



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

FY 12 Strategic Communications –

Modification of Existing Strategies

The following modifications were discussed with the First Things First Board Communications and Government Affairs Committee, as well as the internal Communications Implementation Team. The modifications reflect the advice of the Communications Unit, as well as the insight and input of both advisory groups, which include members of the Board, regional partnership councils, the community and a cross-divisional group of FTF staff.

Revised Benchmarks

In FY2011, FTF met or exceeded its goals in two of three measures associated with the success of our Strategic Communications Plan.

This tremendous success is encouraging, given the amount of work done by FTF in the areas of community outreach, brand management, earned media, enhanced email and online communication and paid advertising. However, we cannot know or discount the potential impact that publicity and advocacy associated with the November ballot initiative may have had on these outcomes.

Therefore, we will make the following aggressive, yet attainable, changes to our goals in those two areas. Our goals for the third measure – where we did not achieve the desired progress – will remain the same.

Increase total awareness of FTF from 34% in 2011 to:

- 37% in 2012
- 42% in 2013

Increase the perceived importance of early childhood issues from 80% in 2011 to:

- 81% in 2012
- 82% in 2013

In this second measure, the Communications Unit recognizes that attainment of an 80-85% rate in the perceived importance of early childhood may be all that is possible. Therefore, we will look more in-depth at our recent research and set more specific goals in specific areas. For example, if the perceived importance of early childhood among a particular audience is very low, we will set a specific target for improvement within that audience. These more specific targets will be identified within the next 30 days.

Paid Advertising

After consultation with our advertising agency partners, it was decided the current creative will continue to be effective for another flight in fall 2011, but that new creative needs to be developed for spring 2012 and fiscal year 13. If there are available opportunities to include a 15-second version of the existing TV spot in the fall media buy, the spot will be edited to meet that opportunity, thereby increasing our saturation.

We feel that the current creative concept for billboards, cinema etc., needs to be changed, particularly in small communities, where folks may have gotten used to seeing it. Therefore, we will “re-fresh” the look of our current creative for the fall paid advertising flight. This will include using the existing visuals in different combinations, and providing additional headlines for consideration.

For the spring paid advertising flight, we will be proposing a new creative concept for all of the campaign. We are working on a specific timeline for the discussion of proposed creative concepts, the final selection of a new concept and production of those materials. All of this would need to be completed by the end of January 2011 in order to be ready for the spring flight.

After discussions with advertising professionals and reviews of FY12 funding, it was determined that local media budgets are insufficient to effectively use mass media as a means of advertising local programs and services. In addition, the cost of mass media does not allow an organization to quickly change focus as programs or services become full. The resulting backlash from advertising programs that are not available also could hinder or hurt our public awareness efforts.

The unit, however, wants to be supportive of the regions’ desire to advertise their local programs. We are designing a marketing manual that describes for regions how other communications strategies – such as earned media, community outreach, and public service announcements using local mavens – can help them to more effectively publicize their programs.

The unit is also aware of FTF’s desire to include a programmatic – as well as educational – focus to our paid advertising flight.

We are working to “stagger” our paid advertising creative so that we have an educational focus and a programmatic focus every other fiscal year. For example:

Fall 2011 – current Ready for School, Set For Life creative with collateral refreshed.

Spring 2012 and FY13—new creative concept with educational message. There will be targeted marketing of Quality First to providers, not utilizing mass media.

FY14—Quality First (across all media – targeted at parents)

FY 15—New Education Campaign

FY16—Program Related (maybe QF again or recruiting teachers to field)

Earned Media

In-depth media training was provided to all community outreach staff in summer 2011 to build their capacity to create positive relationships with local media and capitalize on earned media opportunities.

FTF Communications is finalizing a content strategy that will describe – week by week – the content focus of all our communications throughout the next year. This includes earned media, as well as content in electronic communications, social media, community outreach, etc.

Community Outreach

After review of our Year 1 successes, our tactical achievement and our recent message testing, it was decided that – instead of adding a host of new audiences to our existing list – we will proceed with our Year 1 audiences in a more disciplined manner and add senior groups to our current audience list.

Our message testing indicated that messengers affiliated with the K-12 system continue to be the most credible across all communities. In addition, both in our benchmark areas and our messaging, women and seniors were the most likely to support early childhood and FTF. Our conversations with regional council members, directors and outreach staff at the recent regional forums revealed that –particularly in smaller communities – faith organizations are extremely credible messengers, particularly in more conservative areas.

Review of our community outreach efforts thus far show that only 12% of presentations/meetings were to the K-12 community; 5% to women’s groups; and, 3% to faith groups. None were listed as being to senior groups because seniors were not a Year 1 target audience. While there was likely additional reach to these audiences through presentations and meetings tracked in the general “other” category, those numbers would be minimal.

For these reasons, it is imperative that we solidify support and engagement of leadership in all these audiences.

We will take a more disciplined approach to these four audiences. Specifically, we will:

- Designate a specific target audience from these four in each of the following 4 quarters of the year. For example, K12 would be our focus from September through November; women from December through February; faith from March to May; and seniors from June through August.
- Establish specific targets within that audience for community outreach. For example, in K12, the targets may be presentations to all governing boards, meetings with all superintendents and/or principals (depending on community size); contact with all PTA/PTOs; etc.
- More detailed and specific talking points, presentations, collateral materials, etc. by target audience.
- Earned media efforts by medium and/or messengers likely to be effective with that audience. For example, industry publications, district or school newsletters, etc.

Also, in terms of the business community, the statewide office will focus on chambers of commerce, major labor organizations, key business groups (like the small business association, the manufacturers association, etc.). Key to this interaction will be requests that they specifically include early childhood in their associations with policymakers and the media. In community outreach, we will focus on very specific business leaders who already have credibility in their community due to other activities as potential champions, rather than the business community at large.

Engagement/Social Media

Based on feedback from champions, community stakeholders and our staff, we need to develop a mechanism for engaging champions to take action on a specific call to action in order to keep them engaged. We have had initial conversations internally and with community partners on what that might look like – for example, a communications campaign on early literacy that focuses on specific actions individuals by audience can take (parents reading to kids every day, local businesses donating books to child care centers; local civic groups engaging volunteers to come in to early childhood settings to read; local leaders writing guest columns on the importance of reading and what their favorite book meant to them; social media posts with book lists, reading tips, did you know stats, etc). We have plans to engage a consultant for assistance for developing and implementing that strategy. Implementation would likely in the second half of the fiscal year.