

Spreading the Word: A Survey of Marketing and Branding Among Rural Community Foundations

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Marketing Definition

One action (brochure, event, annual report, advertising, press release, publications, web page, direct mail) **does not a marketing program make.**

Marketing is the sum of a variety of activities that make something you want to accomplish -- happen.

Such as funding increases, an event fills with people, the phone rings like crazy.

Successful marketing programs are built on the following elements:

(From Fenton Communications Nine Laws of Successful Advocacy Communications)

- Measurable Goals: A clear understanding of what you are trying to accomplish. If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there.
- Target audience: Have extensive knowledge of whom you are trying to reach and what moves them.
- Develop clear, simple, concise messages that resonate with your audience. Go for the heart first, then the mind. Avoid literal sclerosis.
- Develop a strategy before tactics: Create an exciting and innovative plan for delivering your message that moves you towards your goal.
- Make a case for action: Tell people what you want them to do, how to do it, and why now.
- Match strategies with tactics. Think of the best way to reach the people you need. Then decide what best fits resources and goals. Use a variety of ways to communicate your messages.
- Budget for success: Spend what you need to accomplish your goals.
- Rely on experts when needed.

When all you can think of is cattle a definition of branding to chew on

Branding is

- Understanding who your audience is, who your major competitors are, how you are similar and different to your competitors, what your audience (donors, financial advisors, potential donors) thinks of everything about you — from your logo to your services. Then, promoting your community foundation in a consistent way that sets you apart from competition and encourages loyalty.
- People use the word branding like marketing to describe many different strategies, but in general it is a holistic marketing approach in which a group's mission and vision come together in ways that build allegiance among target audience. Branding helps all your constituents say and understand, They are the people who
- Branding is focused identity and integrated communications. It attempts to define the essence of the organization, what it stands for, and then converts that understanding into marketing strategies that result in desired actions.
- The branding process is built on market research (donor surveys/prospective donor surveys that helps you understand what motivates those audiences), internal audit, focus group research, developing a positioning statement and messages, and from those, deciding how to present the foundation visually — in everything from logo to letterhead to direct mail.
- One final thing, your foundation already has an identity, and is already a brand; it's really a question of whether you are defining, articulating, and managing that identity to your advantage.

Role of Communications/Marketing in Community Foundations

One way to distinguish between Communications/Marketing functions and Development:

- Marketing helps raise awareness of your foundation and develops an image of the foundation in people's minds.
- Awareness and image are built on frequency.
- You build interest by differentiating your foundation from others — by creating a unique position.
- The donor must be in the market to respond, and must see possible fit to their needs.
- Marketing/Communications are also extremely important in maintaining loyalty among donors. This is where branding efforts have the most potential to backfire if not done right — by altering the image so the foundation is not recognizable to the donor or giving poor service.

Scan of the Field

Arkansas:

\$29 million, 20 affiliates, covering 20 counties

Arizona:

\$300 million, five regions, 11 affiliates

Maine:

\$99 million; 8 county funds serving 9 counties

New Hampshire:

\$237 million, 6 divisions

Structure/Model

Arkansas and Maine:

Area Funds: Single community foundation with individual discretionary funds, dedicated to a particular rural area and advised by local volunteer advisors.

Arizona and New Hampshire:

Federation: Central Community Foundation with one of more mini-CF divisions — central foundation and divisions perform most of all standard CF functions.

- Mini-foundation in this case refers to component funds, not separate 501c3
- In case of Federation model, main foundation does provide back office support on some functions, including marketing, finance, and investment.

A few distinguishing features

Arkansas:

- Received \$19 million grant from Walton Family Foundation three years ago to create affiliates in counties statewide.
- Among other things, the grant funds very part-time executive directors in every county, development training for advisors, and the creation of operating funds to cover operating costs.

Arizona:

- Arizona has big metropolitan areas and very rural areas. The foundation has developed a clear marketing strategy for work with both, and even distinguishes between differences in rural communities.
- The foundation has paid attention to branding organization-wide, including with affiliates.

