

Application: 3885

Beacon College Salon Speaker Series 2023-2024

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Beacon College Salon Speaker Series 2023-2024

Division and Category Selection

Division A - Public Relations Programs > A01 Community Relations

Organization Overview

Beacon College, a nonprofit liberal arts school serving 515 students, is America's first accredited baccalaureate school dedicated to educating neurodivergent students. In 2017, Beacon College launched its Beacon Salon Speaker Series, featuring a mix of regional and national speakers, authors and experts. Serving as the College's educational outreach, the monthly programming event invites the Central Florida community to partake in lifelong learning at the feet of respected scholars, to enrich their souls through the beauty and vibrancy of visual and performing arts, and to weigh new perspectives on old issues through lectures from breakthrough authors and national speakers. Each event features a free catered meal and a 60-minute presentation.

50-Word Summary

Beacon College's Salon Speaker Series features a mix of regional and national speakers, authors and experts. Serving as the College's educational outreach to the local community, the monthly event includes a 60-minute presentation and a free catered meal.

Defining the Problem (5 points)

Beacon College, a nonprofit liberal arts school serving 515 students, is America's first accredited baccalaureate school dedicated to educating neurodivergent students. With a small alumni pool, the College relies on building a donor base of affinity groups with interest in learning differences (ADHD, dyslexia, etc.). Therefore, one key target audience for donations are 55+ local seniors.

In 2017, Beacon College launched its Salon Speaker Series, featuring a mix of regional and national speakers, authors and experts. Serving as the College's educational outreach to the local community, the monthly programming event features a free catered meal and a 60-minute presentation. Prior to COVID-19, monthly attendance averaged 200 attendees. The 2022-2023 season average monthly attendance was 168. The Salon Speaker Series programs kick-off in August and conclude in April.

With the College's \$12 million capital campaign going into its public phase during Season 7 of the Speaker Series, the College needed to raise awareness about the Salon Series to court the target audience for donor prospecting. Through research, the target audience is shown to be ideal for donations; however, because they had no reason to visit campus, engaging these potential donors was challenging.

The purpose of the 2023-2024 Salon Speaker Series campaign was to raise visibility (and build community affinity) and increase monthly attendance — thereby, increasing the potential donor population for annual giving and donations. Prior to this integrated campaign, the Salon Speaker Series primarily relied on brochure distributions at Salon events and word-of-mouth efforts to build attendance and donor support.

Employed Research Methods (5 points)

We utilized secondary research from Census data and other online sources regarding The Villages, Florida, which is in geographic proximity to Beacon College. Census information showed there are over 130,000 residents who are educated (97.8% high school grads; 42.3% college-educated) and affluent (94.4% own housing unit with median housing unit value of \$346,900), and thus had the potential to make major donations to the school. According to World Population Review, the average household income in The Villages is more than \$92,127.

Additionally, political affiliation has been shown as a contributing identifier for sizeable donations, and according to the Tampa Bay Times, more than 75% of The Villages are registered as Republican. As an Apply blog post noted, Republicans tend to give more often and give larger donations – key considerations when expanding the potential donor base.

Pew Research Center research found 74% of adults consider themselves lifelong learners – the ideal audience for the Salon Speaker Series, and 35% of adults attended an event to learn new information. According to the American Psychological Association, 58% of lifelong learners say learning made them feel connected to their community, a key component when developing relationships for donor giving.

Goal-Directed Strategic Thinking (5 points)

The goal of the 2023-2024 Salon Speaker Series integrated campaign was to raise visibility to drive community attendance at the nine speaker events to reach pre-COVID attendance levels particularly among the target audience of The Villages, Florida while increasing event donations to condition Village attendees into being amenable for more significant donor giving such as the college's annual campaign, Giving Tuesday, and its 35th anniversary giving campaign. This goal ties directly to the College's Strategic Plan with a specific goal of establishing a sustained healthy balance of revenue sources for college operations and investments by relaunching and successfully completing a \$12 million capital campaign.

S.M.A.R.T. Objectives (5 points)

The 2023-2024 objectives were 1.) increase community awareness of the Salon Speaker Series leading to a change in behavior measured by increased registrations for each monthly event to pre-COVID levels of at least 200 attendees per event 2.) increase donations through online and onsite giving by 20% for the year compared to the 2022-2023 Salon Series donations (some attendees donate one large annual gift while other attendees donate at each event; therefore, comparing year-over-year donations is more applicable).

Strategies & Tactics Distinguished (5 points)

The strategies included developing and executing a multi-faceted integrated campaign utilizing paid and organic channels to strengthen the Salon Speaker Series brand positioning among The Villages target audience. The Beacon College Office of College Communications (staff of two) utilized public relations, social media, email marketing, and paid media to promote the Series' nine events throughout the 2023-2024 academic year for the campaign.

The tactics included graphic design for all the campaign elements (hired a designer for the brochure, Beacon produced other elements); drafting news releases and event reminders for news distribution, executing organic social media elements; executing paid advertising through a Villages media outlet, and development of a new donor sponsorship opportunity.

The trifold brochure was the driving graphic element throughout the campaign. Its pop art theme provided the style for all other graphic elements and served as a springboard for "pop"-related wordplay in the collateral. With the 55+ age demographic, the printed trifold brochure allowed them to easily share the Salon events. Many attendees took multiple brochures to deliver to their 55+ community centers.

