

Tips for Using an E-Newsletter to Stay Connected

Electronic Newsletters (or E-Newsletters), distributed by email, are used more and more as an inexpensive, consistent, structured, and often interactive strategy to meet needs for information and connection. Different from printed newsletters, e-newsletters are often distributed in a text-only format, omitting any aesthetic appeals that can potentially help build a sense of community. At the same time, e-newsletters can be much quicker and easier to produce. E-Newsletters can be distributed within the organizational community, to external constituents, like-minded organizations, and/or potential partners. The tips below are offered to help ensure your newsletter meets needs while remaining cost-effective and timely for your recipients.

TIP #1: ESTABLISH NEWSLETTER GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.

- Before diving into a newsletter, it s important to establish clear goals and objectives — what needs do you hope the newsletter will meet? How many issues would you like to produce in a one-year time frame? Be as specific as possible.
- The goals and objectives you establish will help you determine how many issues per year are necessary to meet them, AND it will help you focus your newsletter content.
- **SAMPLE GOAL:** To produce a consistent, timely publication for our area NVC community that meets needs for information, connection and community.
- **SAMPLE OBJECTIVES** (remember, these are measurable!): (1) To produce and distribute four issues of the newsletter per year (one per quarter); (2) To increase attendance to area workshops from previous years; (3) To increase our volunteer pool from previous years; (4) to increase the number of practice group facilitators in our area.

➤ **GOALS:** _____

➤ **OBJECTIVES:** _____

TIP #2: CONSIDER ALL COSTS INVOLVED.

- **CONTENT DEVELOPMENT TIME:** It takes time to research and write articles and event listings for inclusion in a newsletter. Try to measure the time necessary to create the product you re hoping for. Determine if this work will be conducted by a volunteer, or if you ll need to hire writers to complete this work.
- **NEWSLETTER LAYOUT/DESIGN TIME:** Consider if you ll be laying out your newsletter in plain-text format (meaning you re not using bold/italics, color, or multiple fonts), or if you ll be building your e-newsletter into an actual web page (fancier e-newsletters that integrate graphics into the design are actually web pages that have been pasted into an email). While plain text is certainly simpler, takes less time, and typically requires only very basic email knowledge, setting up a template web page for your newsletter may result in a more attention-grabbing feature for your audience. Either way, determine how much time will need to be invested to layout the newsletter for each issue. Will this time be donated by a volunteer, or will you need to pay someone to complete it?

TIP #3: IDENTIFY YOUR NEWSLETTER’S TARGET AUDIENCE.

- Review the goals and objectives you ve established for your newsletter. Now, consider who your target audience(s) are for this publication. Be as specific as possible. For instance, is it trainers? Is it just for people who are already familiar with NVC, or is also for those who ve never been exposed to NVC? In other words, is your publication intended to be a tool for connection and community among people who are already in the network, or is it also intended to build the community among other potential NVC supporters?
- Brainstorm with your group all of the possible audiences you d like to send the newsletter to and list them all under TARGET AUDIENCES below. Next, go back to the list and identify 1-2 of your PRIMARY AUDIENCES. These are the audience to whom you will direct the majority of your newsletter content.
- SAMPLE TARGET AUDIENCES: (1) area NVC community (people we currently have in a database who ve attended past workshops and/or have asked to stay in touch); (2) practice group facilitators in our area; (3) CNVC Certified Trainers in our area; (4) others sharing NVC in our area; (5) supporters of our organization (other like-minded groups/organizations who ve expressed support to us); (6) potential new members to our NVC community (others who may have never heard of NVC but may respond to the ideas expressed in our newsletter).
- SAMPLE PRIMARY AUDIENCE(S): (1) area NVC community; and (2) potential new members to our NVC community

- TARGET AUDIENCES: _____

- PRIMARY AUDIENCE(S): _____

TIP #4: IDENTIFY AUDIENCE’S INFORMATION NEEDS.

- Looking back at the primary audience(s) you ve identified above, now brainstorm this audience s information needs. What kind of information do they need from you? (listings of open practice groups, ideas for starting a practice group on their own, how to become a trainer, motivational stories about how NVC has changed someone s life, tips on growing their NVC skills, upcoming workshops, etc.)
- Is your newsletter this audience s only source for information from your organization? In other words, do you ALSO have a website, e-newsletter, bulletin board, etc. where they also obtain information on regular basis? These are important questions to answer because while your audience may have several information needs, you may only choose to meet some of them with the newsletter, while meeting others with different strategies like a website.
- SAMPLE PRIMARY AUDIENCE INFORMATION NEEDS: We ll be using the newsletter quarterly and our website to meet our audience s needs for connection, community and information. Since the info changes frequently, we ll be using the website to post practice groups and volunteer opportunities, and use the newsletter primarily to meet the following information needs: (1) info about our organization/team, such as what support we provide, how to contact us; (2) info on upcoming workshops; (3) inspirational stories of NVC in practice in our area; (4) practical stories of integrating NVC into specific areas like education, mediation or with children.

- YOUR PRIMARY AUDIENCE S INFORMATION NEEDS: _____

TIP #5: IDENTIFY YOUR NEEDS.

- Your group or organization also has important needs that can be met with the newsletter. Brainstorm a list of these needs with your group. Then, identify which needs could be met using the newsletter and how.
- EXAMPLE OF GROUP/ORGANIZATION NEEDS: (1) connection — we have a desire to keep our greater NVC community connected; (2) growth and sustainability — keeping people informed may meet our need for the continued growth and sustainability of our team; (3) acknowledgement — we have a lot of volunteers who work really hard to offer trainings or practice groups, and to administer our group (such as keeping the website up to date, or answering email); we d like to share info about these volunteers to meet needs for acknowledgment; (4) celebration — we d like to celebrate our growth and steps we ve made to spread NVC.
- YOUR NEEDS: _____

TIP #6: BRAINSTORM EDITORIAL CONTENT.

- Review all of the items above, including your goals/objectives, cost considerations, target audience, your audience s information needs and the needs of your group or team. Keeping all of these things in mind, brainstorm with your group some general content for your next issue (or plan for content for an entire year).
- YOUR NEEDS: _____

TIP #7: CONSIDER USING STANDARD CONTENT SECTIONS IN EACH ISSUE.

- Newsletter readers may only read a portion of your newsletter. Others may read it word for word. To compromise between the two, consider offering standard content sections in each issue so readers will have a general idea of what content to expect in your newsletter. This may help persuade them to pick it up and read it thoroughly.

TIP #9: GATHER FEEDBACK ON THE NEWSLETTER.

- Since our information needs change from time to time, it s important to gather feedback from your audiences at least once a year. You can do this using a survey included in the newsletter, or a request for readers to provide feedback by phone or email. Make your request as clear as you can.