American Red Cross
Serving King & Kitsap Counties

Marketing/Communications Plan

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Executive Summary: Top priority recommendations

The full Marketing/Communications Plan that follows provides detailed sections on objectives, strategies, target audiences, messages and tactics. Subsequent sections lay out processes for evaluating the Plan’s results and prioritizing tactics to make the best use of human and financial resources. As a preview to the details that follow, here are top priority recommendations for actions the American Red Cross-Serving King and Kitsap Counties can take to have the most immediate and profound impact on marketing the agency to donors and the broad community:

- Undertake message development training with Board and staff to create an agency “elevator speech” and supportive messages to help lend focus and consistency to marketing and communications.

- Enhance the Public Affairs Department’s capacity to better manage internal and external communications and marketing.

- Commit to developing an active employee communications program.

- Equip Board members, volunteers and staff to articulate and promote agency messages by providing them with tools and training.

- Invest in a complete professional redesign, reorganization and rewrite of the web site.

- Revitalize and redesign the Crossroads newsletter.

- Change the web site address and email addresses to something broader and more inclusive of the now two-county reach of the Chapter. Consider the future – and the possibility of other mergers – in selecting a new domain name.

- Take advantage of cross marketing opportunities – capturing participants in one program for mailing lists and marketing possibilities for others.
Purpose and background

The purpose of this Marketing/Communications Plan is to provide a focused, integrative approach to marketing and communications in support of the mission of the American Red Cross-Serving King and Kitsap Counties. It was developed following personal interviews and meetings with more than 20 Red Cross Board and staff members; an in-depth review of dozens of reports, surveys, publications and other documents; a scan of local news media coverage of the local and national Red Cross over the past two years; and general observations, expertise and experience with the Puget Sound area nonprofit and philanthropic community.

The observations, objectives, strategies, messages and tactics that follow set an ambitious agenda for communications work. Given the realities of human and financial resources, along with other organizational priorities, it should be understood at the outset that the Red Cross likely will be unable to follow every recommendation in this Plan over the next year or even two or three years. Therefore, the recommended processes and tactics that follow should be prioritized to more strategically align marketing and communications activities with the agency’s short- and long-term organizational goals. A final section of the Plan sets forth a process for prioritizing the recommended tactics within realistic resource parameters.

Organizational analysis

The Red Cross is a strong, volunteer-driven organization well respected in our community. When it comes to the agency’s core mission – disaster relief, international messaging, military communication and emergency preparedness – it has a solid sense of purpose that enables it to deliver locally on the “brand promise” for which the American Red Cross is known nationally and internationally.

But like many nonprofits, the Chapter through the years has expanded upon its traditional core mission to meet emerging community needs. New programs have developed, while the traditional core-mission programs have become virtually free-standing entities. As all these programs have evolved, they have taken on their own goals, communication styles and marketing activities. “Silos” have developed among departments – not unusual in large organizations but more pronounced at the Red Cross than most.1 As a result, the Chapter as a whole lacks a cohesive identity.

A reliance on volunteers for some critical communications functions (such as designing and hosting the web site) has further eroded the agency’s ability to present consistent messages and to build a solid local identity. And, like many local chapters of national nonprofits, a disconnect

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1 To a person, every individual interviewed for this Plan remarked on the issue of silos.
exists between the brand identity of its mother organization and the reality of what the Chapter does in its own community. Add to these factors the typical nonprofit issues of not enough money, time or staff to get the job done, and the challenges of creating a recognizable local brand identity and a strong marketing communications program are heightened.

### Marketing communications challenges

- **Communication is overly decentralized.** A two-person Public Affairs staff, heavily reliant on volunteers, is forced to depend upon individual departments and programs to do their own marketing and communications. Staff members in those departments often lack the skills, support and tools they need to do this work effectively. In some cases, major organizational marketing vehicles – such as the web site – have been handed over to a combination of volunteers and multiple departments, bringing about cluttered, unfocused results.

- **Some Red Cross programs and services do not directly and/or efficiently serve the Vision stated in the 2004-2006 Strategic Plan,** which calls for the Chapter to be “recognized as a premier humanitarian disaster relief organization and for its role in building the most prepared communities in America to respond to disasters and other emergencies.” While many of these non-core programs are innovative and beneficial responses to community needs (e.g., the Language Bank), their somewhat tangent connection to the Red Cross’ image and mission complicate the issue of cohesive messaging and communications. In other cases, a multitude of nonprofit and for-profit competitors in some service areas (e.g., the sale of first-aid and disaster preparation supplies) make it difficult for the Red Cross to build brand ownership of such services.

- **Internal, cross-departmental communication is weak.** Many staff members do not feel they are a part of the larger agency and say they often are unaware of what’s going on among other programs. They are ill equipped to carry the Red Cross banner externally because the overarching, broad message of “who we are” is unclear to them. Fix internal communications, and many of the challenges related to external communications will be easier to resolve.

- **The connection to the National organization is a blessing and a curse.** On the plus side, “American Red Cross” is a long standing, highly respected, well recognized brand. On the minus side, everyone thinks they know what the Red Cross does and, therefore, they assume the same activities are carried out locally. Or, worse yet, are unaware that a local Chapter even exists. National research shows a lower awareness level among King County residents that a local Chapter exists here than among people nationally.

"Is our strategic plan focused on who we are and what we want to be? Are there too many programs in which we dabble, a mile wide and an inch deep? We should commit to really marketing what’s important and marshal our resources around what we can own and be best at.”

**Chapter Board member**

“I’ve never worked anywhere where the staff is more committed to the mission of the organization, but we are not encouraged to be ambassadors or to relay our message.”

**Chapter staff member**
• **Riding the coattails of international disaster relief efforts may work in fundraising, but hinders the agency’s ability to build a locally-focused identity.** Too little has been done to effectively communicate the impact of the Red Cross on our own community. A reliance on direct-mail fundraising that is nationally centralized exacerbates the problem – for example, the Chapter’s direct-mail appeals carry the national logo, not the Chapter logo.

