



# 5 Marketing



Slow Food USA®

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## Introduction

**W**hen it comes to school gardens, the desire to get the word out to the community that the local Slow Food chapter is involved in a school garden usually gets lost in the beginning of the project. There is too much excitement and activity around the designing and building of the school garden. Garden leaders may feel that they need to get the project off the ground and get students in the garden before they can effectively market the garden through typical channels in the media, school newsletters, and social media. In the beginning of a new garden program, a Slow Food chapter can be really stretched in its capacity to address all the needs of the fledgling program, so marketing and PR activities can easily be pushed off to the side. Besides, we are all gardeners and foodies. What do we know about marketing and PR activities?

The goal of this Marketing chapter is to illustrate the importance of communicating details of the Slow Food garden program as early as possible so that the new program can reap the benefits of getting the word out. Since most Slow Food chapters are launching garden programs with a small number of volunteers and limited budgets, marketing the garden program may bring in more volunteers and financial support for the program through donations of money and supplies. In addition, it is the mission of Slow Food to educate the public about the Slow Food movement. Currently, the public really identifies with projects like school gardens, so the opportunity to connect to many potential new members is great. However, before any promotional activities are launched, it's best to start with a plan.

This chapter will share a template from Slow Food Miami for a communications plan that includes some of the key objectives, strategies, and tactics that form the foundation of any solid marketing plan. To be more specific to marketing Slow Food garden programs, we have given you a head start in identifying potential targets, messages, and cost-effective activities for your chapter and your garden program. It's important that, as Slow Food chapters, we leverage the messages outlined by Slow Food USA, but there will be unique attributes to your marketing program when it comes to gardens. Not all markets or programs are alike, and you definitely have the freedom to be creative!

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## Communications Plan Template

### MISSION STATEMENT

Before a Communications Plan can be developed, the school garden leaders need to have a clear set of goals and objectives for the program. As discussed in the Design and Build chapter, one of the first steps in getting the program launched is to have an agreement within the leadership on the Mission Statement and how the students will be a part of the program. Is the garden program about teaching kids where food comes from? Or will the program be a science-based education with food more of a by-product of the science education? Will the gardens be supplying fresh produce to the school cafeterias, and is a goal to affect the quality of the school lunch programs? Having a well-thought-out Mission Statement will have an impact on how the Communications Plan will be developed.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A well-thought-out Communications Plan requires that the leaders of the Slow Food chapter spend a fair amount of time brainstorming the Goals and Objectives of the Communications Plan. Within this discussion is a clear understanding of the capacity of the Slow Food chapter and the limitations of the time commitment provided by its key volunteers. You don't want to establish a Communications Plan that requires way more time to achieve than your volunteers are able to give. On the other hand, you want to develop an aggressive enough of a plan so that your volunteers are challenged and engaged at a satisfying level of work and that there will be sufficient success to keep people's interest.

It's important to understand your overall objectives for the Communications Plan. Are you interested in generating awareness for your Slow Food chapter and its garden program? Are you trying to attract new corporate sponsors? Are you trying to reach out to new schools to be part of your garden program? All of these objectives are important and should be addressed in your plan.

Some typical goals of a Communications Plan include increasing the general awareness in the local community of the goals of your Slow Food chapter. Slow Food chapters still have much to do to educate the community on the Slow Food movement, and school garden programs are very effective in attracting attention for the movement. At the same time, a goal of the Communications Plan will be to reach potential donors and sponsors to help with the initial funding and volunteer support for the construction of the garden. Finally, the Communications Plan will need to notify the community about an upcoming event or fundraiser and to sell tickets to the event.



## TARGET AUDIENCES

The next step in your Communications Plan is to identify the top 1-3 audience groups that you need to engage to meet your communications objectives and what you need them to do for your program. As you identify each group, try to determine what will capture the attention of each group, what will they want from your program, and what are they able to provide to your efforts. **Examples of some key constituencies are:**

# 1

### **Community residents:**

potential parents and volunteers for the garden program. They care about the food their children eat or want to give back to a program that aligns with their values pertaining to nutrition and the environment. Some community members could come with gardening experience or just be an active member of the community with school age or high-school children.

