

Ten Suggestions
For
Promoting Your ACHCA Chapter

by

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Suggestion No. 1
Something General

Suggestion: Assess, then plan and proceed accordingly. ACHCA chapters vary in size, resources, etc. which makes it challenging, if not impossible to say what is best for all. However, this step can be applied in any case. *Promotion represents a commitment.* If you undertake it, you want the odds maximized from the start that you will succeed. So before you begin, determine your goal; next, resources; an implementation plan and finally, an evaluation plan.

Timing: Look ahead and determine when you want to see tangible results. From that point work backwards, setting times for the planning and implementation phases. When you see results will depend on what you undertake. Don't give up if results aren't forthcoming right away; you may need to factor a lot of follow-up into your plan. If results prove disappointing, determine the reasons why when you evaluate and make adjustments for the next time.

Method: Focus on doing one thing well (as opposed to conquering the world); succeed before you start; then build on your success to expand your horizons.

Steps: Ask yourselves: to what end do you want to promote? To gain more members? More money? More media coverage? More political clout? All of the above? How would it complement national office activities--and vice versa? Choose something achievable (it's easier to build on success than failure) by taking stock of internal and external factors before you decide on your goal. Make sure you have sufficient resources(time, interest, people, money) and consider how national can assist you. What resources are available in the communities you represent who can help you with promotion? Who are your competitors? Set times for events that don't compete for interest/attention with competitors. Pick people who are dependable and have talents that lend themselves to the project at hand. Once you determine what you want to do—an event, a brochure, a meeting with legislators—think a bit more deeply. What things about your chapter will be the best ingredients for an effective sales pitch—and how can you communicate its unique value? How does what you're planning jibe with the national sales pitch for ACHCA? Whatever you determine, highlight it in your promotional materials. Overall,, be systematic. Set up planning, implementation, evaluation timelines and stick to them. Finally, assuming you succeed, publicize your success--it's the best promotional fodder there is.

Outcome: Achievement of reasonable success that motivates and inspires the chapter, but doesn't overtax it and can be used to leverage more success.

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Suggestion No. 2
Promote Accomplishments of Chapter Members

Suggestion: Strengthen/appreciate what you already have.

Method: Recognize via a press release (for examples, see *August 2004 ACHCA Grassroots Advocacy: A Step-By-Step Guide*, pp10-13 or visit ACHCA web site, www.achca.org click news room, click press releases) individual accomplishment to underscore that your chapter takes pride in and values its members, and is a place of achievement and quality.

Timing: Disseminate press release within two weeks after achievement/ honor is bestowed. If development is anticipated/expected draft press release in advance and distribute it as soon as it happens. If the honor is appropriate (member joins/made chair of local council of health care leaders; elected to ACHCA board, serves as ACHCA officer, etc.) may want to try for a feature article. One way to try that is to have the release touch on significance of the new position, indicating that the person involved is available to be interviewed about LTC in the community

Steps: If a chapter member is honored or achieves—their professional standing in ACHCA grows, they distinguish themselves with other orgs, they/their facility win recognition/honors in their respective community, they successfully complete training-- issue a press release. Include ACHCA national office as recipient of release. Continually encourage chapter members to keep chapter leadership informed of such developments. Use release/news stories in promotional materials.

Outcomes: Build local public image of chapter, LTC; help retain current members, attract new members; develop better promotional tools for attracting new chapter members; build chapter cohesion, teamwork, strengthen standing of chapter as a substantive, active grassroots presence; establish, develop stronger grassroots contacts with media, lawmakers.

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Suggestion No. 3
Promotion Via Spokespersons

Suggestion: Dependability and consistency are key to effective promotion. If you want to promote your chapter and its accomplishments and/or the achievements of your individual members, you need to identify people who should speak/act on behalf of your chapter and make sure they are accessible/their contact info is known. Decide/agree in advance on the message for unity's sake.

Method: Starting with the president, the chapter officers are obviously spokesperson candidates. At least two people should have the role in order to increase the chances someone will always be available. All spokespersons should have the same understanding of the message the chapter wishes to convey. It's a good idea to develop a list of key talking points for spokespersons (and anyone engaged in recruiting new members for that matter).
Timing: You may want to rotate responsibilities every six months to encourage activity by more members, share the responsibilities involved more widely, and foster inclusion and fresh

perspectives. Allow yourself enough time in advance of events/observances to identify/agree on promotional strategy/public message.

