**Marketing Plans in Public Service Agencies**

A well focused public service department would have a thoughtfully prepared, current and active agency marketing plan designed to inform the agency on strategic actions important to better identify, connect with and serve its resident base. The intent of most public service departments is to be a citizen service agency and hence, some professionals do not approach the concept of a marketing plan concluding that it is a tool that better serves the business sector that is busy selling products. However, much advantage can be gained from the development, use and updating of a service agency based marketing plan.

**Components**

There are a variety of ways that an agency may approach the development and design of their marketing plan. At the minimum, the marketing plan would center on the following: (1) a thorough study of the agency noting its strengths and weaknesses; (2) a deep look at their customer base and what services seem most needed; (3) a determination of the competition or other providers of similar services; (4) development of meaningful marketing strategies that speak to those points most aligned with the agency mission; and (5) preparation of an action plan paying special attention to the unique features of the agency budget and other controlling elements. Within each of these components will be additional factors that help to enrich the depth of the marketing plan.

**Agency Analysis:** The first component of a department marketing plan is to prepare a thorough study of the agency. The types of items to consider should include: the vision, mission and goals of the agency; any unique features that might serve as the hallmark of the agency; and a detailed self study of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that impact the organization. The length of this material need not be extensive but the depth should speak to the key elements of the department.

**Customer Analysis:** Of course to effectively reach and serve the agency’s catchment area, the department must be clear on their customer base. For many public service departments, all citizens represent the client group and so a close look at the number of citizens, their age, gender breakdowns, as well as geographic residency within the community will be important to know. Also of interest will be if there are any specific factors that the agency should understand about the customer base such as income levels, number of children living at home or other factors. All of this information is
attainable from the US Census. The purpose of this data is to better understand the
market segments of the population, their needs, and what services the agency provides
that match that need.

**Competitor Analysis:** This section of the marketing plan consists of a close look at the
competition to the agency. The agency would be in the best place to decide what
groups, organizations, and vendors represent others that provide similar services or
programs. In this analysis the agency should be thorough and compare any features
that are important such as competitor location, services, prices, advertising methods,
reputation, and important connections within the community, resources and facilities.
Not only should this study compare the agencies, but any and all similar and even
different program offerings to determine competitor advantages.

**Market Analysis:** This analysis represents a focus on the different strategies that the
agency may take regarding several key areas. Generally the six “p”s are considered:
position, product, price, place, promotion and publicity. Position is a study of where the
agency feels their position is in relation to the competition. For example the agency
might feel that the agency has the best name recognition, and staff skill set. Product (or
in this case service) is considering what services the agency provides and the differences
from the competition. For example, the competition might have a lower program cost
and greater variety of programs because of the use of part time staff. Price, of course is
the cost charged the user for the program or service. What does the competition charge
for a similar program?

It is important to make sure that the length of a program, number of events, staff to
user ratios and other features be assessed so that cost comparison is accurate. The
intent is to determine what price is acceptable, attractive, necessary or possible within
the market. Place speaks to not only where the service is provided but the placement of
the agency within the competition. Many public service departments represent the
primary provider of community services and hence have a favored place within the
market.

Promotion has to do with the advertising methods that are used to penetrate the
market. It may consist of flyers and brochures to web sites and newspaper ads. The
agency logo and slogan become critical ways that the department establishes market
identity. Publicity is the last of the six “p”s and concerns itself with the new ways that
the agency seeks to make connections with current and future customers. Promotion is
more about how an agency describes itself and publicity is more about how the
department presents that description.

**Action Analysis:** This element becomes most essential. It is here that the previously
gathered information is put into play and represents those actions that seem most
appropriate to move the agency forward in connecting with current and new customers.
Any gaps that have been discovered from the earlier studies become part of the action
plan as well as insights that have been gained from a look at the customers, the competition and the current market approach. It is necessary to consult constraining variables such as the agency budget, mission and existing resources so that the actions stay within the realm of possibility.

**Conclusion**
The marketing plan process is an effective planning tool that is a help not only to the business sector but has application to government based service agencies. Many approaches are available but an analysis of the agency, customers, competition, market and an action plan underline the minimum effort. Some special skills may be necessary such as preparing a SWOT analysis or a GAP analysis. Nevertheless, market plans have many benefits in the agencies efforts to identify, connect with and create new customers.