

Using Communication to Serve More Citizens

A Communications Audit and Plan for Legal Aid of Western Michigan

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Fall 2007

Memo

To: Mary Ellen Drolet
From: Jorri Heil
Date: January 3, 2008
Re: Communications Audit and Plan Explanation

The material being presented to you is a communications audit and plan. In the audit, you will find an analysis of the organizational material available for the project, which includes the Legal Aid of Western Michigan (LAWM) Web site and a brochure to seniors. The audit also includes a brief recommendation based on the findings.

The communications plan expands upon the recommendations in the audit. You will find objectives that are used to achieve organizational goals mentioned during the presentation. Strategies and tactics to achieve the objectives are provided. The plan concludes with example tactics which you can use verbatim, or you can alter them to better suit your organization's style.

Using the communications plan has been made simple with the inclusion of usage notes for each tactic. Also, all recommendations are connected to organizational goals so their validity is evident.

The opportunity to work with your organization is greatly appreciated. Thank you for taking time to present to the class as well as respond to e-mail inquiries. If you have any questions about the audit or plan, or if you would like electronic versions of any of the documents, please contact me at jaheil86@yahoo.com or at 231-571-3052.

Thank you, again, for the experience. I hope this communications audit and plan can benefit your organization and the people you serve.

Communications Audit

Situation Analysis

A communications audit is a study of an organization's messages, messengers, publics and outcomes. It is important to do a communications audit to ensure that the organization's communication is effective, and as Legal Aid of Western Michigan (LAWM) continues to have more demand for services but not more money or volunteer attorneys, it is an important time to evaluate LAWM's communication in order to recommend improvements and achieve organizational objectives through communication.

To begin, an analysis of LAWM's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats will be discussed.

One strength is that LAWM has 27 funding sources, so primary services are not in immediate jeopardy, which allows new funding to be directed to new initiatives. There has also been an increase in the demand for services, meaning that the current message is reaching target publics. Other strengths include the:

- number of clients served in 2006—3,873
- call center helping an additional 5,000 people
- 33 staff attorneys
- seven offices
- availability of services in 17 Western Michigan counties

As mentioned by Ms. Drolet, the deputy director, there is a greater need for LAWM's services, but there is not an increase in funding or volunteers. There are approximately 4,000 attorneys in the areas LAWM serves, but only 500 to 600 donated time or money. The misconception that LAWM only files divorces is a disadvantage as is the confusion surrounding eligibility; it is not clear if one is eligible until after the call center is contacted. Other weaknesses include the lack of:

- a unique identity and logo
- an accessible vision and mission statement
- key messages
- regular newsletters to donors, community partners, volunteers, and potential donors or volunteers

With a large staff and service area, LAWM has many opportunities. One opportunity is community partnerships. LAWM can partner with community service organizations, corporations and law firms to reach organizational objectives. Another way LAWM can branch out is with educational campaigns. By educating the community, including seniors and low-income people, LAWM can prevent the need for legal assistance. For example, an educational program about predatory lending could prevent people from participating in scams and needing legal advice. Also, LAWM has opportunities to recruit more volunteers, seek more donations and help more disadvantaged people in the community.

Threats to LAWM include cuts in funding due to reductions in government spending and the weak economy. Another threat is a lack of volunteer attorneys in the future. Finally, an overwhelming response to the call center is a threat because it would mean more wait time and

less people being helped. This could result because of ineligible people filling up the call lines or because of more people needing legal help.

Other information gathered from the presentation by Ms. Drolet that is important to note for the audit is that LAWM currently puts brochures in community service agencies, including: Social Security offices, churches, courts, domestic violence agencies and others. They host two awards dinners annually where volunteer attorneys are recognized. It is also important to mention that all publicity needs to be targeted at the correct audiences so the call center is not overwhelmed with ineligible people.

Current Communications

Based on a review of organizational materials and information presented by Ms. Drolet, it appears there are five target audiences. They are:

- low-income people
- seniors older than 60
- attorneys
- community agencies
- the community

The organizational materials analyzed were the Web site and a brochure for seniors in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties. Analysis was also conducted based on organizational materials presented by Ms. Drolet. Below, the current target audience will be outlined along with the current objectives and messages used to reach these groups.

Low-Income People

It appears the current objective is to help low-income people in the 17 counties of operation who need legal service. The message directed to them is that they can receive legal assistance in most areas of civil law from LAWM for free or with minimal out-of-pocket expenses by contacting the LAWM call center. Tools used to get the message to the audience include brochures, the Web site and ads on the sides of buses.

The outcomes related to this target audience are positive because there are more low-income people seeking LAWM's services, which is evident because of the increase in calls to the call center.

Seniors

Currently, LAWM strives to increase the number of seniors older than 60 who use their services. The message for this objective is that any senior older than 60 can receive assistance from LAWM for civil cases for free or with minimal out-of-pocket expenses. This first step to receive legal assistance is by contacting the call center. This message reaches seniors through brochures.

Outcomes for this objective are also positive because of the increase in calls to the call center.

Attorneys

In regards to attorneys, LAWM's objective is to secure more volunteers and/or donations from attorneys in the 17 counties of operation. The message to attorneys is that they can volunteer their services and donate money to help people in Western Michigan. Two methods are used to disseminate the message: a December mailing and the Web site.

The outcome of this objective is weak. Out of 4,000 attorneys in the service areas, only 500 to 600 donated time or money. Funding is also generated primarily through grants, government sources and legal associations—not donations from individuals.

Community Agencies

Alerting community agencies that serve seniors and low-income people of LAWM's services is the objective for this target audience. The message to these agencies is that LAWM can assist their clients further by giving them free legal counsel. Community agencies are made aware of these services through networking and word-of-mouth tactics.

