Harnessing the Power of Branding: Communicating Your Program's Values and Identity

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HOW TO BRAND YOUR PROGRAM

The **Branding Workbook** that accompanies this guide was developed to assist you as you review the information provided here.

Upon reflecting on the information, you can use the workbook to enhance your current brand or build a new brand. You might consider inviting key audience members to participate in design sessions to think through the branding, or you might identify a different opportunity to gather feedback from these audiences.

For each section of this resource guide there are corresponding sections in the workbook for you to take notes, jot down ideas, and brainstorm.

In an age of misinformation and information overload, it is important that Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) programs protect their reputations and clearly articulate their missions and goals. **Branding can help audiences gain a clearer understanding of what APP programs offer and can help APP grantees take control of the story they tell about their organizations and activities.**

In marketing, "brand" has a variety of definitions. Some use the term, "brand image," which refers "not to reality, but to what they [people] perceive as reality" (Cid, et al., 2022). This acknowledges that organizations cannot rely solely on how they perceive themselves when crafting their brand, but they must also be aware of the context in which they operate and how they will be perceived by the communities for which they provide services. Another synonym for "brand" is "brand identity," which many describe as a first step in brand development and an attempt to provide information about the value of a program to its audiences.

Some organizations are hesitant about investing in branding because of concerns about financial resources (Tudor, 2015). However, there are compelling reasons for APP programs to invest in crafting a stronger program identity through branding. The next page summarizes the various benefits of branding and provides examples of how branding can help your organization promote your programs.

BENEFITS OF BRANDING YOUR APP PROGRAM:

Creates awareness and builds a program's reputation by claiming a position in the community's mind for easy decision-making

Example: A program's positive reputation may encourage a school district to allow APP programming in their district.

Instills confidence in the program

Example: Good branding may instill confidence among parents and other community members in both the content that will be taught in an APP program and the educators who will teach it.

Acts as a "value system" and conveys functional, emotional, and social impact values

Example: A transparent APP program might share the function, or basic need, that programming will address in the community; this could be done by sharing statistics on teenage pregnancy rates and sample lesson plans with parents, thus enabling families to see the value of the program.

Acts as a "risk reducer" by reducing concerns around a topic and building trust

Example: An APP program with a trusted brand is likely to have sufficient legitimacy to positively address misinformation around sexual health education and allay community or parent fears regarding allowing children to participate.

Acts as an "identity system," or set of values and traits, and builds a niche in the community over time

Example: As an APP program builds relationships with communities through partnering to provide youth and families with resources, it starts to build a reputation and a recognizable place in the community.

WHO ARE YOU?: REFLECTING ON YOUR PROGRAM IDENTITY

After considering the value of branding your program, start to develop or refresh your brand by reflecting on your program identity. Ask yourself the following:

- » What are your programmatic goals?
- » Who are your key audiences (e.g., parents, youth, school district)? What are their priorities and challenges?
- » What problem in the community do you want to attempt to solve?
- » What values do you live and work by, and what values do you want to instill in the individuals you serve through your programming?
- » How do your community partners (e.g., youth, parents, schools, community organizations, decision-makers) currently perceive you? Is it different from how you perceive yourselves, and how can you use branding to close the gap?
- » What messages can you communicate to community partners to (1) gain trust, (2) build excitement, and (3) foster curiosity for the work you are doing?
- » How does your APP program fit within the broader culture and structure of your organization? How does it fit within your community?

DESIGNING AND REFRESHING YOUR BRANDING ELEMENTS

With the answers to these questions in mind, you will want to translate that information into a cohesive brand. A brand can include the below key elements (Martinez, 2022):

Physical facets. Like the old saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words," the **visual aspects of your brand** can quickly resonate in viewers' minds and, in a way, speak for you. Community partners may see your logo, colors, typography, and other symbols and have an immediate reaction (negative or positive) to your APP program, associating your branding with a larger set of beliefs and values. Visual elements can even evoke meaning and feelings in your audience. Check out the section entitled "Resources for Creating Visual Brand Elements" at the end of this guide to help you decide what kinds of visual elements will tell the story of who you are as a program. These elements are an important part of an organization's brand guide.

Personality. Think of your brand as a person with a real personality. This means it has a particular character and attitude that may reflect the character and attitude of your community partners. You might also pick a **persona or role that you want to become to youth, parents, or others**. For example, is your program the "cool, older sibling" that youth look up to? This might mean that your brand is youthful, fun, responsible, and approachable. Exercise your creativity and play around with various "titles" and personality traits!

Culture. Your program's culture refers to the **set of values you hold**. You might prioritize things like cultural sensitivity, strong families, respect for self and others' decision-making, and strong partnerships. Choose 4–5 values that speak to your program the most.

Relationship. Consider playing a word association game, where you think of the first things that come to mind when someone hears your program's name. You might even ask those outside your program to identify what words or phrases first come to their minds. This will help you gain an understanding of **where you currently stand in the community and what people associate your programming with**. Brainstorm ways to modify these perceptions if they are stifling efforts to reach your community. Use the tips on how to do this in the section entitled, "Getting the Word Out."

Reflection. Reflection refers to **how you see your audience and how you portray them in your branding materials**. This might be reflected in how you approach communities with the benefits of APP programming. It is important not to assume that every community wants sexual health education programming. Ideally, youth will view your program as valuable and empowering; however, you may learn that some youth view it as outdated or irrelevant. Teachers might see your program as a source of extra support that relieves them of some of their instructional duties, or they might perceive it as a burden that takes away from their instructional time. If there are any negative views of your program, how can branding help you address them? List your biggest strengths and market those using statistics, testimonials from past program participants, and other data you can gather. However, remain sensitive to the needs of the communities you'd like to serve.

