Volunteer Maine

The Maine Commission for Community Service
"A Stronger Maine Through Volunteerism"

2020 Communications and Outreach Plan

BACKGROUND

Volunteer Maine, the Maine Commission for Community Service, builds capacity and sustainability in Maine's volunteer and service communities by funding programs, developing managers of volunteers, raising awareness of sector issues, and promoting service as a strategy.

Volunteer Maine was established in 1994 by Executive Order and under state statute in 1995. The 25 board members of the Volunteer Maine Commission are appointed by the governor to three-year terms and each represents a specific segment of Maine's volunteer sector.

Volunteer Maine is Maine government's partner for the federal Corporation for National Service.

On October 16, 2019, the Maine Commission for Community Service adopted the identity Volunteer Maine.

OBJECTIVES

This communications plan is designed to:

- Position Volunteer Maine as a program leader, convener and champion for working with local communities across the state
- Establish positive, ongoing messages and relationships with media, elected officials, and other stakeholders
- Create an ongoing conversation statewide about the importance of social service and community response
- Strengthen Maine communities through National Service efforts (AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs) and volunteer engagement
- Effectively communicate relationship between the Commission and its private-sector fundraising partner, the Maine Volunteer Foundation

MESSAGES

To ensure consistency and alignment when communicating about Volunteer Maine, the following key messages should be leveraged.

Key Message:

Volunteer Maine builds capacity and sustainability in Maine's volunteer and service communities by funding programs, developing managers of volunteers, fostering adoption of high-quality volunteer management practices, raising awareness of sector issues, and promoting service as a strategy.

When providing more detail about Volunteer Maine, please share these talking points.

Funding programs by…

- Targeting AmeriCorps funds at critical local needs
- Granting and administrating over $2 million to community organizations
- Providing technical assistance and training to all National Service programs operating in Maine (AmeriCorps & Senior Corps)

Raising awareness of sector issues by…

- Monitoring service trends and educating the public and policy-makers on challenges, changes, and policy implications
- Publishing Maine's volunteer statistics and civic engagement profiles
- Conducting outreach and education activities
- Developing pertinent publications and white papers
- Coordinating/conducting research

Developing volunteer managers and practices by…

- Providing resources on the Volunteer Maine Website
- Promoting Service Enterprise and supporting networks of Service Enterprise Trainers
- Providing training for volunteer managers
- Promoting Volunteer Management Competencies and national Certification in Volunteer Administration
- Financially supporting professional development of volunteer managers

Promoting service as a strategy by…

- Connecting individuals to volunteer opportunities through the Volunteer Maine website
- Engaging citizens in targeting service events and modeling best practices
- Encouraging lifelong service for volunteers and AmeriCorps Alumni
- Recognizing Maine Volunteers and sharing their impact
- Promoting National Days of Service

Our Impact

National Service

- Volunteer Maine addresses Maine's most critical needs by investing in high-impact, evidence-based AmeriCorps programs.
- The stats:
    - More than 2,400 AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members engage in one million hours of service serving XXX,XXX (number to be calculated) Mainers. (Courtesy: CNCS)
    - Service members served at more than 300 locations across Maine, including schools, food banks, homeless shelters, health clinics, youth centers, veterans' facilities, and other nonprofit and faith-based organizations. (CNCS)

- Volunteer Maine invests $13 million from CNCS and local funding in Maine communities to support cost-effective community solutions, working hand in hand with local partners to empower citizens to solve problems. (Courtesy: CNCS)
- AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers are preparing today's students for tomorrow's jobs, reducing crime and reviving cities, connecting veterans to services, fighting the opioid epidemic, helping seniors live independently, and rebuilding communities after disasters.
- Since 1994, more than 6,800 Maine residents have served approximately 9.6 million hours through AmeriCorps, earning Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards totaling more than $22.7 million. (Courtesy: CNCS)

Volunteerism

- Volunteer Maine strengthens volunteerism across the state by equipping nonprofit, government, and community organizations with the tools they need to strategically engage volunteers.
- This program year, Volunteer Maine will invest $XX in XX organizations and engage XX volunteers in over XX hours of service. (PLEASE NOTE – UPDATED STATISTICS NEED TO BE CALCULATED AND WILL BE UPDATED)
- Every year, Volunteer Maine coaches, trains and supports up to XX nonprofits on how to best engage skills-based volunteers to get involved with their organization through Service Enterprise Training, a skills-based volunteerism training academy. (PLEASE NOTE – UPDATED STATISTICS NEED TO BE CALCULATED AND WILL BE UPDATED)

TARGET AUDIENCES

Identifying target audiences is a key first step in identifying any communications strategy. The audiences below are the key stakeholder groups that Volunteer Maine engages with regularly. Each stakeholder group requires specific messaging and tailored communications to ensure the Volunteer Maine story resonates with them.

