

What Do Women See When They Look at Your Organization?

by Kathleen Loehr

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Imagine the following scenario: A woman just heard about your organization for the first time. Perhaps a friend mentioned your work to her, or a piece from your recent marketing campaign made an impression. Your mission intrigues her. She wants to know more and – maybe – get involved.

Like most of us these days, her first step is to hop online and run a quick search. She browses your organization's website, clicks through your leadership pages and even scrolls through your social media accounts.

What Do Women See

What does she see? Does your organization's public face pull her closer? Or push her away? When she looks at your marketing materials, your website, your social media presence and your leadership, does she see herself and what she cares about reflected back to her?

Women will look at your organization and read or listen to your words carefully to decide if they want to get involved. Many will notice and care if women are reflected equally. If we want women to give generously to our organizations, the first impression we make matters. Does your organization's public face suggest that women's offerings (of time, money and leadership) are welcomed and valued?

If you're not sure of the answer to that question, it may be time for a close look in the mirror.

5 Steps to Make Your Organization's Public Face Welcoming to Women

Do an Informal Audit

Where to begin? The simplest first step is to conduct a baseline, quantitative evaluation of your public face. This audit does not need to be a formal one, nor a review of the whole organization if it is a large one. You might start with just the website or only the development department's marketing collateral.

Ideally, a woman (or women) with an objective lens can conduct the audit and report back her findings. Depending on your organization, that might mean an intern, a team of staff (including those who did not create the audited materials), a task force of women stakeholders or an outside communications firm.

You'll want to look at the types and frequency of visuals and language presented. Note the number of:

- Photos and stories of women vs. men
- Photos and stories about many women – including women of different races, ethnicities, abilities and gender expression
- Headlines about women and their accomplishments, (vs. women are only in the body of the article)
- Awards given to women vs. men
- Stories specifically about women volunteers and donors and the impact they are making

Evaluate Your Leadership

Your audit can also look at leadership. Reflect on whether the frequency of women leaders you find is proportional to your stakeholder population now and in the likely future. Note the number of:

- Women on the board or other volunteer leadership groups
- Women on the leadership staff

This initial audit will likely reveal both long-term goals and “low-hanging fruit.” The audit may raise awareness around a need to diversify leadership. This is a valuable finding, although one that will require significant and sustained effort to change. Alternatively, being more overt with the photos of current women leaders on your website or posting stories from women leaders about their experiences with your nonprofit are easy wins.

Ask Women Stakeholders

This step will provide a qualitative baseline sense of “what is.” You can further your understanding of women’s perceptions by directly asking women stakeholders for their thoughts. Include women who know your organization deeply as well as those who are newer to the fold and more likely to recall their first impressions.

Asking questions of women will provide rich, qualitative information. When we listen to others and open our own thinking, we end up testing our conscious or unconscious assumptions. Asking high-quality questions and really paying attention to the answers will uncover how your women stakeholders see you and how they see themselves connecting with your organization now and in the future.

Try Surveys or Interviews

Consider creating a survey or conducting interviews to collect this information. This process can be done in-house or run by an external contractor. Some potential questions might include:

- What resonates most with you about our organization? Why is that important to you?
- What do you see in our public face? What do you look for?

- As you think of us, what words, visuals or feelings come to mind?
- Where do you go to learn about our organization? To your peers? Your network? The website? Social media? Newsletters?
- Have you recently told anyone else about our organization? If so, what information did you share?
- What type of communication from us would deepen your understanding and support?

Act, Track And Follow Up

After conducting an audit and asking questions of women, you will have a much better understanding of how women perceive your organization's public face. You will have uncovered both strengths in your current approach and areas for improvement. You may have unleashed a desire for transformative change to your communication style or found only a few tweaks you wish to make.

Either way, be sure to pair your actions with clear benchmarks that will allow you to track and report on progress. Metrics to support your efforts might include X% increase in:

- Number of photos of women vs. men shown in your newsletters, marketing materials, website, and/or social media accounts
- Number of stories about women in general, and women leaders, featured in your newsletters, marketing materials, website, and/or social media accounts
- Number of women recipients of awards/honors given by your organization
- Number of women on your decision-making boards and councils

Review your Direct Impact of Giving Stories

[In another post](#), I describe women's general preference for empathy-driven, impact-focused communication. Given this inclination, you might also design benchmarks around the number of public materials that include stories about the direct impact of giving (on both recipients and the donors) with language that includes empathy and connection, in addition to reporting the facts.

Reporting and Round Two

As you make incremental changes, report back to those who contributed their time and input to your efforts. Consider a second round of surveys or interviews after 6 months or a year of iterative improvements. Use these responses to confirm the changes you've made have had the desired impact and to inform any necessary course corrections. In the future, when you develop new materials, test them with these women and others to be sure they resonate. This sustained follow up will demonstrate your organizational commitment to women's voices.

Also report back across your institution to other leaders and colleagues. Consider collaborations with other departments to create communications and experiences that speak to women. Integration is critical to sustain your changes and make the inclusion of women a consistent part of your strategies.

Take a Look in the Mirror

We want our organizational public face to allow women donors to imagine themselves as welcomed and valued contributors. Is it time for your organization to “take a look in the mirror” and reassess how you appear to women? Intentional and incremental efforts – auditing and asking, followed by acting, tracking and follow up – will bring your best face forward with each impression you make.

You can learn more about how women give and designing communication and fundraising plans that will resonate in Kathleen Loehr’s book, [Gender Matters: A Guide to Growing Women’s Philanthropy](#).