

Afternoon Concurrent Conversation Notes

Virginia Main Street Essentials

September 22 & 23, 2010

Abingdon, VA

These interactive small group sessions reinforced the VMS network, engaging both budding and mature Main Street programs. Facilitators and co-leaders helped capture new ideas, share best practices and problem solve with attendees. A few of the sessions were presentation oriented (designated with *) and the presentations are available on the VMS website in the training archives; regardless, the experiences of the local programs provided the content for all of these sessions.

<i>Day One</i>	<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>
2 p.m.:	Press relations nuts & bolts* – When and how do I write a press release and to whom should I send it? Tips on cultivating a positive press relationship and getting the coverage you want.	Developing a fundraising plan – This session will focus on the best practices and procedures that should be in place for financial sustainability and evaluating your organizational needs.
3 p.m.:	Selling sponsorships* – Tired of constantly running to shakedown sponsors? Attract more money with less effort when you transform your sponsorship programs from selling ad space at events to developing long-term relationships that build downtown partners.	Board engagement and growth – An inspired group of volunteers with the motivation to make things happen in your downtown isn't a pipe dream, but building it takes a lot of patience and some essential structure and recognition.
4:00 p.m.:	Connecting with youth and families - Engaging youth is a great way to increase your program's volunteer base, and for them, giving time to the community provides a rewarding lesson. How can your organization engage these rising leaders?	Organization round table – This session is an opportunity to give a little more attention to unanswered questions about nonprofit management, volunteer attraction and fundraising.

<i>Day Two</i>	<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>
1 p.m.:	Retail promotions – Dig in further to Kathy's potent ideas in this session to help your retailers cook in this economy. And take advantage of priceless ideas from around Virginia that can help your own downtown merchants and make those cash registers ring.	Developing a marketing plan* – A marketing strategy will help your program define the community's unique selling proposition to attract visitors and locals to downtown and design activities to achieve them. In this session we'll identify the necessary basics and explore beneficial outcomes.
2 p.m.:	Buy local campaigns – "Buy independent/buy local" campaigns are spreading rapidly, and with good reason. Properly designed, these initiatives can enhance a community's economic and civic vitality by persuading residents to add downtown as a viable shopping choice.	Strategic partnerships – During challenging economic times, it's essential to turn to one of your local assets, the community. By using strategic partnerships, your organization can create new opportunities to propel revitalization initiatives.

Day One: Wednesday, Sept. 22 - Organization

2 p.m.: Press relations nuts & bolts*

What have you done a press release for?

- Events

- Building dedication
- Awards
- Ribbon cutting
- New director Hire
- Transition: director leaving
- Historic designation
- Volunteer recognition
- New businesses
- New branding

What are the benefits of doing a press release?

- Share information
- Get media coverage
- Bring customers downtown
- Attract volunteers

Tips:

- Post events and releases on www.virginia.org
- Add your tagline about your organizational mission on each press release

2 p.m.: Developing a Fundraising Plan

On the participants' minds:

- Planning tools
- Auctions – best types
- Heads & Tails auction
- Success rate of big or lots of little events
- How to expand sponsorships
- Big ticket raffles - \$20K
- Legality of raffles
- Similar activities with other nonprofits/partnerships
- Criteria for determining success
- Get board involvement

Board involvement

- Abingdon fundraiser – Who's afraid of Virginia's Wolves?
 - Wolf sculptures, fiberglass, painted by artists
 - Board confidence in the project
 - 6 mo. planning
 - Visible project to public, map created showing placement of wolves, walking tour
 - T-shirts, posters and tote bags
 - Evaluated first effort and now evolved
 - Selling smaller wolves for public to paint
 - Partnership opportunities
- Part of board responsibilities to fundraise
- Educate in the beginning, priority task
- Franklin – *We Be Jammin'* summer concert series
 - Board involved, fun, contributes to success

Success rate of big or lots of little events

- Lots of small events, perception from the public
 - May cause an organization to be too busy with events
 - Calendar opportunities, be comprehensive and not jam up with events
 - Change up ways, keep fresh
- One big event
 - Big raffle – who will buy – use social networking, go outside the community
 - Include in marketing plan
 - Or 50/50 raffle as backup

Auctions

- South Boston – 3rd Thursdays
 - Children’s chairs painted by local artists
 - Fundraiser started just to pay for the event
 - Growing interest and could build to something greater
- New Hampshire #1 in auction success – see Dover Main Street
- Silent action tables – do not close at the same time, stagger
- Offer different items, authentic items
- Suitcase Party
 - \$150 entrance, drawing @ end to leave for the trip immediately

Partnerships

- Radford Chamber & Radford Main Street chili cook-off
 - Expected outcome? Answer – breaking even
 - Not a fundraiser, only an image event that puts people downtown
 - Organization fearful that if the organization makes too much, local government funding would be taken away

Legality of raffles

- South Boston duck race
 - Executive Director, Tamyra Vest well-versed

Include E.D. salary in fundraising goal

Sponsorships

- Small local businesses minority
- Most from restaurants & citizens
- For big money go beyond downtown

South Boston Fundraising

- Property owners donated property to Destination Downtown South Boston, tobacco warehouse
- Organization will benefit from the sale

3 p.m.: Board Engagement & Growth

What are the challenges concerning board engagement?

