

Public Awareness, Marketing and Public Relations: A Look at the Efforts of Three Bay Area Counties

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

San Mateo County is retooling its marketing materials and working to enhance and expand its media outreach efforts. It is also looking at ways to increase the number of foster and adoptive parents in the county, and increase the number of families receiving food stamps. San Mateo County, like other Bay Area counties, finds it challenging to recruit and retain foster and adoptive families due to the high cost of living.

Alameda County implemented its Faith Initiative, “A Pathway to Home,” in Fall, 2006. It is an initiative that created a partnership with the faith-based community to increase the number of foster and adoptive parents county-wide. San Francisco County has two EBT Programs, the Healthy Food Purchase and the Food Stamp Restaurant Meals Programs. The Healthy Food Purchase Program allows food stamp recipients to use the EBT card to purchase produce at Farmers Markets. The Food Stamp Restaurant Meals Program allows for the purchase of meals in authorized restaurants using the EBT card. Santa Clara County developed a county-specific social marketing campaign for its Safely Surrendered Baby Program.

Alameda County has increased its number of foster and adoptive parents. San Francisco County has seen a significant increase in the number of low-income families purchasing produce. Santa Clara

County has had a reduction in the number of abandoned babies since implementing its successful Safely Surrendered Baby Program. Each of these counties achieved success in its specific efforts as a direct result of creative, sustained and targeted marketing and outreach.

Recommendations for San Mateo County

My recommendations for San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HSA) are the following:

- The marketing materials for every outreach effort, no matter how small, should be easily identifiable and recognizable as HSA’s materials by the community and the media through the use of logos, color schemes, and format. The most important tools of a sustained, effective marketing effort are “branded” and visually interesting marketing materials that are instantly recognized.
- HSA should also increase outreach efforts to the media to enhance and sustain those ongoing relationships.
- To expand its efforts in recruiting resource parents, HSA should closely evaluate Alameda County’s Faith Initiative to determine its applications for HSA’s recruitment efforts.
- Finally, HSA should also look at the feasibility of a Healthy Food Purchase Program for its Food Stamp recipients.

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Background

Often in the area of social services, communication with the media and the community occurs in response to a negative occurrence, such as a child's death or a poor audit finding. Proactive marketing, public awareness, and outreach are important communication vehicles social services agencies can use to provide information to the media, the public, and the clients served about available programs and services as well as about positive program outcomes.

Through the BASSC internship, I had the opportunity to learn about four different programs in three counties and the creative marketing strategies used to successfully develop and promote them. I met with staff in Alameda, San Francisco, and Santa Clara counties. In Alameda and Santa Clara, I met with the Public Information Officers, and in San Francisco, I met with the Food Stamps Program Manager who was responsible for implementing and marketing the two Food Stamps programs described here. Public Information Officers are the communications coordinators or spokespersons of governmental organizations. It is their role to serve as a centralized contact point for two-way communication between an agency and its various audiences.

MARKETING DEFINITION AND KEY CONCEPTS

According to information from the Social Marketing Institute's website, social marketing is the application of commercial marketing concepts and techniques to target populations to achieve the goal of positive social change. The important general marketing concepts are:

- The ultimate objective of marketing is to influence action;

- Action is undertaken whenever target audiences believe that the benefits they receive will be greater than the costs they incur; and
- Programs to influence action will be more effective if they are based on an understanding of the target audience's own perceptions of the proposed exchange.

Target audiences are seldom uniform in their perceptions and/or responses to marketing efforts and so should be partitioned into segments. Marketing efforts must incorporate all of the "4 Ps":

- Create an enticing "*Product*" (i.e., the package of benefits associated with the desired action);
- Minimize the "*Price*" the target audience believes it must pay in the exchange;
- Make the exchange and its opportunities available in "*Places*" that reach the audience and fit its lifestyles; and
- "*Promote*" the exchange opportunity with creativity and through channels and tactics that maximize desired responses.

Recommended behaviors always have competition which must be understood and addressed. The marketplace is constantly changing so marketing program effects must be regularly monitored and management should be prepared to rapidly alter strategies and tactics.

COMMONALITY OF IDENTIFIED GOAL/BEST PRACTICES FOR MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

Both of the Public Information Officers (PIOs) said that the goals of communication with the community and the media are to:

- provide education and information in order to advance positive awareness of the agency;

- strengthen relations with the community by increasing understanding and support; and
- minimize negative perceptions.

