



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set I Number 3

Rev. August 1999

Set I Strategies for Societies The Society Newsletter

by Sandra H. Luebking, Editor
FGS FORUM

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

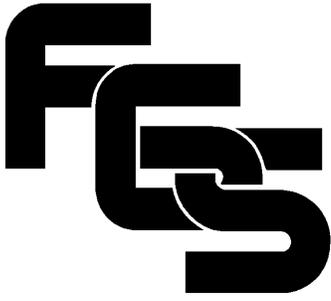
This paper considers the role of the editorial committee, defines terms used in the publication process, and describes the characteristics of a good editor. This paper offers information about newsletter content, the proofreading tasks, and the production and distribution of newsletters.

This paper lacks information about the electronic considerations of society newsletters, but there are many important points which are still valid today.

The information on page 4 which directs the interested person on how to obtain copies of this paper is incorrect. The FGS office no longer reprints the SSS papers, and has phased out paper copies of the SSS papers altogether.

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Set I Strategies for Societies

The Society Newsletter

by Sandra H. Luebking, Editor
FGS FORUM

INTRODUCTION

One of an organization's most valuable assets is its newsletter. Newsletters serve many goals. They **inform** members about events and policies, **motivate** members for volunteer or fund-raising activities, and **recruit** new members from the ranks of readers. Identifying these goals enables the editorial committee to make decisions about budget, format, content, and distribution.

THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

An editorial committee guides the most effective newsletters. The committee establishes a budget, sets policies and monitors each issue for compliance and uniformity. An editorial committee may also decide the title and frequency of the publication and content to be included in the masthead. Policies can be made which determine the size, format and typography as well as the production and distribution.

Title and Frequency: The title of the publication can be selected by committee decision or by a contest among members. It is best to avoid names that are too cute such as "The Chatterbox" or too general like "Newsletter." The title should

promote your newsletter's goals and your society's image. For title ideas, scan the more than 1700 titles which appear in the current issue of *The Genealogist's Address Book* compiled by Elizabeth Petty Bentley (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc.).

Use a subtitle if the title alone does not tell enough. A subtitle should identify the organization and its location. The *Washington County Crier* needs a subtitle with the name of the state. Too many states have counties named "Washington".

Once a title is chosen, engage a graphic designer to develop a nameplate that is unique and eye-catching. This is a sensible investment as a good design significantly enhances even a low budget production.

Short, frequent newsletters are easier to produce and offer more timely news. The ideal is monthly publication but the higher distribution costs require most non-profit groups to publish bimonthly. No newsletter should appear less than quarterly.

The Society Newsletter

DETAILS

The Masthead: The masthead is the block of information that identifies publisher and editor, tells how to contact them, and gives subscription information. The basic content and the location of your masthead should be identical from one issue to the next.

A masthead can include instructions on how to join the society; meeting times and places; officers and project chairmen; disclaimers (for advertisements) and copyright detail (including that granted to authors of signed articles).

Size, Format, and Typography: The most popular page size for newsletters is 8½ x 11 inches because it coordinates with the multitude of processes and products based on standard size. A four-page publication can be printed on an 11 x 17 inch sheet folded once; an 8-page issue takes two such sheets.

Format options include single, double or triple column with varying widths for margins and alleys between columns. Select format by examining successful newsletters from various fields and noting the appearance features that are most pleasing.

Most societies opt for a 2-column format because it provides a flexible layout but can be produced easily on typewriter or computer using the cut and paste method. A mixed format can add appeal. The FGS FORUM's 3-column layout often includes some double column pages or a full margin to margin article for visual enhancement.

A type style that is familiar to readers promotes more efficient reading. Avoid cursive or script, which hampers readers and may encourage them to skip important items. Once a type selection is made, use it for all body copy with the possible exception of headlines.

THE EDITOR

The administrative body of the organization generally appoints editors. Editorial duties, which should be in writing, may range from reporting, photography, typing and design to collating, labeling and mailing. Some societies arrange for a group of volunteers to collate, proof and assemble the newsletter. They find using helpers for such routine production tasks reduces editor burnout. One task that cannot be left to helpers, however, is record keeping. Record keeping will include:

Production Control Sheet: Diagram your production schedule on paper and list people critical to the schedule or who can assist in an emergency. Extend this list to include persons who can verify factual details you may wish to publish.

