

Columbus Housing Initiative

Corporate Public Relations Plan



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Columbus Housing Initiative

Draft Corporate Public Relations Strategy

Introduction: Corporate Public Relations for the Revitalization Organization

Corporate public relations – how we position our organization with various sectors of the public – is a very tricky prospect for those who revitalize neighborhoods *and* provide affordable housing/financing to individuals. Let’s review the inherent conflict.

At its simplest, the point of an affordable housing mission is to get as many poorly housed people as possible into decent affordable housing. For organizations who only produce and make accessible decent affordable housing to those in need, the messages to the public are fairly simple: “we help the poor, we help those with the fewest choices in housing, come see us if you are in need.” But, there are unstated messages that often accompany these in the minds of the public: “if you are not poor and in need, don’t call us; the neighborhoods we work in are only for poor people who have no choices; people who are successful don’t need us and would not live in our neighborhoods.”

The job of revitalization is to intervene in a real estate market and restore confidence in a neighborhood. This confidence needs to be manifested in willing investments of time, money and energy by existing and future neighbors – of middle incomes as well as lower incomes – and business and government. As these investments take off, neighbors benefit from rising home values, safer and more attractive living conditions, and a greater sense of pride.

Typically, one of the most potent symbols to neighbors and others of a positive future for a neighborhood is the purchase and improvement of properties by owner-occupants who could choose to make their investment in another neighborhood. The characteristics of these people vary from one neighborhood to another, but they clearly are not defined by their lack of income. They may be adult children of existing residents, a schoolteacher, police officer, a church deacon, a nurse. Other examples we’ve seen that symbolize success for the neighborhood include the

executive director of the local Urban League, a foundation or nonprofit staff member, the Mayor's assistant, a local small business owner, a nearby university president or professor.

Another potent symbol is the investment by existing neighbors in the visible improvement of their homes. Such improvement signifies that the neighborhood is a good investment, worth staying in, worth moving into.

In order to attract the investment of these buyers and rehabbers to our neighborhoods, we need to talk about what's working instead of what's not. About attributes, rather than deficiencies. About benefits instead of needs. We need to incentivize the behaviors we want, not because these investors need our incentive (some will, some won't), but because the neighborhood needs them. They help create a positive, self-fulfilling image of a neighborhood of choice.

If we position ourselves in the public arena with the aforementioned affordable housing messages, we run a very real risk of alienating potential homebuyers for specific neighborhoods, and of making a significant home improvement by an existing neighbor seem unwise.

Common Mistakes in Marketing Messages

Even when we understand these issues at a theoretical level, it is easy to make mistakes in day-to-day messages communicated to the public about our organization and our programs or products. Here are a few of the most common:

1. "Hoops-R-Us"

This usually happens when we become focused on implementing an income-restricted federal grant instead of using that grant as one of many tools to accomplish revitalization outcomes. Typically, an organization will communicate through a brochure, newspaper stories, etc., a series of hoops through which a person must jump in order to receive low-interest financing or other incentives to buy a home in a neighborhood that is widely regarded as undesirable.

The hoops may include income and family-size restrictions, resale restrictions, geographic boundaries, restrictions on home improvements, sweat-equity requirements, training requirements and an exhaustive list of procedures one must

go through for the “privilege” of living in a home in a neighborhood most people would currently rather not live in. This approach is effective in limiting the use of funds to those in the very worst need – but it works against the neighborhood’s chances of attracting anyone with choices who could be a symbol of positive change that might galvanize the investment of others.

A more useful approach is to secure a variety of funds so that all are not income restricted, to market the attractive financing and the neighborhood as a good choice for anyone, and to sort out who is eligible for which funding source when they get in the door.

2. “First Let’s Talk About Me, Me, Me”

In this message mistake, the nonprofit forgets that there is a customer who needs to be found and appealed to, and focuses instead on issuing a mini-history of the organization in the front of every communicae.

For example, a brochure created to attract first-time homebuyers will have on its cover a very large presentation of the organization’s name and logo and little or nothing about first-time homebuyers and what they are interested in. The first few panels of the brochure will include the organization’s mission statement, a history of how and why it was created, and a list of its board members and funders – more things the potential homebuyer is not interested in. Finally, the rules and restrictions of the first-time homebuyer program are described.