- Volunteer administrators and governmental organizations
- Nonprofit and community organizations
- AmeriCorps and Senior Corps program directors
- AmeriCorps and Senior Corps program members
- Prospective AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members
- Elected officials
- Media
- Educational organizations

STRATEGIES

To achieve the objectives of this communications plan, the following strategies will be implemented.

Materials Development

To effectively communicate with Volunteer Maine's various stakeholders, it's important to have engaging and well-designed outreach materials. These materials should be reviewed and updated every year with new figures and data points and include eye-catching infographics and photos to highlight key information in a visually appealing way.

Additionally, all materials should include a specific call to action. When there isn't a specific action required, include a link to the website directing stakeholders to learn more about Volunteer Maine.

Examples of collateral materials include:

- Volunteer Maine graphic-based strategic opportunity fact sheet
- Maine National Service program directory
- Volunteer Maine fact card (think larger bookmark or one panel of a tri-fold brochure)
- AmeriCorps in Maine recruitment overview brochure
- "Serve in Maine" AmeriCorps benefits brochure
- National Service in Maine overview brochure
- Volunteer resources fact card (think larger bookmark or one panel of a tri-fold brochure)
- Promotional information for award programs, events and special initiatives
- Legislative outreach document (annual report)

Media Relations

A proactive media strategy is necessary to cultivate strong relationships with reporters and increase brand awareness with target audiences. Volunteer Maine will leverage the event and grant schedule to identify newsworthy opportunities to pitch.

Specific opportunities to engage the media include the following:

- Pitch targeted print and broadcast media in Maine markets where service projects are taking place *(Note: Always think through visual and interview opportunities available when pitching broadcast media).*
- Identify earned media opportunities through magazine editorial calendars and pitch longer-lead publications.
- Draft news releases and media advisories as needed for events. Generally, media advisories should be distributed at least one week in advance of the event and phone calls/emails should be made the day prior or morning of the event as a reminder.
- Develop specialty pitches throughout the year to targeted publications to ensure a steady drumbeat of service-related media coverage.
- Coordinate deskside media meetings with key news publications in every Maine market. Deskside meetings are an opportunity for reporters to learn more about the organization and what you do and who you serve.
- Draft editorial content, including guest columns and letters to the editor for daily and weekly publications across the state. Letters to the editor are generally 200 words or less in length. Op-

ed columns on average are about 600-700 words. Letters and op-ed columns should be written exclusively for each publication and should only include one author.
- Schedule and hold editorial board visits with major Maine newspapers.
- Pitch interview opportunities for Volunteer Maine leadership and volunteer spokespeople with mainstream news outlets (TV, print, and radio) within Maine.
- Create and distribute media kits and packages to provide to media outlets.
- Monitor media coverage to provide leadership and board with monthly reports and to leverage to share on social media.

Digital Communications

Website

A website is an important tool to share information about grants, Volunteer Maine programming, events, and other various information relevant to the organization to communicate with key audiences. Specific tactics for maintaining the website include:

- Revisit the website quarterly to ensure design is still modern, links are working properly, written content is accurate, and functionality still serves users well.
- Monitor website analytics monthly to see what content gets the most attention from users. This is especially helpful for tracking blog content performance.
- Refresh photos across the website on a regular basis (twice a year) to keep loyal visitors interested and engaged when visiting the site.
- Add timely news releases and news articles to the newsroom when available.

Social Media

Social media is a critical element to Volunteer Maine's digital strategy because it offers the opportunity for interactive storytelling and an effective way to reach various target audiences. Volunteer Maine currently utilizes Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. A Volunteer Maine Instagram account will be introduced in early 2020.

The nature of social media is designed to encourage conversation and provide a platform for proactive engagement, which is becoming more important to sustaining relationships with stakeholders than follower/like count. Specific opportunities for leveraging social media include:

- Develop a monthly social media content calendar to plan out relevant news, events, stories that should be shared on all social platforms. Content calendars are helpful in ensuring the organization has a consistent and constant voice across all Volunteer Maine channels.
- Leverage Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter to position Volunteer Maine as a thought leader in service and volunteerism.
    - For Facebook, share relevant news and news releases including grant and proposal announcements, volunteer opportunities, events, grantee stories, etc. Posting on Facebook should be limited to 2-3 times per week.
    - LinkedIn is a great platform for sharing news and thought leadership information. Posting on LinkedIn should be limited to 1-2 times per week considering most of Volunteer Maine's stakeholders are likely using Facebook and Twitter primarily.

