

Introduction

Establishing Good Neighbor and Community Relations

The wine and winegrape community face increasing challenges as its neighbors and the general public become more concerned about environmental and social issues. California's projected population growth of more than 20 million people in the next 25 years will put a tremendous strain on the state's resources, including water, energy, land, air and environmental quality. In the past couple of years, the headlines in California have demonstrated growing pressure on vineyards and wineries to become better neighbors. Issues vary widely, including treatments for Glassy-winged Sharpshooter, farmworker housing, hillside erosion, oak woodland habitat removal, increased traffic to tasting rooms, and hospitality events that create noise and light pollution.

This guidebook aims to help winegrape growers, vintners and regional associations take a proactive, collaborative approach to environmental and social challenges. It provides general advice as well as specific examples, which demonstrate successful approaches to issues facing more and more members of America's wine and winegrape community.

The communications strategies described in this handbook are only brief descriptions of complex processes. The guide contains only skeletal information, and novices should do additional research or seek professional advice before pursuing further media attention.

This guidebook is a living document. Readers are encouraged to add to it and help it grow. It can be a useful tool to make wine an integral part of the American culture.

Why Collaborate?

The wine community is a vital part of a larger community with diverse interests and varied perspectives. Collaboration is part of respecting the views of neighbors, consumers, environmental groups, and the general public.

Collaboration will bring more positive results than the alternative, confrontation. Dr. Lori Ann Thrupp of the U.S. EPA recommends the following strategies when working with stakeholders on environmental and sustainability issues:

- Build awareness through information exchange: increase understanding of diverse stakeholders' views, interests and visions;

- Establish informal or formal networking links;

- Identify common aims or mutual interests (as well as areas of difference) to work toward a goal;

- Increase cooperation on sustainable management of resources and/or environmental responsibility;

- Improve business opportunities through increased stakeholder involvement on environmental issues.

Collaboration will raise your credibility and legitimacy, increasing the public's trust and accountability. It will also make you more knowledgeable about the issues and diverse points of view. Collaboration leads to richer input, yielding more creative and constructive solutions.

Telling Your Story

The wine and winegrape community has a story to tell — one that will foster understanding and appreciation of its role in the community. Telling the story involves doing research, understanding and targeting an audience, developing a message, and delivering that message in a clear, honest, persistent fashion.

The primary factor in an effective communications strategy is developing positive relationships. Whether you are communicating with your neighbor, a county supervisor, or a news reporter, your relationship counts. It must be based on honesty and it should be proactive, not defensive. You have a good story to tell. Most people just want to understand the facts, so make sure you're providing them with the truth. Tell it like it is, not like you want it to be.

Doing the Research

The first step in developing an effective outreach strategy is understanding the mood of the community. This step involves research and legwork. Don't trust your own personal opinion.

Researching the community's mood can take the form of a formal questionnaire, informal or scientific polling, one-on-one interviews, or visiting with folks at the coffee shop or local service clubs.

It's also important to know your adversaries. Find out who they are, how they operate, what they want, and where you might have common ground. Read the news coverage of their activities, study their publications, learn how their opinions are shaped, and talk to them. Perhaps most important, listen carefully to what they are saying!

Reaching Your Audience

Who are your audiences? Neighbors? News media? Lawmakers? Environmental groups? Labor groups? Government regulators? Scientists? The general public? Each audience requires specific communication tools.

Start with your neighbors. Develop a plan to build relationships with them and maintain steady, positive contact with them.

Reach the news media, and eventually the general public, through press releases, interviews, special events, public speaking, editorial board meetings, op-eds and letters to the editor, vineyard and winery tours, newsletters and the

Internet.

Meet with government officials on a regular basis. Participate in local, regional and state organizations, such as the California Association of Winegrape Growers, Wine Institute and Family Winemakers of America to reach lawmakers and regulators.

Hold meetings with environmental or labor leaders in "neutral" places or invite them to tour your operations. Seek common ground and try to develop mutual goals. Include them as stakeholders in your decision-making.

Decide who your audiences are and develop communication strategies for each of them.

Identifying Your Message

Once you have targeted a specific audience, develop a message that will provide a constructive connection. Your message must be honest, interesting and backed up with the facts. Be specific. Be relevant. Stick to the point. Use examples.

