



CASE STUDY: BEST PRACTICES

West Valley Fine Arts Council



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I. Background

Organization Name/Location:	West Valley Fine Arts Council 387 Wigwam Boulevard Litchfield Park, Arizona 85340
Year Founded:	1969
Year Incorporated:	1969
Annual Budget:	\$900,000

Mission Statement: The mission of the West Valley Fine Arts Council is to enhance, develop and promote quality arts opportunities and arts education for everyone in the West Valley.

II. Project Description

West Valley Fine Arts Council (WVFAC) is committed to presenting high quality programming that reflects the cultural diversity of the West Valley region of suburban Phoenix. WVFAC provides access to the arts particularly for families, and promotes the educational value of the arts through schools and throughout the entire community. It is interesting to note that West Valley does not have its own presenting spaces or classrooms. Its programs are held at a variety of locations throughout the western suburbs of Phoenix as well as in schools.



Mariachi Dancer

For them, the arts includes an array of Mariachis, Cowboy ballad singers, hip hop dancers, as well as more traditional mediums such as ballet, theater, opera and the symphony. Their season includes a wide array of programs, including concerts, plays, dance performances, which attract a large audience. In addition they produce a number of festivals such as a Native American

Arts Festival, a Jazz Festival, and an Art Show and Sale. With this wide array of programming, WVFAC has been able to expand audiences to include both residents as well as tourists. Their more informal cultural events are favored by most attendees especially families with children. In the past the Arts Council's marketing efforts have been aimed at attracting large audiences, mainly at well established events.



Folklore Singers

The West Valley is geographically, culturally, ethnically and economically diverse with a population that is 44% Hispanic, 6% Black, and 1% Native American. There is a large military presence since the Council is just a few miles from Luke Air Force Base. The area is also a home to a new retirement community. Current data suggests that the market area has a somewhat lower than average percentage of residents who represent a typical arts audience, and they are more likely to favor ethnic and popular cultural programs such as festivals and celebrations. The family composition of the region suggests that family programming would also attract a large potential audience.

With the large and growing Hispanic population in the region, WVFAC needed more aggressive efforts to reach this audience segment with appropriate programming. This is a demographic that is English speaking, have pre-school to junior high age children, and occasionally attend arts functions. The Hispanic community in the West Valley looks for enriching activities for the family and seeks out culturally diverse events that incorporate, but are not limited to, Hispanic-oriented events. They perceive the arts as expensive and requiring a lot of planning and time commitment.

To begin, WVFAC looked to community leaders to help build a bridge to the Hispanic community. They wanted to position themselves as a source for community arts activities that are fun and enriching for children. They strongly encouraged Hispanic West Valley families to come to WVFAC events, especially the Art and Learning Expo, two children's theater performances, Jazz Festival, Native American Arts Festival, Mariachi Mini-Fest, Phoenix Symphony Pops Concert and Children's summer arts camp. To accomplish this, West Valley Arts Council provided rave quotes from reviews of events, easy to read maps for each West Valley location, fun and colorful illustrations of the whole family enjoying events, and a multi-cultural audience as part of their marketing efforts. However, WVFAC has had limited success in this particular enterprise.

This was due in part to a past communication campaign that was constantly reinventing the Council with a new look and theme. In the past, graphic designers were enlisted to develop cornerstone pieces while the staff press relations coordinator created smaller show-by-show flyers, programs, etc. The emphasis had been on press relations, and WVFAC had prior success in placing feature stories in various Valley periodicals, radio stations, and television stations. While these communication efforts proved to be successful in raising awareness of the events and selling tickets, they did not create a strong consistent image for WVFAC, and failed to maximize potential audiences, by targeting communications to a specific audience.

Through a grant from the National Arts Marketing Project, West Valley Arts Council hired Raul Aguirre, one of the founders of the Tucson Mariachi Conference, with the

intent on making what would normally be a small event at a local high school into a major event. "Mariachi Espectacular" was intended to attract a family oriented Hispanic audience in West Valley. WVFAC wanted to present the one music that tied all Hispanic audiences together, whether they were recently from Mexico or had lived in the USA for several generations. The plan was to use electronic media to deliver this message. At the same time, WVFAC emphasized their educational program, and the importance of building knowledge and pride about the Mariachi heritage among students everywhere. The original plan was to hold the event at Agua Fria High School for a small audience (approximately 300) featuring a well known Mariachi group. The performance would be augmented with a local Mariachi band and a local Ballet Folclorico group. There would also be craft and food booths around the auditorium.



The singers enjoy the crowd's enthusiasm

III. Strategies for Implementation

While planning for this event, West Valley Fine Arts Council discovered that they were competing with other major Hispanic events like Cinco de Mayo and Dia del Ninos. These competitors presented several obstacles. Cinco de Mayo had sewed up most of the sponsors and Hispanic media was overrun with advertisements about Cinco de Mayo celebrations. With these issues in mind, the arts council was able to develop their strategy.

