Moving Towards Organizational Best Practice

# Marketing and Communications

Nonprofit marketing and community strategies refer to all messages and media deployed to share about an organization’s work. This may involve advertising, website development, newsletters, branding, managing social media accounts and an online presence, developing printed materials, and general public relation activities. Some nonprofits have an administrative staff person specifically charged with marketing and communications; in smaller nonprofits, these responsibilities are shared among administrative staff and even program staff. Analysis of study participant narratives suggests that marketing and communications work can support street intervention workers through both a) promoting their success in the community and among external stakeholders, and b) contributing to their process of positive self-regard and personal redefinition as a community peacemaker.

Marketing is an effective great tool by which a nonprofit organization can explicitly and implicitly communicate to the public about the organization’s mission, values, services, and others. Study participants indicated that there is a lot of misinformation about street intervention-outreach work out in the public, which may further strengthen some stereotypes and bring about stigmatization.

*I don't like being stigmatized and the stereotypes of, you're just a thug with a job, 'cause they think of outreach workers are people that do this kind of work are usually just thugs, you know, are usually just using that as a front.*

There is an opportunity for marketing and communications staff within nonprofits to elevate the profiles of street intervention workers in their communities. This may involve writing profiles of their staff in newsletters, providing media opportunities to discuss their work, and honoring the work of street intervention staff in organizational reports, events, social media posts, and community engagement strategies. This form of recognition contributes to the positive self-regard of street intervention workers, which counteracts stereotypes largely based on one’s past. This suggestion is consistent with redemptive narratives articulated by street intervention workers’ accounts of their pathway to violence reduction work. Marketing and communication strategies can further enhance the mission of street intervention workers to build up their communities, atone for their past, and change public perception of individuals who were formerly street involved or incarcerated.

*There is nothing, but there definitely needs to be like some type of- some type of affirmation where you know, street intervention workers are recognized for the work that we do.*

It is necessary to acknowledge, however, that not all street intervention workers may be comfortable as subjects of marketing and external communications. Receiving media attention may compromise their street credibility; staff could be viewed as “sellouts” or undercover ‘tricks’ seeking out information on street organizations to share with an external audience. They could also be perceived as taking individual credit for the collective impact of street intervention workers, and therefore generate enmity within their coworkers. Anonymity and maintaining a low-key profile within the community can serve to protect street intervention workers as they navigate violence reduction work. Therefore, these recommendations should only be considered to the extent that street intervention workers are disposed to share their story and work with a larger audience.

If street intervention workers are disposed to participate in marketing and communications work, it is the responsibility of the organization to support street intervention staff in preparing for media contact work as well as negotiating with the media outlets on how the story is crafted. Reporters who conduct interviews do not always have full editorial decision-making power over stories; headlines and news content can shift depending on the desired effect of the editorial board. Thus, although a nonprofit and/ or a street intervention worker may engage with local media with the best of intentions, the story may be crafted in a way that further contributes to the stigmatization of street intervention workers. For example, titles that use deficit-based labels such as “Ex-Offender” or “Former Gang Member…. Gives back to his community and prevents violence” is harmful and perpetuates deficit-based narratives of street intervention work.

# Food for Thought

* + What is the comfort level of street intervention workers in sharing their life and work for external communication purposes? (i.e., an organizational newsletter or annual report)
  + What is the comfort level of street intervention workers in conversing with media outlets (newspapers, television, and radio)?
  + What stories do our street intervention workers feel are important to be shared within our community, and with the city/ country at large?
  + How can our organization support street intervention workers in sharing their story and experience with a broader audience?
  + What opportunities exist to share within our communities the work of our street intervention team?