

"TAKE FIVE FOR..."

Developing Appeals That Work.

Over the years advocates have learned two things. (1) Broad appeals for help don't work. If an appeal sounds too general, or likely to take over one's life, no one signs up. (2) It isn't effective to send mailings to everyone who puts their name on a sign-up sheet. By now, there are so many groups sending out mailings that readers ignore much of what comes through their mail slots. Just as important, groups with tight budgets can't afford to waste scarce resources on postage, paper, and staff time for appeals that don't get results.

If you want your appeals to produce results: offer options; make your appeal time-limited; & design it to fit into busy lives. Here's a version that's been tested, and works.

One year some UW students tried to get their fellow students to write letters about welfare proposals they thought might harm children, but the responses they got just seemed like excuses. In response to their pleas, people said:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| -- I don't have time | -- I wouldn't know what to say |
| -- I don't know my legislator | -- I don't know the address |
| -- I don't have any envelopes/paper/stamps | -- I can't. |

To their credit, the students decided to take the "excuses" seriously: what if these were real barriers, and not just excuses for inaction? In the process they developed "TAKE FIVE FOR KIDS" -- a way to be an advocate for children in just five minutes or less. At strategically located tables they provided: sample letters, brief fact sheets, people to answer questions, blank paper/envelopes/stamps, the names and addresses of all the legislators -- and a big sign reading TAKE FIVE FOR KIDS.

In a single week they generated several hundred letters on welfare reform.

Inspired by their success some advocacy groups have adopted the idea and renamed their legislative alerts, "TAKE FIVE FOR ...(KIDS, or HOUSING, or whatever)." Just like the students at their table, these alerts include all the necessary ingredients, in a simple, easily accomplished format.

On a single page, usually within a "box," are brief information, brief messages, and the information needed to contact a legislator. "Clip art" supplies a clock.

ACTION: People who get TAKE FIVE alerts say they prop them on their telephones or computer keyboards every week until they've made their calls or written letters.

Plus: other groups are following suit: "TAKE FIVE TABLES" are popping up in the lobbies of social agencies and children's hospitals, after services on Sunday and PTA meetings, at similar gatherings to: *generate letters, ... get more members for a network, ... win involvement in a community education campaign.*

People on the receiving end say that just knowing they can be advocates for something they care about, in five minutes or less, is empowering.

D) PREPARING A GOOD FACT SHEET -- The Basics

What Are Fact Sheets?

Fact Sheets introduce you -- and your issue -- in a format useful to busy people. They come in many styles, shapes, and sizes, but every advocacy group needs at least one.

Good Fact Sheets recognize that busy people need something short and punchy to grab their attention. A good Fact Sheet says: "Read me. I'm a painless way to get acquainted with an issue." (Anything long and complicated may not just be ignored, it can be counter-productive.)

Fact Sheets can do many things:

- identify your group with a particular issue;
- set out facts -- key statistics relating to a problem, issue, or group;
- provide Answers to commonly-asked Questions (Fact Sheets can use a Q&A format);
- set out information using graphics or charts;
- inform, persuade, educate (e.g., about a legislative proposal or budget request);
- make an argument for a particular course of action.

Good Fact Sheets rely on format...

Nothing over 1 or 2 pages;

No long sentences or wordy paragraphs;

Something easy to read, with sub-heads, "bullets," and possibly graphics; and

Lay-out that carries the eye from basic facts to logical conclusions or the "pitch,"

As well as content...

Your most compelling, most useful statistics;

Information arrayed to "make an argument," targetted to a particular audience;

Homey examples, or simple ways to convey complicated points;

Reflecting careful thought about the audience, and what facts will work best with *them*;

Drawing a conclusion or suggesting something the reader can do,

...To make a point.

In Short: good Fact Sheets include most or all of the following:

- Basic definition(s),
- basic statistics, and
- basic information,
- organized to draw a conclusion or invite the reader to take some action, plus...
- the name/address/telephone number and contact person of the group responsible.

Now it's YOUR turn: "Just Do It!"