

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR DPRCA AND
OTHER NON-PROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

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Sarah Jane Smith Warren

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Communication Strategies for DPRCA and Other Non-profit Arts Organizations

By

Sarah Jane Smith Warren

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ABSTRACT

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This project serves as a resource for non-profit arts organizations to increase their awareness and skills in public relations and communications. This resource provides background information about the benefits of the arts on the economy and the positive effects on youth. This resource defines and explains key communication strategies and how they are successfully used in other non-profit arts organizations. A summary of the most successful communication concepts used in rural non-profit arts organizations are recommended. Specific communication strategies are recommended to Dakota Prairie Regional Center for the Arts to incorporate into their organization and programming.

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SECTION ONE. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

“The arts are a reflection of America’s identity and civilization – dynamic, diverse, and original” (National Endowment for the Arts Appropriation Request, 2008, p. 1). Arts education and arts opportunities are a necessary component for a thriving culture and healthy country and world. Not only do the arts provide entertainment, conversation, and cultural understanding, they enhance positive development of youth and contribute to economic growth, success, and stability. In recent years, funding for the arts has been stagnant and has decreased, resulting in the loss of educational programs and art opportunities for young people and less fortunate populations who are unable to afford to keep arts and culture in their life (NEA Appropriations History, 2008).

The arts contribute to the culture and stabilization of rural America. Rural communities are a large part of North Dakota vitality. The arts provide a high quality of life and add to the character and culture of the state. According to *Strengthening Rural Economies through the Arts*, a brief published by the National Governors Association (2005), promoting an arts-based economy in rural communities can “enhance state efforts to diversify rural economies, generate revenue, and improve the quality of life, and attract visitors and investment” (p. 1). An arts-based economy in rural communities is imperative because “the arts stimulate economic growth and job creation and improve the quality of life” (p. 2).

Purpose of this Project

This project looks at the need of stronger communication practices and understanding within non-profit arts organizations. This project provides non-profit arts organizations with clear, concise information about the benefits of the arts, what

communication strategies should be used in a non-profit arts organization and how to incorporate these communication strategies into their organization and programming.

The end result of this project serves four specific purposes: 1) The project presents research, information, and resources about the benefits of the arts for the economy and youth. This section of the paper helps non-profit arts organizations to understand their own need and also be able to use this section as a resource when applying for grants, funding, partnerships, and communication practices. 2) The project explains the basic principles of public relations and communication practices. Understanding public relations models and general communication principles are the foundation for identifying which specific strategies work within an organization. 3) An analysis of the most successful communication practices used by other non-profit arts show how communications and public relations are important to the organizations; 4) The project concludes with a recommendation of core communication concepts that should be incorporated into current organizational plans and programs. More specifically, it recommends to Dakota Prairie Regional Center for the Arts which specific communication strategies will enhance their organization as a whole and future programming.

Background Information

Over the past 15 years, Americans for the Arts has conducted three economic impact studies looking at how the arts and culture industry impact the American economy. These studies are the most comprehensive measure of how the arts affect the economy:

The key lesson from Arts & Economic Prosperity III is that communities that invest in the arts reap the additional benefits of jobs, economic growth, and a quality of life that positions those communities to compete in our 21st century creative

economy....The findings from Arts and Economic Prosperity III send a clear and welcome message: leaders who care about community and economic development can feel good about choosing to invest in the arts. (Arts & Economic Prosperity III, 2005, p. 1)

This study, Arts & Economic Prosperity III (2005), shows a steady and dramatic increase in the economic impact of the arts. The information was collected from 156 regions which included 6,080 nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and 94,478 audience members. Over \$166 billion is pumped into the economy from the arts and culture industry. This number shows a 24 percent increase since 2002. Unlike other industries, art and culture events increase spending to local businesses such as restaurants, hotels, retail stores, and gas stations resulting in the average arts attendee spending around \$27.79 per person on non-event related products. People spending money on an arts event also tend to spend more money within the local economy at other businesses. Out-of-town visitors spend twice as many additional dollars as locals (Arts & Economic Prosperity III, 2005).

More specifically, the arts and culture industry in Minnesota boosted the economy by almost a billion dollars (Arts & Economic Prosperity III, 2005). Minnesota organizations and audiences spent nearly five hundred million dollars each in 2005 on the arts and culture industry (Arts & Economic Prosperity III, 2005). In North Dakota, arts organizations and audiences spent over one hundred million with forty-one million being spent in the Fargo-Moorhead area (Arts & Economic Prosperity III, 2005).

In addition to the positive contributions the arts give to the economy, there is growing evidence and research which supports the claim that the arts have a beneficial effect on youth development. According to the report, *Critical Evidence: How the ARTS*

Benefit Student Achievement (2006), the studying of the arts provides six major types of benefits to youth including reading and language skills, mathematics skills, thinking, social skills, motivation to learn, and positive school environment. Students who participate in high school music programs score higher on SATs in both the verbal and math sections (Afterschool Alliance, 2005). A boys choir in Harlem was created to give young boys an alternative to other, destructive activities. The choir eventually became a successful afterschool musical education program, “fifty-five percent of the boys who participate in the Choir live below poverty level, but 98 percent of its graduates go on to college” (Afterschool Alliance, 2005, p. 2).

According to an issue brief by Psilos (2002), the impact of arts education extends to the workforce. The brief provides examples of arts educational programs within the United States which have positively impacted youth and their future. These programs benefit the general youth population and more profoundly, impact at-risk youth and incarcerated youth (Psilos, 2005). Arts education programs help youth develop important life skills as well as skills necessary for success in the workforce, “Research reveals that when young people study the arts they show heightened academic standing, a strong capacity for self-assessment, and a secure sense of their own ability to plan and work for a positive future” (Psilos, 2005, p. 4). Schools are discovering that arts education instills “real-world” skills necessary to thrive in the workplace (Psilos, 2005).

Arts education programs in Connecticut, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, and South Carolina which target general youth populations are finding positive results such as increased test scores, fewer discipline problems, higher attendance, and greater academic achievement (Psilos, 2005).

