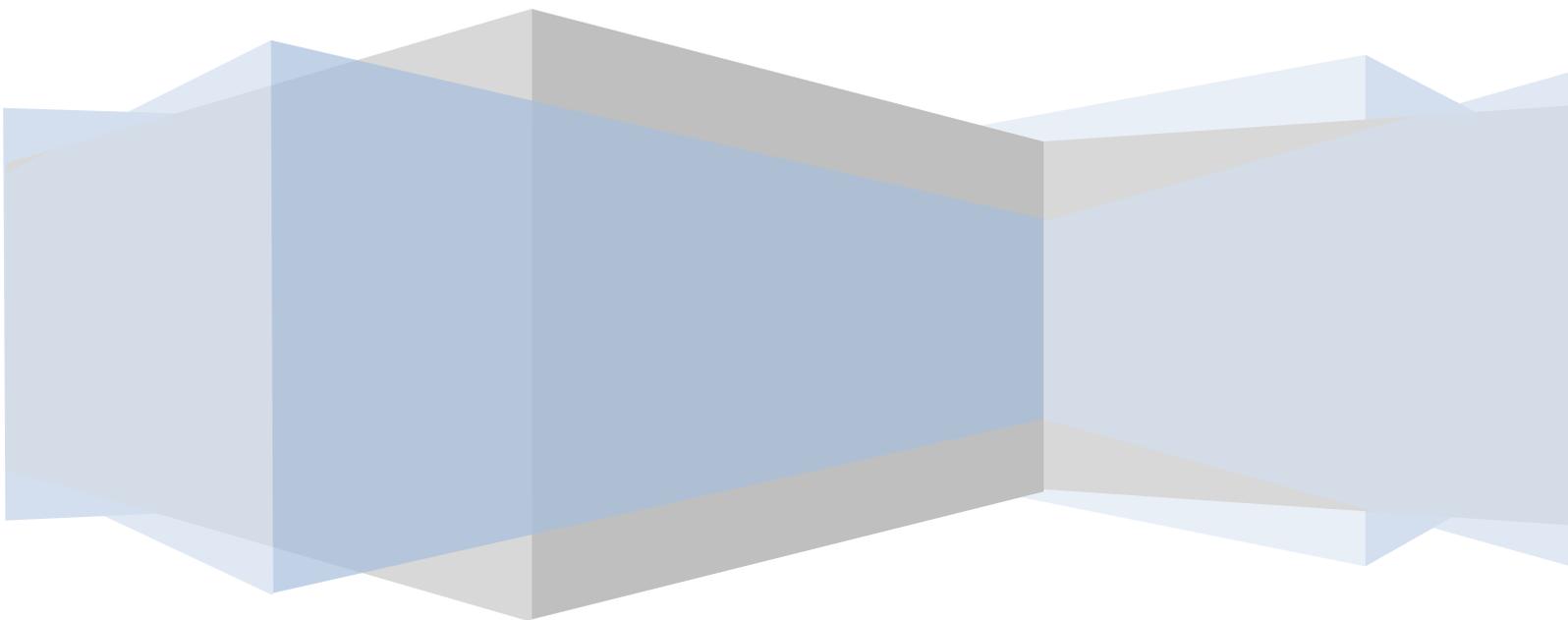


Association of Scottish Community Councils



Newsletters

Written Communications Tool Kit

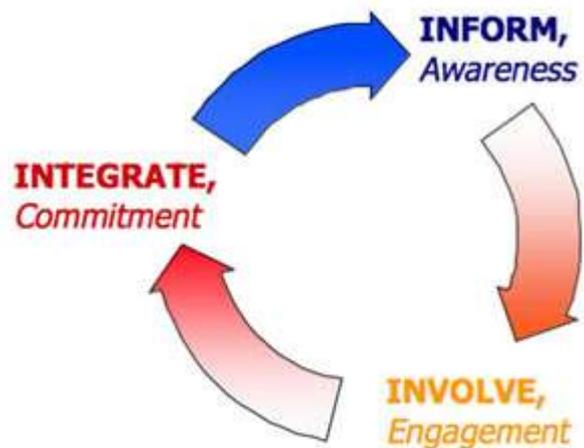


Introduction

A well-designed newsletter with stories and information that can make a difference in people's lives will be closely read. Because it is read, it can be an important tool for sharing information. On the other hand, newsletters are the most over-used publication today; they are definitely not for every group or community effort.