Currently, it is hard to tell what the outcomes of this objective are. Results can be judged by knowing how many community agencies keep brochures available for their clients.

The Community

The current objective for this audience is to increase their awareness of LAWM and other legal issues. The message is that LAWM provides free legal assistance to seniors and low-income people in civil legal matters. It is also implied that the community should be aware and educated about legal issues. Methods used to disseminate the message are the Web site, particularly the community legal education materials section, and ads on the sides of buses.

Outcomes for this objective are difficult to gauge. One method may be counting hits on the Web site's community education page.

Recommended Communications

To achieve organizational goals, such as assisting more eligible people in need of legal assistance, it is recommended that LAWM reprioritize their target audiences and adjust their objectives, messages and tools to reach these groups. The recommended target audiences, in order of importance, are:

- attorneys
- community service agencies
- LAWM staff
- local media
- seniors/low-income people

Attorneys are most important to target because of LAWM's increase in demand but lack of volunteers to help those in need. Community service agencies are next because they assist those served by LAWM who often have no other means of receiving information. For example, low-income people may not have access to television, Web sites, newspapers or other sources. To

help those in need, it is best to go to a source that interacts with low-income people and whose goal is to help them. Staff at LAWM is important to target because they are the voice of the organization, and there is potential for them to disseminate key messages outside of the workplace. The local media is important because they can inform the general community about LAWM along with getting information to seniors who are often unable to leave their homes. Finally, it is important to continue to directly target seniors and low-income people to ensure that they know how to get help when they need it.

In addition to the specific message that will be provided for each group, three key messages have been developed. They should be used in all communication to all audiences to ensure a consistent message is being disseminated. The three key messages are:

- LAWM offers free legal counsel and advice to seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties.
- LAWM has a long history of community partnership with social service agencies to address the needs of seniors and low-income residents.
- The pro bono program serves to increase the availability of direct civil legal services to the low-income population in which individual attorneys and law firms can donate their expertise or resources for the betterment of their community.

Below is a brief description of the recommendations. A detailed discussion with an explanation of how and where to implement the tactics can be found in the communications plan.

Attorneys

The objective for this audience is to increase volunteering at LAWM by 15 percent among attorneys in the 17 counties of operation by September 2008. The message for this group is that they can help their community by volunteering in their area of expertise or by contributing financially. Some tools to achieve this objective include letters, fact sheets, and presentations at bar association functions and professional events. To evaluate this objective, counting the number of volunteers and donations and comparing them to previous years is recommended.

Community Service Agencies

To reach community service agencies, including government offices, churches, shelters and others, it is recommended to inform 20 percent of agencies in the areas of operation about LAWM's services by June 2008. The message is that LAWM provides services in governmental law, family law, consumer problems and housing issues to seniors and low-income people, and community service agencies can help their clients more by referring them to LAWM. Achieving this objective can be done, in part, through letters, fact sheets, brochures and newsletters. Evaluation can be achieved by sending surveys to community service agencies to see if they are aware of LAWM and its services or by counting the number of agencies that receive written material.

LAWM Staff

For staff, the objective is to educate 60 percent about the importance of professional networking and connecting with the community by April 2008. The message is that by networking and connecting to the community through participation in professional events and volunteering, they

can achieve personal fulfillment while helping their community and LAWM. LAWM benefits from this because networking at professional events leads staff to discuss LAWM and the need for more volunteers and donations. Tools for this objective are memos, e-mails and newsletters as well as paying for staff to attend professional events, giving staff one day per month where they may choose to work or they may be paid to volunteer, and hosting a celebration of successes. To evaluate these, the number of staff who participate in these activities can be tallied.

Local Media

The objective for the media is to inform 30 percent of newspaper, radio and television outlets in the 17 counties of service about LAWM by August 2008. The message is that LAWM provides counseling, advice and representation in governmental law, family law, consumer problems and housing issues to seniors older than 60 and low-income people. Some tools to achieve this include news releases, media kits and editorial board meetings. To evaluate, newspaper articles can be clipped and radio and television spots where LAWM was mentioned can be tallied.

Seniors and Low-Income People

LAWM should strive to alert 20 percent of seniors and low-income residents in the areas of operation to the organization's services by December 2008. These target audiences should be told that LAWM provides counseling, advice and representation in governmental law, family law, consumer problems and housing issues to seniors older than 60 and low-income residents. Methods to disseminate the message are brochures and presentations at churches, senior living centers, shelters and other places these groups go. To evaluate this objective, the number of phone calls received and the number of cases opened can be counted and compared to previous years.

Summary

After assessing the organization, reviewing current communication materials, and determining its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, it appears that adjusting the target audiences and the objectives to reach them would offer LAWM more opportunities to reach its organizational objectives.

Instead of targeting low-income people, seniors, attorneys, community service agencies and the community, it is recommended to target—in the following order—attorneys, community service agencies, LAWM staff, local media, and seniors and low-income people. Each of these groups should hear a message unique to their needs along with the three key messages that were developed to give continuity to all of LAWM's communications.

In the communications plan, the recommendations of this audit are expanded. Strategies and additional tactics are added to the objectives as well as usage notes for the tactics, which outline when and how to use them.

Communications Plan

Introduction

Based on the findings of the communications audit, LAWM can lessen the effects of the current problem they face—that there is more demand for services, but not more money or volunteers—and be able to assist more seniors and low-income people in Western Michigan with legal needs.

In the communications plan, objectives, strategies, tactics and evaluation methods will be provided for the suggested target audiences, which are:

- attorneys
- community service agencies
- LAWM staff
- local media
- seniors/low-income people

Rationale will be provided for the audiences and strategies. Also, methods to implement the tactics will be provided. All of the recommendations are based on opinion and findings from the communications audit.