Other research shows that arts education has strong, positive effects on at-risk youth who are “the most in need of educational programs and workforce development training; yet, they are the least likely to receive the necessary assistance” (Psilos, 2005, p. 9). The arts have been integrated into afterschool programs and combined with academics and social counseling. Communities with these programs have shown a decrease in violence and drug abuse and an increase in educational and career goal setting. In Texas, the Juvenile Gang Prevention Program is an example of how arts education is impacting at-risk youth. To combat an increase of dangerous gang activity, the Dallas Parks and Recreation Department created this program for youth between the ages of 10 and 18 years old. The program is free and offers classes in writing and creating plays and visual arts to express personal experiences that relate to gang violence and drug abuse. This program has received favorable attention because of the collaborative artistic work done by youth involved in rival gangs (Psilos, 2005).

Arts education is also enhancing the rehabilitation of incarcerated youth. In 2001, a study by the National Art Education Foundation researched the relationship between arts education and youth in juvenile correctional facilities (Williams, 2008, p. 116). While there is a need for more research in this area, this study found positive results in using art education within juvenile detention facilities. One facility, which has become a model for arts education in juvenile detention facilities, has incorporated visual and performing arts, poetry, and creative writing into the curriculum:

The arts have provided our students with an appropriate and effective outlet for their feelings, including, at times, their anger. Verbal or visual expressions, over time, become habitual and displace the outbursts that these young people have used

in the past to let out pent up emotions. In addition, arts classes very much allow our residents to be “kids” and have fun, even while being locked up. This is important to their adjustment when released. (Williams, 2008, p. 116)

This program is the *Studio 200* model and is particularly creative because it also includes an “aftercare” program for the youth who graduate from the facility. The aftercare program allows the students to continue their involvement with the arts and creates a transitional period to ease back into society (Psilos, 2005).

The benefits of arts opportunities and programming in relation to youth development and economic sustainability are evident. There is a need for non-profit arts organizations to succeed within communities.

Dakota Prairie Regional Center for the Arts

Dakota Prairie Regional Center for the Arts (DPRCA) has served rural communities with arts opportunities for nearly two decades. DPRCA is a non-profit arts organization located in New Rockford, North Dakota. Housed in the historical Niven-Adams Opera House, DPRCA was created in 1991 by a small group of New Rockford community members. The building itself was built in 1910 and included an opera house and retail space. After recent renovations, the building currently includes the opera house theatre, a lobby, coffee shop, dance studio, dressing room area, costume shop and furnished apartments for the performers (Horizons, 2006).

After participating in DPRCA’s programming, working as a seasonal staff and participating as an audience member and volunteer, I have an interest in seeing them succeed for the community. Growing up in a very rural area, these cultural opportunities were few and far between. Investing in these organizations will help the communities

thrive economically and culturally. Using my professional experience in non-profit organizations, arts and humanities and communication, I can use my expertise to help bolster communication practices within DPRCA and other non-profit organizations. DPRCA is the focus and target non-profit arts organization in this project.

DPRCA provides a large variety of arts opportunities as part of their current programming. The programs range from arts entertainment in the form of musical theatre, theatrical dramas, comedies, opera, and reader's theatre as well as a kindergarten music program, renting their space for a dance program and bringing in lecturers and speakers. In March of 2009, DPRCA received the 2009 Governor's Award through the North Dakota Council on the Arts for their innovation and economic contributions (North Dakota Council on the Arts website).

DPRCA seeks to expand their mission to serve rural youth with performing arts opportunities. A summer arts youth camp for kids is the goal for the future. For a small, rural community and organization, beginning a new program with limited resources can be a challenge. In 2007, DPRCA attempted to hold a 2-week performing arts camp in the summer for young students. A lack of resources, marketing, community interest or all of the above could be the reason why the camp never took place. DPRCA seeks to further develop this program and determine a clear goal for the project and identify communication strategies and practices that will enhance the program and organization.

DPRCA is a small non-profit organization with one and a half paid staff members and approximately 15 volunteers. DPRCA wants to create a program proposal, communication plan and begin to inquire about funding opportunities. There is a need for

adequate research to understand what other youth arts programming there is in North Dakota and what communication strategies have contributed to their success and stability.

Nature of Project

This project will collect information on youth arts programming in North Dakota and the key communication practices which are most important in creating and maintaining programming. This paper will explain the basic principles of public relations and communications and which strategies work best in arts organizations by way of example and case studies. Several examples of youth arts programs in North Dakota are analyzed, detailing their mission, strategic plan, marketing and communication plans, target audience, curriculum, logistics and how communication lead to their success. A summary of key communication concepts and strategies are recommended. The information collected in this paper serves as a resource for non-profit arts organizations to understand their need, to realize communication strategies which can lead to success and sustainability, and to understand how other youth arts programming works and survives.

Organization of Paper

This paper includes of five sections. Section One outlines the background of the importance of non-profit arts organizations in rural communities; Section Two discusses the foundation of public relations and communication strategies and how they have helped other arts organizations; Section Three provides three models of successful youth arts programs in North Dakota and what communication practices contribute to their success and sustainability; Section Four presents a recommendation of communication strategies to incorporate into non-profit arts organizations universally and specifically, recommendations for DPRCA as to which communication strategies will work best for

their organization; Section Five gives my personal reflection on the outcome and future of the project.

SECTION TWO. COMMUNICATION CONCEPTS

In the field of communication, strategies to improve a non-profit arts organization might be endless. The communication areas may span from organizational communication to interpersonal communication to conflict management to advertising. I chose to focus on the public relations and marketing communications within the organization. In my experience with non-profit organizations, public relations and marketing are a very familiar concept and are almost always incorporated into the organization. However, there is usually a lack of expertise and knowledge in this area. I think improving marketing and public relations communication can be easily done within an organization with the right tools and direction. In a rural community, it is the relations with the community and audience which are the most important for it's survival.