Steps: Select spokespersons. Look ahead to opportunities to promote chapter and plan accordingly (upcoming observances/events; national organization campaigns, advocacy efforts, etc.) Understand positions/messages of national office and those of allied organizations, and develop a compatible local version. Chapter members probably have expertise in a range of areas (for example, fire safety, quality improvement, Alzheimer's care, etc.). Develop a roster which lists them and their contact info accordingly. Give it to your chapter spokespersons for reference. However, should the media be interested in talking to any of these experts, call them first and prime them. Only after that has been done should you give the interested reporter their contact information. That way, no one will be caught off guard, prone to saying the wrong thing. Meanwhile, lay the groundwork for your chapter to serve as a source by cultivating media in advance. Start with the health reporter at the most influential news organizations in your area. Set up "informational interviews" at their convenience—pay them a visit, asking their news interests/how they like to receive information for future reference, and offering the expertise/resources of your chapter.

Outcomes: Chapter is organized and poised to conduct media relations effectively; chapter members have an opportunity to be active; chances for enhancing image of chapter/LTC increase.

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Suggestion No. 4
Adopt A Visible Grassroots Cause & Advance It

Suggestion: Adopt a cause with a visible, tangible result that will do two things: bring good to the community; and attract media coverage. Pursue it when the odds are best it will draw coverage; use the coverage to continue chapter promotion.

Method: Focus on helping residents/families, something that will not only boost the image of your chapter, but also that of LTC. The cause could be anything (raising money to reunite families and residents; Xmas gifts for residents; obtaining a sponsor/s to provide residents with computers/training so they can email families, etc.)

Timing: Good "pegs" could be year end holidays, LTC administrator's Week (third week in March), late summer (customarily slow news period), Mother's Day, Father's Day, other national family or health-related observances

Steps: Identify cause; identify residents/families affected; obtain sponsors; identify contacts at local/community newspapers (bigger newspapers: health, community, metro, business editors), allied health care orgs, university programs; write/disseminate a press release announcing the activity recycle news stories, testimonials (highlighting those of beneficiaries of chapter activity) in chapter promotional pieces, on chapter web site; send examples of coverage to legislators; thank sponsors

Outcomes: *Same as Suggestion #2*

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Suggestion No. 5
Highlight Achievements/Testimonials In Your Chapter Promotions

Suggestion: How many total years of professional experience do your chapter members represent? Higher degrees? Certifications? Hours of training? Relevant awards? Other distinctions/achievements? What about testimonials? From patients at member facilities? Families? Attendees/vendors at chapter functions? Prominent community leaders and figures? University professors? Highlighting such information will give your promotional materials authority, distinction, and interest. Ultimately, it will strengthen not only your chapter's image, but also LTC's.

Method: Survey your members. Summarize findings (bulleted format could be one type of presentation). Use summary as prominent "boilerplate" element in all chapter promotional tools, including website. As for testimonials, probably 3-4 would suffice. They only need to be a couple of lines and should speak to the value of your ACHCA chapter. Strive for diverse voices and be sure you obtain written permission to use their testimonials.

Timing: Update this information at least annually.

Steps: Pick a fortuitous time to have the survey results—for example, shortly before Long Term Care Administrators Week. Time the survey accordingly, factoring in the size of the chapter. Once you have the results, kill two birds with one stone: use the results as the basis of a press release (see *Suggestion #2* for guidance on format and dissemination) and develop a summary for all stock information pieces about the chapter. In the release, include a quote by Chapter president that explains the significance of the information (one example: the ACHCA chapter is a tremendous local resource of experience and professionalism in LTC) and sends the message that you are the professional home of the best in long term care and welcome more of the best to join your ranks.

Outcomes: same as *Suggestion # 2*

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Suggestion No. 6
Create A Chapter Speakers Bureau

Suggestion: Identify chapter reps who can speak in public health forums: community health councils, university/college events, on electronic (TV, cable, radio) public affairs programs, at chambers of commerce events, at allied organization gatherings, aging-related public observances, legislative town hall meetings, etc.

Method: Make chapter visible to community leaders officials, the media, and the public.

Timing: Probably the odds are best for speaking in conjunction with aging-related observances. Check well in advance with sources of local community calendars or aging related offices for information about planned events. Or consider sponsoring your own event.

