

# Promotion guide

To draw the audience you seek and create awareness about your exhibit and related programs, your organization needs to plan and implement an effective promotional campaign. The following guidelines are intended to help you launch a successful campaign. Included are general suggestions for promotional activities. If you would like more information about promoting your exhibit, the ALA Public Information Office has developed “A Communications Handbook for Libraries,” which is available in PDF format online at [www.ala.org/pio](http://www.ala.org/pio) under “Resources.”

**Please note:** All promotional materials should feature the official exhibit credit line. Please use the organizational logos whenever possible. Please use image credit lines for all authorized publicity images; descriptive captions are encouraged if space is available.

## Getting started

To meet media and other deadlines, you will need to start promoting your programs at least six weeks to two months in advance.

First, you will need to determine your target audience, goals for audience size, and the best communication methods for this program. Involving your fellow staff members in program planning can be a great way to start determining these things and foster new ideas and additional support and enthusiasm. Try holding a mini-workshop or brainstorming session for staff. During this session:

- Emphasize the potential for recruiting new users and building support for your organization.
- Communicate the goals for your program – what audiences you wish to reach, what you wish to accomplish.
- Assign staff with various interests/talents to work in small groups to carry out the goals.

Additionally, share your program plans with your organization’s director, board, Friends, and other host site support groups and invite their ideas and cooperation.

## Defining your target audience

Your general promotional materials such as flyers, news releases, and advertisements are great vehicles for reaching a general audience of mixed ages and backgrounds. However, there are probably many other groups in your community that will be very interested in the exhibition and programs. These groups can provide support through passing the information on to members of their organization who may be interested in attending or providing financial and other support. Following is a list of organizations in your community that may be interested in your programs:

- Historical societies and clubs
- Museums, arts, and humanities councils
- Book discussion groups

- Kiwanis and other civic and service organizations
- College and university departments (literature, history, women's studies, art, humanities)
- Film study organizations
- High school and middle school classes
- Elementary and high school teachers, college and university professors/staff
- Professional associations and societies
- Councils on aging
- Senior centers
- AARP groups
- Lifelong learning societies and educational centers

### **Developing an audience profile**

Ask yourself the following questions when you are developing an idea of the audiences you want to reach with program publicity:

Where do they work?

What newspapers do they read?

What radio programs do they listen to?

What TV stations do they watch?

What restaurants do they eat in?

Where do they spend their leisure time?

What other community activities do they take part in?

What social, religious, professional, civic organizations do they belong to?

What educational institutions do they or their children attend?

What special arrangements do they require?

Is a particular time of day best for programs?

Need child care?

Need transportation?

Need access/space for wheelchairs?

Need signing for deaf/hard of hearing?

If your program is outside your organization, is parking available, public transportation?

Other physical/space/time considerations?

### **Choosing your communication methods**

Once you've determined "who" you would like to participate in your program, you need to focus on "how" you're going to let them know about the event. Most communication methods fall into these four categories:

- **Public Relations/Publicity:** newspaper and magazine articles, announcements on television and radio programs, news releases, letters to the editor, websites, web publicity, social media
- **Direct Marketing:** direct mailings, mass e-mail messages, web marketing
- **Personal Contact:** word-of-mouth, public speaking engagements, telephone, letters, e-mails

- **Advertising:** print ads, TV and radio spots, banners, flyers, bookmarks, posters, buttons, displays

## Public Relations/Publicity

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Public relations/publicity refers to content about your organization and programs that appear in the media. For example, a news release or public service announcement informing the media about your events may result in newspaper coverage or an announcement on a local radio program.

Several sample promotional materials have been developed for the exhibition. Feel free to use these materials as they are or adapt them for your particular needs. You will find these materials in this notebook:

- **Sample news release**
- **Sample media alert/calendar listing**
- **Sample letter to community groups**
- **Sample public service announcements (PSAs)**

Contacting the media and using the web to publicize your event is key to getting your message out to a mass audience. Here are a few methods you can use to contact your local media and use the web:

### Press and media

- Send a **news release** announcing the event to your local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations at least two to four weeks before the event. If you have regional magazines or talk shows that list upcoming events, you may want to send a release to them as well. Since these media outlets often have longer lead times, send these news releases out at least four to eight weeks before the event.