• **The merger of the King and Kitsap county chapters also muddies communication.** While many of the administrative functions have been combined, public identities remain distinct – a necessity when it comes to fundraising and local presence, but a detriment to cohesive branding. (The web site address, seattleredcross.org, is one example.) Potential mergers in the future will exacerbate this issue.

• **Competition is fierce.** Other Puget Sound-area human service nonprofits are better able to articulate their messages. The Red Cross must be able to show its relevance locally to keep up with competitors for donor dollars.

• **Entrenched beliefs die hard.** And growing, modernizing and revitalizing the local brand will be difficult unless they do. Too many key staff members seem unwilling to let go of perceptions that:

  o Because they are typically poor, clients will not become Red Cross donors and should not be actively cultivated.
  o Young people are not attracted to the Red Cross as donors or volunteers because it is a “tired brand” and they have too many other nonprofit options.
  o The Red Cross does not appeal to donors of color.
  o People give to disasters, not preparation.

• **The agency’s strengths may actually inhibit improvements in marketing and communications.** The Red Cross has a large and vibrant volunteer corps that is the envy of most nonprofits. While the agency saves money by depending on volunteers to donate some communications services, it sacrifices quality and consistency by doing so. Managers and staff are knowledgeable and committed to their programs and have become used to communicating without interference to external audiences and to creating their own marketing materials. They may not welcome the controls and processes necessary for a cohesive approach to marketing. Public Affairs staff have created a solid, respected media relations program, a decentralized system of producing publications (e.g., the newsletter) and a departmental structure with staff responsibilities that maximize spare resources. Altering the status quo may prompt a shift in duties and priorities that could meet with resistance.
Competitive edge

The following businesses, organizations and agencies are among the Chapter’s local competitors:

**Disaster relief services**
- Salvation Army
- AmeriCares
- Mercy Corps International
- World Relief
- American Jewish World Service

**Product sales/workplace training**
- Costco and other retailers
- American Heart Association
- Cintas
- Compliant
- National Safety Council

**Language Bank translation services**
- Neighborhood House
- Fremont Public Association
- Catholic Community Services
- Operational Emergency Center
- Helping Link
- Refugee Women’s Alliance

**Youth programs**
- Public and private schools
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- YMCA
- Other after-school programs

**Emergency preparedness**
- Office of Homeland Security

To best distinguish itself from these competitors, the Chapter must articulate (a) the unique and defined need it meets in our community and (b) how the Chapter addresses that need better than anyone else. Disaster relief and emergency preparedness are core services that give the Chapter a competitive edge when it comes to (a). The agency has a long history and solid reputation that rivals its competitors’ in this area. The question of (b) requires deeper analysis as part of the organization’s strategic planning process. For example, while product sales certainly fit the core mission, can the Red Cross purport to sell better products than anyone else and market those products effectively and efficiently? Can it outsell the competition? How does the Language Bank “fit” in articulating the agency’s competitive edge? Are youth programs in the public schools viable given the restrictions of time and state-mandated content (e.g., EALRs and the WASL)? And, is the Red Cross the best organization to deliver that educational content?

While some of these questions will be addressed in marketing Tactics, the viability of programs and services are best determined by the Chapter’s ongoing long-term strategic and financial planning processes.
Objectives

- Add consistency and cohesiveness to marketing activities and messages across all programs and departments.

- Identify the unique “products” of the Red Cross – what the organization does better than anyone else – and mechanisms for selling it to targeted audiences.

- Position the Chapter as…
  - … a humanitarian organization that meets local needs, while maintaining the connection to the broader national and international relief efforts of the American Red Cross.
  - … the premier organization the community turns to in the event of a natural or man-made disaster – both in preparation and response.

- Assist in meeting organizational goals of developing stronger relationships with donors and the community, diversifying the fundraising base, retaining staff and volunteers, and continuing excellent service delivery.

Strategies

- Provide a foundation for developing clear and compelling messages that can be delivered consistently by Board, staff, volunteers and other supporters.

- Create a structure, processes, training and tools for ensuring more consistent communications that recognize limitations of resources.

- Tear down silos and foster better communication and cooperation across departments.

- Enhance cross-marketing of programs and services to meet multiple objectives and audiences.
Audiences

The strategic plan emphasizes the following key audiences:

- Seniors
- East King County
- South King County

To those audiences we add the broader audience groups of:

- Donors and prospective donors
- Clients
- Workplaces
- Communities of color
- Younger donors

Messages

Chapter leadership, employees, volunteers and advocates must be able to articulate messages that clearly convey the benefits and impact of the agency on critical community needs. To ensure that these messages best reflect those benefits, as well as reflecting the passionate commitment of those who speak them, they can only be developed by those who know and love the agency best. Tactics #1 and #2 on page 9 identify a process for identifying key messages for the Chapter. These internally-developed messages might include elements of the following:

- If a disaster occurs, we’ll be here to keep you and your family safe and connected.
- Without the Red Cross, where would you be if disaster struck?
- We save lives every day and here’s how (client stories – lots of them!).
- Natural and man-made disasters are a real threat and thanks to the Red Cross, our community is prepared for them.

“Clients long have not been considered an audience, but circumstances change. They should be. Many have workplaces and many may one day be in a position to be donors. We should consider reaching out to clients as a long-term investment.”

Chapter Board member

“If we are asking for the support of our community, they need to know what would be missing if we didn’t exist: a significant part of the preparedness of our community. Nobody else can provide people with support, food, shelter, mental health when they are out of their homes due to a disaster.”

Chapter manager

- Your contribution to the Red Cross supports a safe community.
- We help our elder adults stay safe and independent in their own homes.
- Donations to our local Chapter help your friends and neighbors.
· There’s no such thing as a small disaster when it happens to you.
· We take the worry out of planning for a disaster.
· Investing in the Red Cross’ emergency preparedness efforts is like buying fire insurance – you hope you never need it, but you’re sure glad it’s there if you do.

