition 2) reinforce the organization's brand and mission; and 3) engage the community with food and hunger issues.

References

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