Action Plan

The recommended actions to improve LAWM's communication will correlate with the target audience that is affected. The objectives below emerged from stated desires and goals of LAWM and from the communications audit. Some of the goals include: getting the community to know about special LAWM programs, alleviating the conception that LAWM only files divorces, obtaining more volunteer attorneys and making publicity targeted so the call center is not overwhelmed with ineligible people. The strategies are methods to achieve the objectives. Finally, the tactics are the concrete examples that fulfill the strategy.

Below, the objectives, strategies and tactics are discussed. Rationales are given for the strategies and an explanation with usage notes is provided for each tactic. Dates to have the objectives complete by are based on a Jan. 1, 2008, start date.

Attorneys

Attorneys were selected as the most important audience because they have the expertise needed to volunteer and because most are able to contribute either time or money. By targeting attorneys, the problem of more demand but not more resources is being addressed.

Objective

The objective is to increase volunteering at LAWM by 15 percent among attorneys in the 17 counties of operation by September 2008.

Strategy One

A strategy for this objective is to focus on the benefits attorneys receive from volunteering. This strategy pertains to attorney's self interest. Since they have a busy, hectic career, they need solid reasons why they would want to take more time away from their day to volunteer.

Tactics

To achieve this strategy, the following tactics can be implemented:

- solicitation letter
- fact sheet
- presentations at professional events
- partner with the State Bar of Michigan, which has volunteering guidelines, and have them endorse volunteering in a newsletter or direct-mail piece

Each tactic should be completed before September 2008.

A solicitation letter is one way to implement the strategy. In Appendix A, a sample letter is provided. The sample encourages attorneys to volunteer at or donate money to LAWM because it is beneficial for their professional careers. Although a letter is mailed to all attorneys in LAWM's service areas in December, this solicitation letter can be a supplement. The attorneys are more likely to remember to volunteer or donate if the message is repeated.

Fact sheets are short, often bulleted, lists of facts about an organization or cause. The fact sheet could discuss volunteering and focus on the benefits of volunteering, such as fulfillment, community involvement, networking and professional growth. A fact sheet could be sent as a supplement to the solicitation letter or mailed or e-mailed separately to all attorneys in LAWM's service areas.

A presentation would be a way to reach attorneys directly and allow time for questions and answers. PowerPoint presentations are one way to present material. When giving a presentation, it is important to cover the three key messages that were created as well as focus on how attorneys can benefit from volunteering. Suggested professional events include State Bar of Michigan functions, law firm events, legal education events and other events where the main audience is attorneys.

Partnering with the State Bar of Michigan gives the request for volunteers a third-party endorsement. Attorneys may also read State Bar of Michigan publications more thoroughly than a solicitation letter. The goal with this tactic is to have the benefits of volunteer work and LAWM's needs appear in State Bar of Michigan publications. This can be done by contacting the bar and setting up a meeting to discuss LAWM's needs.

Strategy 2

Another strategy is to emphasize the positive impact that a short amount of volunteering can have on those in need. Again, attorneys have little free time left after they meet billable-hour requirements, which is why it is important to emphasize that volunteering can be done in a short amount of time while still yielding positive results for both the volunteer and those being helped.

Tactics

To show that volunteering can be done quickly, the following tactics should be implemented by September 2008:

- a feature story about a senior or low-income person who was significantly helped with minimal counsel

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- presentations at professional events with a person who was helped by a LAWM volunteer as a special guest
 - posters in law firms and courts
 - public service announcements (PSAs) on the radio

Feature stories provide more information than news releases and are written in a more creative way. It is recommended to send a feature story that tells the experience of a person who was dramatically helped by a LAWM attorney. The story should also feature the attorney's views and should emphasize his or her positive experience with volunteering. Since feature stories do not include timely news, a feature can be sent any time during the campaign. Feature stories should be sent to major media outlets in the areas of operation, and they should be sent in a method preferred by individual reporters. This information can be found by calling the media outlet or visiting their Web site.

The presentation would be completed in the same way as the previous presentation was described. With this presentation, however, a special guest speaker would participate. The speaker should be a LAWM client who received significant help in a short amount of time and who is able to discuss the experience in front of an audience.

Posters can combine the message that volunteering can be quick and still yield positive results with bold imagery. Posters could be hung in law firms and courts if permission is received. By using posters, attorneys would have the message repeated to them in various locations.

A radio PSA is a way to reach busy attorneys while they are driving. A PSA is an unpaid announcement that promotes programs of a government or nonprofit organization. These can be produced inexpensively at radio stations or recording studios, especially if the voice of a former LAWM client is used instead of a voice actor. This PSA should be sent to radio stations of interest to attorneys, so news and talk stations are recommended.

Community Service Agencies

Those who are eligible for assistance from LAWM may not have traditional opportunities for message exposure. Seniors are often unable to leave their home or living center, and most seniors do not have the ability or equipment to use a computer with Internet access. Low-income people may not be able to afford a television, newspaper subscription or computer. Thus, for LAWM to fulfill its goal to assist these groups, they must be reached through other outlets.

Seniors and low-income people frequently deal with government offices to receive support. They may also be active in church, or they may seek the assistance of local nonprofits. For instance, seniors may come in contact frequently with an organization that provides free transportation to seniors, and low-income people may seek assistance from shelters, food kitchens or welfare agencies.

For these reasons, it is important to target community service agencies so they can disseminate the message to their clients and so target audiences are reached in a way that is convenient and accessible to them.

Objective

An objective to reach this audience is to inform 30 percent of community agencies in the areas of operation about LAWM's services by June 2008.