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**Tactics**

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### General recommendations

1. **Conduct “Heart-and-Soul” message training for the Board, leaders and employees.**

In the first phase of this training, the Board of Trustees and management team work together to articulate “from the heart” the benefits and impact of the local Red Cross on our community and how to convey that message to different audiences. The results of the two-hour facilitated session are (1) standard boilerplate language that can be used in printed materials to describe the Chapter and (2) a suggested verbal “elevator speech” that can be personalized by each individual to deliver a consistent message.

In the second phase, employees/departments develop their own elevator speeches to describe the way their work uniquely advances the agency’s mission. By learning to more vividly articulate their roles in the broader Chapter mission, employees become more effective spokespeople for the organization in both their professional and personal lives.

2. **From the messages developed through “Heart-and-Soul” message training, craft overall organizational messages.**

The results of the first phase of training described in Tactic #1 will fuel comprehensive message development. These messages can then form template language that can be included in individual program communications to constituent audiences. While messages to different audiences will certainly vary depending on the purpose of each communication – a donor appeal won’t be the same as a flyer marketing workplace presentations to employers – the overall themes, tone and descriptions of the Chapter’s impact will remain consistent.
3. Equip Board members, volunteers and staff to articulate and promote agency messages by providing them with tools and training. Activities might include:

   a) Conduct public speaking training.
   b) Train staff and volunteers on how to identify compelling client stories to use in profiles that tell the Red Cross’ story through its impact on people and our community. Also train them in how to ask clients to participate.
   c) Develop a presentation that can be delivered to community groups.
   d) Create, manage and promote a speakers bureau.
   e) Produce a general agency brochure. No single publication currently exists to describe the Chapter and its programs/services to broad and multiple audiences. This limits the ability of formal and informal advocates to widely promote the agency to potential donors, partners and clients.
   f) Cross-market agency services and programs by distributing the new agency brochure at every opportunity – to class participants, purchasers of products, disaster relief clients, Language Bank clients, event participants, etc.
   g) Develop a one-page Chapter fact sheet that describes Who We Are, What We Do, How We Do It, How We Got Here, Who Leads the Way and Where to Find Us.
   h) Print business-card-size cards with the new Chapter elevator speech on one side and key messages on the other that can be carried in wallets or pockets.

4. Expand the capabilities of the Public Affairs Department to better coordinate internal and external communication.

For an agency of its size and with so many varied services – as opposed to a more singularly defined agency that might, for example, offer hunger relief (Northwest Harvest) or disease support (the American Heart Association) – the Red Cross’ Public Affairs Department is understaffed. Even if priorities are shifted, or other efficiencies realized, the Red Cross will be unable to achieve the objectives of this Plan without enhancing resources devoted to marketing and communications either by adding a third staff member or engaging ongoing contract support.

The Public Affairs Department has four stated priorities:

- Public affairs in disaster
- Media relations
- Brand management
- Strategic departmental support

While the two staff members do a good job in the first two priorities, little time remains to devote to the second two. As a result, individual departments fend for themselves, often resulting in inconsistent and unprofessional communications. The two most widely visible marketing communications vehicles – the newsletter and web site – are put together in piecemeal fashion with relatively few internal controls and no consistent “voice” for the agency.

Responsibilities in an expanded Public Affairs Department might include:
Director
- Overall departmental management and strategic communications planning
- Training of Public Affairs volunteers
- Fundraising event support (videos, speechwriting, message development, etc.)
- Crisis communications
- Brand management – Review and oversight of all major communications vehicles, including fundraising appeals
- Implementation of other Marketing/Communications Plan tactics

Community Relations Manager
- Enhanced and regular proactive media relations
- Reactive media relations
- Coordination of community events (centralized scheduling and support for employees and volunteers who staff booths, make presentations, etc.)
- Development and implementation of Chapter/business partnerships and events
- Management of speakers bureau (speechwriting, training, scheduling and solicitation of speaking opportunities)
- Implementation of other Marketing/Communications Plan tactics

Communications Coordinator
- Support for departments’ communications activities
- Newsletter (planning, writing, editing, coordinating production)
- Web site (overseeing redesign, regular updates, writing, coordination)
- Agency publications such as program brochures, event flyers, annual report, etc. (writing and/or editing, coordination of production)
- Employee communications
- Implementation of other Marketing/Communications Plan tactics

5. Engage a local advertising agency to create and implement an advertising campaign to market services and build awareness of what the Red Cross means to our community.

As noted earlier, most people know – or think they know – what the American Red Cross does. But the public perception that the agency’s sole function is to provide major national and international disaster relief inhibits the local Chapter’s ability to raise awareness of what it offers here, particularly high-priority services such as emergency preparedness, local disaster relief and workplace training. The national name, solid reputation and high-quality, much-needed services connected to the Chapter can help attract a top-notch advertising agency that might take on such a campaign on a pro bono or reduced price basis. To effectively launch and implement such a campaign, however, would require the Chapter to dedicate significant financial resources. See more details in the section on Prioritizing Tactics beginning on page 26.2

2 It is possible that a local campaign could be built upon the National ad campaign, whose theme is “when you help the American Red Cross, you help America.” The message of a local campaign might be, “when you help the Red Cross, you help our community.”
6. **Follow a planning process and use a design template to add consistency to program brochures and flyers.**

Many individual programs produce their own brochures and flyers, contributing to the agency’s lack of consistent messaging and branding. Ideally, all these materials would be centrally written, designed and produced. Whether resources allow such centralization or whether program staff continue to produce their own materials, a planning process should be used to better focus messages. A planning process would be facilitated by the Public Affairs communications coordinator (see Tactic #4) and would take staff through these questions:

- Why do you want to develop this publication? What is the purpose?
- Who is the primary audience? Who are the secondary audiences?
- What do we want these audiences to do and/or know as a result of reading this publication?
- What is the single most important main message we want to convey?
- What are two or three secondary messages we want to convey?
- How can we creatively execute the messages?
- How long should we expect to use the publication? What is its shelf life?
- What is the budget for the publication?
- What choices of color or paper will best execute the message(s)?
- What quantity of publications will we print?
- What is the target completion date?
- What is the review process for the publication? Who must sign off on content and design?
- Are there any other important considerations?

