

MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Communications Domain

Consistent marketing and branding are vital to the long-term success of 4-H programming. As a 4-H volunteer, you are a representative of the 4-H program and land-grant university that it is affiliated with; it is a big responsibility. You serve as a champion and avid proponent for 4-H, but it is imperative that the proper messaging and communication occurs. A public relations and marketing plan will help.

Marketing is the process of generating interest in a product or program. Marketing activities include sharing informational assets (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and other items promoting 4-H), engaging in social media campaigns, and collecting information on market trends. Marketing activities should be strategic and follow an appropriate schedule or timeline, target multiple audiences, and be consistent with the public relations policy and/or guidelines set forth by the 4-H program. Recruiting participants and increasing overall awareness of the program are typical marketing goals.

Public relations is the intentional process of promoting a program's reputation and specific image by:

- communicating program messaging
- disseminating press releases,
- Building and maintaining relationships with influencers
- hosting public recognition events and awards

There are many aspects to consider when developing an effective marketing and

public relations communications plan. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

Here are some tips to keep in mind when marketing and promoting your 4-H program:

1. **Work in collaboration** with your county 4-H professional to learn about marketing materials, possible restrictions, 4-H signage, and recognition opportunities. Permissions to use university wordmarks, program logos, and the 4-H emblem should be sought before sharing volunteer-developed marketing assets. This ensures proper compliance and helps to align the messaging with the overall organization. Be aware that the 4-H name and emblem are a federal mark, protected by 18 USC 707¹.
2. **Be intentional** when communicating about 4-H. Use a summary that explains the history of 4-H, as well as future directions. Practice explaining what unique opportunities and strengths 4-H has. Use the phrase "4-H Youth Development".
3. **Emphasize the connection** between 4-H and the land-grant university system. Use the university/4-H logo combination that intentionally connects the 4-H brand (i.e., 4-H emblem) to the land-grant university system.

There are many ways to develop an effective communications plan; however, most plans involve the processes outlined in these three steps considering target audience, budget, and objective²:

- make implementation decisions,
- create a marketing strategy, and

- evaluate communication efforts.

An effective marketing strategy leverages the positive brand image that has been developed for a program through public relations work. Toolkits with ready-made graphics, text, and fillable flyers are resources you, as a volunteer, can use to assist in the active sharing of marketing materials. National 4-H Council, 4-H's nonprofit partner, supports national and state 4-H programs by having a focus on fundraising, brand management, communications, and legal and fiduciary services. There are many marketing and public relations resources available for 4-H professionals and volunteers to use on their website: 4-H.org.



Here are some tips to keep in mind when marketing and promoting your 4-H program:

- 1. Understand cultural beliefs.** Key informants and cultural guides can help Extension staff and volunteers understand the cultural beliefs of specific audiences. Highlighting how 4-H principles relate to a community's cultural beliefs establishes common ground to discuss how 4-H can meet their needs.

- 2. Use 4-H marketing and promotion resources.** Be familiar with the resources currently available.
- 3. Develop and use high quality marketing materials that appeal to a variety of audiences.** Collaborate with Extension staff who can help provide the professional polish to marketing materials. Provide stories, photos, and videos to help tell the local 4-H story! Include photographs and video to reflect the diversity of participants, staff, and volunteers.
- 4. Engage in strategic marketing.** Use targeted promotional strategies. Know where to find youth of the appropriate age to fill participant slots. Contact previous participants via mail or email. Post flyers in kid-friendly and age-appropriate locations. Send flyers to applicable grades in schools and after-school programs.
- 5. Tell your story to stakeholders.** Share program successes with current and prospective volunteers, participants, funders, program partners, and other supporters.
- 6. Provide branded items.** Program staff and facilitators (youth and adult) should wear university/4-H clothing and name tags when engaged with the public. Partners, funders, and guest presenters and youth participants appreciate receiving branded items such as t-shirts or shirts, pens/pencils, key chains, hats, lanyards, plastic cups, and key chains.

In conclusion, volunteers play a vital communication role when it comes to marketing and public relations. You can be a strong advocate for 4-H and fill key network distribution channels. Work closely

with your 4-H professional to purposefully plan and execute effective marketing and public relations strategies.

Creating a Sense of Belonging:

Consider your audience's cultural makeup and curate marketing materials accordingly. Language is one of the biggest yet addressable barriers which can be elevated by intentional collaborations utilizing people resources from within your community as well as organization. Try involving members or volunteers within your community to help you create culturally relevant marketing content as well as marketing platforms - adds buy in to the program.

Marketing and branding tips adapted from the "Marketing and Branding 4-H in Urban Communities" section of the 4-H Science in Urban Communities: Promising Practices Guide. (Ripberger, C., & Blalock, L. B. (2011). 4-H Science in urban communities: Promising practices guide. Rutgers University.)

References

¹National Institutes of Food and Agriculture. (2019). *4-H name and emblem use handbook*. United States Department of Agriculture.

²Shimp, T. A. (2003). *Advertising, promotion, and supplemental aspects of integrated marketing communications*. South-Western.

The original resource 4-H Communications: Marketing and Public Relations (VRKC: Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy) was developed by Tracey L. Pracheil.

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