Robert Mondavi Winery published a brochure highlighting its "Natural Winegrowing" philosophy and practices. It provides very specific information about different aspects of winemaking, from grape to glass, including practices that protect the health and safety of workers, community and the environment. Specifics on vineyard management include:

- Integrated Pest Management, with information on what it is, how it works, and how Cal-EPA has recognized Mondavi's leadership in this area;

- Planting cover crops that improve the land's natural fertility, control erosion and host beneficial insects;

- Creating a biodiverse habitat in the vineyard by planting trees and other vegetation to attract beneficial insects and predators;

- Conserving soil through composting and manual weeding; and

- Conserving water and water sources.

Mondavi's message is effective because it is specific, truthful and it responds to the interests of neighbors, regulators, lawmakers, and the consuming public.

Reaching the News Media

The first thing to keep in mind in working productively with the news media is that reporters want something newsworthy to write about. You can start by developing your message and by examining what you hope to accomplish by getting media attention.

See [What is Newsworthy?](#)

The next step is choosing the right tools to communicate. According to Mike Miller of Brown-Miller Communications, your communications effort might include one, two or all of the following tools:

- Press releases

- Press Kits

- Press Conferences

- Interviews

- Editorial Board Meetings

- Media Events

- Op-eds and letter to the editor

Writing a Press Release

The press release is a short, factual description of, or point of view on, an event or issue prepared for the media. Keep it to one or two pages, and make sure it's newsworthy. It can announce a special event, present a position on specific issues, or deliver facts on the status of harvest, weather effects, production practices, conservation measures, etc.

The essentials of a press release are:

- Who?

- What?

- When?

- Where?

- Why?

- How?

Be sure to include contact information on the top of the press release (name and phone numbers) and don't forget the date. Every news release should contain the phrase, "For Immediate Release." Under the heading, start the release with a headline that is quick, catchy and explanatory.

The first paragraph of the press release must clearly state the main point of your issue or event in an interesting manner. A reporter might not get past the first paragraph if it doesn't capture enough interest, so don't bury the punch line at the bottom.

Fill in the rest of the release with all the pertinent facts on the issue. Use quotes. Use short sentences. Keep the words active, easy and personal. Be factual. Be concise.

Distribute your release carefully — to the right people, at the right time, and with the proper follow-up.

Creating a Press Kit

A press kit is a collection of related printed material (releases, fact sheets, photos, speeches, background materials, etc.) provided to the media for their publication, broadcast or background use. The kit is a useful hand-out for a tour, special event, press conference or meeting.

Holding a Press Conference

The press conference is an event for the media to communicate information about an idea, activity or program. It enables reporters to ask questions and pursue their areas of interest in a subject. It can take place anywhere — in a room, in front of a building, in a vineyard or at a winery. The location will depend on the information you want to convey.

Start by sending a brief news advisory, with contact information, informing the audience of the purpose, place, time, date and principal participants in the event.

The conference should start with a brief opening statement, brief introductions of key participants, and then short remarks (less than 5 minutes) by each participant. Finish by inviting questions from the media.

Granting an Interview

An interview is the basic tool of news gathering. It is not a conversation. The reporter wants news, and you can provide expertise and insight to make the story complete. The reporter may ask tough questions and it's easy to feel defensive. Don't be. Answer the questions honestly and convey your message. Use it as an opportunity to disseminate the message you have carefully developed. The California Farm Bureau Federation offers the following tips on interviews:

- Make the interview worthwhile. Tell your story!

- Deliver key points.

- Don't get angry with a reporter.

- Challenge efforts to put words into your mouth.

- Don't be evasive. "No comment" signals you have something to hide.

- There's no such things as "off the record."

- Always consider microphones and cameras to be "on."

- If you don't know the answer, say so, and then offer to find the answer.

- Be reachable for follow-up.

- Return calls promptly.

- Tell the truth. A half-truth is a lie.

- Be positive!

Visiting the Editors

Editorial meetings can be helpful to inform newspapers, radio and television programs about significant issues. The editorial meeting should take place at the newspaper office or radio or television station. It may involve the entire editorial staff or a couple of reporters.

Keep the meeting brief. Provide as much printed material as possible (by now you've already developed a good press kit.) If you can't answer a question, say so, and promise to get back to them with an answer. As always, be honest and positive.

Showing Appreciation

Many state and regional associations build media relations by staging special events. These can be farm tours, media appreciation dinners, awards banquets to recognize an outstanding reporter, or informal backyard barbecues.

Have articulate leaders of your community there, prepared to help deliver your message. The relationships that develop at these events will likely lead to news stories in the future. Hand out your press kit and send them home with a nice bottle of wine!