Imagine if you wanted to buy a car, but were required to first read or listen to the mission, history and list of current board members and stockholders of General Motors. Nonprofits engaged in revitalization of low-demand neighborhoods need to focus on people as customers – to understand their motivations and wants, and to communicate messages about the benefits of the product that are interesting and meaningful to the customer.

3. “Let Me Tell You How Bad the Neighborhood Is”

This is the most seductive and dangerous mistake of all. As nonprofits, we are used to talking about the problems of a neighborhood so that we can get funding to fix them. That may be fine when talking to individual funders, but when

we do it in the public eye, we are reinforcing that there are lots of problems in the neighborhoods we are revitalizing. And we are inadvertently sending a message that these are places to avoid; that to live or invest in these places signifies that someone is not successful.

We also like to talk about how needy our customers are, so that we look like we are doing a good job of serving the poor. But when we do this in the public eye, we are also reinforcing the idea that only people who are poor and in need should ever call us or participate in our programs.

I prefer to confine talk of problem solving to direct communication with funders who are interested in it. For all other communication, my tests are always “how would this message affect the image of the neighborhood with potential homebuyers?” and “what will this message say about who should be my customer?”

Here is an example from my own community. Cleveland Avenue has been generally regarded as the worst street in town. People associate it with abandoned housing, crime and gangs. A nonprofit has been working there with neighbors and has purchased, rehabbed, and sold many of the vacant homes there, and has plans for the rest. Crime is down, though not eliminated. The nonprofit wanted to feature this neighborhood in a new newsletter targeted at attracting homebuyers to city living. They could have done a story about all of the houses they restored and how neighbors were fighting crime, which would have reinforced the downsides of this neighborhood. Instead, they wisely did an article on a self-guided walking tour of “historic” Cleveland Avenue, noting a church that was a stop on the Underground Railroad, and several homes owned by early leaders of the African-American community.

The best way to avoid these and other mistakes is to develop and use a public relations plan that identifies goals, target markets, messages and strategies. The rest of this document proposes a public relations plan for Columbus Housing Initiative.

A Public Relations Plan for Columbus Housing Initiative

1: Public Relations Goal

To cultivate an image and understanding of Columbus Housing Initiative among specific target markets that contributes to the achievement of programmatic outcomes, including

- Securing adequate funding and political support and
- Cultivating customers for programs and for neighborhoods.

2: Target Markets

There are several target markets that are critical to CHI's success:

Funders

Funders are important for obvious reasons. CHI needs to keep current and potential funders informed about their strategy and successes, and about the wisdom and safety of investing in CHI. In many cases, funders may also want publicity for their investment in CHI.

Neighborhoods

CHI is a new organization, proposing to create significant change in neighborhoods. The people in these neighborhoods who help create and communicate public opinion about issues and organizations through the neighborhood need to trust and value CHI.

Media and General Public/Potential Customers

The media are extremely valuable tools in shaping the way the public views issues and organizations. People believe what they hear or see in the media more than they believe advertising. The media will report on the activities of CHI one way or another. The challenge here is to present the messages you want them to understand and report on.

In a revitalization strategy, almost anyone could be a new homebuyer or someone who advises a new homebuyer. It is important to think of all media publicity as information that may be consumed by a potential buyer in one of the target neighborhoods. If what you are thinking of telling the media isn't something you would say to a potential homebuyer, then don't say it at all. Think of the media as a conduit to potential homebuyers rather than to funders.

Other Policy- Makers and Opinion Leaders

These are the people who influence public opinion and policy throughout a community. They are the people who may influence the decisions of funders and government, who help set priorities and agendas for public and private investment, and shape policy on issues that affect CHI's work.