Maine:

- Maine recently went through a branding process, and began to invest in marketing.
- Before that, MCF had a first generation communications program -- tools (publications and a web page) to communicate with key constituents (board members, donors, grantees).
- Second generation communications focused on expanding the circle to reach others. To do this, MCF looked at its identity, clarified and segmented audiences, services, and their contribution to the state.
- From there, they developed messages to reach targeted constituencies and identified the best means for promoting their offerings. Tools used in this stage included market research, including donor surveys and focus groups, advertising, and media relations.

New Hampshire:

- The first foundation to organize with division in the federation model
- Considers all their work rural. Has been very successful in the state, even referring to the organization as an 800-lb gorilla. They did this with a strong strategy and leader, but without a designated marketing function (until two years ago), and without paying attention to the rules of branding.

Approaches to Rural Marketing

Arkansas:

- No designated marketing function. Entirely up to each county to promote affiliates. ACF provides them with ACF donor packets that all say ACF on them. The packet includes a flyer that lists affiliates, but it up to affiliates to customize.
- The affiliate program has helped raise awareness of the foundation, just by the addition of many more ambassadors. (20 affiliates: 20 executive directors, 200 board members, community and media contacts.)

Arizona:

- In terms of marketing, they don't mix oil and water (metro and urban). They have separate strategies for each.
- They do have a consistent brand image in terms of logo, color, and look. Each affiliate has its own logo, but the logo is the same, except for the letter, designating region, as the main foundation. (For instance, the main foundation logo is the state with an A in it. But for affiliates, Flagstaff has F, Sedona an S, and so on.)

Maine:

- Awareness of MCF has grown through its county fund presence in 9 counties. This awareness has been reinforced with targeted media relations, promoting grant making quarterly, and making the connection between the foundation's other activities in these counties.

New Hampshire:

- All their work is rural. Messages are delivered based on whom they are talking to, not where they are delivering them.
- When divisions were first established, each one had its own name, logo, look, and tagline. No consistent connection was made to the main foundation. We have done everything we can to confuse people. This approach helped build local loyalty and support early on, but now is a marketing nightmare. There are plans afoot to create a consistent image for the foundation.

Most Effective Formal, Organized Efforts, Techniques and Materials

Arkansas:

- Local leadership, the right staff and money. Identifying the right local leadership to build support for the affiliate. With the right leadership, anything is possible -- even in the poorest counties there is success.
- Now have \$19 million over 10 years to invest in counties. The currently have 20 affiliates. In the 80s, they had eight affiliates. They would go into the communities and have to leave because the foundation didn't have the internal infrastructure or budget to support outreach. Five years ago, ACF got its first grant to hire a staff person and pay for travel and outreach. That initial grant to support staff and infrastructure was the first important step. Now, the Walton grant enables them to underwrite costs, provides the money to get started and the headquarters to help.

Arizona:

- Consistent image and individualized logos. Everything has the same look and feel, but reflects regional differences.
- All material acknowledges affiliates relationship with main foundation. Main office reviews each press release before it goes out.
- Currently developing an affiliate brochure for the Arizona CF Network that will have a pocket in the back with individual 4-panel brochures and individual gift cards.
- They look at demographics and then decide techniques. In more prosperous rural areas, they advertise on slides in movie theaters and on public radio. While in poorer areas, they use flyers and word-of-mouth and the local country music station.
- In some instances, they will pay more to have the right look. One rural community did not want to have a color brochure because it looked too Phoenix, so they paid more to create it in black and white.

Maine:

- Targeted media relations, by promoting grant-making other activity (donor advised funds, scholarship funds).
Leveraging the foundation s impact on the county.

New Hampshire:

- Current and prospective donor survey told them that:
 1. Media relations
 2. Publications: donor handbook/introduction to foundation brochure
 3. Events, such as house parties
 4. Advertising on public radio worked well.
- Surveys told them that web site was not popular, but they ignored that and are doing a major redesign, based on trends and attitudes about the web.

