

Ryedale Voluntary Action

Factsheet

Newsletters

Do you need a newsletter?

There are several questions that you need to consider before deciding to produce a newsletter.

- What is the purpose and goal? What information do you need to convey to or about your organisation?
- Have you an audience large enough to justify the printing costs?
- Could you prepare and distribute the newsletter electronically?
- Is there enough interesting information to convey to the reader?
- How will this blend with the organisation's other communications?
- Who else is producing a newsletter and could you work together?

The answer to these questions should determine and justify the frequency and purpose of your newsletter. For example your goal might be to enlarge your membership, to promote and market your community transport scheme or to inform organisations on disability issues etc.

What makes a good newsletter?

There are two main areas of information that make a good newsletter.

- Common interest

Newsletters work best when working to a single, simple purpose based on a shared common interest between reader and newsletter.

- Current news and topical information

The best newsletters convey a touch of urgency. Their content relates to the last few or next few weeks. How current your information can be will often dictate how often you need to produce your newsletters.

How to plan your newsletter?

Once you have decided what you need to communicate, you need to decide how you will convey this information. Mostly print is used for newsletters although e-mail may be more appropriate for your needs. You may also consider local radio or a column in an existing newspaper or newsletter.

If you choose print to communicate with your readers, will this be produced in-house or contracted to external printers? This will largely depend on your available budget.

If it is in-house, costs may include: time to collate, write, produce and edit, any training needed, Desk Top Publishing software, paper and printing. Other costs may include: folding, inserting, labelling and postage. Your costs will also be affected by how frequently you produce your newsletter.

Nominate an editor of the newsletter who will be responsible for style and content, submission deadlines, any themes etc. It is worth thinking about what typeface and size you use. Each newsletter should be recognisable by its layout, typography and use of graphics. Attention should be given to the spacing between lines and margins - these are the kind of things that make typed information easier or harder to read.

Who is your audience?

You have to establish who your audience is. The newsletter should have a specific target audience in mind. This will help define the style and content of the newsletter, which will make it all the more effective.

Writing style

Newsletters generally have a short shelf life and are dipped into for short periods of time. The newsletter is probably competing with a noisy office or home life and continual distraction, long wordy articles packed with jargon are not the quickest way to convey messages. Newsletter writing should be informal, informative and simple. It should reflect the best and most natural spoken language.

- keep it short and simple
- be specific
- use lists and bullet points
- use familiar language
- look out for unnecessary words
- use pictures, images, logos where you can

What is news?

News can be events, developments, decisions that affect the reader, outcomes of meetings, new policy decisions, changes in government strategy, funding successes or the progress of campaigns. If you are writing a news article remember the first paragraph needs to contain the 5 W's: Who, What, Why, When and Where. Use headlines that engage readers and encourage them to read on. Try to get quotes from people involved in the story, in order to help make the article more alive and current.

What else can go in a newsletter?

Regular columns, comment pieces, interviews, question and answer and diaries are some of the possibilities. If your budget allows, images are a very important part of attracting the reader's attention, creating better visual format and selling the story. However, it is worth paying attention to quality of images and how they will reproduce on your chosen printing method. Also, remember to use captions to accompany the photo so people are sure they know what they are looking at.

Electronic newsletters

If you opt for an electronic newsletter remember these points to make it more engaging:

Keep it relevant - use it to tell people about things they'll be interested in.

Attract attention with the subject line - many people will choose whether to read an email by looking at the subject line in their inbox. Make sure the subject line is relevant to the message.

Get straight to the point - don't waste people's time with long stories - use succinct language, get them interested and encourage them to click on a link to your website to find out more.

Use simple language - write simply and clearly so readers immediately understand what you're offering and the benefit to them.

Get the frequency right - only send newsletters when you've got something relevant and interesting to say.

For more information and support, please contact RVA on 01653 600120 or email post@rva-cvs.org.uk