3: Target Market Analysis

Fundere	
Who are they?	If you don't already have a database to manage information on current and potential fundere, you should get one. You need names, titles and addresses of givers and others in their organizations that influence them. It may be useful to organize them into categories of like motivation. For example: financial institutions, insurance, other private sector, government, foundations, and individuals.
Where are they?	Beyond business addresses, it is usually important to think about other places target markets can be reached, such as the daily paper (especially the business section), and Chamber of Commerce mailings, meetings, and functions. Events, reports and newsletters, and one-on-one meetings organized by CHI can also be venues for communication with this audience.
What do they want?	<p>This is an area that may need testing. I recommend CHI conduct a series of interviews with a sample of current fundere to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> find out what they see as the compelling reasons to give to CHI; ask their opinions about what would motivate their peers to give; assess their understanding of CHI and its services. <p>The information gained in these interviews should be used to refine the product and message sections of this plan. In the meantime, we can begin with our best impressions, along with what we know to be common "wants" among this kind of funder throughout the country:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to be part of a success story – an organization that has real impact economic impact: jobs created, tax revenue created, reinvestment leveraged, etc. the "anti-welfare" approach: hand-ups, not hand-outs to create more homeowners, to be part of realizing the American Dream for people they can relate to – grandparents, sons and daughters, teachers, nurses, fireman, secretaries, bookkeepers, etc. an organization that clearly uses resources efficiently and is financially accountable to give to someone the giver knows – an organization they have a relationship with to believe their contribution is making a specific impact on specific issues or people the opportunity to ensure an affordable supply of housing for Columbus workers safer, more attractive neighborhoods in some cases, publicity for their support

Neighborhoods	
Who are they?	<p>These are the people who live in the target neighborhoods – South Lawyer’s Lane, Bibb City, North Highland – but especially those who play a lead role in establishing and communicating opinions about issues and organizations. These could include neighborhood associations, little league coaches, gardening clubs, youth project coordinators, small business owners, current and former council members, church pastors and deacons, crime watches, block clubs, the man who walks the neighborhood chatting with people every day, the woman who checks on older neighbors and sweeps the sidewalks, etc.</p> <p>The best way to identify these people and cultivate relationships with them is through the one-on-one interviewing process described in the South Lawyer’s Lane Revitalization Strategy. A database of these people should be maintained for easy communication.</p>
Where are they?	At their homes, shopping at local businesses, lunching at local restaurants, at church, at meetings of neighborhood groups, chatting on porches and corners, etc. They likely read neighborhood newsletters and flyers posted at neighborhood businesses.
What do they want?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Control over their neighborhood ▪ People moving in who will work to improve the neighborhood ▪ People fixing up ▪ To be taken seriously and treated respectfully by organizations “helping” them ▪ To feel proud of where they live ▪ Fun and interesting ways to be involved in improving neighborhood ▪ To feel useful

Media/General Public		
Who are they?	Newspapers, television news broadcasts, radio news broadcasts. A list of media outlets and contacts should be maintained. The general public is whoever listens to or reads the media outlets, but as mentioned before should conservatively be assumed to be potential homebuyers in the target neighborhoods.	
Where are they?	Media: in offices, at news events. Public: reading or listening to media outlets.	
What do they want?	Media: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To sell papers/advertising ▪ A good story ▪ A new story ▪ A story they care about 	General Public/Potential Customers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Human interest story ▪ To own a home/benefits of home ownership ▪ To feel successful ▪ To live in a good neighborhood ▪ To know someone like them has already called CHI ▪ To be identified by things other than income ▪ To be middle class or higher

Other Policy/Opinion		
Who are they?	Policy and opinion leaders in areas that influence CHI. Need to create a list. For example: Mayor and council, city department heads, Chamber members and staff, media reporters and owners, leaders of other organization's fundraising efforts, other nonprofit staff, CHI and others' board members, issue-based groups (e.g., downtown businesses), Realtors, developers, some trade associations, school boards, alumni fraternities/sororities, religious leaders, etc. Some can be found by asking a lot of people who they think are opinion/policy leaders, and by looking at boards of directors of major organizations and noting the group that overlaps several boards.	
Where are they?	At events and meetings of their or other groups, volunteering for other organizations, reading the paper (esp. op/eds), members of civic clubs and associations.	
What do they want?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To be in the know ▪ To be asked their advice ▪ To advance their personal causes ▪ To spend time with other policy/opinion leaders ▪ To be associated with a winner ▪ To pass on information 	

4: Product and Message Analysis

An important part of any marketing or public relations strategy is to analyze the “product” we are selling from the target market’s point of view. If the product matches what the target market wants, we’re in good shape. Where it doesn’t match, we can work to bring it into alignment.

