

Orientation Module Six
Marketing Your FCSS
Program



**Family and Community Support
Services Association of Alberta**
1998

Orientation Module Six

Marketing Your FCSS program

Produced for

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Orientation Module Six

Marketing Your FCSS Program

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This is one of **eight orientation modules** developed by the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta for:

- Municipal Councils and Metis Settlements who are entering the FCSS program for the first time, or re-entering FCSS on a different basis than previously;
- Newly elected municipal or Metis Settlement councils who are learning about FCSS programs that already exist in their communities;
- FCSS Board members, directors and other individuals who are new to the FCSS program.

The other seven orientation modules are:

- Module One: History and Philosophy of FCSS
- Module Two: The FCSS Mandate and Program Guidelines
- Module Three: Community Development and Community Planning
- Module Four: Managing Your FCSS Program
- Module Five: Legal and Financial Accountability in FCSS
- Module Seven: Networking in FCSS
- Module Eight: Suggested Orientation Activities

All modules are available from the FCSS Association.

Orientation Module Six

Marketing Your FCSS Program

Why would you want to market your FCSS program?

Experienced FCSS board members and directors say that “marketing” is a continuous job for FCSS. We are using the term “marketing” to mean “ensuring an ongoing two-way communication between the FCSS program and others.”

You want to market your FCSS program in order to:

- encourage municipal or Metis Settlement council, the Board and the community to “buy in” to what you’re doing;
- increase the public profile of your services;
- increase the community’s knowledge of FCSS;
- solicit volunteers;
- promote specific events or activities.

Those who do “good works” tend to think that everyone will support their services, because they’re important. The reality is that services cost money and people want to be sure they’re getting their money’s worth. You must continually remind people of all the good you’re doing and what services they are getting. A program cannot get by on being trustworthy – you must prove your worth to the community.

There is also an assumption that, in small communities, there’s no need to promote anything because everyone already knows. While we have all been astonished sometimes by the things our neighbors know about our lives, there have also been many occasions when we’ve been startled to hear “I didn’t know that!” We can’t assume people know everything.

And, in truth, what people know and what they care about are two different things. It is necessary to pique people’s interest in your program.

Marketing Audiences

Basically an FCSS program has four kinds of people who are an “audience” for marketing:

- the people who could use your service (the public, sub-groups of the community);
- people with whom FCSS may work (agencies, service clubs);
- people who may volunteer;
- people whose support you need (council, funders, opinion leaders);

Targeting an audience

Whether you are writing a story for the paper or planning a presentation to the Board, you need to ask yourself the same questions. Who are the people who will get this information? What is it

about my organization that will interest them? What does this group care about?

You must tailor your information to meet the needs of the people you will be reaching. Marketing is a two-way communication process -- both parties should get something out of it. Focus on the benefits of your program that are of most interest to them. For example:

Each of these groups of people will focus on a different perspective of your program:

Group	Area of Interest
People who could/do benefit from FCSS Service	- how do I get helped - what kind of help is available - how will it help me
Ministerial Association	- how many people are being helped
School Board	- pre-school intervention figures - # school age children in crisis
Service Clubs	- ways their club can contribute - how their \$ will make a difference
Municipal or Metis Settlement Council	- effective use of finances/rate of success - return on their investment

In this orientation module we will focus on three “marketing” issues

1. Working with municipal or Metis Settlement councils;
2. Working with other community agencies;
3. Using media to market FCSS;

Working with your municipal or Metis Settlement council

Of any stakeholder group, your municipal or Metis Settlement council is the group with whom it is most important to have a good working relationship. They are the ones who sign the agreement with the province which determines the existence of your FCSS program. They are accountable. They also feel responsible for what goes on in the community. If your municipal or Metis Settlement council also acts as the FCSS Board, building a relationship may be easier, but ensuring positive communication is still critical.

In the beginning it can be worthwhile to get to know your municipal or Metis Settlement council and get to understand why they thought this program was important. Participation in FCSS is voluntary, so there must have been some reason they thought it was worthwhile to be involved.

Find out what your council hopes FCSS will accomplish for your community; get them to tell you what they expect from you, your board (if there is one) and your programs. Though they

must have had solid reasons for wanting the FCSS program don't assume everyone on council is a fan -- find out!

It is helpful to get to know the council and understand what is important to them. Even if they are your FCSS Board, they have many other issues on their plates. Remember they do represent the public and they may be closer to how the people in the community think than you are. The councillors can be a wonderful vehicle for communication to the public and can help explain benefits to community. Your councillors can also be very good informal needs assessors.

You need to know in what form, with what frequency, and including what content the council wants about your program. If they say only "we want to hear from you only once a year at budget time" figure out other ways to ensure they know about your programs regularly so that your contact is more than just a discussion about money. Figure out ways to share more than your statistics, share your stories and the benefits of what you're doing – copies of news releases, snippets of reports, whatever you can manage to get in front of them.

Whenever you have the opportunity to make a presentation to your municipal or Metis Settlement council, remember that you are in competition with every other thing going on in the community. Be sure to be brief, concise and be specific. Ensure your presentation reflects what your program is achieving – and emphasizes that their dollars are being well spent. If you have an issue or concern to raise, be specific about what you want from them – tell them clearly the issue on which you want a decision and what their options are.