Most Effective Informal Rural Marketing Efforts

All foundations say

- **Personal contact**
- **One-on-one meetings**
- **Word of mouth referrals**

Strategies and Techniques For Engaging the Media

- It is not hard to engage the media in rural areas.
- Get to know local media, develop tools — good media lists and contacts.
- Draft and send regular press releases.
- Pitch stories after grants are awarded.
- Involve local boards in outreach to media.

Targeted Rural Audiences

Arkansas:

- Community leaders: people who can enlist the commitment and involvement of others, and who can understand the benefits of an endowment and grant making for their communities.

Arizona:

- Donors
- Potential Donors
- Professional Advisors

Maine:

- Donors
- Potential donors

New Hampshire:

- Donors and potential donors
- Board, incorporators, staff
- Opinion leaders
- General public

Foundation Staff/Board Involved in Marketing

Arkansas:

- Vice president of Development
- Affiliate coordinators
- Executive directors
- Local boards

Arizona:

- Vice president of Marketing
- Regional managers
- Boards

Maine:

- Director of Marketing and Communications
- Local advisory boards
- County fund staff/President

New Hampshire:

- Director of Communications and Marketing
- Communications Assistant
- Senior Vice President of Development
- Chief Operating Officer
- President
- Regional Directors
- Director of Planned Giving

Marketing budgets

Arkansas:

- \$70,000 statewide, mostly publications and website.

Arizona:

- \$230,000, down from \$350,000 last year. Of that \$3,500 or a total of \$45,000 is devoted to affiliates to do grassroots marketing. They choose how they want to spend it.

Maine:

- \$150,000 for statewide marketing, including advertising in targeted publications.

New Hampshire:

- \$153,000 for statewide efforts.

Tracking and monitoring marketing activities

Arizona:

- Most of advertising happens in the 4th quarter, and from calls received, know that radio works better than print, public radio works in certain parts of the state, movie theater advertising works well in some rural areas.

Maine:

- Track where people hear about foundation on fund establishment form.
- Donor survey.
- Track calls to the foundation in response to press releases, articles, and advertisements.

New Hampshire:

- Effectiveness is determined primarily through donor and prospective donor surveys.

What s Working? What s Paying Off?

Arkansas:

- Have seen significant increase in awareness of the foundation statewide because of affiliates.

Arizona:

- Have seen a significant increase in rural giving.

Maine:

- Have seen an increase in rural giving and awareness of the foundation.

New Hampshire:

- All efforts are rural. Asset growth speaks for itself.

Toughest Marketing Challenges

Arkansas:

- It feels like the tail wagging the dog. The main foundation does not have a consistent marketing policy regarding affiliates and how they marketing themselves.
- No branding plan and policy.

Arizona:

- Getting message out in right vehicles.
- Getting to a diverse audience in some communities.
- Getting the attention of winter visitors whose hometowns are other places.

New Hampshire:

- Should the foundation be a household word?
- Who s saying what about what? Getting a consistent message out.
- 800-lb gorilla syndrome.

Best Things that Rural Marketing Has Produced

Arkansas/Maine/Arizona/NH:

- Locally controlled and directed assets and grant making power communities never had or considered in the past.

Arizona:

- Consistent approach to branding, including the logo.

New Hampshire:

- Dusting for fingerprints: All the things the foundation uses its influence to do on behalf of local communities and the state that it keeps quiet.

Lessons and Advice

Arkansas:

- They would cut the cord on less successful affiliates that don't meet the match.
- Get the right leaders to the table when you are creating the fund. Then, add good staff and some money to support your efforts. You can do amazing things with those ingredients.
- Develop a position on branding ahead of time to ensure consistency of image and message.

Arizona:

- Don't mix oil and water — develop different strategies for rural and metro areas.
- Pay attention to branding — developing consistent messages and image, and choose approaches that fit the demographics of the area you are targeting.

New Hampshire:

- Anecdotal isn't plural for data. Do your homework and research. (Donor and prospective donor surveys, wealth identification.)
- Know your market, and understand what moves them about what you do.

- Use your collective voice — donors, board, non-profits, staff — to tell stories that inspire people to give. Help the people speaking for you understand your messages, and how to communicate what you do.