The following chapter reviews basic communication practices in the field of public relations and marketing and specific strategies used in promoting and creating programming for the arts and for non-profit organizations.

Public Relations

"Public relations stem from a type of organizational communication; it is a unique form of communication because it is managed (Grunig & Grunig, 1998). Managed communication in the form of public relations is controlling the communication surrounding an organization. Grunig & Grunig (1998) defined *public relations* as, "managed organizational communication," focusing on public affairs and marketing (p. 142). According to Grunig & Grunig's IABC Excellence Project (1998), "public relations makes an organization more effective when it identifies strategic constituencies in the

environment and then develops communication programs to build long-term, trusting relationships with them” (p. 141).

Grunig & Grunig created the original models of public relations. Their public relations models have been practiced, reviewed, contradicted, and revised over the past 25 years. Reagan, Sumner & Hill (1992) reviewed Grunig and Grunig’s original literature of the four models of public relations; one-way asymmetrical, one-way symmetrical, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical (p. 181).

The one-way asymmetrical model or press agency/publicity model uses persuasion to influence the audience’s behavior to align with the organization. This is a propaganda approach which serves a one-way stream of information from the organization to the public (Reagan, Sumner & Hill, 1992, p. 181).

The one-way symmetrical or public information model also provides a one-way stream of communication such as press releases but attempts to present a clear idea of whom and what the organization is (Reagan, Sumner & Hill, 1992, p. 182).

The two-way asymmetrical model attempts to persuade but does not attempt to receive feedback from a public which does result in a two-way communication however, it is still asymmetrical two-way because their main focus is persuasion and not an equal communication between organization and public (Reagan, Sumner & Hill, 1992, p. 182).

The last of the models and the only model which uses two-way, balanced communication is the two-way symmetrical model. This model uses communication to develop an understanding and relationship with the public. This model strives for a free flow of communication and dialogue which equally persuades both the audience and public but also the organization itself (Reagan, Sumner & Hill, 1992, p. 182).

It is mostly impossible for an organization to practices only one type of model. It is more realistic that organizations practice all four models at various times. However, the two-way symmetrical model is a well-rounded and smart way to practice public relations. A combination of all four models with a larger emphasis on two-way symmetrical model is what an organization strives for (Reagan, Sumner & Hill, 1992, p. 182).

Marketing Public Relations and the Arts

In recent years, the line and language determining the differences between public relations and marketing are blurred. McDonald & Harrison (2001) found that art organizations lack professional marketing and public relations, resulting in declining business for the performing arts. They researched how performing arts organizations use marketing and public relations and concluded that these two terms—marketing and public relations—are used interchangeably. Because small organizations and non-profit organizations rarely have the resources to hire professionals in either of these areas, they often combine the communication efforts. When the organizations were asked what type of public relations and marketing strategies they used, they implied that they most often used marketing strategies. However, the “marketing strategies” they described were in fact, public relations strategies. Conclusions of the study suggested performing arts organizations are “underdeveloped in their use and understanding of marketing practices” (McDonald & Harrison, 2001, p. 114). Performing arts organizations need to increase their education and training in marketing public relations to improve (McDonald & Harrison, 2001).

Kotler & Scheff (1997) agreed with the notion of combining public relations efforts with marketing, pointing out the enormous growth and success of such a combination

which occurred in the 1980's (p. 376). Then public relations and marketing “put an end to a long-standing love-hate relationship” (p. 376). Kotler & Scheff (1997) suggested using an active approach in marketing public relations:

An active, market-oriented public relations stance ... assures that the organization has control over how others see it. Tom Harris defines marketing PR as follows: ‘marketing public relations is the process of planning, executing and evaluating programs that encourage purchase and consumer satisfaction through credible communication of information and impressions that identify organizations and their products with the needs, wants, concerns and interests of their publics’ (Kotler & Scheff, 1997, p. 376).

The active approach would ensure that organizations have the control and management of how others view the organization. Kotler & Scheff (1997) provide realistic, cost effective, and easy-to-use public relations strategies that can be incorporated into arts organizations. These strategies are associated with the two-way symmetrical public relations model and include a focus on audience, image, routine, and crisis.

McKnight Foundation Study

Determining a successful marketing public relations plan that works specifically for a rural arts program will take shape by examining what works for other organizations. The McKnight Foundation (2005), a philanthropic organization, published a report by Cuesta, Gillespie & Lillis titled “Bright Stars: Charting the Impact of the Arts in Rural Minnesota.” The report showcased examples of rural art organizations’ success stories. These examples credit public relations and marketing with a focus on community relations for their

advancement. The three reviewed here are good examples of rural non-profit arts organizations that have improved their organization and surpassed expectations.

Bigfork, MN

“You’ve got about as much chance of building a fine-arts center here as a snowball has in hell”, said a Bigfork resident when hearing of a fine-arts center proposal (Cuesta et al., 2005, p. 25). In a small, rural community of fewer than 500 people, no one thought to invest in the arts was possible or necessary. After ten years of engaging the community and gaining support, a \$2 million fine-arts and performance center came to fruition.

In a small logging community, creating opportunities for community engagement was the key to Bigfork’s success. One strategy used to get the community talking about the arts was asking the community for conversation and input. A local community theatre presented a controversial play, and members of the community had some criticisms and questions. The director, Patricia Feld, encouraged the conversation, going so far as to hand out copies of the script and partnering with the local newspaper to run stories about the play’s content and intent. All this conversation happened prior to opening night, and, by the time the show opened, the entire community was talking about the show and eager to attend. Although having one third of the population in attendance was positive for the theatre and the arts, according to Feld, the best part was creating community interaction and dialogue. This experience sparked the interest and support of Bigfork community members to support and incorporate the arts into their lives not only for themselves, but for friends, relatives, and visitors.

In the case of Bigfork, community engagement was the key communication strategy used to gain support and interest in their organization and mission with a focus on the

entire community as a whole. Instead of ignoring the community's negative reaction toward the play, the organization embraced it, discussed it, and encouraged the dialogue. This is two-way communication at its best as well as a great example of crisis communication. At the heart of Bigfork's case is the constant communication with the community.

