

Telephone Trees

Engagement range	Inform/Consult
Difficulty level	Easy
Cost	Low (up to \$1,000)
When might you use it	To showcase product, plan, policy To communicate an issue To discover community issues To develop action plan
Number of people required to help to organise	A small team of people may be required (three -five people)
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months) Long (over six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Staff or volunteers; Telephone; Agreed lists of names and phone numbers
Innovation level	Low

Description

Telephone trees allow a message to be conveyed by a number of people simultaneously when it is necessary to speak to a large number of people quickly about an event, issue or proposal.

Telephone trees rely on each person on a committee undertaking to telephone a number of specific people. These may be those people who cannot be reached by email, or those who check their email infrequently but who need to know urgently. If one person calls 10 people, and each of those 10 calls another 10 people, you can reach a hundred people with only two 'rounds' of calls.

Another way of organising a telephone tree is for each person to agree to telephone one person, and that person telephones one person, and so on, so that the message is spread sequentially, and no one person has to spend their time or money making a number of calls. An agreed message can then be spread quite quickly, and the expense and/or time involved in telephoning can be shared by all members of the committee.

Electronic telephone tree products are now available commercially that provide organisations with the opportunity to deliver information to each member of a group with the push of a button. The telephone then automatically continues to dial and deliver the messages to each of the designated numbers.

The main drawback is that the automated voice delivers the message regardless of who picks up the telephone, and there is no way of ensuring that the message gets to the intended recipient. As well, an electronic message option which allows a large number of telephones to be reached is sending messages from one computer to a number of mobile telephones using text messaging. This is helpful where a team of workers all have mobile telephones out in the field.

Objective

- To reach a number of people by telephone in the shortest possible time.

Desired Outcome

- Ensures that people have been given a message or piece of information, so that there is a clear understanding of the issue, and of how many people have been informed.

Uses/Strengths

- Allows a group to reach all those who need quick notification of an event or proposal, and to reach them quickly by telephone.
- Can allow a quick survey of people's responses to the event or proposal at the same time that people are notified.
- Ensures that people have heard about an important event, because you have immediate confirmation when you speak to them.
- Can be useful in community emergencies (e.g. closure of schools caused by severe weather conditions).

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- This is more costly and time consuming than sending one email to an electronic mailing list.
- Telephoning may involve some time if the caller has to keep calling until they reach their targeted audience.
- Electronic telephone trees deliver their messages via an automated voice which may not reach the desired recipient.

Step by Step Guide

1. Decide if the issue or proposal is important enough to require urgent notification.
2. If urgent notification is required, you might combine email mailing lists and telephone trees to reach all affected people.
3. Starting with a core group or organising committee, agree on who will telephone whom, and ensure that names and telephone numbers are correct.
4. If in a work situation, people may telephone from their own desks or in an emergency or polling situation, a bank of telephones may be set up with operators working through their agreed lists. If in a volunteer situation, volunteers may telephone from their own homes or from an organisation's office or shopfront.
5. When all those on the list have been telephoned, and especially when it is vital that all those affected are reached, callers should report back to the organising committee who can take other steps to contact anyone who has not been able to be reached.