Messages are the information we choose to communicate about our product – in this case the organization – that matches what the target markets are interested in and conveys our desired image. Messages as described in a plan may not be used verbatim in a press release or brochure, but are meant to guide the writing of those documents, as well as speeches, the planning and design of events, the way the office looks, etc. They should be reinforced through every contact a target market has with the organization. The more consistent we are with messages, the more successful we will be in establishing the image we want for the organization.

In this section, I’ll go through a product and message analysis for each target market.

1. Funders

Being a new organization, CHI seems still to be very close to its funders – keeping them informed, maintaining relationships, seeking and using their input. Funders are now getting an interesting, successful organization with which they can be proud to be associated.

It usually becomes more challenging to maintain this close connection as the number of funders increases and programmatic work expands. It is possible that within the next five years, it will make sense to have a COO position to keep the CEO able to maintain the relationships with funders, board members and others. Meanwhile, I will suggest in the strategies section a variety of ways to systematize relationship building with funders, which should help to prevent slippage in this area as the work heats up.

With regard to messages, funders are the only group for which it is reasonably safe to talk about problems with neighborhoods and customers, and the solutions CHI is employing, though it isn’t usually necessary. However, it also makes sense to work on educating funders about the outcomes of revitalization efforts and the measures of success, so that they will appreciate the high-income homebuyer CHI might get to buy in Lawyer’s Lane, the reasons why rehab and new construction standards need to be so

high, etc. For this reason, I will suggest you continue the neighborhood game/tour event you did with reporters, with other groups.

I would not try to talk directly or primarily with funders through the public media. Instead, I will suggest a couple of direct mail pieces, meetings, and open house events.

Some of the messages below were taken almost verbatim from the Neighborhoods Inc. of Hammond, IN annual report. I have enclosed a copy for you. This is a rare example of an organization in your business that knows how to talk about the work in a creative way. I encourage you to borrow heavily from it.

Funder Messages

- CHI is an exciting public-private partnership that is breaking new ground in attracting and retaining homeowners and renters of ALL incomes to Columbus' in-town neighborhoods.
- Other programs have helped low- to moderate-income families achieve the American dream. CHI expands on that concept, helping families in all income ranges to improve and increase the value of their properties. In this way, individuals of all incomes and the entire city benefit from strong safe neighborhoods, an increased tax base, and thriving businesses.
- One of only a handful of community-based organizations in the nation committed to revitalizing neighborhoods by serving people of all incomes, we offer flexible, low-interest financing for home purchase and improvement, classes in the homebuying process, new homes for sale, support to neighborhood organizations, and marketing of Columbus neighborhoods.

Investment in CHI has a significant, positive economic impact on Columbus, including: (specific statistics on jobs created, goods and services purchased from local suppliers, tax revenue generated/reclaimed, etc. – Michael Collins of Neighborhood Reinvestment can do this economic analysis in a great report that is very impressive to funders – free if you get it through Neighborhood Reinvestment, about \$8,000 otherwise.)

CHI uses resources efficiently, and is financially accountable, with high standards of financial management, including an annual audit, monthly oversight of financial statements, and a full organizational evaluation conducted regularly by a national monitor [this will be true when you are a member of NRC's network]. Members of the Board of Directors include your peers.

CHI is an experienced, stable organization with a growing track record. CHI staff are experts in the field of community development. CHI is a member of a sophisticated national network and has access to the most innovative technology in the field.

- Contributions to CHI are tax deductible and result in direct delivery of services.

2. Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are a very different group. In terms of a product, they want an organization they trust, that is working on things that are important to them. CHI is too new to have created this for them, and a major piece of each neighborhood strategy is an initial one-on-one meeting series that will go a long way to establishing this “product”.

Neighborhoods want their places presented positively in the media, though they too may seek publicity about a crime-fighting effort without realizing the damage that can do to the neighborhood’s reputation as a good place to live. CHI can play an important role in helping to teach everyone how to talk about his or her neighborhood in ways that build confidence so that people will enthusiastically choose their neighborhood to live in.

Neighborhoods need to feel that CHI is doing things with them, rather than to them, but probably don’t want to attend a lot of meetings.