Self-image. This refers to how your audience **sees themselves when they interact with your brand**. Ideally, youth who participate in your program will acquire positive skills and qualities and come to view themselves as informed, capable of making decisions, and empowered, among other qualities. When developing your brand, give thought to how your branding and messaging makes your audience feel about themselves. You might also consider how the staff you choose to represent your program reflect the diversity of the youth you want to serve. Representation is an important component in helping youth feel seen, heard, and understood by classroom facilitators.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

After considering your program's physical facets, personality, culture, relationship to the community, and other elements, it is time to share your work with others. The **STEPPS** framework (Berger, 2013) below will show you how to use six principles of "contagious content" to help you expand the reach of your program throughout your community successfully:

Principle 1: Social Currency

Make people feel like insiders who are in the know.

Example: Add interested individuals to a mailing list, grant them account access to special resources on your website, or allow youth to follow your program's private Instagram account. These are just a few ways that you can make community members feel that they have special access to information.

Principle 2: Triggers

Link your brand with what is on people's minds.

Example: Create marketing tools and messages that play off of observances, current events, and even pop culture. For example, you might hand out pamphlets in February that incorporate a Valentine's Day theme. Your message might say, "February is all about relationships! Enroll in our program and find out how to make sure your relationships are healthy ones."

Principle 3: Emotion

Evoke an emotional response in your listeners so they associate your brand with something happy, inspiring, touching, or exciting.

Example: Have current or past students create video or audio messages about how they have benefited from the program. Edit the snippets into a montage and share them with other teens, parents, school district decisionmakers, and other community partners.

Principle 4: Public

Give away merchandise that markets your programming.

Example: Visit community events where people gather and give away free "swag" with your branding on it. Take that time to also share a little about who you are and what you do in the community. Leave your contact information (e.g., social media handle, phone number, email, or physical address) so participants know how to reach you. The benefit to sharing your social media handle is that people immediately see your work in the community.

DID YOU KNOW?

Consistent messaging is key: 90% of customers expect to have a similar brand experience across multiple channels (Martinez, 2022).

What this means for APP grantees: Make sure your branding covers multiple platforms (e.g., website, social media, or print products like brochures and business cards). Use a brand guide or style guide to help you maintain consistent branding. Reflecting on the information in this resource guide and completing the Branding Workbook will help you create your own brand or style guide.

Principle 5: Practical Value

Useful things get shared, so sell the outcome or the benefits of the program—not the program itself.

Example: Share statistics that highlight the need for prevention programming in schools or data that show positive results of your program (i.e., how it has helped youth, parents, and partner organizations such as schools). Consider using data visualization strategies to present the information in a clear and visually appealing way so that it stands out to viewers. You can find more information on data visualization in *The Exchange* resource gallery.

Principle 6: Stories

People remember information when presented in story format, so introduce your program by telling a story about it.

Example: Share how your organization got started in the work, a "Youth Success Story" from one of the youth in your programming or another story that inspires your audience to support APP programming in your area.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING YOUR BRAND:

» Make your mission or vision statement visible in various locations (e.g., website, social media, merchandise, banners).

» Keep your website updated and consistent with the brand guide.

» Develop and update brochures, business cards, or print material for those interested in learning more.

» Publish a blog.

» Post regularly on social media (and make posts consistent with the brand guide).

» Consider working with the youth in your programs to create and disseminate a promotional video.

» Solicit feedback from community collaborators (through automated feedback forms or a dedicated email address for stakeholders to send feedback).

RESOURCES FOR CREATING VISUAL BRAND ELEMENTS

» [How to Pick Colors to Captivate Readers and Communicate Effectively |Venngage](#)

» [Brand Typography: How To Choose Fonts For Your Brand | DesignRush](#)

» [How to Design a Logo: 5 Steps to Create a Logo You Love | Sprout Social](#)

» [Free Logo Maker | Canva](#)

» [Logo Trends 2023: How to Design an Innovative Logo | UXstudio](#)

» [Neurodesign: UX and Attention, Color, Memory, and Cognition | UX Planet](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

» Berger, J. (2021, April 29) *Spreading the word about your program: applying strategies from Contagious. The Exchange.*

» Big Think. (2021, July 27). *How Apple and Nike have branded your brain | Your Brain on Money | Big Think* [Video]. YouTube.

» IDEO. (n.d.). *Human-centered design sits at the intersection of empathy and creativity.*

» Kakolowski, N. (2020, January 13). What is a style guide and how does it support your branding efforts? (infographic). *Brafton.* Martins, J. (2022, November 10). *5 tips to set great company values that reflect your unique culture (with examples).* Asana.

» Ortbal, K., & Frazzette, N., & Mehta, K. (2016). Constructed stakeholder personas: An educational tool for social entrepreneurs. *Procedia Engineering*, 159, 230–248.

» Seagroves, A., Chen, E. McIntosh, C., & Dickinson, D. (2023, May). *Increasing impact through social media: A roadmap for adolescent pregnancy prevention programs.* Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.

» Singh, N. (n.d.). *What is brand equity?* Canva.

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Martinez, A. (2022, March 15). Building a brand strategy: Essentials for long term success. *Martech*. https://martech.org/building-a-brand-strategy-essentials-for-long-term-success/

Tudor, G. (2015, July 1). Using brands for impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review.*

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