

## EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Parent group leaders often want to increase the visibility of the group within the community in order to have a greater impact for children. This section of the manual is intended to get you thinking about the world outside your parent group.

### I. NEWSLETTERS

Organizations produce newsletters of varying sizes, styles, and types for many different reasons. Cause-oriented, fund-raising groups—like some environmental concerns that raise money through canvassing—may offer an issue-specific newsletter subscription to individuals who pledge support to their cause. Professional societies often produce highly technical newsletters geared expressly for their professional membership. Neighborhood associations tend to create more informal and reader-friendly mailings that inform area residents about upcoming events, elections, projects, and items of local interest or concern. In short, each newsletter is shaped by its creator's purpose and the audience's wants and needs.

#### A. ASSESSING NEEDS AND RESOURCES

Before launching into the publishing business, your group should determine whether newsletter production is truly feasible. Closely consider two factors: needs and resources.

- Does your group *need* a newsletter? Examine your group's mission or purpose. Would a newsletter further your goals? Would it fulfill group needs that are currently not being met? If your group has and/or plans to acquire information that should be distributed on a regular basis to a relatively large (and receptive) audience, a newsletter might be a good vehicle...if you have the resources.
- Does your group have the *resources* to produce a newsletter? Newsletter production may look easy, but it often becomes an involved and time/money/labor-consuming process. To successfully create and distribute a periodical, your group must have:
  1. Time—to gather material for each issue, decide on content, write or edit content, design layout, print copies, and distribute copies;
  2. Equipment/Supplies—for typing, word-processing, desktop publishing, photocopying, printing, mailing, etc.;
  3. Labor—to do the gathering, decision making, writing, editing, designing, printing, and distributing;
  4. Skill—to operate the equipment and perform the tasks listed above;
  5. Money—to pay for whatever equipment, skill, and/or labor is not available in-house or free of charge; and
  6. Ongoing Commitment—to continually produce the newsletter.

Inventory group members' skills and availability, and ask them to think of friends, business associates, etc. who might be willing to contribute time, expertise, or the use of computers and other equipment. Consider ways to finance the effort—through dues, subscriptions, or other fund-raisers. Talk with other groups that produce regular newsletters to find out how they got started and how they keep going.

As with any new project, your group should seriously explore the benefits and costs of initiating a newsletter before starting production. Equally important, groups must honestly assess members' level of interest in the project. If only one or two people truly support the idea, chances for success are significantly diminished.

## **B. WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE/INTENDED AUDIENCE?**

Once your group determines that its needs and resources justify newsletter production, you can start thinking about the publication's purpose(s) and audience(s). The most obvious audience is your immediate group, but other audiences may come to mind as you consider more specifically what you want your newsletter to accomplish.

For example, your group may share one or more of the following sample goals:

**Goal 1:** Inform existing group members of upcoming meetings and social events.

**Goal 2:** Inform prospective group members about upcoming meetings and social events.

**Goal 3:** Share news about group members and their families with other existing and prospective group members.

**Goal 4:** Educate group members/prospective members about local post-adoption services, lectures about adoption, and/or issues that pertain to special needs adoption.

**Goal 5:** Recruit additional group members by educating the community about your group and its activities.

**Goal 6:** Educate the community about special needs adoption.

**Goal 7:** Educate specific members of the community (like politicians, journalists, or teachers) about special needs adoption.

**Goal 8:** Recruit adoptive parents for waiting children in the community or state.

As you add more goals (or more complex goals), the size and configuration of your prospective audience will change. Goal 1 requires only a very select audience that is easy to identify and target. Goal 8, by contrast, warrants a very broad audience—including adoptive parents, foster parents, various populations from the general community, journalists, and even social service workers. Newsletters that reach outside the core group require additional thought and planning. Often, the newsletter may be the only image of your group that many outsiders see.

Ultimately, your group should design a newsletter that not only meets various audiences' needs, but also fulfills group goals. A newsletter that serves an audience without furthering the producer's objectives is not sustainable. A newsletter that seeks to advance the group's goals without considering audience needs will lose its audience.

## C. PLANNING FOR PRODUCTION

The energy and thought that went into your decision to initiate a newsletter should help you determine production specifics. The purpose of your publication dictates content choices, and your projected audience will guide distribution decisions. The resource questions that started this section will also affect every aspect of newsletter production.

Before you start working on your premier issue, ask your group the following questions:

1. How often should we produce the newsletter, and how long should it be?

Frequency will be determined by your group's and your audience's needs, and your group's ability to produce X issues in X amount of time. Length will also depend upon group/audience needs, and upon your group's printing and distribution resources. As your publication increases in size (or frequency), your costs for paper, copying, printing, and mailing will also increase—as will the amount of time needed to pull together each issue.

2. How should we distribute the newsletter?

If your target audience is simply the members of your support group, distribution may be as simple and cost-efficient as handing newsletters out at a monthly or quarterly meeting (and asking attendees to deliver copies to members who miss the meeting). If your audience is somewhat larger, but still relatively small and geographically compact, hand delivery is another possibility (if one or more members in your group will volunteer for that assignment). Mailing is the obvious option, but one that incurs additional cost for materials like stamps and envelopes.

To circumvent the cost of envelopes, many groups' newsletters incorporate space for a mailing label directly on the publication's back page. Groups that mail newsletters to a large (more than 200) and widely scattered audience can also take advantage of bulk mail discounts. In addition, incorporated nonprofits whose mission is largely educational may mail items at library rate (comparable to book rate). Reduced rates, however, also mean slower delivery. If your group opts for either the bulk mail or library rate options, it should anticipate a two to four week delay between mailing and receipt. This temporal gap decreases your ability to share time-sensitive news and information.