In the strategies section, I will suggest several ways to establish and maintain positive working relationships with neighbors in target neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Messages

- CHI is an exciting nonprofit program that works with neighbors to help families of ALL incomes buy and fix up homes in Columbus’ in-town neighborhoods.
- Other programs have helped lo- to moderate-income families achieve the American dream. CHI expands on that concept, helping families in all income ranges to improve and increase the value of their properties. In this way, individuals of all incomes and the entire city benefit from strong safe neighborhoods, and thriving businesses.

- One of only a handful of community-based organizations in the nation committed to revitalizing neighborhoods by serving people of all incomes, we offer flexible, low-interest financing for home purchase and improvement, classes in the homebuying process, new homes for sale, support to neighborhood organizations, and marketing of Columbus neighborhoods.
- CHI cares about understanding neighborhoods and what is important to neighbors, as evidenced by all the time we take to meet neighbors one-on-one, to ask their advice, and to consult with them on strategies and programs. CHI can be trusted.
- CHI is not a part of City government, rather it is a private nonprofit that receives funding from many different sources.
- CHI wants to help neighborhoods be safe places with special character – places where people take pride in their homes and in the neighborhood and are friendly and helpful to each other.
- When you have a problem that needs solving, you can ask CHI for advice and support in getting neighbors together.
- We want to help every house to be the best house on the block.

3. Media/General Public

Barring a good scandal, media generally value a reliable organization that does work with a human-interest angle that can be counted on to turn in a good story on a regular basis. I have seen a few organizations like yours become “media darlings” in their communities because they constantly see the potential stories in their work and feed them to the media, because they are well-connected with other story-makers, and because they know when they have achieved some important quality-of-life outcomes in neighborhoods.

This last item is very important because it gives you something to talk about besides how many homebuyers you trained and it is a way to train people on what is important in your work. For example, you need to know when the crime rate has dropped, when people viewed as successful buy a home in one of your neighborhoods and why they love it, when a neighborhood’s home values have risen higher than the citywide market in any given period.

The thing to remember about media is that they are read or listened to by your potential customers. Again, don’t present an image of neighborhoods or customers to the media that wouldn’t work with your other target markets.

Media/Potential Customer Messages

- Same messages as funders, rotated depending on the angle, plus
- Profiles of strong homebuyers you've helped in target neighborhoods talking about how much they love it there.
- Stories about unique characteristics of target neighborhoods as they are revealed, such as historic buildings in Lawyer's Lane, the great views and parks in Bibb City, etc.
- Stories on unique neighbors in target neighborhoods, e.g., the Army-Navy bandleader, the Bibb City amateur historian, the North Highland architect who restores homes there, etc.
- Stories on important measures of success as they happen, like home value increases, new subdivisions sold out, increases in confidence reported by neighbors, etc.

4. Other Policy Makers and Opinion Leaders

These are the people in every community who can create a buzz about an initiative or organization among the “powers that be”. The choices are: they never heard of you, they like you, they don't like you. Of course, we are seeking the second position.

Typically, these people like to be associated with a winner, but even a great organization needs a few other things to make it with this group. You need to know who they are and have a plan for making a connection to them, have someone they know and like introduce you to them, and give them a way to personally touch your organization or its work.

Examples of this personal touch include board member service, one-on-one advice meetings, volunteer projects in neighborhoods, neighborhood tours, meeting a neighbor or other customer, attending an office or rehab open house. If they are funders – most funders fall into this group – they may appreciate a handwritten thank you note from a customer, or the opportunity to send congratulatory flowers to a certain number of new CHI homebuyers.

They will appreciate whatever expert status you can cultivate for yourself, especially if they can contribute to it and participate in it, which is why I suggest in the strategy section that CHI be a convener of these leaders around special issue areas.

Messages for Other Policy Makers and Opinion Leaders

- Same messages as funders, plus
- CHI remains current with, and contributes to, the latest national research and development in the revitalization of neighborhoods and cities.
- CHI values the expertise of Columbus' city leaders in a variety of fields and is a convener of important discussions about the city's future.
- People who are leaders in Columbus need to know about and be involved with CHI.
- People you know and like help run this organization.

5: Strategies

- A. Establish a tag line and a basic description that explains what you do beyond affordable housing, and use that on everything possible (letterhead, business cards, brochures, press releases) to help establish your image. For example, you could use part or all of the following, as space provides:***

CHI is an exciting public-private partnership that is breaking new ground in attracting and retaining homeowners and renters of ALL incomes to Columbus' in-town neighborhoods.