Both PIOs maintain regular communication with the media and request press time to highlight a successful program outcome in the newspaper, or in a television news segment whenever possible. The PIOs said ongoing relationship-building with the media is important so that when a negative incident occurs like an injury to a child in child protective services, the response from the media is more tempered and less confrontational.

Three key communication methods were identified by the PIOs:

- 1 Uniformity in design of all written communication materials.
- 2 Sustained, targeted communication/marketing effort to maximize public exposure and response to the information.
- 3 Development of issue/program-specific public information campaigns.

CHALLENGES

The PIOs from Alameda and Santa Clara Counties are PIO/Executive Assistant and PIO/Government Affairs, respectively. Both of them told me that to meet the agencies' true marketing and public relations needs, the positions needed to be full-time PIO's. There is a real need for ongoing positive media exposure for the agency. Evidence of this need surfaced after each rolled out their program's marketing campaigns and then received many requests for similar marketing efforts from other agency departments.

Both PIOs emphasized that successful marketing campaigns required a sustained effort, usually over a period of at least three months, to attain maximum exposure for the programs or services that are the focus of the campaign. The costs of a full-on, sustained marketing effort can be expensive, especially if the marketing vehicles include radio, TV, and/or print ad space such as that on billboards or buses.

Programs and Marketing Efforts

ALAMEDA COUNTY'S FAITH INITIATIVE "A PATHWAY TO HOME"

The Alameda County Faith Initiative represents a partnership between the Alameda County Social Services Agency, Department of Children and Family Services, faith institutions and community-based organizations (CBOs) throughout Alameda County. The partnership was forged in response to the significant reduction in active licensed foster homes in the county over a ten-year period. This reduction occurred for several reasons: the increased high cost of living due to higher housing, gas, and other costs; the natural aging of the existing foster parent population; and the changing demographics of the communities. This partnership acknowledges the community's dedication to children and youth in foster care, and its commitment to ensure that they are provided access to all of the opportunities and life enriching experiences they so rightfully deserve.

The Alameda County Faith Initiative began as a simple concept in September, 2005. The goal was to bring together faith institutions throughout the county to assist the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in the recruitment and retention of 400 county licensed foster homes. On September 1, 2005, DCFS hosted its first county-wide faith breakfast to outline the challenges, and solicit help in developing strategies to meet those challenges. With over 75 faith leaders, community activists, adoptive parents, foster parents, and concerned citizens in attendance, the breakfast was the start of the Alameda County Faith Initiative. Out of this group, the Alameda County Faith Advisory Council was formed. The Faith Advisory Council currently has a membership of 75 faith institutions and community organizations. This effort has shaped the DCFS' strategies for community engagement, public awareness, and recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families.

Marketing Materials and Outreach Strategies. The Alameda County Faith Initiative created a concept, "A Pathway to Home," with the tagline "Every child

deserves a family.” The marketing campaign was orchestrated in a phased and coordinated manner. A logo formed in the shape of a house and using the words “A Pathway to Home” was designed. Several types of flyers, bookmarks, a hand-held fan, a business card holder, and a change purse were also designed with the faces of children who needed a home and the logo imprinted on them. These items were then distributed in the churches and in the community by the Faith Advisory Council and the agency to create visibility and recognition for the new program. A ten-minute video featuring interviews with agency staff, the Chairman of the Tribe, the Director of Children and Family Services, the foster and adoption program recruiter, and foster children was created by a local hip-hop artist to put a youthful spin on the message using some hip hop music and stylizations. This video was shown at churches, CBOs, and other venues to achieve community awareness. All of these items were included in a press kit using a folder imprinted with the picture of a child’s hand clasped in an adult’s hand with the tagline “Imagine going through life with no one to hold your hand.” The folder also has the Alameda County Social Services and the “A Pathway to Home” logos on it along with the information telephone number, and website address.

In May, which is Foster Care Awareness Month, 5,000 bookmarks with the “A Pathway to Home,” logo, children’s faces, and information number and website were sent to Barnes and Noble bookstores county-wide. Every book purchased in the month of May at Barnes and Noble would include a bookmark. Three 30-second PSAs were created from the ten-minute video and played on Alameda County’s website and streamed as video on the websites of three very popular hip-hop, R & B, and soft-rock radio stations. An environmental campaign was also launched from November through February using billboards and bus shelters.

Cost. The cost for all of these materials and air time is approximately \$155,000 per year. Some funding support and in-kind contributions were obtained from the Casey Foundation, from the Family to Fam-

ily Initiative funding, and from reduced or donated billboard and bus-depot space, and reduced airtime costs donated by the radio stations.