# 2

### **Sponsors and donors:**

local businesses, foundations, and individuals who have cause-related dollars they are allocating. They may be focused on local food-related causes, childhood obesity, farming, or nutrition.

# 3

### **School administrators and teachers:**

determine your target geographic area in your community where you would plant gardens, and research the schools and community centers in that area.

## BENCHMARKS

A strong Communications Plan will identify key measurable outcomes to help determine if the plan is working. Try to identify 3-5 concrete, specific measures that will help you understand if you're on the right track to achieving your communications goals.

### Potential benchmarks:

- Generate a specific number of applications from schools for new gardens.
- Finalize partnerships with two local organizations to help support and generate funds for the program.
- Secure a feature article in a local publication or media outlet, such as the local newspaper, *Edible* magazine, radio interview, etc.

## MARKETING STRATEGIES

Your marketing strategies are designed to motivate your target audience to take specific actions. Marketing strategies are a series of rules that ensure that you are reaching these audiences in a meaningful way. **Here are some successful marketing strategies that Slow Food Miami uses to support their garden programs:**

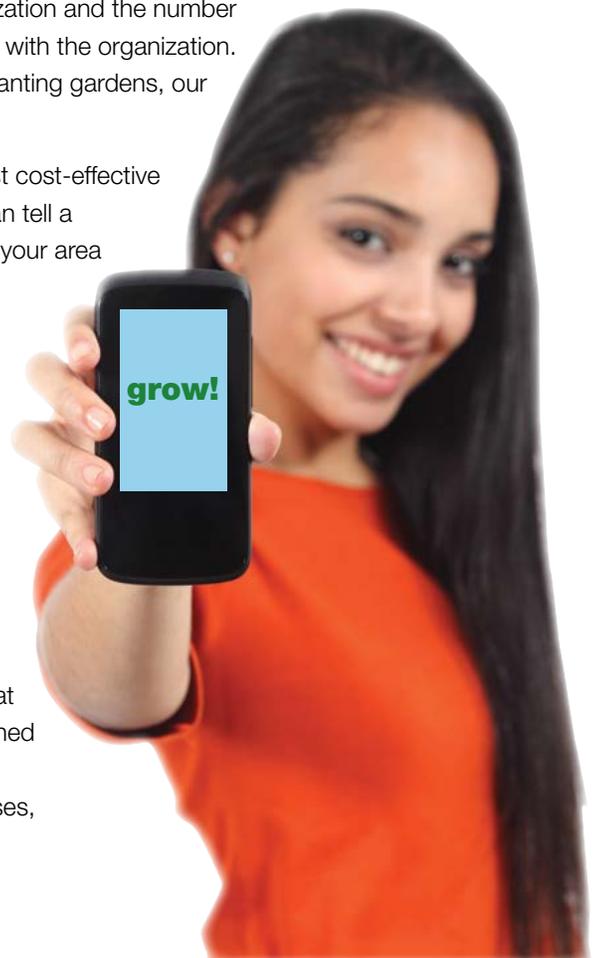
**Branding** Define, convey, and reinforce the Slow Food brand (the unique way in that the organization delivers its expertise in improving food choices and education for children and under-resourced communities) for all target audiences. Consistent, memorable branding helps your base membership to keep Slow Food and your garden program top of mind and spread the word about it.

**Expand marketing reach** Increase the awareness of the organization and the number of people who see the Slow Food name. Associate your garden program with the organization. For example, due to primary focus of the Slow Food Miami chapter on planting gardens, our tagline is *"Planting a Fresher Future for Our Children."*

**Put Public Relations to work for you** PR is one of the most cost-effective activities for a nonprofit organization such as Slow Food to utilize, as it can tell a complete story to a large audience at very little cost. Is there a PR firm in your area that would be willing to do pro bono work? Slow Food Miami identified a restaurant/hospitality PR firm that was willing to donate their time to align themselves with our cause. We write press releases for all events and milestones for our chapter, and the PR firm uses their up-to-date media list to distribute them to key members of the press.

