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The Case for Branding Philadelphia Green Schools

Philadelphia Green Schools: A Complex Entity

What makes a model program for Philadelphia Green Schools innovative and potentially
transformative is also what makes it complex. It is a program that relies on a myriad of partners
to prosper, from the School District of Philadelphia, to the Philadelphia Water Department, to
local nonprofit organizations, to universities and institutional organizations, and more. While
these many partners bring a diverse array of skills and opportunities, they also come with their
own opinions about what a unique identity for Philadelphia Green Schools is and should be.
Further, with many partners and diverse aspects of the program (green schoolyards, place-based
education, community involvement, etc.), more funding sources may exist for this program to
capitalize on. Given the complexity and particularity of Philadelphia Green Schools, a cohesive
branding strategy will effectively make the case for this model program, develop and improve
partnerships, and increase funding opportunities.

Branding in the For-Profit and Nonprofit Sectors

Traditionally used in the for-profit sector, Business Dictionary defines branding as, "The process
involved in creating a unique name and image for a product in the consumers' mind, mainly
through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme. Branding aims to establish a significant
and differentiated presence in the market that attracts and retains loyal customers."[1] Within this
sector, a brand functions to increase and sustain the demand for a service for product by
increasing awareness and perceived quality. Brands help create relationships with customers by
building preferences, trust, and loyalty. Most importantly from the company's perspective, a
branded service or product that is perceived to be of high quality and loyalty can lead to greater
revenues and profits.[2]

Nonprofits and other mission-driven organizations operate differently from for-profit companies.
Instead of making a profit, implementing a social mission is the main goal of nonprofit
organizations. This filters down into the organizational structure of nonprofits: collaboration is
more important than competition, employees are motivated by intrinsic values, and a broad
spectrum of stakeholders are always considered.[3] Acknowledging that nonprofits often had to
manage their brands using tools meant for the private sector, the Rockefeller Foundation has
supported research since 2010 on the role of brands in the nonprofit sector in order to help
nonprofits better use and manage their brands for greater impact.[4] Since Philadelphia Green

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[1] "Branding," BusinessDictionary, accessed December 9, 2015,
http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/branding.html.
[2] Nathalie Laidler-Kylander and Julia Shepard Stenzel, *The Brand IDEA* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 23.
[3] Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel, *The Brand IDEA*, 25.
[4] *Ibid*, xiii.

Schools is a mission-driven model program that will rely on partnerships and outside funding sources, not profits from products or services, to operate, understanding the value of branding for the nonprofit sector is crucial.

While the goals of the two sectors differ, the reasons for branding nonprofits are not entirely unlike the reasons for branding for-profit companies. According to Apaydin, "…by creating strong brands, nonprofit organizations might enjoy the advantage of getting higher support from…society…[to] deliver their services and products to the needy, which will contribute to the achievement of [their] organizational mission."[5] Just like for-profits, nonprofits use their brands to establish favorable associations between them and their supporters, which ideally leads to brand awareness and brand loyalty. If positive associations about a brand are established in the minds of community members and service recipients, they are more likely to accept and promote the services of the nonprofit. Further, loyalty towards a nonprofit brand can increase resource acquisition in the form of donations and volunteer contributions.[6]

Elements of a Brand

While the literature has verified the importance of branding for both for-profits and nonprofits, the term "brand" is more of an elusive concept. While a for-profit brand is a "name, term, symbol, or design, or a combination of them" that is meant to represent the services or goods of a seller in order to differentiate itself from its competitors, a nonprofit brand is more of an intangible asset.[7] According to Daw and Cone, a nonprofit brand is "a collection of perceptions about an organization, formed by every communication, action and interaction."[8]

A brand is essentially a public promise that an organization will behave in a certain way and possesses certain features. Though some equate the terms "brand" and "organization," a brand is not an organizational entity itself. Rather, a brand represents an organization.[9] Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel explain that "a clear brand identity gives one the ability to succinctly describe who the organization is, what it stands for, and why it is important."[10] Brand identity incorporates the mission and values of an organization to guide its decisions and actions. It is an internal reflection of what the organization wants others to see. Brand image, on the other hand, is the external perception that connects with those outside the organization such as other nonprofits, service recipients, community members, and political agents.[11]

A number of elements make up an organization's brand identity including its name, logo, tagline, palette of colors, standardized typefaces, a consistent "style" for images, mission and vision

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[5] Fahri Apaydin, "A Proposed Model of Antecedents and Outcomes of Brand Orientation for Nonprofit Sector," *Asian Social Science* 7 (2011): 196.

[6] *Ibid*, 196.

[7] Philip Kotler, *Marketing management* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000).

[8] Jocelyn Daw and Carol Cone, *Breakthrough nonprofit branding: Seven principles to power extraordinary results* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011).

[9] Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel, *The Brand IDEA*, 22.

[10] Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel, *The Brand IDEA*, 10.

