



# MENTORING FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of Education n Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

Mentoring Resource Center

#3, June 2005

## Marketing Your Mentoring Program

One of the keys to running a successful mentoring program is creating awareness in the community you serve. Strong community awareness leads to easier volunteer recruitment, more successful collaborations and partnerships, and improved program sustainability. Simply put, individuals can't help your program thrive if they don't know you exist.

To create this awareness, many nonprofits apply the principles of consumer product marketing to the services they provide. This type of marketing is called social or cause marketing, as it tries to stimulate interest in a service that benefits a group rather than in a product one can purchase. The service you offer is mentoring and your "customers" are the volunteers, parents, youth, organizations, and community members who could participate in your efforts. The activities you engage in to garner support from these participants define your marketing strategy.

Marketing activities generally fall into four basic areas (Ballasy, 2004):

- **Personal contact** (both formal, in presentations to potential partners, and informal, in personal conversations with people you meet socially)
- **Public relations** (free promotional opportunities such as press releases, media interviews, and public service announcements)
- **Advertising** (billboards, print ads, direct mail)
- **Promotional materials** (brochures, Web site, posters, newsletters, etc.)

While the advantages and disadvantages of each of these areas are outside the scope of this fact sheet, your program should plan to engage in each of these on a regular basis.

### Plan for Success

Regardless of the specific activities you choose, it is important to formally plan your marketing efforts. The MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership's *Elements of Effective Practice* encourages programs to establish a public relations and communications effort, including development of a formal marketing plan (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2005). The following steps can help organize your marketing activities:

1. **Assemble a marketing team.** Pick a group of appropriate staff and program stakeholders (youth, volunteers, parents, and school officials) to help conceptualize and implement your marketing activities. This helps share the workload while creating accountability for getting marketing tasks done.
2. **Create a working marketing budget.** Promoting your program does not have to be expensive, but you will need to know the resources you have to work with. Be sure to include donated, or "in-kind," goods and services when putting a marketing budget together. And remember that this budget may need to be flexible as you find some strategies that work better than others.
3. **Learn about your "market" (your community).** The better you understand the demographics of your community, the easier it will be to market your opportunities to them.
4. **Develop clear, consistent messages.** This starts with your program mission statement, the condensed version of why your program exists. Your team should also develop "positioning statements" that explain what is unique about your program and the services it provides. From these two guiding statements, your team can

create variations for different purposes: short and to the point, for use on business cards, billboards, and posters; longer versions for brochures or public service announcements. The key is to have consistency in the message you put out about your program.

5. **Develop your “brand.”** Branding goes hand in hand with the development of consistent messages. It refers to all the things that create consistent recognition in the minds of your consumers: your logo, typefaces, color schemes, particular photographs, and particular phrases and slogans.

### Ideas to Get Started

Every program should be marketed in a unique way to meet the needs of its unique customers. Your program will likely have many opportunities available to it in each of the four marketing areas mentioned previously. The following are ideas that you can work on over the summer months in preparation for ramping services back up when school resumes. These also can be used to stimulate brainstorming sessions with your marketing team:

- **Write and send press releases to local media.** Area newspapers and magazines, television and radio stations may be willing to give your program free publicity if you do some leg work for them. Some of the resources mentioned at the end of this fact sheet can help your team develop press releases.
- **Take an inventory of summertime community events and their promotional opportunities.** Summer is the time of festivals, fairs, parades, and a whole host of other community events. Find out what’s coming up in your area and what’s involved in getting a booth or other promotional opportunity. Additionally, simply having staff and volunteers attend events can be a great way of informally networking and making personal contacts.
- **Create a program newsletter.** Even better, start an e-newsletter. Newsletters are a great way of informing the community about what’s going on in your program and can help with everything from recruiting to fundraising. An e-mail-based newsletter can be very inexpensive to produce and disseminate (even a print version can be fairly cost effective thanks to modern technology). You may be able to get some of the writing, design, printing, or mailing done as an in-kind donation.
- **Create and promote a program Web site.** In this day and age, having a Web site is as important as having a phone number and mailing address. Even if you already have a site, take a fresh look at it from a marketing perspective: does it “sell” what you have to offer? Be sure to promote the site as well. Make sure the Web address is listed in local service provider directories, that corporate and community partners provide links to it on their sites, and that it’s listed on all your program print and electronic materials.
- **Perfect your presentations.** Summer can be a great time to work on the presentations you use when speaking to corporations and other local sources of volunteers and dollars. Chances are, your marketing team will be developing themes and messages that should be incorporated into the presentations you make. Encourage staff members to take classes that can improve their public speaking.
- **Look for cheap advertising.** Sometimes vacant billboard space is made available to nonprofit groups. Many newspapers and local magazines offer free or discounted space to community nonprofits. Ad space makes a great in-kind donation.
- **Look for specific product placement opportunities.** One of the more popular ideas for mentoring programs is to ask local restaurants if you can place “table tents” in their dining areas. Asking local grocery stores if they’ll allow

inserts into their bags is another great way to reach a mass audience without incurring the costs of direct mailing.

- **Plan for National Mentoring Month 2007.** January is National Mentoring Month, and states and municipalities that have a mentoring partnership often provide promotional materials and opportunities your program can take advantage of throughout the month. Even if your locale has nothing formal planned, this is an excellent time to run public service announcements related to mentoring so that they coincide with the national media push.
- **Gear up for the response.** There's no point in promoting your program if you're not prepared for the success it can bring. Use the summer months to solidify staffing and to clarify roles,

responsibilities, and procedures for handling the flood of interest you are about to generate.

Above all else, have fun and be creative when marketing your program. While there's no magic formula for creating community awareness, being creative, flexible, and enthusiastic will increase your program's visibility. And while product marketing may be a science, your social marketing is also about passion: the passion you have for your program's work and the passion others have for making the world a better place. Your marketing activities can be the things that bring those two passions together throughout your community.

### Additional Reading

*Sharing your national service story: A guide to working with the media.* Corporation for National and Community Service. Available online at: [www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/media\\_guide.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/media_guide.pdf).

*Getting your message on the air: A guidebook for community nonprofit organizations.* National Association of Broadcasters. Free; can be ordered online at: [www.nab.org/publicservice/Get\\_Msg\\_on\\_Air.asp](http://www.nab.org/publicservice/Get_Msg_on_Air.asp).

*Going to market: Marketing concepts for mentoring programs.* EMT Group. Available online at: [www.emt.org/userfiles/GoingMarket.pdf](http://www.emt.org/userfiles/GoingMarket.pdf).

*Mentoring: A guide for local broadcasters.* National Association of Broadcasters and the Harvard Mentoring Project. Available online at: [www.mentoring.org/mentoring\\_month/files/nab\\_guidebook.pdf](http://www.mentoring.org/mentoring_month/files/nab_guidebook.pdf).

National Mentoring Center *Bulletin*, 2(1). Marketing and Media Outreach. National Mentoring Center. Available online at: [www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/v2n1.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/v2n1.pdf).

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. National Mentoring Month. Activities for 2007 have not been announced at this time, but information about last year's activities can be found online at: [http://www.mentoring.org/mentoring\\_month](http://www.mentoring.org/mentoring_month).

### References

Ballasy, L. (2004). *Marketing for the recruitment of mentors: A workbook for finding and attracting volunteers.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, National Mentoring Center, p. 56.

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. (2005). *Elements of effective practice.* Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved online May 23, 2005, from [www.mentoring.org/program\\_staff/design/elements\\_of\\_effective\\_practice.php](http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php).

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