Strategy

A method to achieve the objective is by building partnerships between LAWM and community service agencies. By building partnerships, LAWM can keep in contact with various agencies and keep them informed about how they can help their clients.

Tactics

To reach this strategy, the following tactics should be implemented by June 2008:

- a monthly newsletter
- direct mail
- fact sheets
- brochures
- a section dedicated to these agencies on the LAWM Web site

Keeping a partnership strong requires regular communication, which is why a monthly newsletter is suggested and provided in Appendix B. The newsletter could include tips for community service agencies to get their clients to seek legal help, stories about new scams or legal threats to seniors and low-income people and updates about LAWM. The newsletter should be mailed or e-mailed to all directors of community service agencies. If mailed, copies could also be sent for them to hand out to their staff who are involved with the public.

Direct mail to agency directors is a way to introduce LAWM. The letters could include basic organization information, including services and eligibility, along with contact information and a phone number or e-mail where they can sign up for the newsletter.

Fact sheets, which were discussed in the attorney section, could give basic LAWM information, and they could be mailed as a supplement with the direct mail. They could also be distributed to agencies for them to display and to distribute to those in need.

LAWM currently places brochures at community service agencies, and it is recommended to continue this tactic. All agencies that assist low-income people or seniors should be targeted.

Another method to reach community services agencies is through the LAWM Web site. This audience frequently uses computers and the Internet while at work. The new section (Appendix C), "For Community Agencies," directly addresses the target audience. It tells them how to get brochures to give to their clients and who their clients should call if they are in need of legal services. It was important to rewrite the home page too because this is the first impression Web users get of an organization. The rewrites ensure that people who visit the home page do not navigate away. One improvement is that all key messages are stated. Another is that contact information is available and visible above the fold (meaning there is no need to scroll). The revisions also ensured that bullets, headings and subheads were used frequently to make the text easy to scan.

LAWM Staff

It is important to target LAWM staff because of their professional connections. Staffers, especially attorneys, are likely to participate in professional events, such as State Bar of Michigan functions. At these events, networking often leads to discussions about places of employment. During these conversations, LAWM staff have the chance to discuss the organization and the need for donations and volunteers.

Objective

To promote these events and encounters, as well as increase employee morale, an objective is to educate 60 percent of the staff about the importance of professional networking and connecting with the community by April 2008.

Strategy One

One strategy is to show how much one benefits professionally and personally by participating in professional organizations and professional events. This strategy benefits LAWM staff and gives them opportunities to disseminate key messages about LAWM. Word-of-mouth is an important resource in LAWM's tight-knit communities, so hearing from peers about the need for volunteers and the importance of LAWM can generate an interest in volunteering. It can be assumed that, at these functions, staff would network and discuss their jobs and organizations with others in the legal profession. They would also have improved morale and more knowledge in their fields, which improves productivity. More productivity means more people can receive legal help.

Tactics

Tactics to reach this strategy are:

- e-mail memos
- internal newsletters
- a professional development lecture series
- a monthly prize drawing for those who attend professional events, meetings or the lecture series
- a reward for recruiting attorneys to volunteer
- compensation for membership or event fees

Each of the tactics should be started by April 2008.

An e-mail memo is a quick way to inform employees about the importance of professional development and give them information about new initiatives. The memo should be sent to all LAWM employees and should include detailed information about the new programs and a person to contact for more information.

An internal newsletter, which can be sent to all employees via e-mail, can give monthly updates on the new initiatives. It can also provide articles about the importance of professional development, and it can give statistics to show the positive affects of such initiatives.

The professional development lecture series would be a time where speakers come and present on various topics related to improving oneself within the profession. This should be offered to

all employees on their lunch hour. Speakers could range from professional motivational speakers to local business people who improved their careers. The lectures can be held quarterly.

Each month, employees who attend the lecture series, professional events or meetings, or other career development programs should have their name put in a drawing. Rewarding employees striving for professional development shows that LAWM takes professional development seriously, and it gives employees an incentive to attend different events. Prizes could include gift certificates or cash.

To directly incorporate this strategy with LAWM goals, employees could be rewarded for recruiting attorneys they meet at professional events to volunteer. When an employee refers five attorneys to volunteer, which would be determined by giving all new volunteers a survey to ask if they were recruited by a LAWM employee, they could receive an award, such as an extra day of paid vacation or a cash bonus.

Finally, to reinforce the importance of professional development and to show LAWM's commitment to the efforts, the organization should pay membership dues and event fees for employees. This ensures that all employees, no matter what their financial status is, have the opportunity to learn.

Strategy Two

Another strategy to connect staff to the community is to stimulate volunteering outside of LAWM. This is another way to get employees to talk to other professionals. It also gives them first-hand experience with volunteering so they can tell others how rewarding it is. This is another way to improve employee morale.

Tactics

To reach this strategy, it is recommended to use the following by April 2008:

- e-mail memos
- internal newsletters
- a day every month where employees can either work or they can be paid their regular salary to volunteer elsewhere
- a volunteer of the month where the winner is awarded a certificate, lunch and is named in internal publications

Similar to the first strategy, e-mail memos and internal newsletters would be sent to all employees via e-mail. To fulfill the second strategy, information about the importance of volunteering, the personal benefits and the ability to network with the community should be addressed.

One day every month, employees should be given the opportunity to either work or be paid as they normally would to volunteer. This encourages employees to volunteer, which makes LAWM a good community member but also gives employees first-hand experience about the positive aspects of volunteering, which they can then share with potential LAWM volunteers.

Each month, LAWM could choose a different organization to assist or it could be left up to employees to determine the cause they want to work for.

Another way to increase employee morale and encourage volunteering is to reward employees who make an outstanding effort by naming a volunteer of the month. The person would receive a certificate, be named in an internal newsletter and would receive a prize, such as a free lunch.

