Connect the Dots…
Leveraging Community Partnerships & Media Relations

www.laura-bishop.com
WHO WE ARE

Laura Bishop, Managing Principal
- 35 years of experience in public relations field
- Launched Laura Bishop Communications in 2011
- Name to the 2014 Top 40 Women in Business by SNJ Business People
- Former member of PDE Board of Directors
- President of the Rancocas Conservancy

Karen Forst, Development/Grants Consultant
- 20+ years experience in environmental issues and community involvement
- Including 10+ years experience in grant writing, grant administration, fundraising event planning, donor communication and engagement and corporate partnerships
- Former NJDEP employee and former Development Director at PDE
You are likely on the staff, board or a volunteer with a nonprofit seeking to:

- Expand your network
- Raise your visibility
- Bolster support (financial and otherwise)
- Build your volunteer base

.....But where to start?
There is strength in numbers

The right partnerships can improve visibility, public perception, staff morale, and even lead to funding!
WHAT IS CONNECTING THE DOTS?

Connecting with others is the lifeblood of nonprofits and organizations that serve the public.

**Nonprofit Organizations**
- Environmental
- Social Services
- Education

**Other Organizations that serve the public**
- School Districts
- Local government
- State government
- Federal government

Connecting with:
- Members, donors, supporters, parents, teachers, current and prospective board members
- Other nonprofits, potential funders, business and industry, regulators, lawmakers, academic institutions
It means connecting what at first may appear to be disparate individuals and organizations to create opportunities and results that benefit two, several or many individuals and organizations.
Environmental nonprofit teaming up with a...

- Health related nonprofit - support for programs that encourage kids to be active, promote outdoor activity, combat childhood obesity, connect kids to nature
- Youth services organization - support for programs that give underserved youth the chance to experience science and nature
- Local business with community volunteerism goals
- Finding local champion for your cause that will help connect you to other available resources in their network

It’s not about pulling you away from your mission.

It’s about finding common ground to help your organizations achieve their goals and work toward their missions more effectively.
According to Steve Jobs:

Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

(Steve Jobs)

From his 2005 Commencement Address at Stanford University
Connecting the Dots involves not only looking backwards, but also looking at what’s happening today and in the future!

It is critical for nonprofits to Connect the Dots today, to create boundless opportunities for organizational growth and success going forwards.

Lay the groundwork for your future success!
Think of the “Connect the Dot” puzzles of our childhood. The dots are numbered and when a line is drawn between the dots sequentially, the outline of an object, animal or person is revealed.

For a child to successfully complete the puzzle, they first must study and understand their numbers or letters.
To successfully Connect the Dots for your organization, you too must study and understand your organization’s:

- Mission and Goals
- Strengths
- Challenges
CONNECTING THE DOTS
ALIGNING PRIORITIES

How do your mission, goals, strengths & challenges relate to:

- Those you serve – members and constituents
- Your colleagues in the nonprofit and for-profit world
- Current and prospective supporters in your community and beyond
Capitalize on Opportunities to Connect!

Gather staff to think about partnership opportunities

Think of:

- Locally owned small businesses
- Public, private and charter schools in your areas
- Colleges and Universities
- Nonprofits in your field
- Nonprofits in other fields – Education, Health Care, Social Services, Animal Protection, Disaster Relief/Aid Organizations, Youth Services
- Business and Industry – large employers in the area
- Companies with local branches/offices – Banks with community giving programs, local companies with employee volunteer programs

Go beyond your typical list of partners and allies!
Scientists like measurable and quantifiable results

However, this type of success is *not always easily measured*!

Don’t let that discourage you!
Establishing, revitalizing or changing an organization’s reputation/public perception takes time.

- Look for **anecdotal evidence** of progress and success:
  - Positive comments from people outside your organization
  - Increase in media coverage for programs and events
  - Positive change in staff/partner attitudes
  - Expanded partnership opportunities
  - Increased funding
Mission - To preserve, protect and enhance the ecological and cultural integrity of the Rancocas Creek and its environs.
**Strengths:**

- Leading land trust in the watershed
- Preserved more than 2,000 acres of land
- Loved by many for its natural beauty, recreation opportunities on the creek and throughout the watershed

**Challenges:**

- All volunteer organization
- Collaborating with nonprofits with complementary/competing missions (PPA, Rancocas Nature Center)
- Connecting with school districts
- Connecting with business community
Must view every activity as an opportunity to “Connect the Dots” - bolster existing relationships & build new ones.

- Events/Fundraisers
- Annual Dinner - folksy, fun and reflects the personality and spirit of the organization
- Dedication of new preserves
- Hikes and cleanups – opportunity for current and prospective trustees, members and media to experience our preserves
- World Series of Birding
CONNECT THE DOTS
MEDIA, BUSINESS & COMMUNITY

- News releases announcing:
  - Partnerships and acquisitions
  - New Board Members
  - Events

- Op-Eds
- Contacted as experts for comment for media coverage of issues that affect the Rancocas Watershed, land preservation, etc.
- Maintain active Facebook, Twitter and Website
- Publicly thank supporters – annual donors, meal donations
- Share Compelling Photos

- Business & Community:
  - Membership in business/community organizations (Environmental Committee of CCSNJ) – raise visibility and source of new members
  - Sponsor events (Annual Dinner, meals for dedications, hikes & cleanups)
Annual Dinner & Meeting – 2016

- Sponsor: New Jersey American Water
- Speakers:
  - Patty Elkins, of DVRPC – Spoke about how the Rancocas Conservancy fits into the larger picture of the Delaware Valley.
  - Jim Bintliff, Owner, Lena Blackburne Baseball Rubbing Mud Spoke about the history of Lena Blackburne Baseball Rubbing Mud. Comes from a secret location along the Rancocas. Use by MLB and college teams nationwide.