- They positioned themselves as a kick off for the Cinco de Mayo celebrations.
- They included Dia de el Ninos in their advertising and planned several Ballet Folclorico pieces that included children.
- They had Mariachi Masses at two local churches the day of the event, and sold tickets after the service.
- Local organizations were involved in selling tickets, and were given \$1 for every ticket sold.
- West Valley Arts Council made education a major part of the event, and scheduled Mariachi workshops and Ballet Folclorico workshops at five local schools.
- People were also informed that educational services would increase in the future, since the objective was to get Mariachi music into the curriculum at West Valley Schools.

The Hispanic audience was targeted locally and across the Valley, and encouraged families by keeping ticket prices low (\$10) and making kids free. Tickets were handled by Ticketmaster, which has locations around the city.

The goal? Attract 3,000 attendees.

WVFAC's marketing consultant helped to develop ads for the Hispanic print media as well as one for the major English language newspaper, and PSA's in both English and Spanish for radio and television. There was much effort put in to ensure that no one Spanish speaking radio or TV station would have exclusive advertising and all stations would run the ads. The consultant was also able to secure a number of free

announcements from advertising clients, while PAX-TV was enlisted to run English language ads.

The message was that the event featured top talent and entire families were encouraged to attend. The event would also be professional, affordable, and fun, and tickets were easily accessible at Ticketmaster outlets, or could be bought at the door. The venue was also accessible to the Hispanic audience.

Because of the NAMP grant, there were changes reported to the initial plan. WVFAC initiated their Hispanic marketing effort earlier than they had originally planned, and with a larger event and more vigorous campaign. It was reported that it took a lot more time, and money, but not necessarily more staff since WVFAC was able to rely on the outside consultant. The budget went from \$24,000 to \$65,000, but the West Valley Arts Council was able to find sponsors to fill the added costs.

IV. Results

WVFAC took a big risk in adding a large, new program at an untested market. Financially, the Festival broke even in its first year. Additionally the Arts Council did in fact reach their goal of 3,000 attendees despite the other competing events. The best news was that the Mariachi festival positioned the West Valley Arts Council to become a regional leader.

Because of this initial success, West Valley Arts Council budgeted the event to be even bigger in future years. They received a grants or sponsorship commitments from the Phoenix Arts Commission, American Express and APS. Local municipalities, including the cities of Tolleson, Avondale, Glendale and Phoenix committed funds to the project as did Quaker Oats as a corporate sponsor.

V. An Update

Mariachi Fest was repeated the next year but, unfortunately, plans for a third festival are on the shelf for a variety of reasons, despite drawing another 3,000 visitors. First, there was dissention between the consultant and WVFAC over who owned WVFAC's festival. Since the consultant had already run such a festival in Tucson, he believed he had ownership, making it impossible for West Valley to run another festival without his consent.



Inspiring music for everyone

Additionally, while Tucson has a very large Spanish-speaking population, they are more likely to be recent immigrants who are Spanish dominant. Phoenix's Hispanic population is more likely to be second and third generation, or more, without the reliance on the Spanish language. Consequently, demand for Mariachi is not as high in the Phoenix area. WVFAC is considering either running the festival every few years, or simply mixing mariachi into its normal programming. In its first attempt at this, WVFAC booked a well-known mariachi band in 2001, but had to cancel the performance when the band was unable to travel from Orlando after 9/11.

The staff at WVFAC has also met with other local and regional arts organizations to consider collaborating on a more broad-based family festival that might include

mariachi but also TexMex and other forms of Hispanic/Mexican/American music. This time, they are taking care to define each organization's role in this new collaboration, and to define the relationship with sponsors. WVFAC has been approached by Phoenix government officials and a local Hispanic advertising agency as well who are both interested in keeping the festival alive. They are also considering moving the festival around the Phoenix area from year to year. WVFAC is first and foremost an educational organization so their main interest is doing any kind of collaborative festival would be the educational aspects. WVFAC has a long track record of getting musicians into the schools.

One reason for this change of venue is that the original venue for Mariachi Fest, Desert Sky, is not a venue frequented by Hispanics and frankly is not considered Hispanic friendly.

VI. Conclusions

West Valley Arts Council learned that there is a difference in marketing to the Hispanic audience, particularly that the communications pieces require more energy, color and emotion than usual. Also, like it is with all ethnic communities, the program itself is very important. Finally, educational programs for youth are critical.

In fact, while WVFAC learned several years ago via focus groups that Hispanics wanted arts programs especially for the children. However, managing the Mariachi Fest taught WVFAC that Hispanic parents simply want their children to have exposure to excellent arts experiences, not necessarily Hispanic things only.

WVFAC is working on developing a new cultural center on 5 acres of land in the West Valley where it would have classroom space as well as an open air theatre. The new space also will house an art gallery as well as administrative office space.

Through participation in the NAMP Audience Development Training Program, West Valley Arts Council has been able to improve their planning, and now has a much better understanding of marketing terms and strategy. They also have the tools to make grant proposals more business-like, improving their sponsorship proposal success rate. In addition, WVFAC now possesses a greater understanding of what goes into designing a marketing strategy. This has helped develop broader support throughout the organization for the marketing programs.