Never let your municipal or Metis Settlement council be surprised. Always let them know ahead of time if you foresee any problems arising or if your program is thinking about doing something controversial. Your municipal council may get complaints about you -- try to get to them first. Always be straight – if you've made a mistake, tell them the truth – you can never recover your credibility and trust if you lose it.

The municipal or Metis Settlement administrator is likely the pivotal link between your FCSS program and the council. You will need to know what this person needs to stay on top of the program from an administration point of view. The idea is, at minimum, not to jeopardize and, at maximum, to enhance your relationship with council. You will need to figure out how to have a positive relationship with the administrator. Of course, if you *are* the administrator this shouldn't be a problem!

Theoretically, a municipal or Metis Settlement council will only deal with broad goals, policy, etc. In reality, the smaller the community, the more likely the council practice will be to deal in details. Go with their usual style.

Working with other community agencies

Use these same common sense approaches to dealing with other agencies in your community.

Traditionally, FCSS has been involved in local Interagency groups and has developed relationships with other agencies in the community. These agencies are important to the success of your FCSS program because they can help you:

- serve the public;
- help the public learn about what you have to offer.

In order to reach the people your program is intended to serve, determine their natural meeting places and market appropriately in those venues – which might be in the offices or program locations of other agencies.

Following the theme of two-way communication, you can also help these agencies reach people who might benefit from their services.

In small communities, don't overlook word of mouth as an effective form of marketing. Identify the natural leadership of the community and be sure to keep them informed of your activities. Some of these people may already be on your board, municipal or Metis Settlement council; others may be involved with the community in different capacities. A well informed public is a fabulous lobbying tool!

Using the media to market your FCSS program

While every community is different, there are some general guidelines that are useful to remember when you are dealing with a local newspaper, radio station or the local cable company:

- They are there to help. Their job is to share information and promote interest in the community.
- Never assume the media know and understand all about your program. Develop a relationship with your media representatives and try to establish a consistent, primary contact. Provide them with information regularly and on a timely basis, explain things in detail, always confirm if they are aware of your special events or activities.
- Call on the media when you have good news and when you have things going on.
- If your organization runs into a problem, call the media before they call you. Make it a firm rule that if something happens in your organization you will be the first to talk about it publicly. For example, if something goes wrong in a big way, notify your local media and tell the story. Let them know what happened and be sure to emphasize what action you are taking to ensure it never happens again. Accentuate the positive.

For example, a local community centre was recently the target of a break-in. The centre coordinator does fundraising for a local charity as a volunteer. She had a sum of money in her desk that had been donated to the charity. When the community centre was robbed, the charity's money was taken. She contacted the media and said "Who would do this awful thing? Please ask whoever took this money to have a heart." She and other staff also talked about the things they would do to ensure the security of the centre was improved. The story became hers and no-one focused on the question "Why wasn't the charity's money in the bank – what was it doing in your desk drawer at work?"

- Small market media outlets are often training grounds for young, inexperienced reporters. They are eager to learn and can be great allies, but they do need a bit of extra "handholding" and patience.
- Those who are owners or long-time managers of small market media outlets have made a choice to live and work in this community and be part of what happens. They are also great allies. Be careful about asking these people to always donate advertising space or do free printing for your program. Small market media outlets are not always hugely profitable and these people have to pay their bills, like you.
- Be willing to provide information to your local media. Offer to write a regular column or provide monthly updates on your programs. Call them to take photos of exciting moments in your services. Suggest ideas for feature stories. Also be accepting if things don't appear exactly according to your specifications. Remember, they have the right to edit, re-write, use on their schedule or throw away any item they are given. If those parameters aren't acceptable to you, buy a paid ad.
- Though the local media want to help you, you must also remember that your program or event is only one of the things going on. Give them lots of notice and don't expect to monopolize their time or their space.
- Choose the right medium for the right project. Ask yourself "what is the target market of this particular media outlet?" If they are a big city daily newspaper, they are not likely to provide coverage to your community's volunteer appreciation tea. They might, however, do a feature story on an innovative community project that has been documented to have significantly altered the circumstances of a large group of residents, especially if the circumstances are similar to what's happening in other areas that they cover.
- Whatever your event, the media must benefit from their coverage, too. Their benefit is usually in the form of increased readers, listeners or watchers.

Here are a few tips on providing information to your local media or preparing a brochure for the public:

Even though it may sound hokey, start by answering all of the “Five Ws”. These include:

- **who:** is the organization
- **what:** are they doing
- **when:** are they doing it
- **where:** is it taking place
- **why:** is it happening

Include the answers to these five questions and you provide most of the information required. No public communication is complete without these basic elements. The sixth commonly used element is to include the answer to the question “how: is it being done?” To make your news release as effective as possible, emphasize the “w” that is most significant and relevant.

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Presentation Materials



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- **encourage Council, the Board and the community to support what you're doing;**
- **increase the public profile of your services;**
- **increase the community's knowledge of FCSS;**
- **solicit volunteers;**
- **promote specific events or activities.**

Marketing Audiences

- **the people who could use your service.**
- **people with whom FCSS may work.**
- **people who may volunteer.**
- **people whose support you need.**

The Five Ws

Who: is the organization

What: is the organization doing

When: are they doing it

Where: is it taking place

Why: is it happening

and

How: is it being done