Fergus Falls, MN

Fergus Falls' successful "A Center for the Arts" is another example of engaging the community. Because Fergus Falls is a larger community of over 13,000, engaging the community as a whole was more difficult. The Center wanted to be the central place where people across the community could come together for different events and occasions. The town was full of other options for residents to come together, but mostly as smaller groups, not as a whole community. "A Center for the Arts" wanted to create opportunities for the community to come together as one and break down barriers that exist (Cuesta et al., 2005). One way they engaged and brought the community together was with the show *Songs from the Tall Grass*. The show, a collection of stories from people living on the prairie, resonated with the people of Fergus Falls as if it was their own story. The cast was composed of all local community members sharing their own talents with the community.

In Fergus Falls, creating opportunities to bring the community together as one has increased support for the arts as well as respect for the arts and each other within the community. Fergus Falls took the time to listen and learn about their community and used commonalities within people to bring community members together. By understanding their audience, they were able to develop a show which connected with the community and was the start to bringing the community together.

New York Mills, MN

New York Mills was inspired by possibility that the arts could benefit the community and have an economic value. In the early 1980's the town's outlook was bleak after several businesses closed within one year. When artist John Davis moved to the 1,175 member community, he was inspired by the community and the serenity of the area. Davis wanted to bring artistic opportunities to New York Mills and also help revitalize the community. Davis says: "Artists often try to sell arts for art's sake, losing sight of its tremendous economic value" (Cuesta et al., 2005, p. 38). Davis started an Artist in Residence program in New York Mills. He accepted proposals from artists who wanted to immerse themselves into the culture of a rural community. The artists' proposals main focus was to offer a benefit to the community.

Community members were more than skeptical. They did not believe that artists would have any interest in coming to New York Mills, let alone, having their artistic projects help the community. The program received proposals from artists across the country and the world including New York City, France and Poland. The community started to believe in the benefits in the arts and they believed they deserved the arts in their community. Because the artists and Davis were completely focused on the community and immersed into the culture of the community, Davis and the arts as a whole gained a reputable credibility. He then approached other community members, leaders, and businesses to help renovate a historical building and turn it into the New York Mills Regional Cultural Center. Davis credits community involvement, communication, and leadership as the key to the success of the center:

Leadership is key, but back-and-forth communication is critical. You can't try to move too fast, or try to be too smart, or try to tell other people how to do something. It's important to listen, to talk to people who have been there, to look for the town historians—people who know the town intimately because they have lived here (Cuesta et al., 2005, p. 39).

New York Mills experience is an example of two-way symmetrical communication. Both the arts and the community benefited from each other and needed each other to thrive. Davis focused on the audience first, understanding them, listening and answering their needs.

These three communities are examples of how to incorporate the arts into a community and work together to benefit from each other. These examples use the two-way symmetrical model to engage in constant communication with their audience. The most common communication focus in these communities is connecting with the audience. In these cases, their audiences were not the people who attended their activities, but any and all people within the community. Community focus is a theme which emerged from these case studies.

SECTION THREE. YOUTH ARTS PROGRAM MODELS

After identifying community relations as a crucial communication strategy for an organization and program, the next step was to identify similar youth arts programs in North Dakota which successfully used these strategies and had a mission and program similar to what DPRCA sought to create and implement. Since DPRCA's programming mostly takes place during the summer months, programs reviewed focused on existing summer programs. There are several arts organizations in North Dakota, but very few serve the youth population and even less are located in rural areas.

North Dakota has several stellar youth arts programs across the state. Trollwood Performing Arts School, a program of the Fargo Public Schools, has been in operation for over 30 years. It serves the Fargo-Moorhead region which is a population over 120,000. A smaller, but prominent program is the Shade Tree Players in Bismarck. This program is part of the Dakota Stage and it has also been operating for over 30 years. Since DPRCA is located in a very small, rural community, it was important to find a program which serves rural youth in North Dakota. The Stump Lake Fine Arts Camp is located near Pekin, North Dakota, population 80. Although the town is very small, the program is located in a popular park located outside of the town and serves the entire county.

After identifying three successful, established programs, each organization was contacted for information about their organization, youth program and communication strategies used. The information collected covered a broad range of information including the mission of the program, educational components, logistical information, instructors and staff, costs of the program, evaluation information, community support and involvement and key communication strategies credited for the success of the programs.

The three programs are very detailed, including logistical elements which don't seem relevant to a larger communication concept or goal. However, it is important to see how a communication concept and strategy is incorporated specifically into a program or task.

Youth Arts Program Models

After analyzing the information, websites and program materials, each program was compared and contrasted and formed into a program model with specific information about what the program is consisted of.

Model 1: Trollwood Performing Arts School's ArtSpark

Mission/Goal of Program. The goal of ArtSpark is to provide a basic foundation of performing arts tools to young students. The foundational tools focus on the performing arts, movement, and voice. Out of these three areas emerge theatre games, singing and speaking, character development, body movement including dancing, stage blocking and yoga and basic technical theatre components. The instructors work with the students to develop and write a script for a performance. At the end of the program, there is a performance for the public and families. The ArtSpark program is popular and the performances are well attended.

Youth Served. The number of students served in this program is approximately 80 to 100. The students are divided into two age levels of first grade through third grade and fourth through sixth. Any student can participate regardless of theatre experience. Auditions are not necessary to participate. Students are typically from the Fargo, West Fargo, Horace, Moorhead area.

Logistics of Program. The ArtSpark program is a half day session which occurs everyday for three weeks during the month of June. There is a morning and afternoon session. The time of the sessions were based upon parent's requests for convenience of transportation. Parents are hopefully able to transport kids before or after work or on their lunch break.

Trollwood Performing Arts School has the advantage of being a part of the Fargo Public Schools. This partnership is a key to its success. Therefore, the ArtSpark program is able to take place in various empty elementary schools across the city. Strong support and interest in the program along with positive relationships allow the Artspark program to also take place in West Fargo and Moorhead schools. They provide a large variety of locations, allowing more students and allow conveniences to parents for transportation purposes.

