

Pathways to Excellence Workshop

Excellence in Communications

May 25, 2016

9:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York
135 West 36th Street, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10018

Moderator: **Anat Gerstein**, President, Anat Gerstein, Inc.

Panelists: **Meredith Barber**, Senior Director of Institutional Advancement, Leake & Watts
Lia T. Schwartz, Chief of Staff, The Children's Village

Strong communications practices help nonprofits succeed, whether it's by raising money, recruiting volunteers, advancing a policy agenda, launching a new program, navigating a crisis, or reaching another organizational goal. This session will include an exercise to help your organization be prepared for crisis communication.

Agenda

9:35 AM – 9:40 AM	Welcome
9:40 AM – 9:50 AM	Moderator and Panelist Remarks
9:50 AM – 11:05 AM	Panel Discussion & Short Exercises
11:05 AM – 11:25 AM	Q & A
11:25 AM – 11:30 AM	Wrap Up

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*The Pathways to Excellence workshop series is an outgrowth of **The New York Community Trust Nonprofit Excellence Awards Program**, managed by the **Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York** in collaboration with **The Trust and Philanthropy New York**, and sponsored by **WNYC**.*

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

Leake & Watts

2014 Gold Prize Winner for Overall Management Excellence

Founded as an orphanage in 1831, Leake & Watts continues to provide support today to over 11,000 children, adults and families each day so they can achieve success tomorrow through a wide variety of early childhood, child welfare, developmental disabilities, special education, and juvenile justice programs.

Six years ago, Leake & Watts was operating with a multi-million-dollar deficit and 80% of all its programs were in Corrective Action. Today, it is routinely cited for its excellent program practices and outcomes, operates with a surplus, and has had clean audits for the past six years. This remarkable turnaround is the result of implementing a robust set of management practices, including establishing an agency-wide culture focused on results and building systems that leadership could turn to for data to help guide the organization. For example, Leake & Watts developed and employed a set of 39 separate Performance Effectiveness Indicators (PEIs) for measuring outcomes that go far beyond those prescribed by funders or required by government contracts. This extensive, interlocking system of PEIs helps measure and understand the full impact of the organization's work in every program and across the agency as a whole.



A strong collaboration among the Board of Directors, Executive Director, and staff involved being transparent about what they were doing and holding people accountable. Leake & Watts' Board and leadership understand that they must continually work to improve their service delivery and infrastructure to meet the ever-changing needs of the communities they support. Their strategic plan was developed with this in mind and ensures that management's focus is on mission-related and organizational results. Leake & Watts hired a Chief Strategy Officer (CSO) to lead its efforts in achieving the goals of the strategic plan. With the support of the CSO, all staff remains actively involved in the implementation of the strategic plan and achievement of its goals.

Leake & Watts established rigorous Quality Assurance (QA) procedures, and involves the QA Department all levels to ensure that programs remain mission-focused and that outcomes are consistently measured. A Risk Management Committee continually examines trends in the industry to ensure that the organization is addressing all potential challenges that have the necessary procedures and protocols in place.

Examples of Excellence Identified by the 2014 Selection Committee:

- Annual communications plan created by Institutional Advancement Committee and approved by the Board
- Plan directly tied to programmatic and development efforts
- Plan ensures consistent messaging and branding in multiple communications channels
- Expertise in crisis communications; focus on transparency
- Assess and prioritize community needs through two-way communications
- Parent Committees provide feedback
- Revamped internal website (intranet) to be a resource for staff, including relevant forms and a calendar of events
- Keep staff informed via agency-wide Quarterly Employee Newsletter

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

The Children's Village

2013 Gold Prize Winner for Overall Management Excellence

The Children's Village's mission is to work in partnership with families to help society's most vulnerable children so that they become educationally proficient, economically productive, and socially responsible members of their communities. CV was founded in 1851 to shelter New York City's juvenile delinquents. Over the decades, CV has evolved to become an innovative leader in strengthening the most at-risk youth in New York's child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Each year, CV serves over 10,000 children and families through a variety of short-term residential and community-based programs. We focus on keeping children safe and, whenever possible, in their community with family.



CV is an equal opportunity employer with demonstrated strength in recruiting and retaining staff committed to excellence. The Board's HR Committee reviews a multi-pronged strategy for human resources which revolves around to the agency's mission and values, intensive screening, professional development, and creating an inclusive workplace. CV offers staff an extensive menu of training opportunities. New employees participate in a ten-day training that includes safety, health, HIV, pedophilia, sexual-harassment, clients' rights, CV values, child abuse, PC basics, professional responsibility, cultural competency, child development, and families. Professional development includes in-service training, workshops, outside conferences, coaching, 360-degree feedback, and guest speakers. Program-based training brings teambuilding, crisis management, and strengths assessment to program staff. CV offers two fully paid scholarships to the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College and direct care staff can attend classes free of charge at Empire State College.

Human resources policies are detailed in the Employee Handbook that is posted on the agency intranet and furnished to all staff in English and Spanish. Every position has a job description. CV has whistleblower, conflict of interest, harassment, safety, and social media policies, which are discussed in team meetings and signed by all employees annually. Every employee has an annual performance review that includes professional goals and a development plan, and salary increases are tied to performance. CV believes in cultivating in-house talent and nurturing and rewarding those who have the ability to succeed. CV acknowledges staff in many ways including an annual recognition luncheon planned by a staff committee, celebratory events for social workers, nurses, etc. and a shooting star system in which peers acknowledge each other. In response to staff surveys, CV offers wellness fairs, a wellness newsletter, Spanish lessons, Weight Watchers, discounts on sports/health club memberships, and subsidized housing and day care.