    - Twitter is a great tool for engaging with stakeholders, especially elected officials. Monitor key state officials' Twitter to retweet or reply to anything related to funding for service and volunteerism. Posting on Twitter can be much more frequent than other social platforms.
- Share engaging images on Facebook and Twitter as often as possible as posts are more likely to be read if accompanied by a visual element.
- Engage with stakeholders by asking Maine AmeriCorps alum to share their volunteer story on social media. This is a great way to build up a bank of stories that can be repurposed across multiple communication channels including the blog.
- Invest in paid advertising to boost content and increase awareness.

Video

Video is a powerful and captivating tool for influencing and engaging stakeholders. It is the primary way the public now consumes information online and on social media. Sharing videos on social media a great way to increase Volunteer Maine's following and engagement with stakeholders such as elected officials, potential AmeriCorps members, potential grantees, etc.

- Develop short 30-second-to-two-minute videos to share on social media that help tell the story of Volunteer Maine and show the impact AmeriCorps members and community volunteers have on the state.
- Capture video from larger events held throughout the year that can be leveraged in future promotions.

Blog

Maintaining an active blog on the Volunteer Maine website is a great way to build the brand and position Volunteer Maine's executive director and commissioners as thought leaders in the service and volunteerism sectors.

Blogs are a great tool for building a website's search engine optimization (SEO) since regular content is being published on the site. It's also a good platform for repurposing content and showcasing stories that are too lengthy to share on social media. When possible, blog posts should include photos to help tell the story and enhance the content. Specific opportunities for the blog include:

- Invite an elected official or program director to write a guest blog about the importance of service and volunteerism. Volunteer Maine can encourage them to share their own personal story/experience with volunteering, if applicable.
- Invite current AmeriCorps members to guest write a blog highlighting the scholarship and professional development benefits of their experience.
- Feature a "Where are they now" Q&A style blog post by interviewing an AmeriCorps alum.
- Repurpose earned media on the blog.

Email Communications

Email communications, including an e-newsletter, are helpful tools for communicating with various stakeholders. When planning email communications throughout the year, review Volunteer Maine's

organizational calendar to identify opportunities to communicate about specific events, grant opportunities, etc. It's important to establish a thoughtful cadence of email communications as to not overwhelm stakeholders with too many emails and so that they know when to expect to hear from you.

An e-newsletter is a great way to round up relevant content, important dates, stories, etc. to share with stakeholders on a regular basis. Distribute the newsletter on a bi-monthly basis around the same time every month to establish consistency with stakeholders. Maintaining updated distribution lists is crucial to ensuring you're reaching your intended audience. Contact lists should be reviewed and updated on at least a quarterly basis. Emails that receive bounce backs should be updated after each distribution.

Some examples of content to include in e-newsletters:

- Events and dates to remember
- AmeriCorps programming for current and potential members
- Funding announcements and grant opportunities
- Video and written content featuring a personal volunteer or AmeriCorps story
- Repurpose earned media and blog content. Include the first 4-6 sentences of the story and link back to the full story on the Volunteer Maine website.

Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging with community-level organizations, volunteers, elected officials, commissioners, and other key stakeholders is essential for boosting awareness of Volunteer Maine across the state. Tactics to achieve this include the following:

- Identify opportunities and prepare Volunteer Maine staff and partners/spokespeople for speaking engagements and media interviews, including the following:
    - Develop key messages and talking points tailored for the target audience.
    - Assist as needed with presentation/takeaway materials.
- Develop communications and collateral materials, such as talking points, "stump" speeches and scripts, template PowerPoint presentations, etc.
- Draft template materials when promoting key initiatives/events. Materials could include template news release, template social media posts, template newsletter article, etc.
- Consider preparing and deploying an "ambassador program" consisting of a team of Volunteer Maine staff and statewide partners to engage with stakeholders in specific Maine markets.

MEASUREMENT

To ensure the success of this communications plan, it is important to monitor and track results on a monthly basis to determine if Volunteer Maine is achieving its objectives. Items to monitor include:

- Media coverage, including number of media mentions and potential reach.
- Website traffic, including number of unique visitors, total number of visitors, page visits, total hits, and website referrals.
- Blog traffic and views.

- Social media engagement:
    - Facebook – new fans, post likes, post comments, post shares, video views, link clicks, page reach, top Facebook posts.
    - Twitter – new followers, retweets, likes, replies, link clicks, engagement rate.
    - LinkedIn – new followers, likes, comments, shares.
- Social media advertising reach and engagement.
- Email marketing open rates, click-throughs, and click-through rates.