Other programs have helped low- to moderate-income families achieve the American dream. CHI expands on that concept, helping families in all income ranges to improve and increase the value of their properties. In this way, individuals of all incomes and the entire city benefit from strong safe neighborhoods, an increased tax base, and thriving businesses.

One of only a handful of community-based organizations in the nation committed to revitalizing neighborhoods by serving people of all incomes, we offer flexible, low-interest financing for home purchase and improvement, classes in the homebuying process, new homes for sale, support to neighborhood organizations, and marketing of Columbus neighborhoods.

- B. Establish and maintain a database of contacts for all four target market groups.***

Research names and addresses of key people in all four target markets and add them to the database. This database can be used to implement some other strategies.

- C. Track economic and neighborhood indicators and report them in places where your target markets will see them.***

Prove CHI's economic impact by tracking indicators such as jobs created, purchases from local businesses, increase in the tax base and in tax assessments. Translate these figures into very meaningful terms, such as the number of police officer salaries that represents or the number of children educated in public schools. Also research progress toward quality-of-life outcomes in target neighborhoods. Report this information in fundraising materials, newsletters, a story in the newspaper's business section, etc.

D. Schedule and conduct a series of neighborhood game/neighborhood tour dates for various groups of current and potential funders and other policy/opinion leaders.

Assuming this was successful with the media group, plan to repeat it every other month (or every month if you can manage it) with a series of small groups. This should get them to know you and care about you, and help them understand your work.

E. When you move to your new office, hold open houses for the funder and policy/opinion group, and one for each neighborhood that you have had substantial contact with. (Lawyer's Lane and Bibb City for sure – it's not clear that North Highland is ready for that yet.)

F. Hold a series of open houses in newly constructed or newly rehabbed properties – one for funders/policy leaders, one for the neighborhood in question.

G. Co-sponsor, with a neighborhood organization, an annual picnic or other community get-together for each neighborhood.

H. Systematize personal one-on-one contact with current and potential funders, media and policy/opinion leaders.

1. Develop a schedule for CEO and Board President to have meetings or lunches with these target markets.

A regular schedule, such as one meeting each a month can be helpful in managing this. Use it to bring key contacts up-to-date on CHI activities and the impact of their contributions, and to let potential contributors know what CHI does and how they can help.

2. Research appropriate clubs and professional associations that CHI should have a presence in, and get memberships for CEO and/or board members.

These should be the clubs and associations that your target market belongs to. For board members, consider getting them business cards that identify them as a CHI board member.

3. Do speaking engagements with civic groups.

Again, set a goal for this, such as four times per year (once every 3 months).

4. Develop and implement other techniques for creating more personal contact between funders/policy leaders and your work.

Some ideas:

Ask existing funders to send flowers to a new homeowner you/they have helped buy a home.

Have new homeowners speak at your annual meeting and other events -- when you do presentations for civic organizations, bring a new homeowner or other customer with you to tell their story

Ask customers to write a personal thank-you note to a funder who helped make their loan possible

Offer home-ownership orientation sessions for employers

I. Implement the one-on-one interviewing process in target neighborhoods, which is described in the neighborhood strategies.

J. Create a one-page newsletter for funders, that focuses on stories and messages that appeal to them.

This really should be done four times a year – if you can't do that, do one before the fundraising campaign. Put announcements and stories in this newsletter that reinforce giving, recognize funders, report on accomplishments, review your fiscal responsibility, etc.

K. Cultivate your image as experts in your field.

1. Sponsor or co-sponsor forums of funders and other policy/opinion leaders with keynote, expert speakers to discuss industry topics, once or twice a year.

This could be an effective method of establishing your organization's expert status, while educating community leaders and laying the groundwork for new partnerships to address important issues. Forums could include Bruce Katz speaking to CEOs or the Chamber of Commerce and city council on the link between

neighborhood health and overall city health; Tommy FitzGibbon on the importance of capital financing to neighborhood health and the economy; Cicero Wilson speaking on the importance of asset-building strategies to reverse poverty and revitalize urban economies, Michael Collins reporting on the economic benefits of your work, etc.

