

6 Ways to Reach Out to Your Community

Reaching out and sharing with the community can become a natural part of what you do. Some of the best ways to reach out to the community happen in our everyday experiences of going to the grocery store, at the kids' soccer practice or working on a community project. The key to reaching out is making sure that you're prepared to share about your non-profit group when opportunity arises.

Wise people say, " success is when opportunity meets preparation." I do agree. Conversations about your organization can happen anywhere. As I look at ways that have been effective for my work in ministry and non-profits, I pass these ideas on to you.

1. Keep brochures, invite cards and newsletters handy. While out and about, be sure you have a small stash of communication tools available and ready to share with the community. I love invite cards with the name of the non-profit and a brief description of the activities. (Note if you have regular volunteer recruitment days, you may want to place them on the card too.) Picture this, you are at the gas station and someone notices your bumper sticker and asks you, "Where are you located?" That's all you need to share information about you. Be ready.

2. Maintain an email database mailing. Continually add to your email database so that you can keep people in the community aware of your non-profit. Email blasts are a great way to let folks in your contact group know about events and upcoming fund drives. Adding to your database or listserv is a great way to stay connected to the community. Also note email is FREE!

3. Inform the community leaders. Every community has people who influence others. These persons can be elected officials, neighborhood association leaders, heads of organizations or others. Find ways to keep them in the loop about who you are, what you do and how your non-profit serves the community. You may be surprised at how this impacts getting the word out. Having an e-newsletter or "email update" may be one way to connect with community leaders.

4. Invite at least 3-6 people each week. Always invite people to be a part of what you do. As you circulate in the community, extend invitations to friends, family and yes even strangers. Encourage other staff and volunteers to do the same. Simply inviting volunteers, supporters may be a great way to connect with the community you serve.

5. Get out of the office. Sometimes the obvious must be stated. If you want visibility you have to move beyond your walls. Find ways to get involved in the community so that you as one of the leaders in the community. For example, if your work is with kids, why not volunteer for other kid-related groups so you are viewed as a leader in that area. It's so important to have hand-on activity with people you serve. This may take the form of serving on boards, volunteering for a community event or working on a city assigned task force. Whatever you do stay visible.

6. Wear your non-profit group well. I have a shirt with my church's name on it. Whenever I wear it someone says, "Where is that church located?" I often wonder if I did not have it on would they have said anything. If you have not, consider getting hats, t-shirts, buttons, car magnets or other clothing for volunteers and staff to wear. These items become walking billboards. Can you imagine the impact of everybody wearing your group's shirts at the local baseball game this summer?