Local Media

Since most people in the target audience stay connected with various media outlets and since the general community can donate financially, it is important to target local media. By targeting newspapers, television stations and radio stations, the entire community can be made aware of LAWM and its needs.

Objective One

One objective is to inform 30 percent of newspaper, television and radio media outlets in the 17 counties of service about LAWM's service and the community's eligibility by August 2008.

Strategy One

One strategy is to build relationships with the media. This is important because they may ask LAWM for advice, which gets LAWM's name in the media. Also, by building relationships with individual reporters, an organization is more likely to get to know which reporters cover which beats and what methods they prefer to receive information. If the media are familiar with the organization and they receive material in their preferred way, they are more likely to notice and read the material that was sent.

Tactics

Ways to build relationships with the media include conducting the following by August 2008:

- editorial board meetings
- news releases
- backgrounders
- a media kit
- making attorneys available to speak or give statements for legal stories

An editorial board meeting is where organizations meet with editorial staff to discuss their opinion in hopes the media will adopt the same opinion. Meetings should be held with the major media outlets in the service areas. These will familiarize the media with LAWM and let the media understand LAWM's positions.

News releases are short pieces that alert the media to newsworthy information. They should be written when timely, newsworthy information can be disseminated. They should be sent, in a method preferred by individual reporters, to all major media outlets in the service areas. By providing reporters with newsworthy material, LAWM makes their job easier, which is why news releases can help build a relationship.

A backgrounder is a factual piece that offers information about an organization or one of its services. The sample backgrounder provided (Appendix D) was written so LAWM would have

an organizational snapshot they could repeatedly hand out to reporters, donors, volunteers, clients and the public. Ms. Drolet said that people often have the misconception that LAWM just files divorces. The backgrounder discusses all aspects of the organization clearly, including eligibility so publicity can include this information and minimize the call center being tied up by ineligible people. This means that LAWM can distribute this piece to the target audiences and the media to alleviate misconceptions. Backgrounders can be sent to individual media outlets, or they can accompany a coordinating news release.

To give all major media outlets in LAWM's service areas a plethora of information, a media kit is recommended. A media kit can contain a news release, fact sheet, backgrounder, contact information along with other information useful to reporters. These can be mailed to reporters, or they can be provided if a reporter interviews a LAWM employee. Media kits ensure that a reporter will have background information and facts needed to write an accurate story.

Another way to make reporters' jobs easier and to build relationships is by offering LAWM attorneys as speakers. This information could be provided to the media immediately or when a story that requires legal expertise arises. The speaker should be an attorney who can speak well and who represents LAWM in a positive light. There could also be multiple speakers from different practice areas available to speak.

Strategy Two

A second strategy is to stimulate media coverage throughout the year. By doing so, this keeps LAWM continuously in people's minds and the message repetition will become more engrained in people's views.

Tactics

The following are suggested tactics for this strategy and should be completed by August 2008:

- feature story
- news release
- letter to the editor
- media alert

As discussed previously, both a feature story and a news release can be sent to major media outlets in LAWM's areas of service. Both pieces should strive to be newsworthy so they will be used by the media.

A letter to the editor is a way for LAWM to express its opinion and view on a particular issue. A letter to the editor can be sent to any major newspaper in the areas of service. An example of a topic could be on Medicare changes. Even though a letter to the editor does not directly promote the organization, the three key messages can be worked in, and it is another way to spread awareness about LAWM.

Media alerts are sent prior to events to let the media know the details so they can attend. These should be mailed to all major media outlets in the areas of service. The media alert could announce an awards ceremony for the outstanding volunteer of the year or any other event. It is

also important to include opportunities for the media to interview and photograph people at the event.

Objective Two

Another objective is to raise awareness of LAWM and the community's legal needs by 15 percent by August 2008.

Strategy

A strategy to achieve this objective is to tell the media how many need help and how little help there is. This will encourage the media to develop concern regarding LAWM and legal issues, which may increase news coverage.

Tactics

To achieve this strategy, LAWM can use the following objectives by August 2008:

- fact sheets
- backgrounders
- news releases

The three tactics above have been discussed previously and can be used in the same ways as described to generate media coverage, which will lead to community awareness.

Seniors and Low-Income People

Continuing to help those in need is a desire of LAWM, which is why it is still important to target the two categories of eligible people through traditional methods.

Objective

An objective for this audience is to alert 20 percent of seniors and low-income people in LAWM's areas of operation to the organization's services by December 2008.

Strategy One

One strategy to achieve the objective is to tell seniors and low-income people about LAWM's services and eligibility. This ensures that the target audience understands what cases can and cannot be accepted and who is eligible. This information means the call center will not be overrun with ineligible calls.

Tactics

Achieving this strategy by December 2008 can be done by:

- a television public service announcement (PSA)
- brochures
- presentations
- fliers

Many seniors do not know that LAWM's goal is to help them with legal problems. The best way to reach this audience, which is often isolated at home, is through a medium they are familiar with and use frequently. That medium is television. A television PSA, once produced, may be run for free on local television stations because they are required to air a certain amount of non-

commercial advertisements for the public good. According to an e-mail conversation with Ms. Drolet, seniors are commonly the victims of consumer scams, so the sample PSA (Appendix E) addresses this issue. The PSA informs the public of the issue while letting them know some of the eligibility requirements so the LAWM call line is not tied up. It is recommended to send the PSA to local television stations, such as WZZM, WWMT, WOOD and WXMI, in all the areas of operation.