2. Apply for awards for your work, and publicize them as a way of emphasizing your expert status.

Examples include:

Social Compact
Fannie Mae Foundation
Chamber of Commerce?
National Association of Realtors® (access their awards through the local Board of Realtors®)
Urban Land Institute
National Association of Home Builders

Awards can be publicized through a press release, a press event around its presentation, an FYI letter, etc.

L. Develop and institutionalize recognition of funders.

Almost all funders want recognition for their contributions. Keep your eyes open for any opportunity to give funders public recognition that is visible to their peers. Some ideas are:

Recognize outgoing board members with something big and attractive for their office, with your name on it, such as a framed poster or photograph, with a cutout in the matte for a special thank you and your logo.

Do press events around contributions. This will not only recognize the funder, but start to build the understanding that giving to you is a good idea.

Apply for awards with funders (Social Compact, BEA?)

For lenders, explore the use of “CRA Reports” by NHS of New York City, and NHS of Chicago. Both organizations provide annual reports to their financial institution partners that document their CRA-eligible support. I believe the financial institutions put these in their “CRA file” for examinations.

6: Training the Team and Controlling the Message

As I mentioned before, the more consistent your message is, the more success you'll have at creating the image you want and reaching your goals. Sadly, most organizations in our field do not pay much attention at all to defining the message and controlling it by training staff and volunteers, and repeating it throughout written documents.

Staff should be trained, and rewarded, for using the core message when describing CHI's work. Again, I would use the following, or something like it, as the core message:

- CHI is an exciting public-private partnership that is breaking new ground in attracting and retaining homeowners and renters of ALL incomes to Columbus' in-town neighborhoods.
- Other programs have helped low- to moderate-income families achieve the American dream. CHI expands on that concept, helping families in all income ranges to improve and increase the value of their properties. In this way, individuals of all incomes and the entire city benefit from strong safe neighborhoods, an increased tax base, and thriving businesses.
- One of only a handful of community-based organizations in the nation committed to revitalizing neighborhoods by serving people of all incomes, we offer flexible, low-interest financing for home purchase and improvement, classes in the homebuying process, new homes for sale, support to neighborhood organizations, and marketing of Columbus neighborhoods.

Produce whatever you decide on in a framed wall hanging for every staff person (and maybe every board or baby-board member), and print it on the back of their business cards.

One of the most effective organizations in the revitalization business, Neighborhoods Inc of Battle Creek, Michigan, was also very effective in training staff on the uniqueness of the approach. Every staff person - and every board member -in that organization could explain to a newcomer exactly what the organization's philosophy and approach were – and they all said pretty much the same thing.

To deepen their understanding of this core message, you may want to send your other staff and some board members and neighborhood leaders to the Neighborhood Reinvestment Training Institute for the Creating Neighborhoods of Choice course, or bring trainers in to do a group training for board and staff on-site, or do your own training.

You may want to try using staff as an impromptu “editorial board” to review all brochures, press releases, ads, etc. to be sure they carry the appropriate message. This would help get the messages right, and reinforce the right message for staff. Some questions to use in evaluating messages:

1. Neighborhoods: How does this message impact the image of our target neighborhoods? Would it encourage a potential homebuyer to choose buying a home there? Would it discourage them? Does it inspire confidence in the neighborhood or not?
2. Customers: How does this message portray our customers? Would the customers we want be able to identify with this? Does it encourage a wide range of incomes to seek our services? Does it discourage some people from seeking our services?

The Lafayette, Indiana NHS staff are trained to always ask themselves and each other “how will this impact the neighborhood?” when discussing programs, marketing tools, and so forth.

7: Evaluation

Following are some ways to evaluate the success of your public relations effort:

1. Is the right message getting across in the media? Have your staff editorial group evaluate newspaper stories and videotape of television news stories with the same questions they ask about you own material. Assign a rating of 1-5 to each story according to how well it matches your intended message and watch how this changes over time.
2. Six months from now, ask neighbors to describe CHI and rank how well their impression matches.
3. Six months from now, ask board members to jot down on a card how they describe what CHI does. Rank consistency with the official organization description and among the board members.
4. Are you raising the money you want to raise?
5. Are you able to garner the political support you need for your work?