

Telling the Story: Communicating with Your Community

To *better inform the community* about the purpose, structure and achievements of the school's music program, provide an annual written report to the appropriate supervisor and, with permission, to parents and the community.

Steps to Success in Communicating Goals and Accomplishments

The Content

- **Data! Data! Data!** People are busy, so respect their time by providing easy-to-decipher data about every aspect of your program. Include data on enrollment, program growth, percentage participation within the school, average student GPA, number of performances, number of students participating in Honor Groups, All-State Ensembles, etc. This data should provide measurable information that would be used for comparison in subsequent years. In addition, this will assist you in setting goals for the future.
- **The report could also include** more generalized information about the music program, special community performances and appearances by guest artists. The music program is a wonderful public relations component to the school; administrators know this, so use it to your advantage. Make the school and your students the focus of all of your good news.
- **Use student quotes** about the value of being in your program, and place those quotes strategically in the document. (Be sure to secure written permission to use the quotes.) You could also include quotes from adjudicators, parents and other community notables about how wonderful your program is and its benefits for participating students.
- **Detail every positive contribution** in the school or community—no matter how small—by individuals or groups, students and staff.

The Process

- **Start an annual report file** at the beginning of each school year and add material to it on a daily basis. It is much easier to eliminate excess information than to create it just before the deadline.
- **Sort the entries by useful categories**, such as ensemble types or grade levels. Review each event with the perspective of whether it is a selling point for the program, or an interesting detail for an administrator.

The Format

- **Use a spreadsheet to report your data.** It should be easy to understand at first glance. You may want to show it to a colleague before submitting it to your administration. Remember that the format established for your report will be used in subsequent years to make comparisons and show overall program growth.
- **Consider what appearance the finished report should have.** Think about how many photographs and charts to include and what size the report should be. One standard size is 8-1/2 x 11 inches, which prints on an 11 x 17 sheet that yields four pages. Deal in multiples of four pages. (It is impossible to have an odd number of pages unless one page is blank.) Also consider the **texture and quality of paper** you will use.
- **Secure permission beforehand** if you want to include photographs in your report. Parents must provide written permission for photos of your students to be included.
- It is important that the **report is submitted to your supervisor before** it is distributed elsewhere. Work with this person to determine how best to proceed with additional copies and distribution.

Graphically Appealing

- **Leave enough white space** so that components don't look crammed together.
- **Think about the size of the text** (11 point works well); the space between lines of text (consider a minimum of a 1/2 point larger than the type size)
- **Consider the kind of type style used**—serif versus sans serif—the printer can show you examples of these type styles. Studies have shown reading speed and comprehension are 30 percent better with serif typeface. Avoid using too many different sizes and type styles.
- **Pictures and graphs are appealing.** A small number of photos showing only a few people is better than too many tiny photos or large ones of an entire ensemble. Position photos so the dominant subject looks into the page, not off into space.
- **Pay attention** to page balance.

Organize

- **Before you start writing**, organize
- **Include all pertinent information**
- **Prioritize information**
- **Determine which information can be further illustrated** with charts or graphs, or enhanced by other visuals, such as photos
- **Remember to include information** about the importance of music education to student success

Use the “Write Stuff”

- **Attractive graphics will interest readers**, but the core of any publication is its editorial substance.
- **Write professionally** and have your report proofread before taking it to your administration. Be sure to ask for permission to publish the report beyond the confines of the school and ask for input from your supervisor before you make additional copies for others.
- **Write in simple, direct language** to convey information of significance and interest, but with a meaningful message.
- **Outline first**
- **Use strong action verbs**
- **Use short sentences and paragraphs**
- **Use the active voice**
- **Keep people in mind**
- **Use educational jargon sparingly but appropriately.** It is important that you are seen as up-to-date on all current issues related to education, so use the proper terms. Use quotes when possible. Be concise; avoid wordy descriptions.
- **Select familiar words**
- **Simplify; then simplify again**

- **Check and double-check your grammar and spelling**, then have someone else check it yet again. You will be judged by the quality of this document.
- **Write headlines that say something.** Headlines need to communicate so that the people who scan your report can also learn something. Choose titles and headlines that will give a snapshot of the feeling you want to create.
- **Once you have designed an annual report that seems complete**, ask for comments from a variety of others, including an English teacher, a parent and an administrator, before sending the report to a printer. They may not only find typographical errors, but may suggest something you have overlooked.

Distribution

- **The final step is to distribute the report** to the school board, administrators, parents, feeder schools (and the administrators, music educators and counselors in these buildings), the local media and local politicians. Be sure to inform your supervisor about which people you want to receive your report. Make extras to keep on hand and be sure that the principal's office is provided with extra copies so that they can share them with visitors.
- You can also use the report for background information when applying for grants, or as an internal tool to help assess the program.
- **Consider expanding your distribution to include local service groups**, especially since you may find yourself asking them for financial support in the future. You could also distribute a copy to each visitor to the music department, including student teachers and guest artists. Give copies to real estate agents who might have clients looking for a community with a strong music program.

Project Reminders

- **Have clear goals** for what you want to accomplish by producing an annual report.
- **Enlist the help from other faculty members and students** in producing the report. Communicate your goals and what you are trying to accomplish. Talk with journalism and art faculty to create a team approach to producing the most dynamic, content-driven report possible.
- **Work with a local printing company** in understanding time and cost considerations. Ask for their input, based upon their experience and expertise. Get preliminary cost estimates so that you have an idea of the amount involved for the number of copies you want to distribute.
- Talk with your booster or parents' group to **request funding to accomplish your goals in producing an annual report.**
- **Share the process** with your students so they can learn the importance of telling others about the value of music.

Want more tips for keeping music strong in your schools?

Visit the site devoted to all things music advocacy: www.supportmusic.com

TIP 11