In addition, a design template that sets basic standards (such as including the Chapter logo and boilerplate language in all brochures) should be created in Word to lend design consistency. The graphics designer who produces a general agency brochure (see Tactic #3d) can create this Word template to reflect design elements of the agency brochure.

7. **Meld databases to enhance cross marketing.**

According to some staff members, many departments have their own database systems – Excel, Access, Raiser’s Edge, an old system no longer supported by National – for class-takers, volunteers, donors, product buyers, etc. Working together with IT, departments should find a way to meld databases to enhance cross marketing. Product-purchasers can receive marketing materials for new classes; class-takers can be added to the donor prospect lists; donors can get flyers advertising products or classes; volunteers can be recruited from among class-takers, donors and product-purchasers; and so on.
8. Change the web site address and email addresses to something broader and more inclusive of the now two-county reach of the Chapter.

Consider the future – and more potential mergers – in selecting a new domain name that can serve the agency for many years (e.g., pugetsoundredcross.org, greaterwarencross.org, waredcross.org). This will be especially critical as the agency implements this Plan, making more people aware of the Red Cross and driving them to the web site for more information.

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Internal communications

9. Develop an employee communications plan.

As previously stated, internal communication within the agency is weak. No regular form of written communication exists to inform staff of agency activities and milestones. An in-depth internal communications plan is beyond the scope of this Marketing Plan, however, elements of a vital internal communications program might include:

a) Commit to monthly or every-other-month all-staff meetings with a format that invites dialogue, not reports. Design specific questions that prompt programs and departments to do more than simply recite what they’ve been doing. Encourage the exchange of ideas as well as information.

b) Initiate a monthly email newsletter for staff, managed by the Communications Coordinator in Public Affairs.

c) Schedule regular staff trainings in marketing and communications topics that better equip employees to be ambassadors for the agency.

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Web site

10. Redesign, reorganize and rewrite the web site.

The Chapter’s web site is functional and informational. Its strengths are its depth of information and the ability for readers to search for and sign up for classes online. Its weaknesses lie in its cluttered appearance, difficulty of navigation (it takes too many “clicks” for readers to find what they’re looking for), and its failure to make an emotional impact on the reader.

The Red Cross should invest in a total professional makeover of its web site. Content should be rewritten to reflect the messages developed in Tactics #1 and #2. Navigation should be enhanced by more efficiently organizing the site with fewer home page headers and buttons. Instead of allowing individual programs and departments to create their own updated pages, responsibility for maintaining and managing web content should be centralized to Public Affairs and a process developed to ensure consistent messaging and regular updating.
Consulting with a professional firm for a makeover will provide detailed suggestions for improving the design and navigability of the site. Here are a few initial ideas:

- Rewrite content to add more vivid descriptions of the Chapter’s impact on our community. Approach content from a “what’s in it for me” perspective – showing how the different programs, services and opportunities meet people’s needs instead of simply providing information or describing programs.

- Edit home page buttons/content areas to better attract readers. The Grand Canyon Chapter’s (www.arizonaredcross.org) style of Get Prepared, Get Trained, Get Products, Get Involved, Get Help, Get Info, Give Money, etc. is a simple, appealing approach.

- Add client profiles and personal stories to each of the pages that describe services.

- Provide more easy-to-find information that invites readers to browse useful tips such as “Protect Yourself During a Disaster,” “What to Do Before Disaster Strikes,” “Keeping Your Aging Parents Safe in Their Homes,” “Staying Connected to Your Loved Ones After a Disaster” and so on.

- Add a Donor Honor Roll page that recognizes major donors.

- Offer corporate donors the ability to place their logos on key pages for specific contributions; include logo placement on the web site as added value for major event sponsorships.

- Include testimonials from donors on the Donate page to better articulate to potential donors the value of supporting the Chapter.

- Include testimonials from volunteers on the Volunteer page to better entice people to sign up.

- Add a staff directory organized by department containing telephone numbers and email addresses of all employees. Include photos and short bios of senior management staff.

- Include Board members’ professional affiliations with their names.

- Capture email addresses from online sign-ups for use in cross-marketing.

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**Newsletter**

11. **Refocus the Crossroads newsletter and centralize content development.**

The newsletter has become a vehicle that seeks more to appease the desire of all departments and programs to be included than to truly meet a defined purpose. Following the process described in Tactic #6, the agency should develop – and share internally – a clear purpose and mission for the publication. Here are initial recommendations for improving the newsletter and enhancing the agency’s brand identity:

- Professionally redesign the newsletter. The style is dated and perpetuates the notion that the Red Cross is an old organization for old people.
• Target donors/funders as the primary audience. Focus the bulk of content on telling donors, “Here’s the impact we make and we make it because of you.” Don’t simply try to educate donors, inspire them!

• Accepting that donors are the primary audience does not mean that other audiences (volunteers, prospective class-takers, clients, etc.) will be ignored. Continue to recognize volunteers and volunteer opportunities in the newsletter, but do not single out entire special sections for them. Highlight new and innovative upcoming classes, and include testimonials from or profiles of class-takers or workplaces for whom these classes made a real difference.

• Eliminate separate newsletters that currently exist for the Language Bank (The Language Bank Teller) and West Sound (The West Sound Connection). The Language Bank newsletter appears to have no clear purpose, text is over-long and the Chapter logo does not appear on the cover. Neither of the publications reflects the kind of professional quality and branded image that the Chapter should project. Multiple newsletters give the impression of an agency that is scattered and unfocused. Instead, incorporate news about the Language Bank and West Sound into the Crossroads newsletter. This will help focus articles on the news that is most important to convey to readers.

• Devote a page or two to West Sound. Kitsap County is still a young member of the merged Chapter and has unique needs, particularly as they relate to volunteers. Dedicated pages to West Sound will show the Chapter’s commitment to including the smaller county in the fold and provide information that is of primary interest to Kitsap constituents.

• Include more detailed information aimed at volunteers in the existing quarterly volunteer mailings or in an email newsletter.

• Make an emotional connection with the audience. Tell the story of the Red Cross’ impact through the clients you serve. More client profiles, with photos, will make the newsletter a more compelling and effective communications tool.