Another way to inform seniors and low-income people is with a brochure. LAWM already uses a brochure, but it could be adapted to apply to both audiences. It could also be placed in other venues, such as bus terminals and grocery stores. The sample in Appendix F is applicable for both audiences, which is the best idea considering both groups visit places where the brochure may be placed, such as government offices. It is also visually appealing to ensure that people see it and pick it up. Also, the colors match the color scheme of the Web site and the newsletter. In addition, the text is shorter, yet all pertinent information is included.

As Ms. Drolet mentioned, LAWM does not have any materials to use when they have informational booths at events. By creating a PowerPoint, LAWM can have a visual to display. A presentation should also show the three key messages along with other talking points. A PowerPoint can attract attention to their booth or presentation and ensure a consistent, accurate message is being disseminated. The sample presentation (Appendix G) is intended for a general audience. Attorneys, seniors, low-income people and the general community can all get useful information. It is recommended to display it in the LAWM lobby. It can be shown at community service agencies, churches, shelters and senior living centers. The slides can also be used for other strategies where a suggested tactic was a presentation, including professional association meetings or other events where attorneys are present.

Fliers, posted in places frequented by seniors and low-income people, are another tactic to repeat LAWM's messages, services and eligibility. They could have a tear-off section where interested people could pull off LAWM contact information. Locations to which fliers could be distributed include: churches, grocery stores, shelters, bus stations, community service agencies and apartment complexes.

Strategy Two

Educating audiences about legal issues and current scams is another strategy. By educating audiences about basic legal issues, they may be able to resolve the problem on their own. Informing them about scams and other topics may prevent them from being a victim and needing legal service. By reducing the need, more people who have legal problems that require an attorney's assistance can be helped.

Tactics

To reach this strategy, LAWM can implement:

- a public service announcement (PSA)
- brochures
- presentations
- fliers
- fact sheets

The tactics to achieve this strategy have all been discussed previously. The only difference is that for this strategy, the tactics should educate, which means LAWM's messages and services are not prominent. It is recommended that these materials talk about problems faced by seniors and low-income people, such as consumer scams, and then provide contact information for LAWM. All of these materials should be distributed or presented in the ways suggested for other strategies.

Evaluation

To evaluate the objective aimed at attorneys, which is to increase volunteering at LAWM by 15 percent among attorneys in the 17 counties of operation by September 2008, evaluation can take the form of counting. It is recommended to count the number of volunteer attorneys before the campaign begins. Then, in September 2008, count the number of attorneys. These numbers can then be compared to see if 15 percent more volunteered.

The objective for community service agencies—to inform 30 percent in the areas of operation about LAWM's services by June 2008—can be evaluated by sending a short survey to these agencies. The survey would ask if they are aware of LAWM.

To evaluate the objective for LAWM staff, which is to educate 60 percent of the staff about the importance of professional networking and connecting with the community by April 2008, there are two methods. One is to send a survey to all staff members asking whether they are aware of the importance of professional networking and whether they know of events they can attend. Also, the number of people who have participated in the volunteer days and the number of people who have requested that professional event dues be paid by LAWM can be counted.

The first objective for the media—to inform 30 percent of newspaper, television and radio media outlets in the 17 counties of operation about LAWM's service and the community's eligibility by August 2008—can be evaluated by clipping stories that mention LAWM out of the newspaper and counting the amount of times LAWM is mentioned on television or the radio. The second objective, which is to raise awareness of LAWM and the community's legal needs by 15 percent by August 2008, can be evaluated in the same way. A survey could also be distributed to media outlets asking if they are aware of LAWM and the community's need for legal service.

Evaluation for the objective of alerting 20 percent of seniors and low-income people in LAWM's areas of operation to the organization's services by December 2008 can be done by counting how many seniors and low-income people contact the call center compared to the total number of those people living in the service areas. Another way is to count the number of new cases.

Conclusion

By targeting the aforementioned audiences in the ways recommended, LAWM should be able to achieve organizational goals and alleviate current challenges. Not only is this communications plan helpful to the organization, but it has also provided a learning opportunity for the creator. Without LAWM's cooperation and Ms. Drolet's direction, this real-world experience would not have been possible. Thank you for the opportunity to work with your organization.

Appendix

Appendix A

Legal Aid of Western Michigan
89 Ionia NW, Suite 400
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616-774-0672
www.legalaidwestmich.org

January 3, 2008

<Insert attorney's full name>

<Insert title>

<Insert company name>

<Insert address>

Dear <Insert courtesy title and attorney's last name>:

In the 17 counties Legal Aid of Western Michigan (LAWM) serves, there are 272,000 people living at or below the poverty level. These individuals qualify for free legal assistance, but LAWM only has 35 staff attorneys. By volunteering for or donating to LAWM's pro bono program, you can help your community's senior and low-income residents.

The American Bar Association and the State Bar of Michigan have pro bono guidelines for their members. Minimum Michigan recommendations are to assist three low-income people for free, provide 30 hours of pro bono service to low-income individuals or organizations, or contribute \$300 to organizations, like LAWM, that offer legal services to poor individuals.

To volunteer, submit the enclosed case pledge form to the LAWM address above, or submit a pledge electronically in the pro bono section of www.legalaidwestmich.org. You can volunteer for cases in 25 specialties, and LAWM lets you accept or reject a case before a referral is made, reimburses all expenses, and provides professional liability coverage.

If your caseload is too heavy to accept referrals, you can contribute financially by mailing the enclosed financial pledge form to LAWM or by visiting the LAWM Web site and clicking the Access to Justice link in the pro bono section.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me with any questions at 616-774-0672 or at medrolet@legalaidwestmich.net.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Drolet
Deputy Director

Encl: case pledge form and financial pledge form

Appendix B

Legal Aid of Western Michigan offers free counsel and advice to seniors older than 60 and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties.

Volume 1, Issue 1

Debrief

How Can Legal Aid Help Your Clients?