**Social Media** Social media allows you to reach a potentially large audience in a cost-effective manner. It allows for one-to-one dialog with individuals and organizations and grows the number of people who choose to hear from and support you.

**Pre- and post-event marketing** Should your chapter host fundraising or garden events, it's important that you support attendance at these events via your marketing and PR efforts. Event marketing is designed to generate ticket sales and could include presence on community event calendars, grassroots marketing at coffee shops and other local businesses, and placement in local media outlets.



## MARKETING AND PR TACTICS

Marketing tactics are the specific activities you use to deliver your messaging to your audience. They leverage the strategies listed above and create the action-oriented part of your marketing plan. All tactics should support your overall goals and objectives as well as your strategies.

**Some potential marketing tactics include:**

**Create a messaging platform** It's important that messaging about the Slow Food movement and your chapter's garden program be consistent. This language should be reflected in all materials you create—from your website and collateral to Facebook posts and press releases. Slow Food USA has designed a media training and messaging platform that outlines the mission of the organization and allows you to create your own messaging platform, using their guidelines.

As your chapter engages more and more in marketing activities, you'll often be asked for materials and logos. Use a service such as Dropbox to store graphic files and easily share them with someone via email. Dropbox will keep a library of images in a single location and keep you from having to email large files. In addition, having a Standards guide available within your Slow Food chapter will help with consistent messaging and fewer hassles to the staff and volunteers. Create a PDF guide for staff and volunteer messengers to use to make decisions on messaging and the “look and feel” of communications.

**Use a consistent look and feel** Consistency of look and feel is important. Slow Food USA has created branding guidelines to help you ensure that the Slow Food logo is used properly, as it's a registered trademark and needs to be treated as such. Individual chapters have the ability to brand their garden programs or create taglines to help describe the mission of their chapter. As mentioned above, the Slow Food Miami chapter tagline is *“Planting a Fresher Future for Our Children.”*

**Develop marketing materials** As part of Slow Food USA, we have access to a series of collateral materials that we can use for new members or for donations. Slow Food Miami has developed several collateral pieces to help support their garden program.

### Donation Brochure

Using the Slow Food USA brochure as a guide, Slow Food Miami created a two-sided card that provides an overview of the program and outlines how people can get involved. You'll notice that Slow Food Miami described ways that people can get involved, ranging from attending an event to helping plant gardens and make a donation. For a school-garden donation program to work well, it's important to understand the cost to plant a garden. Slow Food Miami allows people to donate \$625 to plant a garden, or someone could donate just \$48 to provide plant starts and seeds for one being planted.

### Garden Sticker

An additional piece of collateral created by Slow Food Miami is the garden sticker. Every child who plants a garden is sent home with the sticker on their shirt. The sticker may spur conversation with parents about their experience during the day and further generate awareness of the organization and potentially get parents involved in tending to the garden, volunteering in the Taste Education classes, or becoming donors to the program.



**Create a strong online presence** There are many ways that chapters can leverage their website to support their garden program. Designating a section of the website for “Garden Program” or “Edible Garden Program” will feature your efforts in this area, while giving the chapter an opportunity to provide:

# 1

**an overview of your mission**

# 2

**the locations of the gardens you've planted in the area**

# 3

**an education section for seasonal planting ideas, literature, etc. and**

# 4

**a page that will provide people with the opportunity to donate.**

There's also an opportunity to create a page to thank donors and sponsors in this section, as it can be one of the benefits they receive when sponsoring a garden.

### Engage in social media (Facebook/Twitter)

**Facebook.** As mentioned earlier, social media provides nonprofit organizations such as Slow Food with an opportunity to reach out to supporters on a one-on-one basis at no cost. Your chapter may already have a Facebook page, and it's a powerful vehicle to use to promote your garden program. **Below are some ideas and guidelines for using Facebook for this purpose:**

- Always try to post smart, inspiring, and useful content. There is an 80/20 rule for nonprofits when it comes to content posts. 80% of the content on Facebook posts should be directly related to the nonprofit's cause and programs, while 20% can be related to current events and food/nutrition/farming related topics.
- Once you have photo releases signed by people participating in your garden plantings, post them on Facebook with descriptions of what they were planting and some information about the school or class. Throughout the growing season, you can show updates of the garden growing and even photos of garden harvests.
- Other Facebook posts could include articles about nutrition and food advocacy, information on farmers, and details about restaurants in your area that are actively supporting the movement.