Time and Costs Sheets: Even if the editor is not reimbursed for expenses, the society and future editors must know the true time and cost commitment to produce the newsletter. A time sheet should note the specific task for which each hour was spent, including telephone calls. A cost record should include receipts when possible.

Editor's Index: A simple index will help an editor locate articles in earlier newsletters. Headlines may be cut and taped to index cards showing the issue and page number. General topics may be noted and filed by subject, region, or repository. Maintaining this index is a task easily delegated to an assistant or a home-bound volunteer.

Editor's Library: The editor will need a style manual, i.e., the *Chicago Manual of Style*; a good quality dictionary (not your seventh-grade grandchild's); and basic genealogy "how-to" books, such as *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy* or the revised edition of *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*. In addition, the editor will want to acquire standard reference books such as

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Genealogist's Address Book; current issues of the *Directory of Professional Genealogists* or the *Ancestry Family Historian's Address Book* by Juliana Szucs Smith. A good thesaurus and a United States almanac will be helpful. You will also want to obtain current local area resource material.

Style Sheet: While the *Chicago Manual of Style* can resolve complex questions, for frequent writing quandaries a one or two page style sheet provides a quicker reference. These writing difficulties usually center on when to capitalize, when and how to abbreviate, acceptable acronyms, modes of address, names, symbols, dates, titles, and numerals. A style sheet insures uniformity from issue to issue.

CONTENT CHECKLIST

Content should first and foremost be accurate. It should be factual and complete. Details, especially those likely to change often such as fees or hours, need to be verified with the proper authority. Even articles lifted intact from another publication (and, of course, used only with permission), must be cautiously evaluated for accuracy and timeliness. (See "Just Because It's in Print Doesn't Make It So" by Desmond Walls Allen, FGS FORUM 3:4 (Winter 1991). Copyright laws should be heeded.

Sources should always be cited, whether the reference is from an individual, a booklet, another publication, or even an author's fantasy. Include the addresses of authors of signed articles (with their permission, of course). Since newsletter articles tend to be brief and to the point, it may be helpful to list additional sources of information.

THE FINISHED PRODUCT

Newsletter text needs at least four proof readings, including two by someone other than the editor. It is important to proofread the particular details in

the article and to be certain all the necessary information is reported. Careful examination for correct grammar and spelling is also essential. Misspelled words suggest carelessness. The misspelling of names is unforgivable, since surnames are our business. Verify the spellings of prominent genealogists' names through the *Directory of Professional Genealogists*. For your own society, use a current membership list, which includes exact titles of officers.

And speaking of spelling—is genealogy spelled correctly in your publication? Genealogy and cemetery are the most frequent errors found in society publications although "lead" for led and "chose" for choose come close. You cannot depend on a computer with a spelling checker. The latter two errors—and many others—will not be corrected by a computerized spelling checker.

PRODUCTION

The choice of a printing process must consider equally the cost, the time and the quality of the final product. All costs incurred, especially the indirect ones such as postage (which is affected by paper weight), maintaining equipment (if you do your own printing), office supplies and volunteer service should be documented.

Time is important. Arranging for a member to print the publication free at his office sounds wonderful unless it means your newsletter is always the last work to get the printer's attention.

Quality is critical. A newsletter typed with low-cost ribbons and mimeographed on ancient equipment does not represent your society well. Appearance is as important as content, especially if one of your goals is to recruit new members.

The Society Newsletter

DISTRIBUTION

The number of mailings will determine how you distribute the newsletter. Some groups mail only those copies not distributed at a society meeting. The money saved by circulating most newsletters directly to members may permit first class mailings of those issues left behind.

Organizations with many non-local members will save the most money by using second or third class mail. However, non-profit status with the Internal Revenue Service does not guarantee the same treatment by the United States Postal Service. Contact the USPS to learn how to apply for a reduced rate mailing permit.

PROVIDING THE MAILING LIST

An organization may be asked to sell or contribute its mailing list to a commercial firm or to a society member. In order to avoid potential conflict, the editorial committee should establish a written policy before—not after—a request is received.

A FINAL WORD

Readers will judge your organization by the appearance and content of your newsletter. Regardless of budget, your goals are quality and consistency.

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