Legal Aid of Western Michigan (Legal Aid) is looking to partner with community service agencies like yours to help more seniors and low-income community members.

"Debrief," our monthly newsletter for community service agencies, keeps your organization informed about the latest scams and legal threats that face seniors and low-income people.

Also, every issue has tips on how to get your clients in need of legal assistance to seek help.

This first issue is dedicated to letting you get to know us.

We are a nonprofit organization that offers free legal counsel to seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties. Low-income people are those who fall within or slightly above the federal poverty level. Household size, income and assets are also figured into a person's eligibility. Seniors older than 60, no matter what income or assets they have, can receive assistance.

Cases in most areas of civil law are accepted; however, Legal Aid cannot take criminal cases. Commonly, we work on cases dealing with consumer law, landlord/housing disputes, family issues and governmental law.

Offices are located in Big Rapids, Grand Rapids, Holland, Kalamazoo, Muskegon and St. Joseph.

These offices serve the counties of: Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Ionia, Kalamazoo, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa, St. Joseph and Van Buren.

People eligible for services must call the toll-free call center at 888-783-8190. The call center is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. It is open on Wednesday from noon to 6 p.m.

So, what can your organization do to help your clients even more? Send them to Legal Aid when they have legal issues, and stay in touch with us so we can find out how to help seniors and low-income people that come to your organization.

Tips to Help Your Clients

Here, a bulleted list of tips on how organizations can get their clients legal help can be included.

New Scams and Threats

In this section, new information about consumer scams or legal threats that commonly plague seniors and low-income people can be included. Along with this information, ways to prevent the problem should be addressed as well as what people should do if they think they have been affected.

Appendix C

Home Page Rewrite

What does Legal Aid of Western Michigan do?

Legal Aid of Western Michigan (LAWM) offers [free](#) legal counsel and advice to seniors and low-income residents in [17 Western Michigan counties](#).



Caption: counties of service

For over 30 years, LAWM has helped seniors over 60 and low-income people with [civil legal matters](#).

[Eligible clients](#) can receive the following from LAWM attorneys:

- counsel and advice
- representation in cases with organizations
- representation in Michigan courts

Pro Bono Program

The pro bono program of LAWM works to increase the availability of civil legal services to the low-income population. Individual attorneys and law firms are encouraged to [donate](#) their expertise and/or resources for the betterment of their community.

Community Partnerships

LAWM [partners](#) with social service agencies in the communities serviced to address the needs of eligible people. These partnerships help those in need in Western Michigan learn about and receive free legal service.

Notes

It is recommended to have the material that is underlined and in blue link to the related pages on the LAWM Web site. These links can be made less obtrusive by changing the color or removing the underline.

A layout suggestion is provided so contact information and the main messages of LAWM are easily visible on the top of the page.

For more information, contact LAWM at 1-800-442-2777.

For free legal assistance, eligible people can call 1-888-783-8190.

New Section

For Community Agencies

We know you are committed to serving Western Michigan [residents in need](#). To help your clients after they leave your facility, give them Legal Aid of Western Michigan (LAWM) resources.

LAWM offers [free](#) legal counsel and advice to seniors over 60 and low-income residents with [civil legal matters](#) in [17 Western Michigan counties](#).

How Can You Help?

If you are part of a church, social service agency, governmental office, or other organization that assists seniors and low-income people in LAWM's counties of service, contact us at 1-800-442-2777.

We can send brochures that you can distribute to your clients who need legal assistance. You can also get on the mailing list for our monthly newsletter so your organization can be informed about the latest legal issues and legal assistance available.

When one of your senior or low-income clients needs legal assistance, you can recommend that they call the legal-assistance line at 1-888-783-8190.

Appendix D

LEGAL AID OF WESTERN MICHIGAN

89 Ionia NW, Suite 400 ■ Grand Rapids, MI 49503 ■ 616-774-0672

Organizational Backgrounder

THE ORGANIZATION

Legal Aid of Western Michigan (LAWM) is a nonprofit organization that offers free legal counsel to seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties. The board of directors consists of 21 volunteers from both the legal profession and the communities served.

WHO LAWM SERVES

LAWM assists low-income people who fall within or slightly above the federal poverty level. Household size, income and assets are also figured into a person's eligibility. Seniors over 60, no matter what income or assets they have, can receive assistance. Before a person can speak to an attorney, they must be eligible according to LAWM's policies.

Eligibility for some people who are not U.S. citizens or who are incarcerated is restricted by LAWM's donors.

AVAILABLE SERVICES

Cases in most areas of civil law are accepted; however, LAWM cannot take criminal cases. Commonly, we work on cases dealing with:

- consumer law
- landlord/housing disputes
- family issues
- governmental law

Consumer problems involve insurance, loans, bill collection, repossession and the purchase of goods. Cases in housing issues can occur when a landlord turns off utilities, evicts tenants, or raises rent. It may also relate to title or financing problems with homes. Family law covers domestic violence, divorce, and child support and custody.

Cases in governmental law may be made if a person was denied, terminated from, or had funding reduced in:

- welfare
- food stamps
- Medicaid/Medicare
- Social Security
- disability
- unemployment compensation
- veteran's benefits

-more-

LOCATIONS

Offices are located in:

- Big Rapids
- Grand Rapids
- Holland
- Kalamazoo
- Muskegon
- St. Joseph

These offices serve the counties of: Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Ionia, Kalamazoo, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa, St. Joseph and Van Buren.

HOW AND WHEN TO GET HELP

People eligible for services must call the toll-free call center at 888-783-8190. The call center is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. It is open on Wednesday from noon to 6 p.m.

