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Beyond Growth – Membership Campaign Transforms SVP Culture

Posted by [seattle](#) — March 1, 2017



SVP Boulder County's partnership grew by nearly 20 percent last year – six times their average annual growth – thanks to a campaign expertly managed by membership director, Shannon Sackmann. But the growth was just one benefit. The real triumph was how Boulder County partners transformed their relationship to recruiting and to each other.

“There was a mind shift among partners,” explains Shannon. “It’s doesn’t feel like a job to recruit anymore. It’s fun.”

In the past, partners felt overwhelmed or tended to make assumptions that prevented them from introducing people to SVP, thinking they wouldn't be interested or didn't have the resources. So Shannon tried a different approach.

She encouraged partners to simply bring friends and colleagues to an event so they could experience SVP,

knowing that some people would join and the others would have a better understanding of SVP and hopefully share their story.



Shannon and the Boulder team even set a couple of additional goals beyond gaining more partners: Every partner would bring at least two people to an event and 100 new people would have an SVP experience.

Campaign Events

To help introduce people to SVP, the Boulder team designed the following series of fall events that were open to partners and non-partners alike.

- **SVP Social** – This event was held at a partner’s home and there was a short program where three partners got up to talk about “why SVP” in 10-15 minutes.
- **Do What We Do** – To give people a taste of the capacity building work SVP does, three nonprofits presented a challenge they were facing. Participants were then broken into three groups to advise and brainstorm solutions with those nonprofits.
- **Enlightened Eats** – These three intimate dinners focused on rich conversation around SVP Boulder County’s programs such as Execs Evolve and Catapult Investees.

- **Invisible Boulder** – This multimedia event explored the untold stories of those living on the margins of Boulder County and highlighted the nonprofits that serve them. The presentation flowed into small group conversations facilitated by SVP Partners.
- **Fall Partner Meeting** – This standing event was opened up to a broader audience with whom they shared the business and impact of SVP.

These events made it really easy for partners to invite someone they knew to learn about SVP. It wasn't "recruiting." It was just an introduction, which took the pressure off.



Simultaneously, SVP Partners started to see how much they enjoyed being part of the SVP community. The culture was previously centered on "getting work done" and socializing was seen as less valuable. After the campaign, however, partners started to crave more of that social time – strengthening their bonds.



Advertising

In addition to the event series, SVP Boulder County’s education and communications director, Olga Heifets ran a marketing campaign to reach people beyond partner networks.

Olga zeroed in on the publications and social media channels that were both affordable and read by potential partners. Plus, she invested in relationships with local media and was able to **quadruple the impact** of her modest marketing budget with in-kind advertising.



Here are the publications and channels Olga worked with:

- **The Local Paper** – Olga placed paid ads in Boulder’s local paper (above) featuring three different SVP

Partners with varying backgrounds to help readers see themselves in SVP, plus upcoming events. The ads ran in the business and local sections of the paper as these were more affordable, but reached the right audiences.

- **A Lifestyle Magazine** – Olga worked with a high-end magazine that is widely read by SVP audiences to feature SVP events and photo spreads through a combination of paid ads and the magazine's community calendar space. SVP was also featured in the magazine's e-newsletter.
- **Facebook** – Using paid and unpaid tools on Facebook, Olga ran a complementary social media campaign featuring SVP Partners, events and stories.

Through this combination of media outlets, thousands of people received information about SVP Boulder County.

Recruiting Kit

Using the campaign as inspiration, Shannon, Olga and Executive Director Jennie Arbogash reimaged their recruiting materials.

"Jennie, Olga and I combed through the materials we've used in the past and refined our message so we can walk folks through what it means to be a partner," explains Shannon. "The packets are beautiful now. They tell folks about the process, what they can do, what we're looking for, not just skills, but the **type** of person."

That last part is an important distinction, as Shannon found that partners were stuck on looking for potential partners with a certain skill set and were therefore ruling people out. So Shannon engaged those partners in a different conversation. She asked them to list the **characteristics** of an SVP Partner, which helped broaden their idea of who they could invite to learn about SVP.

The characteristics they identified were then incorporated in their recruiting materials (see below), which also featured fresh language about SVP that helped align

partners around shared messaging.



Beyond the Campaign

The beauty of SVP Boulder County’s membership campaign is the enduring change it sparked.

Partners are now engaged in recruiting. They even see it as fun! They speak a common language. Shannon has recruiting materials that work. There’s a new emphasis on community that has informed SVP Boulder County’s events calendar (including partner-organized progressive dinners). Olga has the data she needs to advocate for future advertising dollars. And they’ve doubled the list of people they invite to SVP events – continuing to build their pipeline of new partners.

It was a big investment that just might pay off for years to come.

Tips & Tools for Your Own Membership Campaign

Interested in running a similar membership campaign at your SVP affiliate? Here is some advice from Olga and Shannon as well as tools and materials you can use and adapt.

Invest In Planning & Buy-In

SVP Boulder County's membership campaign ran for four months, but the planning process was easily an additional seven. Shannon knew a successful campaign depended on partner buy-in and that takes time. She invested heavily in bringing partners together, cultivating campaign volunteers, aligning partners around shared messaging, and so forth.

"The pre-work should actually take more time than the campaign," says Olga who also spent a great deal of time hounding local media outlets, building relationships and honing clear and crisp messages for specific channels.

Don't Reinvent the Wheel! Tools & Materials You Can Adapt

Shannon and Olga shared a number of useful resources to help get you started.

- **Recruiting Kit** – Check out SVP Boulder County's [recruiting materials](#) and [folder](#).
- **Campaign Check-List** – Want the nitty-gritty details? See Shannon's [campaign checklist](#).
- **Volunteer Prep** – Engage your partners in the campaign with [training materials](#) and clear job descriptions for the [Campaign Co-Chair](#) and [Campaign Captain](#).
- **Paid Ads** – The ads Olga placed in local publications are pictured above.

There will be editable versions of some of these materials in our new resource center that launches later this month. If you're interested in a particular piece, please email SVPI's knowledge manager, Sarabeth Zemel at

sarabeth@svpi.org.

Ask the Experts

Olga and Shannon are happy to answer any questions for folks interested in running their own campaign. Please feel free to contact them at olga@svpbouldercounty.org and shannon@svpbouldercounty.org!

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