Definition

News, feature stories, and graphics that communicate information on a specific topic for distribution to a target audience.



Essentials

Every newsletter should be considered a best source for information about an organization, a topic or a project. If articles are interesting and easy to read and the graphics of professional quality, the audience will understand the message and will often assist or become advocates for the cause.

When considering whether your group should do a newsletter, keep in mind there is a lot of competition for people's attention. One more newsletter may not get noticed. It may also be that another group is providing similar information. To help make a decision about whether to start a newsletter, ask the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the newsletter?
- Would it be more effective, and more economic, to place advertisements in other groups' newsletters and submit editorials to local papers?
- Is it feasible to create a web site and make information available online? Does the target audience have access to computers and is this an acceptable method of communication?
- Who will be the editor to handle decisions regarding content, assure style continuity and be responsible for writing or getting writers for each issue? Who will oversee the mailing?

How It Works

1. Decide on Content

Most likely your newsletter will be mailed periodically, not daily or even weekly. Thus the stories will not be late breaking news but items of general interest about the project, the area and its people as well as the project schedule or the publication of findings. Make the text interesting, keep it short, and use the active voice ("we are" versus "we have been").



Consider also including:

- A community bulletin board where people can share their project activities and accomplishments.
- Pictures of people in action.
- Quotations and poetry to enhance images or messages.
- A colouring page for children, activity ideas or references for learning more.
- Theme issues that include interviews with experts on that subject.
- Profiles of landowners, volunteers, employees or other stakeholders.
- Descriptions and dates of upcoming events.

2. Design for Readability

Since the ultimate purpose of your newsletter is for people to get information, it needs to be easy to read and not all fonts are easy. Use only two or three different fonts, or typefaces, in the entire newsletter. Make sure the size is also

easy to read (11-12 point size). Don't try to squeeze in more copy with a small font (size 8-10); it's better to make the stories shorter or add more pages. Also use plenty of white space, which refers to blank areas that have neither copy nor images. To immediately create white space, try increasing the margins.

3. Select Images Carefully

Select only quality photographs and artwork. Images should be used both to attract people to the information and to enhance their understanding of the message. To aid in understanding, always include a caption for each image. Avoid using photographs, maps and drawings that are inserted just for decoration and do not strengthen a story.

4. Give it Style

Create an identifiable look that allows immediate recognition when people pick it up from their mailboxes. Be consistent from issue to issue by placing sections like contents, letters from the chairman and community calendars in the same locations. But do take freedom to vary formats of articles like number of columns, use of bullet statements, question-and-answer format, etc.

5. Proof It

Always, always have a person who was not involved in the writing or design of the newsletter give it a careful read before printing. This is not only to look for typos, it is also to make sure paragraphs were not accidentally dropped, captions are included, page numbers are correct, dates and contact information is accurate and that every story and image make sense.

6. Print It

Printing can be as easy as making copies or as complex as a four-color production on glossy paper. What method of printing is chosen will depend upon budget. But whether a newsletter is black-and-white and stapled in the corner or full-colour and bound like a magazine is not as important as the content and design.



7. Mail It

Depending upon the size of your mailing list, there are several options for reducing mailing costs such as a bulk mail. Before starting your first newsletter, determine the best method by visiting your post office to find out what is involved.

When to Use

- You have the human resources to write and design newsletters and the financial resources to print and mail copies.
- You have an ongoing need to present detailed information, provide a forum for exchanging ideas, and share updates, announcements and news.
- You want to keep a targeted audience informed on developments over several years.
- You have information to share about a topic that is not covered anywhere else.

Not Recommended If....

- You do not have the resources to write, design, print and mail more than one issue. Make it a brochure instead.
- You cannot identify a target audience. In other words, you have not been able to identify a group or community that is directly impacted by or supportive of your project.
- Your messages are similar to or would be of interest to other existing groups that already produce newsletters for their members. Editors are always scrambling to find copy and usually welcome submissions from others.