HOW TO HELP LAWM

LAWM accepts financial contributions so we can increase legal services to seniors and low-income people. Individual attorneys and law firms can make financial contributions and donate their expertise by volunteering for cases. To donate or volunteer, visit www.legalaidwestmich.org.

Appendix E

Legal Aid of Western Michigan
89 Ionia NW, Suite 400
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616-774-0672

Legal Aid of Western Michigan

“Legal Aid of Western Michigan Helps Seniors over 60”

Time: 60 seconds

Air: September through December of 2008

Writer: Jorri Heil

VISUAL	COPY
A man who looks older than 60 is sitting on a couch in a living room. The furniture is clean but dated. A picture of a boy is on the end table next to the man.	MR. WILSON: “I finally saved enough money to take my grandson to Washington, D.C. That was until I became the victim of a refinancing scam.”
The camera zooms closer to the man.	MR. WILSON: “I tried to solve the problem, but I wasn’t sure where to get help. I was about to give up when my neighbor told me about Legal Aid.”
The camera zooms out. The man walks to the front door and opens it. A woman dressed in a suit smiles, and he invites her in.	FEMALE VOICE OVER: “Legal Aid of Western Michigan offers free legal services to all people over 60.”
The man and woman sit down at a dining table. The woman takes paperwork out of her briefcase. The following list fades in: Medicare, veteran’s benefits, Social Security, loans, bill collection, housing, consumer scams and much more.	FEMALE VOICE OVER: “Our attorneys can give you counsel and advice for problems with Medicare, veteran’s benefits, Social Security, loans, bill collection, housing, consumer scams and much more.”
The camera zooms closer to the man and woman at the dining table. They stand and shake hands.	MR. WILSON: “Thank you so much, Susan. I’m glad you’ve helped me fix my financing.”
The man and woman walk to the front door. They pass antique-looking furniture and décor. The man opens the door for her.	SUSAN: “No problem, Mr. Wilson. Now you know how to protect yourself from scams, and you and your grandson can take that trip.”
The screen dissolves to a graphic with the Legal Aid of Western Michigan logo and the text: Legal Aid of Western Michigan Toll free: 1-888-783-8190 www.legalaidwestmich.org	FEMALE VOICE OVER: “If you’re over 60, call Legal Aid toll free at 1-8-8-8-7-8-3-8-1-9-0 to see if we can help. You can also log on to w-w-w-dot-legal-aid-west-mich-dot-o-r-g for information.”

Do You Need Legal Help?

Have you been the victim of a consumer scam? Has your landlord turned off your utilities without cause? Maybe you qualify for a government assistance program but have been told that you are ineligible.

If you need help with these or other areas of civil law and you are a senior or low-income resident of Western Michigan, contact Legal Aid of Western Michigan (Legal Aid).

Legal Aid is a nonprofit organization that offers free legal counsel to seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties.



LEGAL AID OF WESTERN MICHIGAN



LEGAL AID OF WESTERN MICHIGAN

Call center: 888-783-8190

89 Ionia N.W., Suite 400
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616-774-0672
www.legalaidwestmich.org

PROVIDING FREE LEGAL AS-
SISTANCE TO SENIORS AND
LOW-INCOME PEOPLE



WHAT SERVICES ARE OFFERED?

Cases in most areas of civil law are accepted; however, Legal Aid cannot take criminal cases.

Commonly, Legal Aid offers free legal help for cases that involve:

- consumer law
- landlord/housing disputes
- family issues
- governmental law

For more information, call 616-774-0672 or visit www.legalaidwestmich.org.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Legal Aid assists low-income people who fall within or slightly above the federal poverty level. Household size, income and assets are also figured into a person's eligibility. Seniors older than 60, no matter what income or assets they have, can receive assistance.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Offices are located in Big Rapids, Grand Rapids, Holland, Kalamazoo, Muskegon and St. Joseph.

These offices serve the counties of: Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Ionia, Kalamazoo, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa, St. Joseph and Van Buren.

HOW TO GET HELP

People eligible for services must call the toll-free call center at 888-783-8190.

The call center is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. It is open on Wednesday from noon to 6 p.m.



Legal Aid provides seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties free legal help.



Appendix G



What Services are Offered?

- Free counsel and advice with civil legal matters, including:
 - Consumer law
 - Landlord/housing disputes
 - Family issues
 - Governmental law



Legal Aid of Western Michigan advises seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties for free.

Who is Eligible?



- All seniors older than 60
- Low-income people
 - Those within or slightly above the federal poverty level
 - Household size, income and assets affect eligibility

Legal Aid of Western Michigan advises seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties for free.

What Counties are Served?



- Allegan
- Berrien
- Cass
- Ionia
- Kalamazoo
- Kent
- Lake
- Mason
- Mecosta
- Montcalm
- Muskegon
- Newaygo
- Oceana
- Osceola
- Ottawa
- St. Joseph
- Van Buren

Legal Aid of Western Michigan advises seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties for free.

How and When to Get Help

- Eligible people can contact the call center at 1.888.783.8190
- The call center is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday
- It is open Wednesday from noon to 6 p.m.

Legal Aid of Western Michigan advises seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties for free.

How to Help

- The pro bono program provides civil legal services to low-income people
- Attorneys and law firms can donate
 - Time
 - Money



Legal Aid of Western Michigan advises seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties for free.

Community Partnerships

- Legal Aid of Western Michigan helps seniors and low-income residents by partnering with organizations, including:
 - Government offices
 - Religious institutions
 - Social service agencies

Legal Aid of Western Michigan advises seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties for free.

For More Information

- For information or to volunteer, call 1.800.442.2777
- For legal help, contact the call center at 1.888.783.8190
- Visit www.legalaidwestmich.org

Legal Aid of Western Michigan advises seniors and low-income residents in 17 Western Michigan counties for free.