• Liven up the writing style. Use much shorter articles with snappier, more inviting headlines (for example, “CEO Column” is not a headline that compels perusal!), bulleted key points, boxed sidebars, etc.

• Centralize writing, editing and proofreading in Public Affairs. Continue to solicit ideas from other departments, but a singular tone and voice for the agency cannot be built by continuing to allow multiple contributors.

• Include standard boilerplate language in each issue that describes who we are and what we do. Profile a different program in each issue, again using client stories to generate interest.

• Offer the newsletter as email/web-based to those who prefer to receive it in that format. Not only would it ultimately save resources in paper and printing, but it would serve to drive readers to the web site and capture email addresses for other cross-marketing purposes.
12. Add variety and creativity to direct-mail appeals.

The Chapter depends heavily on direct-mail appeals for its contributions. Many of the Board members interviewed for this Plan felt they received far too many appeal letters. Development staff agreed that direct-mail appeals often caused confusion – people who donate to an international cause such as tsunami relief don’t understand why they’re getting another appeal for a donation to help local efforts. The Development Department also has recently expanded its capabilities in major donor outreach in order to reduce its reliance on direct mail and increase its ability to form more substantial relationships with donors. Nonetheless, for the foreseeable future, direct mail will continue to be an important fundraising tool for the Chapter. To enhance the effectiveness of those appeals, the Chapter may wish to address these issues:

- Appeal letters are produced by a national direct-mail firm and bear the American Red Cross logo, not the Chapter logo. This directly contributes to the perception that there is no local Chapter in King and Kitsap counties! Remit forms and envelopes bear the typed name of the Chapter, but this is very easy to overlook. If we hope to build local brand awareness among donors, it must start here.

- Break through the clutter of mass produced appeals by doing some in-house. Because the Chapter relies upon a national firm to write and produce its appeals, the letters look and sound very much like many other national nonprofit appeal letters. A more home-grown approach will help build brand equity. Producing the letters in-house also will allow more control over messages.

- Vary the look of the appeals, while still maintaining brand consistency. Because there are so many, sometimes even two a month, donors may grow bored with them or inured to their impact. A change in look – adding color, highlighted quotes, boxed client stories, photos – to appeals could help them stand out.

- Describe the Chapter’s impact through stories about the people it has helped. If many donors are unaware of the local Chapter’s services, why not include a profile of a family who lost its home to a fire and how the Chapter helped them through this local disaster?  

- More directly personalize, localize and specify the “ask.” Emphasize the local impact and more specifically describe the way donor dollars changed people’s lives.

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3 A review of the past six months of Chapter appeals did indeed find them to be more numerous than any other nonprofit which includes Moore Ink. in its donor base. (In the past two years, we have contributed to an estimated 30 different charitable organizations.) At least seven appeals were mailed between November 2004 and May 2005, including two in the month of May alone. During that same time period, the most we received from other nonprofits was three and the vast majority sent just one or two.

4 The new “Compassion in Action” emails do a good job of telling the impact of local programs. This is exactly the same approach that mailed appeals should take.
13. Relate some of the Local Heroes awards to the services and programs that the Chapter provides, as well as to some of its own “heroes”.

Some of the current awards honor individuals in categories that seem far distant from the Chapter’s mission and core services – animal rescue, nature rescue, good Samaritans, etc. The Chapter can emphasize key programs for specific target audiences and heighten awareness of its impact on the local community by more directly relating most of the awards to Chapter programs. For example, a Be Prepared award could recognize a business that took important steps to protect its customers and employees in the event of a disaster (nominees would be chosen from businesses that had undergone Red Cross workplace training). A Volunteer of the Year award could recognize one of the Chapter’s own volunteers. A Senior Lifesaver award could honor someone who made sure an older adult was safe in an emergency. An Emergency Response award could highlight one of the Chapter’s own volunteer teams.

14. Create a DVD to use in house parties, with major donor asks, at events and more.

A brief (7 or 8 minute) overview of the local impact of the Red Cross – told through client stories – can have many uses. It can succinctly set the stage for a personal appeal to a major donor, introduce discussions about Chapter involvement/donations at a house party, orient new staff and volunteers, and so on.

15. Partner with a regional grocery store chain during Emergency Preparedness Month in September for donations to help keep our community safe.

Make sure that posters, collection cans, flyers and other materials include specific examples of how our local Chapter works to ensure that individuals, families, workplaces and our community will be safe if disaster strikes.

Public relations

16. Create topical presentations for delivery to businesses and civic groups.

Business and community groups are more likely to respond positively to a request by the Chapter to give a presentation if the topic is of broad interest. Instead of asking, “Can we come to speak to you about the Red Cross?” develop presentations on topics that hold wider appeal: “Keeping Your Employees Safe at Work”, “Helping Our Elderly Citizens Remain Independent at Home,” “Are You Ready When Disaster Strikes?”, “Terrorist Attacks: Is Our Community Prepared?,” etc. Include messages about the Chapter when discussing these issues. Use the DVD recommended in Tactic #14 to describe “our organization’s proven-effective approach to solving these kinds of social and business problems.” Develop PowerPoint presentations for each topic.

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5 Adding a business-oriented award could have the tangent benefit of introducing winning businesses to the prospect of corporate sponsorship of future Heroes Breakfasts.

6 See Tactic #3 for additional PR recommendations.
17. Develop a process for determining which community events warrant Red Cross participation.

Staff time is limited and opportunities for participating in community events, trade shows and other programs are limitless. Include such considerations as size of crowd, profile of participants, type or theme of event, location and other factors. Although different departments might still be called upon to staff events, centralize scheduling and coordination in the Public Affairs Department.

18. Invest in a conference display for community events and presentations.

The agency currently has nothing to provide to staff and volunteers who set up booths and tables at community events. Design and purchase a portable display like the one at left and equip people with the display and a “kit” with a banner, table skirt, brochures and other materials that will enable them to present a professional image of the Red Cross at events.

19. Develop a brochure to leave with clients, asking for their story, how the Red Cross helped them through a crisis and telling them about other services, volunteer opportunities, etc.