3. How should we gather content for the newsletter?

Depending on the newsletter's purpose, the answer to this question may be self-evident. If your group's sole purpose is to keep members informed of upcoming meetings and activities, the minutes of each meeting should provide all the information you will need. If, however, your goals include educating outsiders about adoption and waiting children, the task becomes more involved.

One readily available source of printable material is other adoption-, parenting-, or child-related newsletters and magazines. Many publish original articles that, with permission, can be reprinted at no cost. Such publications may also contain book

reviews, legislative news, or conference listings that your audience would find interesting. If you do not already receive other organizations' newsletters, you might be able to obtain some without charge by initiating a newsletter exchange. If you want to reprint items from copyrighted materials, always obtain formal permission before printing and carefully attribute your source.

Other potential sources for original material include members of your group, group members' children, and professionals you know (therapists, social workers, advocates, etc.). They may be able to write articles for you, or may have contacts who can. Professionals (and parents) may also have access to the wealth of information available over the Internet. Material gathered from that source is very current, though it is not always reliable unless posted by a well-known authority or reputable service.

## **D. GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS**

When planning for production, your group should also be thinking about ways to solicit help for the specific tasks involved in newsletter production. For the most basic of newsletters, help could be as close as one volunteer who will type meeting minutes onto a single page, make photocopies, and distribute the copies at the monthly meeting. More involved newsletters require one or more individuals who are willing and able to perform a variety of more time-consuming functions.

### **1. Developing Content**

As mentioned above, your group can derive newsletter content from a number of sources. Someone needs to watch for opportunity and/or create it by soliciting submissions and following up on leads. One of the single-most challenging parts of this task may be encouraging contributors to meet your production deadlines.

### **2. Writing**

While much newsletter content may be pre-written and could even be photocopied, someone may still need to write introductions for articles, compose short news items, rewrite submissions, or even create original pieces from phone interviews or other source material. The more complex your newsletter, the greater your need for a good writer.

### **3. Editing**

Even well-written submissions may require editing due to content or space limitations. A good editor can also help catch spelling and grammatical errors, and improve the newsletter's overall readability. A good rule of thumb is to craft your message so that anyone who might pick up your newsletter can understand it. Publications for general audiences should be written at an eighth grade reading comprehension level.

### **4. Proofing**

While an editor may be able to catch obvious mistakes and improve readability during the writing process, a proofreader should carefully review the newsletter

text at least once before it goes to print. Many errors occur during the correction process, and a good proofreader (preferably someone who did not write and is not too familiar with the text) can make the publication look more professional by catching typos and other small, but potentially embarrassing errors.

## **5. Layout/Design Work**

Few parents have formal training in layout or design work (unless that happens to be their profession), but most small newsletters do not require a high level of expertise. In the end, resources—specifically hardware, software, and skill—will again dictate how your newsletter looks.

Keep in mind the following few hints when designing your newsletter:

- Keep your margins relatively wide (at least 3/4 inch or 2 centimeters). Framing “white space” around text looks better and helps readers to focus on the words within the space.
- Consider using more than one column. If your newsletter is the size of a standard sheet of paper, readers will have a hard time following text in a column that spans the entire width of the page. The Chicago Manual of Style suggests that the “ideal” line should accommodate no more than 65–70 characters. Smaller typefaces thus warrant more narrow columns.
- Incorporate adequate space between lines of text. Tight, single-spaced text looks cramped and is hard to read. A little white space between each line helps prevent unnecessary eye strain.
- Incorporate graphics if possible, but use them cautiously. Easy-to-read charts and graphs can synthesize complex information, and pictures can add warmth and feeling. However, every picture and piece of artwork gives the audience a certain impression of your organization. While cartoon-like, computer clip art may work well for casual meeting notices and social events, they may not be so appropriate for serious adoption stories that individuals outside your group will see. Newsletter “logos” also create an image. If you choose to design and use a logo, make sure its style and look is consistent with the image your group wants to project.

## **6. Printing**

Depending on the scope of your project, a good photocopier (preferably one that can make two-sided copies) may be all the printing help you need. For larger or more complicated jobs (like a newsletter that includes photographs), a professional photocopying shop can deliver fairly good quality at reasonable prices. Full-service printers, of course, offer the best in quality but their services are often more costly.

If you need good printer quality, but cannot afford to pay full price, consider asking for donated services or costs. You could, for example, approach a new printer that needs customers and offer to advertise the printer’s name on every newsletter in exchange for discounted or donated printing services. You might also

investigate the possibility of obtaining a corporate sponsor to either furnish funds for printing or provide free access to the corporation's own printing service.

## **7. Mailing**

Mailing involves more than simply slipping the newsletters in a mail box. Depending on your set up, the mailing task may also include folding each newsletter, handwriting or printing mailing labels, sealing the newsletters or envelopes, and taking the pile to the post office for weighing and stamping. In addition, your group should establish a system for (1) keeping track of who gets the newsletter, and (2) making sure that addresses and names are up-to-date.

## **BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE**

Based on the information above:

- Does your group truly need a newsletter?
- What type of resources would be necessary to publish a newsletter?
- Think of your community. What businesses could assist your group with publishing? computer needs? mailings? etc.