

Town forest recreation planning is a community-oriented process. The opinions and ideas of townspeople should guide the plan. Therefore, spreading the word about your town's process and upcoming events is essential. Publicizing the events and workshops across a variety of platforms brings a sizeable, diverse group. The outreach process should begin a few weeks before the workshop to get it on people's radar and continue right up to the day of the event.

This toolkit provides templates for flyers, press releases, social media posts, and newsletter features. The following instructions explain how best to share these materials to reach as many members of the community as possible. There are a few big ideas to keep in mind for all the outreach as well as guidelines for how to edit and use each specific tool.

Big Ideas

Meet People Where They Are

These materials should target people where they already are – community gathering places, popular social media sites, and schools.

Coffee shops, grocery stores, churches are all prime locations for exposing people to the process and sparking informal discussions about the project. In the past few years, social media has become a virtual gathering place for the community. Many people rely on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Front Porch Forum, to hear of local news and events.

Schools represent an opportunity to meet a hard-to-reach population where they are. Families with children are busy and often struggle to accommodate community meetings into their schedules. Targeting these materials to families, via school newsletters, mailings, or bulletin boards, not only increases awareness but adds these events to their school-dominated calendars.

Utilize Community Networks

With all of these tools, it is important to utilize community networks to spread the word. These community networks can increase the message's audience to include hard-to-reach groups and further remind people of the meeting and its relevance to them. Reaching out to these networks can increase attendance with a diverse, passionate group. Organizations aligned with forests, conservation, or recreation should publicize the events via their networks to gather any resident who would be passionate about their town forest. Outreach should also target organizations not typically involved in conservation or recreation planning but who are vital to the community. Contacting religious or senior citizen groups and asking them to share the materials with their networks, for example, can ensure a variety of voices and opinions at the event.

Consider sending the appropriate communication piece (newsletter blurb, social media flyer, etc.) to each group with a specific request to share it with their network, rather than just include them in your distribution list.

Guidelines

Flyers

Well-placed flyers act as visible notification and reminders for the upcoming event. By posting the flyer at heavily visited locations around town, community members will become aware of the event. Some suggested locations include coffee shops and bakeries, the library, the post office, the grocery or general store, churches, and schools. The flyers can also be disseminated by schools or other community organizations as handouts or at other community events.

The event flyer is provided as an editable-form PDF, so if you wish to make changes to the flyer you may do so using Adobe Acrobat reader. Editable fields show a blue box around the text on the screen, which isn't shown when the file is printed or saved as an image (JPG, GIF, etc.).

If you do not already have Adobe Acrobat reader, you may download it for free, here:

<https://get.adobe.com/reader/>

Press Release

The press release is a longer, detailed, informative piece on the project. It should be featured in all local publications, both online and in print. Contact the reporters who tend to write recreation-related or local government stories. The piece should be disseminated as far ahead of time as possible to allow readers to accommodate the event with their schedule and spark further stories about the project. The event should also be added to local newspapers' calendar of events. The press release can also be attached to other tools, like a Facebook post or newsletter item to offer detailed information to interested parties.

The press release is provided in a word document format so you may edit and change any of the content there, and add any community-specific information about your event such as the availability of food and refreshments, etc.

Newsletter

The newsletter piece is a fantastic means of accessing other community networks. Many organizations, once emailed, would be glad to enclose a blurb about the event in their newsletter. In doing so, these organizations share your event via their existing robust outreach network. These

newsletters will then be viewed by additional members of the community and area residents passionate about this issue. As newsletters go out infrequently, this outreach should be completed as far ahead of time as possible.

The newsletter blurb is also provided in a word document format, so you may also edit any of the content included there.

Social Media Posting

Social media networks have become an incredibly popular place to hear about community news and events. A Facebook post or event can be shared many times over, and people can see that many of their friends are planning on attending. This photo should accompany the post/event that gives all the necessary details. The event should then be shared on the town's Facebook page, as well as those of community partners and organizations, and members of the steering committee.

Though social media is incredibly popular, there are many residents of rural and age-diverse towns that are not online. The other outreach tools should be deployed to reach the segments of the population that may not use social media.

Both Facebook and Twitter (and most other social media outlets) only allow posting of non-edible image file formats (JPG, GIF, etc.). For this reason, you will need to save your edible-form PDF as an image file (JPG, GIF, etc.) using the "save as" feature (click "File" then "Save As" and select JPG as the file type).