- Complacent due to strong executive director
- Not showing up for meetings, no quorum (tired, stressed)
- Initial excitement, no follow through
- Different expectations
- Communication

- Personal agendas
- Perception of lack of progress, expectations, burn-out
- Desired members-too busy
- Same people too involved, small town

Believe in Bristol Tips

- Annual strategic meetings, vision, top three priorities
 - ½ day board retreats
 - Teambuilding opportunity
 - Eating – have food
 - Emotional connection to other board members and workplan/direction of the organization
- Know your organization’s by-laws
- Board member commitment letter if not attending, maybe have them step down or do something else
- Have members identify good & bad qualities of board members (Kathy’s exercise – drawing the outline of a person on a large piece of paper, have the board members write in desirable qualities on the inside and on the outside bad qualities no wanted)
- Formal interviews for board – help get feedback
 - Find self-starters
 - Rule of thumb – Give, Get, or Get Off
 - Have board members name a personal contribution
- Upfront have a good board orientation

Where do you find new board members?

- Make sure you have the mix of people you need, evaluate talents first
- Youth coalitions
- Loft tours
- Colleges and universities
- Young business owners & developers
- Your organization must follow through, paid staff to help facilitate, DIRECT
- Read “Good to Great” book, social sectors
- Appointments – City code
- MBA/marketing students

Keep rotating board members

- By-laws, term limits
- Move to advisory boards

Communication

- Emails & phone calls, personal contact
- Separate meetings all board and then executive board
- High School clubs that do community services
- Make them feel important, celebrating efforts
- Have framed conversation, prompt them to talk, separate from casual conversation
- Wet blanket/negative people need “positively representing organization

3 p.m.: Connecting youth and families

Why?

- Future

- Energy
- Good image
- Fresh ideas
- \$ money
- They're connecting

Opportunities for getting them involved

- Promotions
- Volunteers
- Staffing for events
- Educate about technology
- Vendor/small business
- Learn from each other-leaders
- Entertainment-bands
- Interns-data entry
- MS & HS art programs
 - Getting the School involved
 - Talk ahead of time- allow time for them to put into schedule (art teacher)
 - High School clubs-resume builders
 - Collect Cell number for future volunteers
- Boy scouts
- Church youth groups
- High School marketing group
- Governor's school
- National Honor Society
- AIM Scholar
- Farmers market – education project
- Getting in touch with the right teacher
- Newsletters through school
- Events for children
 - Trick or treat
- Get dance studio downtown and do entertainment.

Youth events being done currently

- Harvest festival
- Street festival
 - Easter egg hunts
 - Halloween
- Duck race – inflatables
- Movie Night
- The Balance: kid designated area away from alcohol: moon bounce, games, volleyball: free activities
- JR Board? Committee
- Design and festivals

Outcomes

- Respect for the community
- Education of downtown area
- Connecting to downtown
- Take pride in downtown
- They bring their parents

- They'll help as they get older
- Get media coverage
- Bring customers downtown
- Attract volunteers

3 p.m.: Organization Roundtable

How do you capture the benefits of events that don't necessarily raise money?

- Evaluation—will be covered in the morning session on Friday
- Tracking from businesses
- Return visitors
- Exit Surveys

Make retail Events as separate from other events...do it something just for retailers, but invite them to participate in non-retail events

- Coupons, Displays, etc...
- Don't promise merchant activity to increase

Getting Funding from Downtown businesses

- "The best thing they can do is run an effective open business
- Invite their ideas and participation
- Use the overall mission for non-retailers as the pitch...it doesn't change that much
- Let them give products in kind-auction-donations

The retail foot traffic goal is not all of the Main Street Mission—it's broader

On planning:

- Consider the costs of staff time in taking on projects and partnerships
- Consider the timing of events in partnership with other organizations

On the Community Benefit nature of Main Street

- Main Street services have to go to the entire community of the district, not just to members!
- The community is the customer, not just members
- Main Street is stronger by including all assets/businesses.
- Everyone should get a door sticker for their business....not just members

Day Two: Thursday, Sept. 23 - Promotions

3 p.m.: Strategic partnerships

What to address in the session:

- Targeting the right partnerships/why partner with a specific organization or business
- How to make partnerships work
- How to get started
- Atypical partners
- Evaluate partnerships

How do you target the right partners?