Examples of Excellence Identified by the 2013 Selection Committee:

- Conducts quarterly community advisory meetings.
- A "listening organization:" uses mail, email, and phone surveys – as well as focus groups – to solicit feedback on communications efforts; feedback used to improve communications practices.
- Conducted a communications audit to review all marketing materials and ensure use of a consistent voice, message, and brand.
- Communications not just relegated to communications staff; everyone—staff and board—is involved.
- Developed a Results Card to communicate social impact, and results are profiled in newsletter, website, and annual report.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S GOVERNANCE

Tips from the Workshop Panelists

❖ **Leake & Watts**

- **Use the Voices from your Programs Whenever You Can!**
At special events and in appeals, let your program participants do the talking. Nothing brings in a donor like a personal connection. A five-minute speech from a program participant (foster youth, parent of a child with a disability, etc.) is so much more meaningful than the speech from the CEO.
- **Build Relationships to Foster Positive Communications.**
Positive two-way communications begin with relationships. With many residential programs, we focus on building relationships with our neighbors, local officials and the police precinct. We invite them to BBQs, for tours, etc. Then, if a car (perhaps from a visiting parent or outside stakeholder) is blocking someone's driveway or a youth is playing music too loud out his/her window, we can openly communicate and resolve the issue with all parties before something gets blown out of proportion.

Send government funders and other local officials information on good things that are going on – positive news articles, eNews blasts. This way, you aren't only reaching out when you need something – i.e. an increase in funding. They are more open to hearing from you overall.
- **Be Transparent.**
If a crisis occurs, be transparent and open. Get the facts you can in collaboration with agency leadership and state what you know at the time to stakeholders. Understand that you may not know everything as quickly as you wish. It is ok to say "We don't have any more information at this time, but will let you know as soon as we do." Don't ever speculate. Only give the information you have at hand, but do be open about what you know and how you are addressing the crisis in real time. It is much better to be as open as possible with donors, government funders, volunteers, etc. They will come back and respect you for it later!
- **Make a Calendar for Yearly Communications.**
Every year, map out what communications you want to send out for the whole year – appeals, fundraising invitations, newsletters, online newsletters, annual report mailing etc. With a calendar, you can work out a better strategy than you can by putting together your communications as they come up. And if something changes, you can always be flexible.

❖ **The Children's Village**

- **Branding and Consistency**
Make your publications immediately recognizable by having a clear branding strategy. Keep key elements consistent, like colors and fonts, while adding freshness through size or style. People should look at your envelope or cover page and immediately feel familiar with you. Also keep consistency of scheduling – create an annual communications cycle and stick to it.
- **Know Your Audience and Target Communication**
Be clear about who your audience is for each of your communication pathways. Know who uses your Facebook page versus who reads your annual report versus who might be better targeted with a moving story. Each time you produce something, be clear about the target audience and what appeals to them. Also, put the target audience first. If it's a publication for staff, make sure staff are featured front and center. If it's for donors, it should be all about them. Once the audience is featured first and foremost, then you can shout from the rooftops how great your organization is.
- **Everyone Has the Opportunity to Participate in Communications**
With limited resources for communications, take all the help you can get. Empower staff, donors, and clients to participate in your communications by sending you stories, pictures, ideas, and insights. This can be an opportunity for people to boast about their work or get their name out there. When your entire community is invested in telling the story, you'll never run out of material. A cute picture taken with a cell phone on the basketball court can be your most popular Facebook post of the week.

Pathways to Excellence Workshop

Excellence in Communications

Exercise #1: How to Make It Work without a Communications Staff

Think about how your organization currently manages its communications. Whether or not you currently have active communication functions and staff, what activities can you add or improve on and who can be responsible for the execution? Be strategic, making sure you have an organizational reason for each activity you add and each person that is involved, defining who is responsible for what.

Communications tactics to consider as you complete this exercise:

- PR – securing press stories
- Social Media
- Web site – adding and/or updating content and images
- Story development – developing stories on your efforts/successes/people you serve (these stories can be “placed” in a blog, your website, newsletters., other collateral)
- Newsletters – electronic and/or print
- Videos
- Annual report
- Collateral (brochures, one pagers)

How you currently manage communications:

What activities can you add or improve on:

Who would be responsible for these new or improved activities:

New York Community Trust Nonprofit Excellence Awards
29 Winning Organizations 2007 – 2015

- **America Needs You**, 2015 Winner
- **BRC**, 2015 Winner
- **BronxWorks**, 2013 Winner
- **Center for Urban Community Services**, 2007 Winner
- **City Harvest**, 2011 Winner
- **Community Health Action of Staten Island**, 2008 Winner
- **CSH**, 2013 Winner
- **Families United for Racial and Economic Equality**, 2007 Winner
- **God's Love We Deliver**, 2010 Winner
- **Good Shepherd Services**, 2007 Winner
- **Graham Windham**, 2014 Winner
- **Groundwork, Inc.**, 2009 Winner
- **Harlem Academy**, 2011 Winner
- **Harlem RBI**, 2009 and 2012 Winner
- **Ifetayo Cultural Arts**, 2008 Winner
- **Institute for Family Health**, 2008 Winner
- **Leake & Watts**, 2014 Winner
- **Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project**, 2009 Winner
- **New York Cares**, 2009 Winner
- **New York Common Pantry**, 2015 Winner
- **New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**, 2010 Winner
- **Open Door Family Medical Centers**, 2012 Winner
- **Red Hook Initiative**, 2012 Winner
- **Row New York**, 2014 Winner
- **Sadie Nash Leadership Project**, 2010 Winner
- **Sanctuary for Families**, 2011 Winner
- **The Children's Village**, 2013 Winner
- **Vera Institute of Justice**, 2009 Winner
- **WITNESS**, 2007 Winner