The costs to participate in TPAS programs are varied. Because TPAS is a part of the Fargo Public Schools, they are partly funded by the Department of Public Instruction. Therefore, taxpaying residents of Fargo pay less for the public school programming than other students such as West Fargo or Moorhead. A student that resides in Fargo pays \$210 for the three week program. A Cass or Clay County resident, other than Fargo Public School district residents, pay \$260. All other locations outside of Cass and Clay County pay \$360 for the program. TPAS offers financial assistance for all programming. TPAS does not deny any student due to inability to pay. Parents can fill out a financial aid form and receive discounted or full tuition waivers.

ArtSpark mainly serves youth within the Fargo/Moorhead metro area. Transportation is not offered for the ArtSpark students. Carpooling is encouraged if parents are struggling to find transportation for their children.

Instructors and Staff. The instructors of the ArtSpark are the heart of the program. Hiring talented, well-received instructors is a priority. The instructors need to have an education and arts background and a very strong reputation for working well with children and having a creative edge. The instructors must be educationally qualified, innovative and talented. Each instructor is paired with another based on their particular expertise. A strong theatrical instructor would be paired with someone who is strong in vocals or movement. The instructors work together to develop the theme of their performance and help the students write their own script.

Marketing, Public Relations, Recruiting. Trollwood Performing Arts School has several youth arts programs and ArtSpark is the program which serves younger children. There is a large amount of advertising for the entire school and all the programs. *The Performer* is the yearly magazine which lists all the programs available for the summer. ArtSpark is listed with information and registration materials. Hundreds of *The Performers* are sent out to every school in the Fargo/Moorhead metro area. School newsletters inform students and parents that *The Performers* are available to pick up in the school offices.

Other marketing and promotional strategies for Artspark include press releases in local newspapers, school newspapers, and newsletters, radio advertising and events such as the Annual Parents Fair located at the Fargodome, where there is an ArtSpark promotion booth set up for parents and children to get information and learn more about the program.

Perhaps the most successful promotional tool for ArtSpark is the school recruiting which is done in the winter and spring. One or two ArtSpark instructors go into elementary classrooms within the Fargo/Moorhead area and talk about the program. This will take place during music time or another classroom time. The instructor explains the program,

hands out informational tools, and demonstrates some activities and games done in the program. The enthusiasm of the instructors and creative activities is a successful motivation for students to enroll in the ArtSpark program.

Evaluation Methods. Evaluations and feedback are an important part of successfully growing and improving this program. Based on the form of funding which pays for a program, it is often required. At the end of the ArtSpark program, teachers, students and parents are asked to fill out evaluations. Vital information has been found in these evaluations and has allowed the ArtSpark program to make changes and improve.

Community Involvement. The main community support for the ArtSpark program comes from the Fargo Public Schools, sponsorships and in-kind donations in the form of facility space and supplies. Other partners include the West Fargo Public Schools who offer to pay part of any West Fargo student's tuition and allow ArtSpark to operate in their classrooms. Fundraising isn't necessarily done on the behalf of this program alone but for the school as a whole.

Reason for success. There are several reasons for the success of the ArtSpark program such as it offers something different than other summer camps for kids. Parents are attracted to the creative process and want their kids to experience and learn something different. The experienced, talented, and enthusiastic instructors are credited for the success of the program. The instructors create a great experience for the students and the parents are pleased. This keeps families coming back each summer and spreading the word to others.

Key Communication Strategies. After reviewing the TPAS ArtSpark program, several key communication strategies are evident in its success. First, there is evidence of two-way

symmetrical communication throughout the program. They are in constant communication with key publics and partners such as the parents, students, instructors and their school partners. TPAS takes the evaluations very seriously. In fact, one reason this program is so successful is the constant analysis of evaluations submitted each year by parents, students, instructors and partners and implementing the feedback from the evaluations. These make the programs more suitable for the audience and promotes and understanding with the audience that their feedback is wanted and actually used.

Securing and maintaining successful community partnerships is also a key communication strategy used by TPAS. These positive partnerships not only logistically help the program by offering many locations and spaces, but it allows a great opportunity for recruiting within the schools, promoting the programs in school papers and reaching instructors and parents.

Model 2: Shade Tree Players

Mission/Goal of Program. Shade Tree Players is a summer performing arts program for youth in Bismarck, North Dakota. Shad Tree Players is a program of the Dakota Stage, a community theatre. The program uses arts as an educational component to increase self esteem and youth development. The program takes place the end of May to the end of August. Throughout the summer, a total of 8 different shows are produced completely made up of students. The students learn performing arts skills including voice, movement and character development. They also help build the sets and put together costumes. The main event is the end result – a complete theatrical performance.

Youth Served. This program serves approximately 300 kids per summer. The students range in age from six to sixteen. The students generally come from the Bismarck-

Mandan city area with little population from outside the city, in rural areas. Students indicate their top three choices of which show they want to be involved in. Based on age and experience and preference, the staff casts the shows. No student is turned away because of level or experience.

Logistics of Program. The Shade Tree Players program takes place during the summer months of June, July and August. The entire experience of participating in a show generally takes four weeks from start to finish and the students go Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The Shade Tree Players program serves primarily the inner city, Bismarck-Mandan students and therefore do not provide a transportation program.

The program and performances take place at the Frances Leech High Prairie Arts and Science Complex, home to the office of the Shade Tree Players. Performances also take place at the parent organization, Dakota Stage. Both of these facilities offer the space and equipment for the rehearsals and performances.

The cost to participate in the program is \$80 for the first child and \$60 for each additional child in the same family. Financial aid and scholarships are available. The fiscal policy of the Shade Tree Players is to never turn away any student because they are unable to pay. The program is funded in part by the Dakota Stage, grants and sponsorships. The majority of the funding is generated by the box office which charges a fee to attend the performance.