If possible, address news releases to a specific reporter. Call your local media outlets to find out who covers community, arts, or literary events and send your release to his/her attention. If that information is not available, address news releases to the “News Desk” for larger publications or “Editor” for smaller publications. Most media outlets prefer to receive news releases via e-mail. Also, if any of these publications also have a “Calendar of Events” section, be sure to send a news release to the contact for this section. Quite often, publications will run an article about an upcoming event and include information about it in their community calendar sections.

- About a week before your event, follow up the news release by sending a **media alert** to key contacts. The alert provides specific information about the date, time, and location for reporters and photographers who may be interested in attending the event or including the information in an “Upcoming Events” section. If possible, call each contact a day or two later

to confirm that they received the media alert, find out if they have any questions, and see if they are interested in attending or getting more information about the program.

If you find that media professionals are interested in attending the event or in getting more information, you will need to have additional materials available in a press kit. The **press kit** should contain one copy of the news release, media alert, photos, and biographies of your speakers and other key participants, and copies of all promotional materials – flyers, bookmarks, etc. Alternately, you may decide to create an **electronic press kit**, which would include PDFs of all the materials listed above saved to a disk or a USB flash drive, or uploaded to a section of your organization’s website that can be easily accessed by the local media. If you do get an opportunity to discuss the event with a reporter, suggest story ideas and offer to schedule an interview with your speakers and partner organizations. (First make sure your program guests, scholar, and partner organization representatives are willing to be interviewed.)

- Since television and radio stations are required to use a percentage of their airtime for non-profit and public announcements, your local stations may be willing to air a free **public service announcement (PSA)** about your program or event.

### The Web

- If your organization’s website doesn’t have a “Coming Events” section, talk to your webmaster about creating one. This is the perfect place for your patrons to find out details about your programs. Make sure you include as much information as possible on your site. The web is a key way to provide details to patrons and community members who may have heard about the event, but need details about the date, time, location, topics discussed, etc.
- Also include links from your site to your partners’ sites. When the website is up, send an e-mail with the address of the site to the ALA Public Programs Office to include on their exhibit website. If you post information about the exhibit on your organization’s website, be sure to include the web address on all promotional materials.
- The web can also be useful for getting the word out about your event through other organizations’ websites. Your city, community centers, local media outlets, and Chamber of Commerce may post information about community events on their websites. Additionally, many major cities also have web-based entertainment and event guides, like citysearch.com, which provides information about events in several cities. Find out if these websites exist in your area and contact the site’s staff about posting your event and information. Many of these sites will post information about non-profit organizations’ events free of charge.

### Social media

- If your organization has a presence on social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, or Flickr, be sure to post information to those venues when promoting your upcoming events. Include the relevant information about date, time, and location, but also include a preview of the themes of the program. Consider creating a short video or podcast to

preview the subject matter to be discussed and provoke conversation. Remember to include the organization's electronic networks not just through the promotion period, but through the programming period as well. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter can be the logical place for participants to continue any conversation that begins at your site.

## **Direct marketing**

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Using the list of community organizations and other groups you identified as your target audience, you can use direct marketing to contact these groups and individual members of these groups:

- When contacting community and other organizations, use a personalized letter or phone call. You can also use a copy of your program flyer as an informal letter, if needed, but be sure to include a personal note soliciting support, especially if you are asking for financial or other support.
- In addition to contacting organizations, you may want to target individuals in your community. If you keep a list of patrons' e-mail addresses, sending a mass e-mail message about the upcoming event can be an effective and inexpensive way to get the word out to a number of people. If e-mail addresses are not available, you may want to consider creating a postcard to mail to your patrons, community members, or others. Additionally, you may want to send an e-mail message about the program to community group leaders to post to their electronic discussion groups or forward on to their own address lists.