Outcomes. Since implementation in Fall, 2006, 300 inquiries were received about the foster and adoption programs, and 15 families are already in the licensing process. This is striking given the fact that at the time of program implementation, Alameda County had about 200 foster and adoptive homes. Marian Wright Edelman, Executive Director of The Children’s Defense Fund, saw Alameda County’s program and its marketing campaign, and has launched a national Faith-based Foster and Adoptive Parents Recruitment effort using many of Alameda County’s marketing strategies.

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY’S EBT CARD PROGRAMS

San Francisco County’s Food Stamp Restaurant Meals Program allows both non-assistance and public assistance households who are homeless, elderly, or disabled to purchase prepared food from authorized restaurants using an EBT card. The restaurants are equipped with an EBT swipe machine authorized and coded by the USDA. During client intake interviews, the EBT cards of each homeless, disabled, or elderly person is imprinted with a code. The clients are given a list of the county-wide authorized restaurants they may patronize. Signage that clearly states who is eligible to use the EBT card was designed and every authorized EBT restaurant displays it. Participating restaurants include 15 Subway, 3 Carl’s Jr. Restaurants, and 11 neighborhood restaurants. At clients’ suggestions, and upon inspection by the Food Stamps Manager, additional restaurants, particularly neighborhood restaurants, are added from time to time.

Outreach and Marketing. San Francisco was the first county in California to implement the Food Stamp Restaurant Meals Program. San Francisco’s marketing and outreach efforts were centered on highlighting the benefits of the program to the clients, and the community. San Francisco County identified several program benefits which included:

- the influx of new money into local restaurants which rejuvenated the struggling community;
- less panhandling;
- better public health due to the reduction in purchased groceries left near encampments; and
- the increased “street value” of food stamp benefits due to the ability to use food stamps benefits for prepared food.

All marketing materials, including the list of participating restaurants given to clients, have the San Francisco County’s Human Services Agency logo. The Food Stamps Manager is the contact and the connection for the clients, the restaurants, and the community. Participating restaurants and clients contact this manager with any issues or concerns, and this manager is the contact designated by the state as the contact for any counties desiring to replicate the program. The Food Stamps Manager also conducts outreach to non-participating restaurants to encourage participation and increase the clients’ restaurant choices.

Cost. The swipe machines located at each authorized restaurant are provided by the state. Two full-time senior eligibility workers were added to the Food Stamp Department to provide information and general customer service to clients.

Outcomes. Below are the total dollar amounts spent in the authorized restaurants by clients using their EBT cards to purchase prepared foods.

2003	\$231,760
2004	\$545,099
2005	\$481,487
2006	\$466,825

At implementation in 2003, San Francisco had almost 2,000 elderly and/or disabled people, and 4,000 homeless people receiving food stamps. This represented 40% of the total food stamps caseload in San Francisco County. Between 2004 and 2006 San Francisco had a reduction of over 1,000 homeless cases in its caseload.

HEALTHY FOOD PURCHASE PROGRAM (FARMERS MARKET PROGRAM)

In collaboration with the San Francisco County Department of Health, the San Francisco County Hu-

man Services Agency implemented a program called, “The Healthy Food Purchase Program” in 2003. This program allows all food stamp recipients to purchase produce at the eight Farmers Markets located throughout the county. The San Francisco County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution requiring any Farmers Market operating within the County of San Francisco to be equipped to accept EBT card purchases. The Resolution described the benefits of the program as follows: promotes better nutrition and healthier living; offers an efficient delivery of produce directly to consumers, especially for those without cars or convenient access to supermarkets; and brings people outdoors to walk and mingle with others engendering community solidarity and connecting City residents with farmers.

Food stamp recipients swipe the EBT card at one specific cash register in the Farmers Market. They are given “Scrip” in return, which is a voucher, instead of cash, for use at any vendor located within the Farmers Market. Each vendor accepts the Scrip, and then turns in all Scrip received from purchases to a designated Farmers Market Manager who reimburses that vendor with cash. That designated Farmers Market Manager is the only person who has an account with the County Human Services Agency to receive monthly food stamp fund deposits used to reimburse the vendors. This system is very efficient and eliminated the need for EBT swipe card machines at each individual vendor area. After much negotiation, in May, 2007, the Bayview Hunters Point Farmers Market opened. This was a significant accomplishment because there is no supermarket in that area so residents did not have easy access to fresh fruits and produce.