Instructors and Staff. The Shade Tree Players program is run by a year-round manager. During the summer, each of the eight shows has two staff, a director and assistant director. The staff members typically have an educational and theatrical background. Many instructors are local teachers, actors or theatrical professionals.

Marketing, Public Relations, Recruiting. The Shade Tree Players has been in operation for over thirty years and their reputation is well-known in the area. The program has experienced tremendous growth over the past several years. The large interest in the program resulted in adding more performances each summer to allow more students to participate; however, many students still are turned away because they operate at capacity. They have developed a contact database made up of Dakota Stage patrons and current and past students of Shade Tree Players. Email notices and reminders are sent to this list to inform of program deadlines and performances. The information is also posted in school flyers within the Bismarck-Mandan area. Bismarck/Mandan Parks and Recreation list the program in their summer activities magazine and other general advertising takes place in the newspaper or community flyers.

Evaluation Methods. The directors and instructors of the programs are asked to complete evaluations at the end of the program. The evaluations are mostly positive with feedback about logistical problems such as space, volunteers or equipment. Neither the parents nor students are asked for feedback.

Community Involvement. Volunteers are a large component of this program. Without the volunteerism of the parents and patrons, the program would be too expensive to exist. Parents volunteer to make costumes, donate supplies, provide props and help make the sets. They also work in the box office and usher during performances.

Positive partnerships are also important to the success of this program. The Shade Tree Players are housed in the Frances Leech Arts and Science Complex and use the facilities resources and equipment within the program and also partner with other arts organizations within the complex.

Reason for success. Success of this program is attributed to talented, enthusiastic and professional staff. A positive experience creates high retention of students who return year after year or siblings of students who join the program. Another reason for the success of the program is the family orientation of the program. The entire family can be involved with the program whether it is making costumes, driving the student to class, watching the performances, or helping to build sets. The volunteerism has helped contribute to the success and longevity of the program. The non-competitive approach is a strength of this program. Students do not have to compete in auditions participate. It is a non-threatening environment where every student gets the chance participate. It helps to build strong, positive, peer relationships.

Other Program Components. Shade Tree Players also offer classes and workshops year round as part of the program. One particular workshop is a week long summer arts camp for kids. A director and assistant director travel to any community interested in the workshop for a fee of \$1,000. This fee includes the salaries for the staff, equipment, supplies and costumes. The workshop takes place for a half day for five days. The morning session is offered to a younger group and the afternoon session is offered for an older group. The students learn theatre techniques, movement, voice exercises and study a script to put on a performance at the end of the week.

This particular workshop could be a learning tool for a community interested in starting a summer arts camp. This workshop would be low maintenance for the community and would help to understand the arts interest for kids in the community.

Key Communication Strategies. The key communication strategies that emerged from Shade Tree Players were the community partnerships and revising the program to fit the

needs and wants of the audience. In this case, the audience wanted more opportunities for kids and having this program be more of a family experience. This worked well for both the organization and audience. The organization needed a strong involvement by the family to fill the needs of volunteers and keep students and families interested. In turn, they found that families were looking for an experience in which they could be more involved as a family in their child's activities. Creating and maintaining positive partnerships within the community such as with the Frances Leech High Prairie Arts and Science Complex, Shade Tree Players provided more opportunities logistically for their program and found another target market.

Model 3: Stump Lake Fine Arts Youth Camp

Mission/Goal of Program. The mission of the Stump Lake Fine Arts Youth Camp is to provide students with a well rounded experience within the arts. In its tenth year, the camp is located in the Stump Lake Park which is 10 miles from the town of Pekin. The program offers a combination of visual, performing, and vocal arts. The visual arts are broken up into different classes such as painting or mosaics. The performing arts portion is a theatrical troupe that works with the students to create a performance. The goal is to provide unique arts opportunities for rural youth.

Youth Served. The 80 students served by this program live within the county or a within a 30 to 60 mile radius. A small number of students attend from other areas or other states. The program is open to students in the second to twelve grade. Students do not need any theatre or art experience to participate in the program.

Logistics of Program. The program takes place in the Stump Lake Park, a large park area with a building, café and shelters. The city commissioner allows the program to use

the buildings and space for the camp each summer. The program runs from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday through Friday for one week in August. The arts showcase and performance take place at the end of the week on Saturday afternoon.

The days are divided into two sessions – visual and performance and younger and older students. The younger students first participate in the performing arts session in the morning while the older students take two visual art classes. In the afternoon they switch. The students get the freedom to choose which visual art classes they want to take or the option to only participate in either visual or performing.

Since the program runs the entire day, a lunch program is provided. The café at the park offers students a very low cost lunch for \$2 per day. The lunch menu is set prior to registration and the students can register and pay for lunch when they sign up for classes. Students also have the option to bring their own lunch. The café takes care of the entire lunch program which is logistically appealing for the program.

The program costs \$60 per student for the entire week. This does not include the \$10 for lunches for the week. If a student only wants to participate in visual or performing portion, the price is \$50. There are scholarships available for students who are unable to afford the program. It is the policy of the Stump Lake Fine Arts Camp not to turn away any student because of their inability to pay.

The towns surrounding Stump Lake Park are very small and rural and they are all 10 to 30 miles away from the park. The transportation component of this program is an important piece to the success of the program. There are free bus rides to and from the park everyday of the week including Saturday. Two-thirds of the participating students ride the buses to the camp. There are a total of three busses which pick up and drop off

students in Tolna, Pekin and McVile. Transportation is a free option provided by the program.

Instructors and Staff. The visual arts staff is generally local artists or art teachers. They do not advertise the positions of staff, but the staff is personally invited to teach in the program. The teachers are usually different each year to give the kids new professionals and a new type of art. It depends on the type of art medium the program wants to teach.

The performing arts staff is a professional traveling theatrical troupe. The troupe is from Grand Forks and made up of five instructors and one technical person. The troupe is very self-sufficient, providing everything from sets to costumes to sound. The troupe is paid approximately \$3,000 for the week. The theatre troupe provides quality programming for a small amount of logistical resources to the program.