**Twitter.** Twitter is a social medium that is effective in sending links, quick updates, and photos. You are limited to 140 characters, and it requires some finesse to get your point across effectively. If your chapter already has a Twitter account, be sure to leverage it to show pictures of plantings, harvests, links to your garden application, and other interesting garden-related items.

**Above right is an example of a 'tweet' promoting the Slow Food Miami Edible Garden program.**

Lunches @FloridaCookery  
Still Benefit Our Gardens  
Mon-Thurs. Enjoy farm fresh  
fare & giveback #SnailMIA  
<http://conta.cc/18MXMv5>

**Leverage Public Relations Activities** In addition to social media activities, Public Relations is a cost-effective means of generating awareness of your Slow Food chapter and garden program, in addition to generating ticket sales to specific events. **Press releases or media alerts are a great way to inform key members of the press about activities such as:**

- **Launch of your garden program**
- **New donor or sponsor of the program**
- **High impact planting(s)** at a large school or community or a planting that has special meaning or a storyline (e.g., sensory garden at a school with handicapped students).

Once you've written a press release, the work begins. Getting your release into the hands of key members of the press can often be helped by someone who regularly updates a press list in your area. Try to find a PR firm willing to do pro bono work. Offer to write releases and ask them to distribute them and follow up with the media. PR firms have the relationships to get media coverage for you, whether it's a feature story about your chapter in a local newspaper to listings on blogs or event calendars about your fundraising events. Be sure to always post press releases on your website in a News section.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Because Slow Food chapters are volunteer-based, it's important to look across the organization to determine what members can assist with some of the activities in the Communications Plan. Can your existing team handle these activities or do you require some outsourcing? Some companies, such as design firms, will offer a nonprofit rate for web and email design. Also, which activities are project-based and which ones require ongoing support? For example, social media requires consistent effort and attention, so it's important that someone with capacity to monitor the different social marketing channels take on this role.

To ensure consistency of messaging across your Slow Food board, share the messaging plan with them and do a brief media training. Work on your mission statement for your chapter and your garden program, and prepare an elevator pitch. All members of the organization should be familiar with the language used to describe the program, whether it's in social media, on the website, or in press releases. Clearly specify each board member's and volunteer's role as a marketer with necessary training so that they become effective communicators of Slow Food's key talking points.

## BUDGET

It's ideal to start your marketing planning process with a budget in mind so that you can plan realistically. Your goal is to develop an understanding of the greatest return on investment of each of your activities and to track budget expenditures in the coming year. Marketing plans should be refined and tweaked as you go along. Evaluate what is working best so you can do more of it. Determine which targets are engaged and which audience segments you need to engage differently. What content resonates most with your base? And what messages generate action?



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## METRICS

Some metrics to analyze include:

# 1

### Website usage analytics:

what are the most visited pages on your site and what keywords are users searching to reach your site?

# 2

### Review your open and click-through rates for your marketing emails.

MailChimp is an effective and free email platform that will allow you to create, distribute, and track emails sent to your list. Looking at open rates will help you determine if you are effectively marketing to your database.

# 3

### Use online surveys to determine what your constituents are seeking from your chapter.

SurveyMonkey is a free online survey platform that will help you quickly develop, distribute and analyze survey data.

A marketing plan for school gardens should be considered a work in progress. Keep close account of the impact of your messaging and the extent that it is reaching your target audiences. Continue to ask yourself if the message is fresh or does it need to be updated to keep from getting old and repetitive. As the garden program experiences successes, be sure to include these stories in your updated messaging and to expand your reach to segments of the community that may not have been your original targets.

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