Steps: Budget for speaker travel and incidental expenses, cost of materials. Identify a handful of members to serve as speakers with an eye toward having one cover each major area of your state. Try to pick chapter members with experience and interest at public speaking. Ask each to research possibilities for speaking engagements in their respective communities. If the event at hand relates to something national might be concerned about, find out national's position and work it into the presentation. Ultimately, develop "boilerplate" points, leaving room for the speakers to personalize their presentations, tailor them to local references, and lengthen them according to the requirements of their speaking engagements. Develop packets featuring a press release about the speakers bureau, brief bios of each speaker, as well as a summary description of ACHCA. Disseminate to local print and on-line papers. For each event, set a goal of gathering a set number of names of contacts who could serve the interests of the chapter down the road, potential members, friendly legislators, etc. Clip and use for promotion any media coverage of your appearance. If photographers are at the event, be sure to find out how you can get copies of photos for promotional purposes. Be sure to send a follow-up thank you to the organizers, expressing your interest in returning.

Outcome: Increase chapter visibility, attract new members, draw media coverage, get leads to potential members, increase chapter contacts, increase local chapter presence.

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Suggestion No. 7
An Easy Way To Get In The News

Suggestion: An easy way to get into the news is to write a Letter To The Editor commenting on the latest LTC developments.

Method: Track the news for developments. Make sure you understand it. Decide on one or two significant points(three at most) that you want to make (standard letters are very short). Check with the national office to see if a position has been taken on the matter. Make sure the position you express jibes with national's. In your letter, give the development a local angle.*("What this means for the citizens of our community is . . .")*

Timing: Typically, these types of letters are reactions. Other readers will be reacting, too. Thus, it's important to submit your letter quickly since there will be a competition for space. Usually, the longer you wait to submit your letter, the dimmer become its chances of being published.

Steps: See *Grassroots Advocacy: A Step-By-Step Guide*, pp.10,12,14

Outcomes: Besides publicizing your viewpoint, publication of your Letter To The Editor will promote your chapter as a vital, active, expert, and forceful voice about LTC; position it as a potential information source for reporters; expand and strengthen its public image; and serve the cause of member recruitment.

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Suggestion No. 8
A More Ambitious (But More Substantive) Way To Get In The News

Suggestion: Have a chapter member—as a chapter member--author a consumer newspaper column on LTC.

Method: Convince an editor why readers will be interested; secondly, that the column will be publication quality; lastly, that the author will dependable.

Timing: You might propose a pilot—for example, a weekly column for a month leading up to LTC Administrator's Week, or a limited number of columns pointing toward another relevant national or public observance. Remember that during the summer and end of year holidays, news organizations may be more open to the idea if only as "filler" since news tends to slow then and staff reporters/writers take time off.

Steps: Draft a couple of sample columns (300-400 words). Keep them short and pointed, with a focus on imparting consumer advice. Determine the editor responsible for health coverage and/or health section at the largest regional paper. Write a brief cover letter proposing the column and attach the samples. Key points to make: columns are free and exclusive; why readers would benefit/have interest in reading them; the paper would have first publication rights only, after which they would revert to the chapter; you want the columns to appear with an ACHCA identifier and chapter email. Indicate that you will follow up in a couple of days with a phone call. If you strike an agreement, make sure it's in writing. It's best to submit columns well before deadline in case rewriting is needed. Send clips to officials and lawmakers; use for promotional pieces.

Outcomes: Same as *Suggestion # 2*

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Suggestion No. 9
Web Sites: Warmer Is Better

Suggestion: ACHCA is fundamentally a professional membership society. It's about people. Thus, have your chapter web site show people.

Method: At the least, have your home page and "About Us" sections show pictures of members in action: attending its trade show, meeting with officials, greeting prospective members, etc. As your chapter continues conducting activities, update your web site with them.

Timing: The more current the shots, the better. Refresh your web site regularly.

Steps: For ideas and to get an appreciation of the difference photos can make, check out sites like the Florida or the Michigan chapters'. Redesign or design your site accordingly.

Outcomes: Web site will be more accessible, interesting, and appealing.

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Suggestion No. 10

Sponsor A Photo Contest: Use Winning Shots To Create A Photo Exhibition

Suggestion: An effective way to have the name of your chapter/LTC in the public's mind and the news is to have an exhibition of photos recording life at your members' facilities on display in public places in your communities: town halls, community centers, galleries, main public libraries, etc.