Marketing, Public Relations, Recruiting. The Stump Lake Fine Arts Camp has consistently been operating at capacity for the past several years. Therefore, a large marketing and recruiting focus is not necessary. The basic advertising is a mailing in the spring announcing the classes and information about registration deadlines. Information also goes into school newsletters throughout the county. They advertise in the area county and city papers. Performances and visual art projects are showcased in the newspapers during the summer and are put on display in local businesses within the community.

Evaluation Methods. The program currently does not use any evaluation tools or measures. They generally receive feedback from parents during the course of the camp.

Community Involvement. This program relies on community partnerships and support to survive. The county commissioner allows them to use the park and the facilities and offers a generous deal for meals. They also offer storage space for costumes and

equipment during the entire year. The local schools donate the use of the busses for transportation and the program pays the bus drivers. Volunteers and teacher aids are also important to the program. Approximately twelve volunteers and aids help with the program throughout the week.

The program is mostly funded by the Pekin Arts Council's fundraiser. However, there is also a fundraising effort for scholarships. Any person, organization or corporation can donate \$60 for a scholarship for a student. This has been a successful fundraising campaign. People enjoy donating to a specific cause – a scholarship for a child.

Reason for success. The Stump Lake Fine Arts Camp credits community partnerships and community support for the success and longevity of the program. Without the partnerships of the County Commission, the program would not be able to afford to operate. The transportation portion also allows students and parents to conveniently participate in the program. Without the transportation, numbers for the program would be significantly lower. The transportation itself is also a partnership with the school district.

Key Communication Strategies. As mentioned throughout the explanation of Stump Lake, most of their success can be attributed to key communication strategies relating to community involvement and partnerships. It is evident that they are engaged in a two-way symmetrical communication strategy, always focusing on the audience and community first and bringing that feedback into their organization and programs. Especially in a rural community, understanding the needs of the audience and community is the life support of a thriving organization.

SECTION FOUR. RECOMMENDATIONS

After reviewing the benefits of the arts, basic communications principles, key communication strategies used in other arts organizations and youth arts programming in North Dakota, this project offers a recommendation of the appropriate communication concepts best suited for non-profit arts organizations and provides specific communication strategies for DPRCA to incorporate into their organization.

Communication Strategies for Non-Profit Arts Organizations

After reviewing communication practices such as public relations and marketing and analyzing successful arts organizations, several key communication strategies emerged as the most used and most successful.

Two-Way Symmetrical Communication

Two-way symmetrical communication is the foundational communication concept to incorporate into the arts organization. Two-way symmetrical communication is the balance between promotion of the organization to persuade the public and learning from the public to persuade the organization. Practicing two-way communication involves a constant back and forth, give and take between the organization and the public. This communication strategy clearly communicates what the organization can do for the community and what the community can do for the organization.

Marketing Public Relations

Kotler & Scheff (1997) provide a basic framework of how to focus marketing public relations strategies: “PR is the systematic promotion of organizational goals, products, images, and ideologies” (p. 378). Marketing public relations strategies should

revolve around audience needs, the organization's image, routine public relations, and crisis management.

Audience Analysis. The arts organization should determine the audience's level of intelligence, attitudes and beliefs, how they are persuaded and their expectations. Learning about the audience is the first step to creating successful marketing public relations strategies. The organization must first ask who the audience is and deeply analyze this question in the form of surveys, evaluations, focus groups and looking at other successful organizations in the community and what their relationship is with the public (Kotler & Scheff, 1997, p. 337).

Image. The organization should focus on image public relations and the image should be in direct relationship with how they want the audience to view them. What image does the organization want to portray to the audience? Again, this strategy is in direct relationship to the audience. Kotler & Scheff (1997) recommend revitalizing, relaunching and repositioning the organization to build consumer confidence and trust (p. 378).

Routine Public Relations. Consistently engaging in routine public relations helps to continuously connect with the public. Frequently introduce new products or programs to continue excitement and conversation and constantly communicate new benefits to the public (p. 378).

Crisis Communication. Create a crisis communication plan – just in case. Anticipating crisis public relations is necessary to help overcome a potential crisis. In an attempt to anticipate potential problems and create strategies to deal with crises before they actually happen, the organization minimizes negative public relations and damages to the image of the organization (p. 379).

Community Involvement

Rural art organizations enhance support and sustainability through community involvement and participation. It is important for the community to see and understand how the organization and the arts relate to and benefit them.

Community Conversation. Create projects, programs and events that can create a conversation within the entire community. When a person or community feels like they are personally involved or have contributed to a program or project, they are more likely to stay involved and even advocate for the program, project and organization

Community Center. Use the organization's space to create a central community center for general community use and interaction. A community center can be used for many different activities and meetings taking place within the community alongside the organization's own programs. This contributes to a positive image of the organization and the community will feel comfortable in the organization's space.

Collaboration. Take the opportunity to collaborate with the community through programs and projects. If the program or project can both fulfill the arts organization's mission as well as benefit a part of the community such as a business, community space, or group, this will raise the awareness of the arts organization and the benefits of the arts. For example, in New York Mills, the artist in residence program benefited the community and brought the artist and community together.

Community Partnerships

Many non-profit organizations would not exist, thrive or be sustainable without the partnerships of other organizations and businesses. In the three non-profit youth arts programs previously discussed, a large part of their sustainability is attributed to

community partnerships. Creating partnerships can give your organization opportunities and resources otherwise unavailable such as performance space, equipment, transportation equipment and even costumes. These partnerships are healthy for the image of the organization. For example, Trollwood's ArtSpark program is highly credible because of its affiliation with the Fargo Public School District.

After reviewing these key communication strategies, it is evident that in any community, rural or urban, a *community* focused communication plan helps the organization to achieve success and sustainability. Community relations in the form of partnerships, economic development, sponsorships, image, service, and open communication is key to creating and maintaining a thriving organization.