We must, of course, walk a fine line between encouraging people to share their stories and exploiting them in a crisis. It can be done. Using a brochure to solicit personal stories and contact information can help us generate the compelling client stories that in turn help us tell our story to donors and the community. These brochures may be inserted by volunteers into the pre-packaged “comfort kits” (razors, shampoo, etc.) that they leave with residents who have experienced a disaster. Follow up with phone calls from volunteers trained in how to tactfully and respectfully solicit client stories.

20. Sponsor a public forum on the status of emergency preparedness in our community.

Invite key opinion leaders, human resource directors and CEOs of major businesses, government officials, and leaders among other nonprofits, philanthropy, education, human services and media. Gather and present facts, figures and statistics from the Office of Homeland Security. Organize the event into presentations/questions/answers on both problems and solutions. Have a high-profile emcee – Robert Mak, Enrique Cerna, Phyllis Campbell, Norm Rice, Patty Stonesifer – and maximize content and participants for news value.

Base the written report on the findings and comments that result from the public forum. Highlight the Chapter’s programs and services approach as part of the solutions. Unveil the report at a news conference and distribute it to donors and prospective donors, potential workplace training clients, government officials and more.

22. Enhance the Executive Director’s presence among community leaders.

Relatively new to the community, Larry Petry already has brought fresh leadership and a revitalized presence for the Chapter in the community. His participation in organizations that attract civic and opinion leaders will help the agency build awareness of its mission. The limitations of time and money, of course, must be considered but some high-level organizations to consider include the Washington Athletic Club, City Club, Seattle Downtown Rotary, Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Executive Alliance and the Bellevue Athletic Club.

23. Partner with other organizations to reach out to new immigrants.

People from other countries may be more familiar with the Red Cross than native-born Americans because of its international presence. Build on this awareness and invest in these new residents as potential donors and volunteers by partnering with organizations that specifically serve them – Neighborhood House, King County Housing Authority, Seattle Housing Authorities, SEA-MAR, Asian Counseling and Referral Service, Chinese Information & Service Center, etc. The Red Cross might be able to jointly sponsor programs and/or include information about its services in the welcome kits or other client materials offered by these other agencies.

24. Produce a donor-financed weekly radio how on KKNW News Channel 1150 AM.

This opportunity allows a nonprofit organization to use its in-house staff experts in one-hour weekly radio programming financed by corporate donors’ commercials. For example, the Chapter’s weekly broadcast might be titled “Be Prepared, Be Safe” and could feature a wide array of topics of interest to target audiences. The Chapter would provide the host, the speakers and the topics and also would solicit sponsorships from among its corporate donor base. Not only would the Chapter get its name and message out to listeners, but the corporate sponsorships would raise funds over and above the cost of the advertising.
25. Develop and implement an annual media relations plan.

The Public Affairs Department has been successful in placing stories in major and community newspapers and in broadcast media through the years. While a media calendar exists, development of a more in-depth media relations plan – coupled with increased efforts to generate client stories – can enhance the agency’s ability to generate feature stories that show local community impact on people.

An in-depth plan would tie media relations efforts to overall organizational goals and priorities. For example, if the Chapter’s strategic plan targeted the Language Bank for a 50 percent increase in revenue in 2006, the media plan would identify (1) a “pitch” that emphasized the unique nature of the program along with facts and figures to support its newsworthiness; (2) a client with a compelling story willing to be interviewed about how the Language Bank affected his/her life; (3) a specific reporter or editor at the Seattle Times to pitch the story to; and (4) the right time of year – perhaps just before a major donor ask – at which to promote the story. Also, include in the plan proactive, strategically timed pitches on emergency preparedness topics for public affairs programming such as Robert Mak’s “Up Front” program on KING-TV and Enrique Cerna’s “KCTS Connects” program on KCTS-TV.

26. Publicize Local Heroes through individual news releases on each winner distributed to the individual’s home town or neighborhood newspaper.

Get more mileage out of heroes news coverage by targeting individual feature articles, with photos, to specific newspapers. Send articles on people of color to publications serving those communities – Northwest Asian Weekly, The Skanner, The Medium, Seattle Chinese Post, etc.

27. Offer monthly columns to newspapers with “Safety Tips from the American Red Cross”, instead of relying on ad hoc news releases.

Ghost-write the columns for Larry Petry and provide his photo to go along with the columns. Make them available “exclusively” to newspapers serving different areas of the Chapter community – the five-paper Reporter newspaper chain in East and South King County, the six-newspaper Sound Publishing group in Kitsap County, the eight-paper Journal chain in North Seattle/South Snohomish County and The Medium (African-American oriented) in Seattle.
Volunteer recruitment

28. Change the style of recruitment communications from one that expresses a need, to one that fulfills a need.8

People don’t give their time or their money to organizations that have needs, but to organizations that meet needs. Volunteer recruitment should be approached as an opportunity to “sell” the benefits of getting involved, not just to the community or Red Cross clients but to the volunteers themselves. Here’s an example of how a position listing taken off the web site might be rewritten to better appeal to potential volunteers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Needs” communication style</th>
<th>“Benefits” communication style</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Services Receptionist</td>
<td>Emergency Services Receptionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Emergency Services Department needs a volunteer to handle incoming calls, clients, and visitors in a friendly and professional manner. Responsibilities include: Answer main telephone lines for the department &amp; transfer calls as necessary; help incoming visitors and clients; prepare disaster preparedness information for distribution; completes data entry work as needed; completes other duties as assigned. Qualifications needed: comfortable with a computer and MS Office applications; strong verbal communication skills. Time commitment: must be able to commit to a minimum of one day per week for at least 6 months, Monday -Friday during business hours.</td>
<td>Are you always the calm center of the storm? Cool under fire? Unflappable under pressure? Are you looking for a way to use your outstanding communications skills to make a difference, while also learning more about how the Red Cross makes our community a better, safer place? Then, serving as a volunteer Emergency Services Receptionist is just for you. At the end of each shift, you’ll leave knowing that you made life easier for someone in crisis. You’ll handle incoming calls and greet visitors who are looking for help. You’ll also organize disaster preparedness information and complete some data entry. If you are comfortable with a computer and MS Office applications, have strong verbal communication skills, and are willing to devote at least one day a week for six months, Monday -Friday during business hours, call us today!</td>
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</table>

29. Target recruitment efforts toward those with daytime availability.

One of the agency’s greatest needs is for volunteers who are free during the business day. That means targeting seniors and other retirees. Potential outreach for older-adult volunteers could serve the dual purpose of raising awareness of Red Cross services among this key audience. Some potential methods of reaching this audience might include:

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7 At the time this Plan was being written, the Chapter also was developing a formal volunteer recruitment plan.