Marketing Strategy/Materials. Each Farmers Market vendor wears a small button with the EBT card symbol and the words, “We gladly accept EBT.” Flyers describing the program are mailed to every food stamp recipient once a year. Large, color posters with colorful pictures of fruit and produce are displayed in local businesses throughout the County. The poster bears the EBT card symbol and provides information on the location, telephone number, and operating

hours of each Farmers Market. The hotline number for San Francisco Food Stamp Outreach is also included.

Cost. Marketing materials cost approximately \$4,000-\$6,000. Two full-time senior eligibility workers were added to the Food Stamp Department to provide information and general customer service to clients for this program as well as for the Food Stamp Restaurant Meals Program.

Outcomes. EBT card purchasing data is available for each individual Farmers Market. Here are the annual EBT card purchase totals for all Farmers Markets combined:

2004	\$17,481
2005	\$31,676
2006	\$32,038

The Healthy Food Purchase Program is the result of collaboration between the County of San Francisco Human Services Agency, and the Department of Environmental Health. Program evaluation measures have not been fully developed at this time, but there may be positive implications for a reduction in obesity percentages in low-income populations as this program is used more widely by higher numbers of food stamp recipients.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY'S

SAFELY SURRENDERED BABY CAMPAIGN

The Safely Surrendered Baby Program was implemented in Santa Clara and state-wide as a result of the enactment of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law in January 1, 2001. The law states that, "No parent or other person having lawful custody of a minor child 72 hours old or younger may be prosecuted for child abandonment if he or she surrenders physical custody of the child to any employee on duty at a public or private hospital emergency room, or any additional location designated by the board of supervisors." The law requires use of the state-wide logo, a baby cradled in one hand by an adult, on all documents publicizing the program. The goal of the program is to educate women about choice of surrender versus abandonment, and reduce the number of abandoned babies. The targeted audience is women of child bearing age (14 to 38 years of age).

Marketing Methods and Materials. Santa Clara County created a Safe Haven Task Force to implement the program, and a Media, Education, and Outreach Sub-Committee to implement the marketing campaign. The marketing campaign was developed as a multi-pronged approach. The objective was to blanket the message across each community within the county's 15 cities, to connect those communities to the issue. Bus and CalTrans ads were used to reach commuters; flyers and pamphlets were widely distributed throughout the community; and the newspapers carried the story.

An education component was developed too, and an education kit which included a video and instructor's guide was provided to every hospital, ER, fire station. A curriculum was created for middle school, high school, and college students. All materials had the logo and contact information for the county printed on them with a blue baby blanket as the background.

Cost. The cost for the campaign is approximately \$110,000 annually (\$55K grants, donated funds; \$50K First 5 Santa Clara County funds, and \$5K from the Lucile Packard Foundation).

Outcome/Impact. Some of the issues Santa Clara faced in its efforts to evaluate the program were: the lack of a comprehensive strategy for the prevention of infant abandonment, and the difficulty in knowing if the law is working – are those who safety surrender infants those who would have abandoned them if there was no law? Even though these issues exist, Santa Clara still had positive results from the campaign efforts. These are:

2001-2005	1 Safely Surrendered Baby;
2006	4 Safely Surrendered Babies, 0 Reported Abandoned Babies
2007	3 Safely Surrendered Babies to date

Recommendations and Next Steps

San Mateo County Human Services Agency (HAS) is currently developing a new marketing campaign for its Food Stamp and Resource Parent programs. Also, HSA developed a template for use by any department for individual department's outreach efforts.

Recommended next steps include the following:

- Enhance marketing efforts. Continue to develop uniform written marketing tools that “brand” HSA;
- Develop individual program marketing plans. For example, develop a plan to market, “Creative Avenues to Successful Hires,”-CASH program, a new program charged with increasing the work participation rates of clients.
- Study the feasibility of implementing an EBT Farmers Market Program. Currently, there are 1700-1900 individuals receiving food stamps in San Mateo County.
- Identify cities having the greatest need for food stamps (most likely to be eligible). HSA sent Food Stamp information inserted inside Val Pak coupons to: San Carlos, Redwood City, East Palo Alto, Burlingame, San Bruno, Pacifica, Daly City, South San Francisco, and Brisbane. Target the Farmers Market Program to those cities as a start.
- Study the feasibility of a faith initiative similar to Alameda’s program. The faith community is currently engaged in health care awareness and health disparities programs and could likely be engaged for this effort as well.

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