

# Developing a New Name

If your organization is considering changing its name, there is a lot to think about. A new name can provide a renewed sense of vigor for the organization, but it can also be a frustrating process if not handled correctly. Keep in mind these factors for creating a successful outcome.

- 1. Recognize that developing an effective name is difficult.** With 1.6 million nonprofits in the United States, plus 21 million domain names, many good names and URLs are taken. Understand that it's not as easy as it seems to come up with the right name that perfectly expresses what your organization stands for, and is available.
- 2. You need a clear process.** From egos and office politics to the creativity needed to generate a great name, there are myriad aspects of the name change process that need to be managed. To ensure that everything goes smoothly, you need a rigorous process that clearly defines all the steps.
- 3. Understand why you are changing the name.** Changing out of necessity or opportunity will dictate different approaches.
- 4. Involve the right people.** Your name change is an opportunity to galvanize people around your shared vision, so be sure to include a the appropriate cross section from your staff, board, donors, partner organizations and other key constituents. The challenge is incorporating all perspectives so that everyone feels heard and managing the expectations that not all needs can be met.
- 5. Know where you stand.** Your organization is not operating in a vacuum. Conduct research to assess the level of brand recognition, positive and negative attributes, and audience perceptions of the name. What do people think of your name, and will they care if you change it?
- 6. Prepare for change.** Understand your organization's propensity for change and have strong leadership to usher the organization through the process and build consensus. It's important to consider people's potential responses to the name change and to be able to pro-actively address any resistance to change.
- 7. Know your target.** Before you start generating names, you need to know what you are aiming for. It helps to develop a Brand Statement that expresses that you want to convey, and to establish criteria for the new name. For example, whether the name needs to reflect your organization's mission, respect the organization's history, etc. What are the practical considerations, such as words that must be included or excluded, a tagline that must be used, a certain length, legal issues, chapter, parent or international affiliate considerations, or other expectations or limitations. Also consider the tone you want the name to convey.
- 8. Go wide.** In developing potential names, it pays to think outside the box and gener-



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## Developing a New Name for Your Nonprofit

ate hundreds of potential possibilities. Cast a wide net to get the best ideas, and then edit them down based on your criteria.

9. **Respect nuances.** Understand the subtle differences between words that can effect the perception of a name and what is acceptable. For example, the words “network,” “clearinghouse,” and “association,” all have to do with the exchange of information, but they all have different connotations.
10. **Be creative.** Nonprofit names don’t have to be mundane — they can and should be appealing. So aim for one that will capture the imagination of your staff, donors, and clients, not merely describe your services. Which would you rather support: Jumpstart NYC or the New York City Small Businesses Administration Program?
11. **Connecting with the old name.** Consider if the old name should be recognized in some way (such as “formerly...”) and how that should be done (with the old logo, or just a line of type, how prominent, and for how long, etc.). Having this plan beforehand, can help you make judicious decisions regarding the best way to roll out the new name and in replacing old stationery and materials and updating your website.
12. **Look smart.** Your name will usually not live alone, but must be represented graphically. Consider how the name works with the logo or tagline. If you are going to change the name, take advantage of the opportunity to create a positive impression by developing a unified visual identity for the organization.
13. **Field test.** Before settling on a final name, see how it works in various contexts, for example, on a business card, on your website (how it works as a URL), on interior and exterior signs, when answering the phone or on voice mail, in directory listings, etc.
14. **Spread the word.** It’s best to have a plan for informing your different audiences appropriately in a timed sequence, for example, starting with the staff and board and moving out toward large funders and donors and partners before announcing it to the public. Your strategy will depend upon the size and nature of your organization and its board (or multiple boards), and other constituents including size and type of donor base, funding sources, organizational partners, and clients served.
15. **Implement smartly.** Consider the full scope of what needs to be changed and have a plan for managing that. For example, you may have a hard launch in which the new name is introduced on a certain date, or a soft launch in which older stationery and materials are used up and the new name is introduced when new materials are created (within a certain time frame). And plan for staff training on how to and when to use the new name.

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A great name can give your organization the recognition it needs, so take the proper steps to plan appropriately for success.

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