8 This style of communication is introduced in the “Heart and Soul” training detailed in Tactic #1 and can be used in communications to all audiences for virtually any marketing purpose.
a) Purchase mailing lists for direct-mail flyers and/or place ads in the local or regional editions of these publications:

- Northwest Prime Time
- Senior Scene
- Grand Times
- AARP Magazine
- Senior Journal
- Good Life Magazine
- The Senior Times
- Reminisce Magazine
- Home Front Magazine
- Best Retirement Spots
- Today's Senior
- Vintage Magazine
- Where to Retire

b) Join the Healthy Aging Partnership (www.4elders.org), a Puget Sound-area coalition of nonprofit and government organizations that work with seniors. Joining this informal coalition would give the Chapter access to more than 40 other organizations which share similar goals of keeping seniors healthy and safe and also provide a vehicle for helping to achieve marketing goals related to older adults. For example, the Healthy Aging Partnership could market and conduct a half-day emergency preparedness workshop for seniors using Chapter materials and personnel. Logistical details, recruitment and much of the cost of the workshop can be borne by the Partnership, while the Chapter achieves one of its goals and publicizes its programs, services and mission to class participants and Partnership members.

c) Sponsor booths at events such as:

- Seattle Senior Games
- The Old-Timers Picnic
- Washington State Senior Citizen Lobby annual meeting
- AARP conferences and events
- Washington Association of Housing and Services for the Aging conferences
- Washington Education Association-Retired annual meeting
- Washington State Association of Senior Centers annual meeting

30. **Write profiles of local volunteers for weekly newspapers.**

Identify current Red Cross volunteers who have unique, compelling stories to tell. Write feature articles on individuals and provide them, with photos, to weekly newspapers in the volunteers’ neighborhoods and towns. End each article with a paragraph providing contact info for those who would also like to volunteer for their local Red Cross. This also serves the dual purpose of raising awareness of the agency’s impact on our community.

31. **Create a local volunteer opportunities brochure and distribute it at Red Cross venues.**

Volunteer recruitment can be cross-marketed at many opportunities – classes, workplace trainings, community activities, fundraising events, even with disaster clients who may wish to give back to the agency that helped them in a time of crisis. Using the Word template described in Tactic #6, develop and produce in-house an easily updatable brochure that describes current volunteer opportunities and distribute it widely.
32. Consider incorporating product sales into other programs and eliminating other avenues of product marketing.

Successful marketing answers the questions, “What do we do better than anyone else?” and “How can we deliver what we sell efficiently and effectively?” Many of the people interviewed for this Plan remarked on the continual downsizing of the agency’s product sales function and questioned its viability. Both through the development of this Plan and in reviewing a market research report prepared for the Oregon Trail Chapter, it appears that workplace training has far greater market potential than product sales. To make the best use of resources, the agency may wish to further streamline its product sales by eliminating such marketing efforts as trade show participation and product shows at area businesses and instead sell products only as value-added services during workplace presentations and classes.

33. Conduct focus groups of seniors and other target audiences to determine what they want and what they will buy from the Red Cross.

The agency’s strategic plan has identified older adults, South King County and East King County as key target markets, yet little is known about what these groups really want and how they perceive what the Red Cross has to offer. The Chapter should conduct more in-depth research to determine how we position ourselves against the competition and how to meet real needs.

34. Recruit a Marketing/PR Committee from community volunteers.

Invite marketing and PR professionals from top businesses to serve on a Marketing/PR Committee. Generate ideas for individuals to approach through Board contacts and other relationships. Develop a job description that delineates responsibilities, which might include:

- Advise the Chapter on how best to market its workplace training program to businesses that need to comply with OSHA training requirements in first aid and CPR.
- Develop an incentive program that rewards businesses for referring other businesses to the Red Cross for workplace training.
- Review, assess and recommend new strategies for the Chapter’s public relations efforts, including media outreach, public speaking opportunities, community collaborations, marketing and promotional materials, etc.
- Help the Chapter make connections and build relationships with media, business and community leaders.
- Serve as a sounding board for special projects, such as videos, fundraising events, branding efforts, web site redesign and buildup, and others that may arise.
35. Market workplace training to other nonprofits.

Large nonprofits are under the same mandate to provide workplace safety training as businesses, and many who are not so obligated could still be interested in Red Cross classes. Wouldn’t they rather support another nonprofit than to get that training from for-profit firm like Compliant or a government agency like the National Safety Council? Use the Puget Sound Business Journal’s top-50 list of large nonprofits and create a training marketing flyer that appeals directly to them.

36. Market community disaster preparation classes to seniors via direct mail.

Use the same volunteer recruitment strategies identified in Tactics #29 to market classes.

37. Professionally produce and distribute the class schedule.

Just as community colleges print and distribute their semester class schedules, professionally design and produce a quarterly class catalog and distribute it to senior centers, retirement communities, libraries, workplaces and other locations. Because every publication should build brand awareness, include agency boilerplate language and other messages developed through Tactics #1 and #2.

38. Clearly define how the Language Bank “fits” into the Chapter’s mission and incorporate Chapter messages into Language Bank materials and communications.

The Language Bank provides a valuable service to other nonprofits, to non-English-speaking individuals and to our community. Yet its place in the Chapter’s mission is not clearly defined and contributes to the difficulty the Chapter has in building brand identity. The agency and the Language Bank must be able to build a better connection between language services and the Chapter’s mission and articulate that connection more consistently.