Presentations connected with the dinner guests and provided a new opportunity for the conservancy. Created a sense of local pride.

- Guests/sponsors/speakers leave feeling more connected with RC
- Board Members feel more connected to member and each other
Like all organizations, RC is challenged to leverage the enthusiasm generated at our annual dinner/meeting and events on our preserves into ongoing involvement and support.

Connecting the Dots: World Series of Birding and Baseball Mud
- Leverage Jim’s connection with MLB to engage the Phillies and perhaps a local college team.
- Leverage those connections for print and broadcast media coverage as well as via social media.

Opportunity to pitch a story in the Land Trust Alliance’s magazine and website.
WINSLOW TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT –
Preparing our Students for Tomorrow....Today!

- **Strengths**
  - Dedicated teachers
  - Enthusiastic leadership – open to new ideas and overcoming challenges
  - Great program concepts

- **Challenges**
  - District is in a socio-economically and racially diverse community in Lower Camden County
  - Funding is very limited
  - The district has struggled with a poor reputation for years
  - The reputation is undeserved and doesn’t reflect the dynamic, innovative and progressive curriculum; engaged and enthusiastic students and dedicated, creative staff and administration

SUCCESS STORY

WINSLOW TWP. - STEM AS A CATALYST
CONNECTING THE DOTS
FOR WINSLOW TOWNSHIP MIDDLE SCHOOL

- Must view every program and activity as an opportunity to “Connect the Dots” - bolster existing relationships & build new ones.
  - Focus on most promising programs/activities first
  - Promote successes
  - Publicize teachers doing great work
  - Engage parents
  - Engage local and regional partners

Build a winning attitude – create a positive buzz
Past two years, WTSD has proactively worked to Connect the Dots to tell the district’s very positive and inspiring story. STEM program has been a major catalyst in helping us to tell that story.
CONNECTING THE DOTS
FOR WINSLOW TOWNSHIP MIDDLE SCHOOL

Steps to Success
- Took time to understand the program and vision
- Thought about partnership opportunities
- Made connections, introduced others to Winslow
- Resulted in guest speakers, field trips, donations
- Identified and received grants and awards
CONNECTING THE DOTS
WINSLOW STEM

Developed a new program with Stockton University
- Working on similar process for Ocean City School District
  - Identifying and speaking to potential partners
  - Thinking about donations and grants
  - Leveraging relationships with community organizations to help offset costs and save time
A ROLE MODEL FOR CONNECTING THE DOTS...

Great at building mutually beneficial partnerships

Makes the most of relationships

Builds on success of events and programs
CONNECTING THE DOTS
MAKE YOUR STORY “STICK”

- Figure out what makes your program/project/organization unique. Why would they want to know about it/support it?

- Why would someone care about it?
  - New/innovative idea?
  - Helping to fill a need?
  - Underdog success story?

- Can you make a personal connection? Tell a story?
CONNECTING WITH MEDIA - TRADITIONAL & SOCIAL

✓ **Media Relations** – Promote innovative project, identify newsworthy programs and activities for local, regional and national media, positions your organization as a leading expert in your field

✓ **Social Media** – Website, Facebook, Twitter and other social media

✓ **Word of Mouth** – Perhaps the most important and effective
CONNECTING WITH MEDIA
EFFECTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS IS:

- Proactive
- Responsive
- Creative
- Genuine
- Long-term
EFFECTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS DOES NOT MEAN

- THROW IT UP AGAINST THE WALL AND SEE WHAT STICKS
- GUARANTEED COVERAGE
- GIVING THE MEDIA FREE REIGN
CONNECTING WITH BUSINESS & FUNDERS

- JOIN PROFESSIONAL AND NETWORKING ORGANIZATIONS
  - ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATIONS
  - EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS
  - CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE (TOWN/CITY/COUNTY/REGIONAL)
  - NONPROFIT ASSOCIATIONS (DANA, ASSOCIATION OF FUNDRAISING PROFESSIONALS)
  - YOUNG PROFESSIONALS GROUPS
  - SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

YOU ARE “SELLING” YOUR ORGANIZATION AND THE SERVICES YOU PROVIDE TO YOUR COMMUNITY AND BEYOND!
When funding is needed, think beyond the usual foundation and government opportunities!

- Most companies have funding available
- Giving is aligned with their area of work or their corporate philosophy
- A little online research goes a long way!
- Find those that align with your priorities and needs
- Identify local contact, invite to events, tours, programs
  - build relationships
KEY TO SUCCESSFUL GRANT WRITING

No way to guarantee funding....

Increase your odds of funding success by having...

- Compelling Project Idea Aligned with Funding Priorities
- Ability and Expertise to Successfully Complete Project
- Project Purpose and Goals Clearly Communicated
CONNECTING THE DOTS
DONATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS

Successful partnership and media attention can also attract additional resources – volunteers, donations of time and materials.

If you don’t have to pay for it, that’s more funding to put toward other priorities. “Connecting the Dots” saves money and time!
Sometimes the most unlikely opportunity will be the one that works out! (In other words, it never hurts to ask!)

- Think about social marketing
  - How can partnering with you benefit them?
  - Look for the “Win-Win”

- Find a story that “sticks” – Once you get their attention you can share other ideas and programs
QUESTIONS?

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