Communication Strategies for DPRCA

Two-Way Symmetrical Communication

Analyze the audience, public and community of the New Rockford-Sheyenne, Carrington and Fessenden area. Look at what other youth opportunities are available in the community and what is the need. Ask the question: "How can DPRCA fill the need?" Engage in constant communication with the audience and public about the program. How can DPRCA incorporate this feedback?

Marketing Public Relations

Audience Analysis. DPRCA should determine the audience's level of intelligence and attitudes and beliefs, by conducting surveys, focus groups, evaluations and providing comment cards. Learning about the audience will help DPRCA answer the need.

Image. DPRCA currently has an image since they have been in business for several years. However, with the creation of a new program and new opportunities, it is the perfect

opportunity to look at what the image should be. Kotler & Scheff (1997) recommended revitalizing, re-launching and repositioning the organization to build consumer confidence and trust (p. 378). This is the perfect time to bring in a new logo, website, color scheme or sign to show the changes of the organization, but it also shows that the organization is thriving and continuing to grow. This sparks confidence, yet inspire curiosity from the audience.

Routine Public Relations. Public relations and communication is not a one time project. Even addressing these concepts every couple years is not enough. The public relations and communication between the audience and DPRCA must be constant. Routinely interact with the audience by introducing new products and opportunities such as movie night, music in the lobby or other events to keep the audience interested and updated.

Crisis Communication. It is smart to create a crisis communication plan and be proactive in public relations and to protect DPRCA from damaging their image. List potential hazards and problems that might arise from each program, event, performance and discuss how DPRCA would handle those problems. Make a list of crisis contacts such as physician, counselor, lawyer, carpenter, sound technician, seamstress, plumber, artist, newspaper, radio contact, and have names and contact information ready.

Community Involvement

Community Conversation. DPRCA should create projects, programs and events that can create a conversation within the entire community. A play that addresses issues within the community or shares a history with the community could be opportunities to start a conversation. The community could participate in a script reading and discussion, panel

discussion after the performance, newspaper articles and even radio discussions of the theme/issue. Engaging the community will increase the awareness of DPRCA and also how the arts can lead to dialogue and community participation.

Community Center. DPRCA has a beautiful space with a coffee shop, small theatre, dance studio and apartments. They have an opportunity to use this space as a hub for the entire community in different ways. The Opera House should be “the place” where people meet, converse, discuss, and host parties. Encourage local book discussion groups, library events, school events, service club meetings, scrapbook parties, showers, receptions, and community planning meetings to hold their events at the opera house. Creating a central space and place for the community and events will increase the flow of traffic in the building and increase the understanding of who/what DPRCA is. The image of DPRCA improves because of the service they are providing to the community. A new audience will feel comfortable in the Opera House and likely to return.

Community Collaboration. In a small, rural community, where resources and participation is limited, collaboration with people and organizations throughout the community is important. This is a perfect opportunity for the community to see and feel the arts and their benefits. Take the opportunity to collaborate with the community through programs and projects. The youth arts program participants could perform at the Retirement Community or the Fourth of July parade. Perhaps the theatre troupe could perform at the halftime show of the basketball game or be a guest lecture or activity in the high school musical education class. DPRCA could organize and host a field trip for youth to attend an arts event at a professional theatre.

Community Partnerships

Opportunities for partnerships in any community are almost always available, especially when creativity is involved. Small, rural communities need to pool resources and partner with fellow organizations and businesses in a rural community. I would recommend that DPRCA research the possibility of partnering with the school district to offer credits for arts and physical education courses. Perhaps a dance class or music class can satisfy requirements from the Department of Public Instruction. There might be an opportunity to provide an after school daycare program for students who are not old enough to stay home by themselves. An after school program from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. could help the needs of parents while introducing different arts opportunities to students.

These strategies can easily be incorporated into arts organizations and specific programs to increase awareness, support and participation. This paper serves as a communication resource for non-profit arts organizations looking to improve, enhance and sustain their organization or to begin new programming and projects. It is evident that communication plays a significant role in the success in any organization and the relationship between an organization and its audience.

SECTION FIVE. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This project provided me with a new understanding of the significant role that non-profit organizations play in the state of North Dakota and rural communities. Working in the non-profit sector and seeing first hand the lack of communication resources and expertise used resonated with me given my education background in the communications field. When beginning this project, I was more focused on improving arts programming in North Dakota by using communication strategies to make the organization and program more successful. Upon completion of this project, I feel there is so much more to think about. It is evident that these non-profit organizations, arts or otherwise, are a lifeline in a rural economy. For example, DPRCA recently completely renovated the outside of their building and the next door businesses as well. This added a great deal of economic value to that area and the community. The theatre also opened a coffee shop and dance space for classes, workshops and a community space. Through this research, I found these non-profit organizations are on the right track, they care about their community, they care about their cause and are driven by passion and their love for their community.

However, it seems something is missing. I believe there is an insufficient use of community support and clear communications in these organizations. Communications and public relations is about clearly communicating your message to someone else. It is the goal of communications and public relations to help others to understand, believe, and invest in the organization's mission. In my recommendations, I focus more on the specific communication strategies; however, I highlight two main concepts which are imperative to DPRCA and their moving forward in their organization. These concepts are "Understanding the Community" and "Community Collaboration". The first step to

creating clearer communications is to know who you are actually communicating to. There is an urgent need for audience research and analysis, specifically with current audience members, non-audience members, and people from surrounding communities. The second concept is to create a community focus through collaboration, partnerships, and conversations. This community focus enhances the organizations image and support a community culture which represents working together and thriving together. These partnerships are crucial to the economic development of a rural community and the satisfaction of the community members.

This project has contributed to my current work in the non-profit sector as program officer for the North Dakota Humanities Council. Working at the humanities council helped me to understand the significant role that the arts play in the larger picture of the humanities. I understand how the arts can serve as a tool to connect us to the humanities, to our families, to conversations, to our community. Arts are not an end in itself, but they are so much more than that. They can be the bridge and the connection to public discourse, community conversation, economic stability, personal reflections and growth. These are the very reasons why it is important that we invest the time and resources in the arts, humanities and the non-profit organizations which bring them to the public.

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