



PROBLEM-SOLVING JUSTICE

PUBLICIZING YOUR PROGRAM AND ITS SUCCESSES

“Telling your program’s story and sharing your successes is crucial in establishing your credibility—within the justice system and the community at large.”

— Aubrey Fox, Bronx Community Solutions

This fact sheet is one in a series to support the development of problem-solving justice initiatives. For other documents in the series, please visit courtinnovation.org.

Problem-solving initiatives seek to improve public trust and confidence in the justice system, and publishing results is one way to demonstrate transparency and accountability. If planners want the public to invest in their programs, they need to market their ideas to the neighborhoods involved—and demonstrate that the investment is paying off.

Below are 10 examples of strategies that problem-solving justice programs have used to let the community know about their programs and successes.

TEN STRATEGIES TO PUBLICIZE SUCCESS

1 Develop a clear plan for getting the word out about your program

Work with your operational team to develop a clear strategy for publicizing your program. Build an effective message that expresses the core values of your program and the results you expect to achieve. Identify effective spokespersons for your program and support them with talking points, presentation coaching, and visual aids. When planners of the Philadelphia Community Court decided to hold a press conference and ribbon-cutting ceremony for the court’s opening, they came up with a list of speakers and key talking points and developed flow charts and other visual aids to underline the speakers’ messages.

2 Hone your message and develop key themes and goals

It’s important to come together and agree on a strong and consistent message. What are your program’s goals? How is it meeting those goals so far? Why should community members support your program? In what ways can they get involved? In San Diego, prosecutors and volunteer community court ambassadors worked together to develop flyers letting residents know the various ways they could improve their neighborhood by getting involved with the Beach Area Community Court.



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CITIZENS “JUDGE FOR THEMSELVES” IN SALFORD, UK

One example of a court engaging the community in an innovative way comes from Community Justice Salford, a problem-solving initiative near Manchester, England. In July 2006, the court team held an interactive sentencing event where citizens could “judge for themselves” after hearing fact patterns drawn from real cases. After listening to a prosecutor and defense attorney explain how they would have approached each case, audience members were asked to vote on what sentence they felt the defendants should have received, using electronic keypads. The real sentence was then revealed, with a judge discussing how the outcome was driven by the project’s problem-solving approach.

3 Talk to local media

Cultivating relationships with local media is a great way to get information to the community. To generate interest, project staff should meet with reporters to find out what stories journalists are interested in and what their needs and deadlines are. Staff should develop relationships with individual reporters or editors, and host media-friendly events such as graduations and park clean-ups. Also, providing media with photos—before and after photos illustrating community service projects, for example—can be a very effective way to show a project’s success. Some practitioners have written regular columns or op-ed pieces for local papers. The Athens County Municipal Court Substance Abusing/Mentally Ill Court recently appeared on a local radio show sponsored by the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill in Ohio.

4 Create a website

Websites can convey a tremendous amount of information in a clear, accessible manner. And by regularly updating your site and providing new content, you can ensure that web users come back. The Atlanta Community Court’s website (http://www.georgiacourts.org/courts/atlanta_community/) not only describes the court and its history but provides contact information, the judge’s biography, staff listings, probation information, links, descriptions of various programs and initiatives, and even a short video.

5 Publish regular newsletters

Newsletters are a good way to keep community members up to date on project achievements and milestones. Newsletters are only as good as the mailing list that receives them, however—keep yours up to date and constantly add to it. The Hartford Community Court puts out a regular electronic newsletter full of information about programs, staff, upcoming events, and milestones (to access a copy, visit: <http://www.jud.ct.gov/Publications/CommCourt.pdf>).

6 Plan events that involve the community

Develop events around your project that involve both the community and media—park clean-ups, graduation ceremonies, etc. Invite public officials, and promote the event on the project website. You can also appear at other events, displaying the project’s logo on a banner or table skirt to draw attention to your presence. South Carolina’s 4th Circuit’s first Drug Court Graduation attracted a large crowd of community and family members, as well as state and county political representatives who spoke at the ceremony.

7 Compile mailing lists and use listservs

Collect addresses and emails in a database and use them to send out notices that create interest in your project and publicize noteworthy achievements or events. Just be careful not to overwhelm your audience with emails. Listservs are another great way to promote discussion of relevant topics among stakeholders. The “Courtbuilders” listserv has been active since 1998, and provides over 150 problem-solving practitioners with access to an online community of peers who answer questions and share ideas (to find out more about “Courtbuilders,” send an email to info@courtinnovation.org).

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE WEBSITE

- Write in short sentences that are easy to skim.
- Make sure your navigation is consistent and easy to use
- Make sure there is enough contrast between the background and font colors.
- Proofread!
- Put a link to the home page on every page.
- Include a search function.
- Include a site map.
- Keep the look and feel of the site consistent throughout.
- Keep pages simple—don't overload.
- Be sure to include contact information.

8 Publish an annual report

Publishing an annual report is an effective way to demonstrate your achievements to the community and key stakeholders. The Seattle Community Court disseminates an annual report that highlights achievements—including social service linkages made and the dollar value of community service sanctions completed by defendants.

9 Appear at community meetings

Practitioners should attend public meetings hosted by other organizations such as the police or homeowners associations. This provides planners an efficient “path” into the community, and can show the community how the criminal justice system works together. Community meetings allow planners to hear firsthand about local issues and provide a forum for planners to develop collaborative ideas and report results. To promote Lynchburg, Virginia’s problem-solving initiative, the community prosecutor began attending a series of neighborhood advisory board meetings, introducing herself and networking with members. When she was asked back to give a presentation about the program, she was able to describe its goals and objectives, as well as get feedback from the community.

10 Share credit with partners

When publicizing a project and its successes, it’s important to give credit to key partners. Doing so builds trust and encourages support from the community. In Portland, the neighborhood prosecutor makes sure that citizens send collective thank you letters to key agency officials, community groups, and other stakeholders who’ve helped to make the initiative a success. When problems surrounding a city park were solved by a large, multi-agency effort, satisfied community members sent letters to officials from law enforcement, the parks department, and the state highway division.



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