- Through mission statement

- Use the work plan to identify potential projects for partnerships
 - Facilitated
 - Board and committee chairs
 - Develop mission oriented project

Winchester

- Goal – enhance Winchester as a Town & Gown community
 - Target families and students, parents and faculty
 - How Shenandoah University was approached – through new leadership in both organizations
 - Developed a welcome card mailing and to incoming freshman parents
- *Artscape* project – partnered with Art Council
 - Direct partnership
 - MOU developed for next year
 - Though online research developed the banner project, sponsored, 30 art pieces competitively selected
 - Sponsorships sold to local businesses, \$250/banner
 - Includes a youth category

Martinsville – embrace local rails to trails project that connects to route 58

- Who are the potential partners
 - County paying for improvements
 - Conservation groups
 - Trail users
 - Bicycle groups
 - Activate organization, biking, walking, healthy living
 - Landscaping organizations
- How to use partnerships
 - Promoting living downtown
 - Using downtown/come downtown
 - Change image

Sponsors with Friday Cheers – Lynchburg

- Nonprofits and corporate partners
- Advertising/teambuilding employees
- Construction, hospital, call center
- Recognition
- Mixture of approached partnerships and established relationships
- Nonprofit selection process
- Bring volunteers and earn donation
- Concert series make bucks!

Berryville – Gallery

- Created by founders money
- Economic dev and arts strategy
- Working toward gallery self-support/mutually beneficial relationship
- Work towards growth
- Committee (arts) under BMS

3 p.m.: Retail Promotions and Shop Local Campaigns

Business owners are micro-focused. *Our focus is the Macro.*

- “Merchants are a crotchety bunch.” That is said with the appreciation of the independent spirit that makes them sole proprietors. The best thing they can do for your downtown is run a successful business. *Retail promotions are solely intended to support their businesses.*
- How can Main Street build a coalition of them?
- There are two drivers for shop local campaigns:
 - The Cause
 - The Coupon (price discrimination)

Print pieces still matter!

- Help retailers participate in your promotions by making them basic, simple and low tech—in Harrisonburg, they write the instructions on an envelope and ask the merchants to tape it to their cash register for collecting the coupons.

An alternative to the coupon (but one not as easily tracked might to connect the cause to the coupon—have people say your shop local tagline or message for a discount.

Social Media

- Spend 15 minutes every day getting the word out via your Facebook and Twitter accounts. Do your E-mail blasts on a weekly or monthly basis.
- Be friends with businesses on Facebook and follow their tweets on twitter. Help them set up accounts. Post updates about them from your account.
- If you need help setting up their accounts, visit www.vastartup.org--the Department of Business Assistance, they have a training with mobile computers and can set one up in your community.
- Make sure you add douglas.jackson@dhcd.virginia.gov to your email blasts so that he can post your happenings on the Main Street blog and e-blasts.
- Websites need to be rich in content to be searchable. We’re working to build a critical mass – one that’s large enough to effectively promote.

Check with your local SBDC or Virginia Tourism on the “Give them the pickle” hospitality training. In Southwest contact Becky Nave at People Inc.

Examples:

- **Radford** does a coupon sheet as a PDF on their website—they are considering handing it out with a thumb drive as a promotion.
- **Charlottesville** has printed coupons, a website that includes everyone in the district, and online coupons
- **Pulaski** gives out coupons at the Christmas parade. There was some discussion that coupons could be handed out earlier to catch the women shoppers and at the parade to catch the last-minute men shoppers.
- **Abingdon** has a shop after 6 campaign and a shop local message on the website.
- **Bristol** puts its members on the website, gives free first-year memberships, and gives coupons to college students. There are also video interviews with merchants online.
- **Bedford** puts everyone on the website and will do a larger web presence for additional money.
- **Culpeper** has a campaign on a separate website: “Be a Culpeper Local. Shop, Eat, Enjoy.” There is a coupon on the back of concert tickets for restaurant week. They are going to track the website statistics to look for demographic and traffic information. They may use survey monkey to get more information.
- **Franklin** has a logo campaign.

- **Wise** encourages 3/50 campaign and if people are part of it, they become eligible for a gift card drawing tied in with other promotions.
- **Rocky Mount's** town council authorized \$30,000 for the "Five on us" campaign--\$5 discount on a purchase of \$25 dollars. The 10% returned accounted for a spending of \$150,000. It was a six-month program with a tip sheet and window decal for merchants. Ferrum University students were targeted with the plastic card.
- **Radford** measured concert benefit to restaurants by looking at receipts for the previous week. The impact on restaurants was a 15-20% increase.