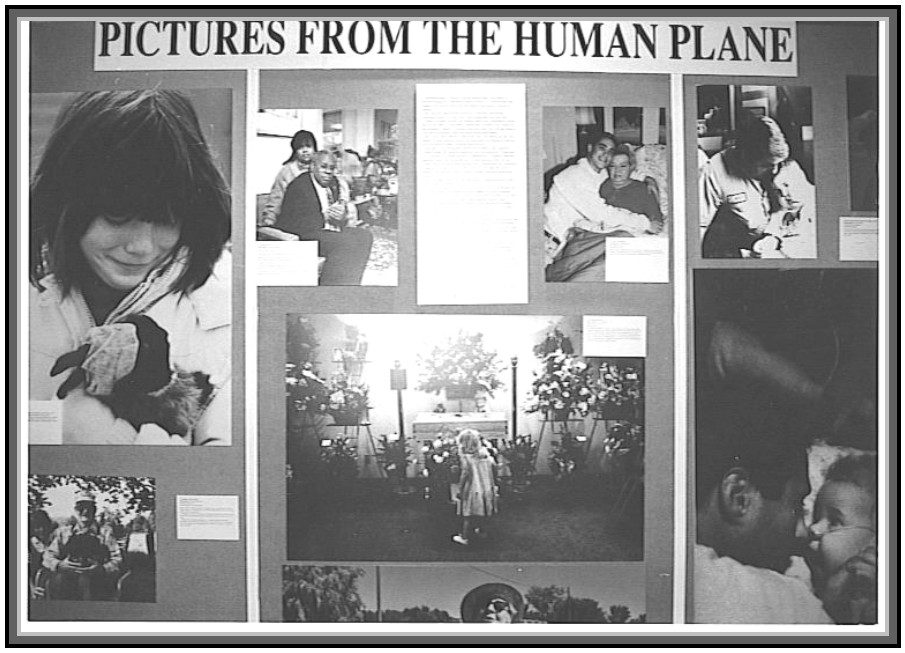
Method: Sponsor a contest to gather the elements for display.

Timing: Can take approximately 4-6 months to carry out. Time things to have the display ready for annual meeting or in conjunction with an important observance like LTC Admin Week.

Steps: Decide rules of the contest (important one: photos are submitted with understanding that they won't be returned and can be used by chapter indefinitely for any/all purposes promoting chapter/ACHCA). Develop necessary releases in consult with lawyer. Establish time frame for the contest with a realistic eye for when the display will actually be ready. Pick judges, including one neutral party, preferably a professional photographer. Decide categories. Some examples: Photographer's Choice, Residents & Pets, Employees & Volunteers In Action; Intergenerational, Family (see following pages). Important: be sure to require photos to be submitted with identifiers and contact info on back of photos and with 200-word contexts which clearly explain the circumstances of each shot. Solicit vendors to sponsor and produce the display. Meet with reps of public sites about having the display in their facilities. Once a site and winning photos have been selected, issue a press release announcing the news (include community leaders, officials, politicians). Find a vendor to create a display where the photos would be enlarged and accompanied by their stories. Title the display overall (see following pages).Turn the unveiling of the display into an event; invite media, community leaders, etc. Recycle the photos for other purposes: chapter web site, promo literature, etc. Recycle the display itself—show it in communities around your respective states.

Outcomes: Build interest, excitement, cohesion in your chapter; promote its name in your communities; attract attention from potential members, media, community members, foster a positive image of long-term care and long-term care administration.

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PICTURES FROM THE HUMAN PLANE


PICTURES FROM THE HUMAN PLANE

Bonus Suggestion

Always Go A Step Further

Suggestion: No matter the promotional efforts, don't be content to simply achieve the stated goals.

Method: Reformat and re-apply any success you achieve, build upon them with an eye toward maximizing their impact.

Timing: Depends on the promotion. In general, it's probably good to reformat and re-apply while the basic activity and its results are still fresh.

Steps: If your chapter gets in the news, be sure to send clips to your local officials and lawmakers. You have a press release prepared about chapter members' achievements? Include it in your recruitment handouts**.** Be sure your print promotional materials are reflected in your chapter web site.

Outcome: Chapter maximizes the benefit of the resources you put into promotion and the impact of its promotional successes.