



# LOCAL NEWSLETTERS

START, IMPROVE AND PUBLISH NOW

## Message FIRST

In today's world, communication is the key to success. The most basic element of a local's public relations program is a newsletter mailed regularly to affiliate members. While television, radio and local newspapers carry the union's voice to decision makers and opinion leaders, a union publication is critical to conveying a local's strategic message to its members at all times.

It is vital to have a publication sent regularly to keep members advised of the local's progress and programs. What is relevant and important to your members is your guide to a successful newsletter. It keeps members informed and increases their interest in the union's activities.

Plan your newsletter and give it a distinctive name. Decide on a newsletter format before you launch your publication and keep it consistent. Prepare an annual publication schedule and stick to it. A newsletter must be sustainable, so be realistic about the amount of content you can consistently produce.

The final product belongs to the Local President. His or her name should appear on the masthead as editor-in-chief. The individual primarily responsible for the newsletter can be listed as the managing editor.

Carefully choose individuals for your newsletter who have skills in writing, design, art or photography. Spread the workload among committee members to ensure high quality levels.

Remember: A good publication is well planned, written, designed, and produced on time, every time.

## The Meat & Potatoes of Content

**N**ewsletters, like homes, are built on solid ground. A basic newsletter should have a message from your Local President, a good lead news story, and shorter news items as appropriate. The objective is to tell your members what is going on in the union and local government, and how policies will affect department funding, benefits, health and safety.

The president's message needs to appear on page one. It is the single most important piece in the newsletter. Generously use content from the IAFF web site, the International Fire Fighter magazine and the IAFF Leader to inform your members about the International's activities. Focus on news, but remember that members love to read articles about themselves.

Be honest and talk about real issues and

not fluff. When writing a news story answer the Who, When, What, Where, Why, and How in the first paragraph of the article. Make sure that the first paragraph carries the most important information and following paragraphs carry details of the story. When in doubt, write like you speak.

A calendar of upcoming events, charity events and political activities is always a winner.

Make sure to edit, copyedit, and proof articles several times before publishing. Look for errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling, and learn from feedback. Always be concerned about how your newsletter reads before you worry about how it looks. Remember that deadlines are sacred, so build in a safety cushion to allow for unexpected delays.

## Design Challenges

**Y**ou don't have to be professional designer to lay out a simple, readable newsletter. If you know how to use a computer, you can design a newsletter. Just keep it simple, consistent and easy to read.

Start by trying a readymade newsletter template available in most word processing software. You can also download them cheaply from the Internet and customize them to suit your needs. It only takes about two hours to lay a four-page newsletter once you have a basic design template ready.

The IAFF has a well recognized and powerful logo that you can use to identify your local as part of the fire fighting profession. If you want your own local logo, you can add your local number and name.

Use a two or three column design with

wide margins and stick to simple fonts. Times, Ariel or Courier fonts are recommended for text and Verdana or Helvetica for headlines. Avoid using more than two types of fonts on a single page.

Tasteful graphics, and photos used generously on every page enhance the appeal to the readers. Mug shots of local presidents and other officials are critical. Simple two colors (black and red OR black and orange) are good combinations.

Printing and mailing a newsletter should be cheap. Check with your local union print shops if it's too big a job for your copier. You can mail a newsletter for as little as 17 cents an issue. Get the required permit as a non profit organization from your local post office.

### ADVERTISEMENTS?

The International neither endorses nor objects to locals running ads. If you choose to run them, be selective and follow these four rules of thumb:

- **Screen carefully** those you allow to advertise in your newsletter. Ensure that the company is union friendly and has no history of contention with a member or the local.
- **Give priority to members** advertising about their special skills and talents.
- **Push the ads** to the back of the newsletter so that they do not steal the main show.
- Ask advertisers to use profits to **support charities** sponsored by the local.

UNION OFFICE ADDRESS: LOCAL AVE. • PH. 555-5555