

LAF effectiveness: raising profiles & recruiting members

Workshop at LAF National Conference - Bristol – 4th February 2013.

Case Study: Promotion of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum

Leicestershire County Council has undertaken 3 distinct strands of Forum promotion
Copies of items mentioned below are available to view (or to adapt and re-use!) via either:

- The original recruitment web page on the web at: www.leicslaf.org.uk/lafapply
- Annual Reports, news releases, and meeting papers at: www.leicslaf.org.uk/papers
- Word files are on **Huddle** in the folder Files > Documents > LAF Recruitment >

1. Publicity Campaign – a general emphasis on profile raising has included:

- Most papers for main Forum meetings are included on the web site since 2007
- A Forum introductory leaflet, A4 poster and pull-up banner produced in 2008.
- Display of Forum banner/leaflet and local walks leaflets in public libraries in 2008.
- A Forum-hosted day conference for district councils, parishes, user groups etc. in 2008.
- Forum Annual Reports in a short fold-out newsletter format in both 2009 and 2010.

These things all went well, but it is unclear how much the Forum profile was raised. Many leaflets/newsletters were distributed. A wide spectrum of 80 people (plus Forum members & LCC staff) attended the conference, but it was resource-intensive to organise and run.

2. Publicising Forum Key Issues – only a small initiative but a useful model for others?

Two combined press release & briefing documents were issued to local media, community publications, district councils, parish councils, user groups & other relevant organisations.

The end of Defra funded permissive access - April 2012 - about HLS agri-environment scheme changes, promoting use while it lasts, and urging parish councils to encourage farmers to retain the access – view at: www.leics.gov.uk/defrapermisiveaccess.pdf

Grants for new public paths to help rural areas & businesses - Dec 2012 – encouraging local interest in Paths for Communities grants – see www.leics.gov.uk/p4cscheme.pdf

Both releases concluded with a paragraph on Forum, but were time-consuming to prepare.

3. Recruitment Drive

Needing 5 new Forum members justified a more concerted effort, which involved:

- Producing an Applicants' Pack, including Role Description and Person Specification.
- Devising a Press Release on what the Local Access Forum is, and why apply to join it.
- Compiling distribution lists for the release, an email alert, or printed packs and publicity.
- Devising a process for handling applications and holding candidate interviews.

The campaign produced wide coverage in local print media and on local news websites, 2 radio interviews, 11 varied enquiries, and 17 applications, mostly from suitable candidates.

The package either emailed or posted consisted of: covering letter; applicants' pack and application form; Forum introductory leaflet; Forum newsletter-style annual report. Parish Councils were also sent a laminated Forum A4 poster to display on their noticeboard.

Key elements

The good response to the recruitment campaign was helped by:

- a. Making clear what the Forum involves - and what is expected of members.
 - **Package it like a 'job'**, conveyed the message this is a significant volunteer role.
- b. Focusing on the potential applicants and what things might attract their interest.
 - **Highlight benefits rather than features** in the press release etc. Tell people what Forum involvement will do for them – what do they gain by becoming a member?
 - **Avoid jargon or abbreviations.** Make clear what 'access' means in this context.

e.g. our headline was *Help shape countryside and urban access in Leicestershire*
which is better than *LAF seeks new applicants to discuss access issues*
- c. Widespread but well-targeted distribution of the information, or actual printed packs.
 - **Use existing channels** if possible, e.g. the Council press office, job and volunteering adverts, Schools links (re Outdoor Education), via consultative Community Forums, to Heritage Wardens, Black & Ethnic Organisation contacts, via the Association of Parish Councils, and via a rural business and communities partnership network.
 - **Compile listings** for parish/community newsletters and stakeholder groups. Include:
 - Main groups e.g. U3A Local branches/walk groups, Ramblers, CHA Ramblers; local groups for walking, horse-riding, cycling, orienteering, climbing, running;
 - Local contacts of national bodies BHS, OSS, CTC, NFU, CLA, BTCV, CPRE; Other bodies with no local contacts e.g. Auto Cycle Uni, British Driving Soc, Endurance GB, Fieldfare Trust, Green Lane Assn, Land Access & Rec Assn, Trail Riders' Fellowship;
 - Green groups e.g. YHA, local wildlife trust, Woodland Trust, BASC, Groundwork;
 - Community bodies e.g. WI, disability groups, local history groups, youth organisations, also Duke of Edinburgh local co-ordinators and expedition panels.
- d. Tailoring the format and distribution channel to the specific audience
 - **Customise the covering letter** e.g. to Parish Councils, Black/Ethnic Organisations.
 - **Email where possible** so people can easily forward messages, as well saving costs.
 - **Don't send attachments** to clog inboxes - include items on the web and send links.
 - **Post as well, if printed copies will get more attention** – print is more likely to be seen and circulated in some contexts e.g. to hand round at Parish Council meetings.

On reflection

- a. **Allow enough time** - so people can observe a Forum main meeting before applying..
- b. **Seek coverage in any Council newspaper** – we didn't as scope / timescale didn't fit.
- c. **Remember the Council is the appointing authority** - recruitment is it's responsibility. But Forum members can help e.g. compiling distribution lists, spreading the word etc.