The monthly posters greeted the attendees at the entrance and promoted the next speakers. Flyers promoting upcoming events stood in acrylic holders on the tables.

Email drove registrations. Beacon College utilizes Constant Contact as the email platform and Qgiv as the registration/donation system. At the beginning of the Salon Speaker Series season, the email database included approximately 550 contacts. By season's end, the list swelled to more than 1,000 contacts.

For each event, social media posts were generated including registration links. Platforms included Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

Paid advertisements were placed in The Villages Property Owners Association tabloid sent to every resident in The Villages (64,150 homes), which generated many new registrations. Additionally, an ad was placed in the Triangle News Leader Winter Wonderland supplement targeting seniors returning to Central Florida.

Although local news coverage is difficult to secure due to limited media outlets, news releases were emailed for each event.

A new sponsorship program was developed to help boost donations. The sponsorship flyer was included in email promotions and distributed onsite.

Audience Identification (5 points)

The target audience is local residents 55+ in age with disposable income living in The Villages and surrounding senior communities and interested in lifelong learning opportunities. About 75% of The Villagers are registered as Republican; therefore, the residents tend to express more conservative values and beliefs and prefer to attend speakers with those same viewpoints.

Informed by secondary research, these communication vehicles were chosen based on the high usage of each channel in the 55+ age group: email with 95% usage; print advertising with 71% preferring ease of print; and social media with women 50+ using social to stay connected.

Sequence of Events/Timeline (5 points)

A detailed timeline is included in the support. Beacon College's Office of College Communications coordinated all the activities for the community relations campaign. Work began in January 2023 reviewing Salon Speaker proposals and finalizing speaker dates for the 2023-2024 speaker series. In April, we created and printed a trifold brochure highlighting the 2023-24 speaker lineup for distribution at each event. Throughout May, we developed email and social media post designs incorporating the brochure elements. We launched the community relations campaign in June with the first email announcement about the 2023-2024 speaker dates. Our team created an event landing page on the Beacon College website with links to each speaker event for registration. For each monthly event, we scheduled regular invitation emails, news release distribution, one paid advertisement each month, and social media posts.

Throughout the year, the team had to review the monthly integrated communications plan and adjust based on attendee registration numbers. The email distribution list grew from 550 contacts to over 1,000 emails. The event in November hit registration capacity, and each event in 2024 reached capacity; therefore, fewer emails and social posts were generated.

Effectiveness of Plan Messaging (5 points)

The key messaging for the target audience of 55+ seniors in The Villages (and other senior communities) reinforced that each Salon Speaker Series event was an opportunity to attend a free lifelong learning event with an option for a donation. This key messaging was consistent throughout all communication channels employing variations of the Salon Speaker Series' slogan "educational, edifying, and entertaining" with the overarching reminder that the lifelong learning series is provided by Beacon College. Calls to action included pop art language and directed the audience to register and donate for each event. As evidence through metrics in the support, the audience responded through clicks and registrations.

Goals and Objectives Met (10 points)

The Beacon College team exceeded the community relations communications campaign goal of the 2023-2024 Salon Speaker Series to raise visibility (and build affinity) and increase donations at the nine speaker events. The first objective to increase awareness leading to a change in behavior measured by increased registrations for each monthly event to pre-COVID levels of at least 200 attendees per event was exceeded by the 358 average event attendance (79% increase); similarly, the "Growing Bolder" TV segment on the Salon Series was a testament to the kinship many Villagers have developed for Beacon College through the Salon Speaker Series. The second objective was to increase annual donations through online and onsite giving by 20% compared to the 2022-2023 Salon Series donations of \$6,840. The 2023-2024 event series donations mushroomed 526.082% to \$42,824. Additional metrics for each communication method are detailed in the support document.

Budget Documentation (5 points)

A detailed budget is included with the support document. Overall, the Salon Speaker Series communications budget was \$2,885 for the 2022-2023 speaker events and increased to \$8,700 for the 2023-2024 speaker events. Beacon College staff included the two employees. Hard costs totaled \$8,512 for the 2023-2024 Salon Speaker Series communication campaign. Beacon's digital communications manager accumulated an estimated 85 staff hours from June 2023 to April 2024. The community relations communications campaign far exceeded expectations with both a sizable surge in attendance and in donations.

Budget Justification - ROI (7 points)

Average monthly event attendance jumped to 358 —much higher than the pre-COVID attendance goal of 200. Total 2022-23 attendance was 1,345 while 2023-2024 season enjoyed 139.777% increase with a record total of 3,225 attendees. Additionally, the 2022-2023 season netted \$6,840 in donations. Due to the expanded attendance and dedicated outreach efforts for sponsorships, the 2023-2024 season grew donations to \$42,824! Beyond boosted attendance and donations, doubling the email contact database list —and receiving a pledged donation sponsorship for \$45,000 for the 2024-2025 season — justify the ROI for this community relations campaign.

Support Material (30 points)

Download File (<https://fpra.secure-platform.com/file/287494/eyJ0eXAiOiJKV1QiLCJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJtZWV1kIjoiODc0OTQsImFsbG93Tm90U2lnbmVhVXJsIjoiRmFsc2UiLCJpZ25vcBeaconCollegeSalonSpeakerSeriesDivACatA01Support.pdf>)

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