See Clarify Definitions

Working with Regulators

Some people from the government really are there to help. You just have to find them. The California Environmental Protection Agency offers a variety of grants, available to the wine and winegrape community, to encourage environmental stewardship. The Winegrape Pest Management Alliance (PMA), comprised of grower organizations from across the state, receives \$100,000 a year from Cal-EPA to support adoption of reduced-risk pest management. The California Association of Winegrape Growers is responsible for implementing the project, which focuses on sustainable sulfur application and reduced-risk weed management.

Winegrape growers led the list of "natural" innovators honored in 2000 for their work in integrated pest management (IPM.) Cal-EPA's Department of Pesticide Regulation recognized the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association, Vino Farms, and Wente Vineyards for work ranging from harboring beneficial insects to replacing pre-emergence herbicides with mechanical, cultural and post-emergence alternatives.

DPR Pest Management Grants went to UC Cooperative Extension in Monterey County (\$15,451 for "Demonstration of Vineyard Floor Management Alternatives"); Central Coast Vineyard Team (\$30,000 for "Reduced-Risk Vineyard Practices"); and Sonoma County Grape Growers Association (\$30,000 for "Promotion of Vineyard and Pest Disease Management and Reduced-Risk Pest Management Practices in Sonoma County.")

Cal-EPA is working with two wineries, Davis Bynum and Benziger Family Winery, on pilot projects to develop an Environmental Management System (EMS) for their vineyards and wineries. Both participants are developing sustainable agricultural practices to produce biodiversity and soil health. The pilot projects will test the theory that as environmental quality increases, so does the uniqueness and flavor of the wine and the ability of the vines to remain healthy. The participation of both wineries in the Sonoma Green and Bay Area Green Business Programs is a unique aspect of the pilot. These programs certify businesses that are in compliance with all environmental laws and are operating beyond compliance by implementing pollution prevention and resource conservation activities.

The Central Coast Vineyard Team also received a \$250,000 grant from the State Water Resources Control Board to fund a three-year project addressing non-point source pollution. The CCVT will establish demonstration sites aimed at reducing sediment and nutrient loss, and then monitor the effectiveness of the methods used. Members of the Central Coast viticulture industry contributed matching funds of 40 percent.

The California Department of Conservation issued \$2 million in grants to enable Resource Conservation Districts around the state to kick-start efforts that lead to cleaner water, scenic preservation and improved natural wildlife habitat.

UC's Sustainable Agricultural Resource Education Program (SAREP) also issues grants, with details posted on its web site at www.sarep.ucdavis.edu.

These programs not only provide the funds to launch sound environmental programs, but also add credibility to your efforts. They give official recognition that you can incorporate into your message.

Collaborating with Stakeholders

See Who Are Stakeholders?

"Upholding sustainability means inclusion of community interests and accountability to the public," according to Dr. Lori Ann Thrupp of the EPA's Agricultural Initiative. She urges the wine and winegrape community to learn what motivates stakeholders and be proactive in dealing with them.

"Work on significant changes," Thrupp advises, "Don't just modify the image or advertising." She provides the following tips on collaborating with stakeholders:

- Include local, regional, state or national stakeholders, depending on priorities and concerns to be addressed. Try to pick cooperative, non-contentious individuals.

- Stakeholders can be active members in a committee or groups (preferred), or serve as advisors (less desirable.)

- Invite stakeholders early in the process and build cooperation, trust and shared vision throughout the process.
- Encourage open participation and consensus. (Independent facilitation helps achieve this goal.)
- Strive for balance, seek win-win approaches.
- Assure credibility (use third-party if necessary.)
- Clarify who, what, when, why, where and how you are working together (just like the press release!)
- Clarify terms and goals. Don't rely on assumptions about definitions, principles, values, standards, or process.
- Be specific. Avoid generalities.
- Be truthful. Do not overstate your case or make exaggerated claims.
- Find common ground. Collaborate and communicate.

Kari Birdseye of Wine Institute says there are many organizations that can help the wine community find common ground with environmental, labor and neighborhood interests. Wine Institute is already working with the following groups, among others, to promote sustainability:

California Environmental Dialogue — a collaborative process where representatives from environmental, business and regulatory stakeholders are working to address the issues of environmental and economic balances for the state.

California Council for Environmental Balance — a unique coalition of business and labor, working on long-term balance in the state.

California Futures Network — an organization focused on growth issues at the state government level.

The result of successful collaboration with stakeholders, according to Dr. Thrupp, should be increased credibility, trust

and bottom-line business interests.

Final Thoughts

Success means being proactive. Procrastination won't make it any easier to deal with difficult issues.

Don't Wait!

Act Now!