## **Personal contact**

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One-on-one personal contact can be one of your most effective ways of communicating with key individuals and groups. It can create a better understanding of programs and more enthusiasm than any other communication method. Some tips:

- Create a list of influential individuals in your community – the mayor, city council members, business leaders, etc. – who may be interested in your event. Send them a letter and program flyer about the event and ask to meet with them to discuss further. If a meeting is not possible, mention in your letter that you will call them within a week to follow-up. Even if these individuals cannot participate in the exhibition and events, letting them know about the program could help your organization in other ways.
- When contacting community groups, you may want to ask to speak for 5 to 10 minutes at one of their upcoming meetings or events. This is inexpensive and effective since it allows you to both deliver your message and gauge responses. At the meeting, outline your overall series plan and present convincing reasons why the series may be of interest to them. Bring flyers, bookmarks and other materials along to handout after your speech. If possible, speak at the end of the meeting or offer to stay until the end of the meeting to answer questions.

- If speaking at a meeting is not possible, solicit support from these groups to help promote the program themselves. Ask the group leaders to pass out flyers or mention the program to their members and staff.

## Advertising

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Often the most expensive promotional method, advertising can also be one of the most effective vehicles for promoting your programs. Here are a few advertising methods:

- Promotional flyers and posters should be simple and include: the basic title or theme for the series, an identifying graphic, times, place, speakers' names and brief biographical information, acknowledgement of funders and program partners, and if applicable, your organization's web address. Flyers and/or posters can be posted at your organization, other libraries, museums, and community centers (e.g., city hall, the post office, schools, local college student centers), restaurants, grocery stores, dry cleaners, bookstores, cafes, health clubs, etc. Ask Friends and trustees to post flyers and posters at their local grocery store, dry cleaners, hair salon, etc.
- Paid advertising in local newspapers and on local radio or television stations can be another effective, but costly method. Before considering paid advertising, approach your local newspapers, radio, and television stations regarding free public service announcements. Some newspapers and broadcast stations may be willing to donate or offer discounted airtime or ad space for non-profit groups. If you do receive free advertising, acknowledge the media outlet as a sponsor on program materials. If you consider paid advertising, also look to your Friends or other groups to underwrite costs.
- Developing simple, cost effective bookmarks, buttons, or other promotional items is another effective way to promote your event. These promotional items can also double as a "freebie" for patrons who attend the programs. Hand out promotional items at schools, community group meetings, or other locations. Ask Friends and trustees to hand out bookmarks to their friends and others.
- To assist you in customizing a flyer, postcard, or bookmark to promote your programs, check out the Programming Librarian PR Generator. Visit the ALA Public Programs Office resource site, [www.programminglibrarian.org](http://www.programminglibrarian.org) and click on "PR Generator" (located in the right-hand column, under "Programming Tools"). After you register with the site, you will be able to use a variety of templates to create promotional materials for your programs.

## Putting it all together

After reviewing this list, spend a little time thinking about which of these methods will work best for your event, your community, and your organization. Consider your budget and time available. Consider your planning team – is this effort a one-person production or committee-based? And,

consider past successes and failures by looking at which communication methods you've used to promote past events. For your programs, you may want to combine some successful methods you've used before with some new ideas.

Also, keep in mind your goals for the size and type of audience you wish to attract. If your organization can only hold a group of 50, you don't need to spend hundreds of dollars on publicity. Instead, use your resources wisely. Use cost-effective methods and spend most of your time contacting individuals and groups you think will be most interested instead of contacting everybody in town. It is important to make sure that public is aware of your event, but this can be done with flyers and a few news releases to key media outlets. The rest of your time can be spent on letters and phone calls.

On the other hand, if you want to attract a group of 200 people who have never set foot in your organization, you will need to be more creative in your promotional activities. Most likely, you will need to spend a little more time contacting new people and developing promotional materials for new outlets and locations. However, this time and effort could pay off and result in new faces and involvement in your organization.