39. Raise the fees to make the Language Bank self sustaining.

The Language Bank’s services are under-priced, even for nonprofits. A sliding scale pricing structure based on nonprofits’ annual revenues would better serve the program than the current low-priced flat-fee pricing.

40. Create a marketing and PR plan specifically for the Language Bank.

Because this program is not clearly aligned with the other major Chapter programs and services, marketing and PR for the Language Bank cannot be adequately addressed in the scope of this Plan. Successfully building the program as self sustaining (or nearly so) requires a more focused Plan that also addresses fundraising.
Youth education

41. Develop a targeted marketing plan for the Youth Services program.

A few of the individuals interviewed for this Plan questioned the ongoing viability of the Chapter’s youth programs, particularly the school programs. While involving youth is a service to them and the community and invests in their potential as future adult donors and volunteers, schools are increasingly limiting the time they devote to such programs. In addition, other competing organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs – along with the schools themselves – provide some of the same services as the Chapter. Youth volunteer efforts might be incorporated into the overall volunteer program. The agency may through its strategic planning process determine that resources devoted to youth programs might be better focused on other growth areas, such as workplace training.

Because this audience and “product” is unique to the core services offered by the Chapter, marketing and PR for youth programs cannot be adequately addressed in the scope of this Plan. Should the Chapter’s youth programs continue to exist in their present form, a separate marketing plan should be developed for them.

Evaluation measures

Measuring tactical results – the number of media mentions, community presentations, Web site hits, new donor relationships, etc. – will be useful in evaluating this Plan. However, true success lies in determining how communication efforts have advanced the Chapter’s organizational mission and goals. Did the demand for disaster/safety programs for seniors increase? Have more East King County employers accessed workplace training? Are donations higher this year than last? These most critical questions cannot be answered by counting news clips. Although marketing and communications are not solely responsible for achieving organizational goals, they should be considered in concert with other program/organizational evaluations to judge overall effectiveness.

From a subjective standpoint, this Plan can be evaluated to help determine if resources devoted to implementing tactics have produced results. In some cases, this evaluation may be as simple as looking at an activity and saying, “We did it.” For example:

- Marketing communications capacity was expanded
- Board members and staff underwent public speaking training.
- The newsletter and web site were redesigned.
- Regular all-staff meetings were held.
- A marketing/PR committee was formed.
Other tactics lend themselves to more concrete measurement. For example:

- The number of workplace presentations increased by ___% (communications efforts evaluated in conjunction with other organizational activities).
- The number of new donors increased by ___% (communications efforts evaluated in conjunction with development activities).
- Heroes Breakfast attendance increases and more media cover award recipients (communications efforts evaluated in conjunction with development activities).
- __ corporate and community presentations were delivered.
- __ client stories were identified.
- News and feature stories in the media accurately reflected Red Cross messages.
- More reporters contacted the Red Cross proactively for stories on issues affecting emergency preparedness, disaster relief and workplace safety.

Ongoing evaluation should be a part of the implementation of every communications tactic. A comprehensive evaluation covering the above elements should occur at least annually and coincide with budget development for the following year’s planned activities.

Prioritization process

The strategies and tactics outlined in this Plan are ambitious. Given existing resources and other organizational priorities, it is unfeasible to think that every tactic could be implemented within the next year or even several years. Working with its marketing communications consultant, the Chapter can use the following process to rank the tactics that might have the greatest impact on one or two top organizational priorities.

**Step 1:** Review the entire list of recommended tactics and determine whether they can be accomplished with current staff, technological and financial resources or whether they will necessitate additional resources.

**Step 2:** Review the list a second time and assign a priority level of 1, 2, 3 or 4 to each tactic, basing the rating on how significantly the activity will impact organizational objectives.

1 = Move immediately to implement this tactic
2 = Once priority 1 tactics are in place or showing significant progress, begin this tactic
3 = Worth considering if resources exist after we implement priority 1 and 2 tactics
4 = Definitely on the back burner, at least for now
Step 3: When Steps 1 and 2 are complete, secure cost estimates for implementing the highest-priority tactics and determine an annual marketing communications budget.

Step 4: Create a detailed one-year work plan to implement the highest-priority communications tactics within the assigned budget.

### Prioritization Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Can do now</th>
<th>New resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Conduct “Heart-and-Soul” message training for the Board, leaders and employees.</td>
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<td>2. From the messages developed through “Heart-and-Soul” message training, craft overall organizational messages.</td>
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<td>3. Equip Board members, volunteers and staff to articulate and promote agency messages by providing them with tools and training. Activities might include:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) Conduct public speaking training.</td>
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<td>b) Train staff and volunteers on how to identify compelling client stories.</td>
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<td>c) Develop a presentation that can be delivered to community groups.</td>
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<td>d) Create, manage and promote a speakers bureau.</td>
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<td>e) Produce a general agency brochure.</td>
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<td>f) Cross-market agency programs by distributing the new agency brochure at every opportunity.</td>
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<td>g) Develop a one-page Chapter fact sheet.</td>
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<td>h) Print business-card-size cards with the new Chapter elevator speech and key messages.</td>
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<td>4. Expand the capabilities of the Public Affairs Department to better coordinate internal and external communication.</td>
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<td>5. Engage a local advertising agency to create and implement an advertising campaign to market services and build awareness of what the Red Cross means to our community.</td>
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<td>6. Follow a planning process and use a design template to add consistency to program brochures and flyers.</td>
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<td>7. Meld databases to enhance cross marketing.</td>
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<td>8. Change the web site address and email addresses to something broader and more inclusive of the now two-county reach of the Chapter.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Develop an employee communications plan.</td>
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<td>a) Commit to monthly or every-other-month all-staff meetings.</td>
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<td>b) Initiate a monthly email newsletter for staff.</td>
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<td>c) Schedule regular staff trainings in marketing and communications topics.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Redesign, reorganize and rewrite the web site.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Refocus the Crossroads newsletter and centralize content development.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Add variety and creativity to direct-mail appeals.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Relate some of the Local Heroes awards to the services and programs that the Chapter provides.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Create a DVD to use in house parties, with major donor asks, at events and more.</td>
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