[11] *Ibid*, 22-23.

states, and so on.[12][13] These elements should all be uniquely identifiable, simple, recognizable, and aesthetically pleasing. Further, they should also strive to be culturally relevant, timeless, and easily reproduced across a variety of media.[14]

Logo as Object of Brand Identity

The logo is one of the most easily recognizable elements of brand identity. According to Henderson and Cote a logo is, "graphic design that a company uses, with or without its name, to identify itself or its products."[15] A logo can help an organization to communicate an image, gain attention, differentiate a brand, and provoke an emotional response.[16] It should also identify the target public and offer information about the service. The logo is the signature of a company.[17]

While some logos effectively portray an organization's mission in a simple and aesthetically pleasing way, others do not. Within Philadelphia alone, there are a variety of organizations that exhibit an array of logo quality and design. The ones that clearly portray the mission of their organization stand out.

For example, the mission of the Schuylkill River Development Corporation is: "SRDC is revitalizing Philadelphia's tidal Schuylkill River corridor into an asset that connects neighborhoods and encourages investment. Working with the City and stakeholders to build, maintain, and program Schuylkill Banks, SRDC drives improvements in recreation and transportation, community and economic development, public health, and environmental stewardship, benefiting neighbors, Philadelphia and the region."[18] While Schuylkill Banks is an excellent mission-driven organization that is doing great work in Philadelphia, its logo, though attractive, does not accurately reflect what it does as an organization. Not only does the logo not include the actual name of the nonprofit, which could present confusion for those who view it, its generic leaf and water design does little to differentiate it from any other waterfront park. Further, the work SRDC does to encourage neighborhood investment and the urban context of the river are not reflected at all in the logo.

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[12] "8 Essential Elements to a Comprehensive Brand Identity," Visible Logic, accessed December 9, 2015, http://www.visiblelogic.com/blog/2010/04/8-essential-elements-to-a-comprehensive-brand-identity.
[13] "Brand Identity," Elements, accessed December 9, 2015, http://www.elementsdesign.com/capabilities/brand-identity.
[14] "Elements of a Successful Brand Identity," HPCA, accessed December 9, 2015, http://www.hpcaonline.com/hpca-news-reader/items/elements-of-a-successful-brand-identity.html.
[15] Pamela W. Henderson and Joseph A. Cote, "Guidelines for selecting or modifying logos," *Journal of Marketing* 62 (1998): 14.
[16] Brigitte Müller, Bruno Kocher, and Antoinette Crettaz, "The effects of visual rejuvenation through brand logos," *Journal of Business Research* 66 (2013): 82-88.
[17] George Adîr, Victor Adîr, and Nicoleta Elisabeta Pascu, "Logo design and the corporate identity," *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 51 (2012): 650-654.
[18] "What We Do," Schuylkill River Development Corporation, accessed December 9, 2015, http://www.schuylkillbanks.org/about/what-we-do.

The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, on the other hand, does an excellent job of reflecting the work it does in its logo. The mission of the organization is: "The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education inspires meaningful connections between people and nature. We use our forests and fields as a living laboratory to foster appreciation, deepen understanding, and encourage stewardship of the environment."[19] While The Schuylkill Center's logo clearly denotes the natural component of the organization's mission, it also contextualizes it. Not only do the buildings within the leaf show Philadelphia's skyline, but they capture the "urban nature" identity of the organization. By including buildings together with the leaf and bird, the organization is choosing not to divorce the idea of nature from the city. They are able to forward their mission of fostering appreciation and stewardship of the environment by reminding viewers that nature exists in cities, just as it does everywhere else.

Lastly, and most relevant to Philadelphia Green Schools, is the logo for GreenFutures, the School District of Philadelphia sustainability plan for the 2015-2016 school year. While GreenFutures does not have an explicit mission, its five focus areas include: energy and efficiencies, green schoolyards, waste and consumption, healthy schools, and education for sustainability.[20] The simple incorporation of the leaves and pencil in the logo reflect the fact that this is a sustainability plan for an educational entity. Though the model program for Philadelphia Green Schools goes beyond creating standards for sustainability within the city's public schools, the logo for GreenFutures should certainly be leveraged during its branding process.

Branding Process

The actual process for creating a brand can be time consuming and fairly complicated. However, if the time, resources, and passion are put into the process, it can yield great results. The basic elements of the design process in the development of a brand are:

- Definition and consultation with owners/users, stakeholders
- Description of mission/intentions
- Development of brief
- Alternatives of naming and taglines
- Alternatives of graphic approach, including logo
- Selection of preferred alternatives
- Refinement
- Test

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[19] "About the Schuylkill Center," The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, accessed December 9, 2015, http://www.schuylkillcenter.org/aboutus.

[20] "Environmental Management and Services," The School District of Philadelphia, accessed December 9, 2015, http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/e/environmental.

- Launch

During the initial research and development stage, the organization needs to consult with stakeholders to identify who its audience is and who will be interacting with its services. This will help inform both the brand's mission and how the organization wants stakeholders to interact with its brand. A design brief is then developed which contains summaries from the research stage. It should include target audiences, values and mission of the brand, messaging objectives, the brand's services, a project schedule and budget, and more.[21]

Next, possible names, taglines, and graphic elements, specifically a logo, are devised. A number of alternatives for each of these categories should be developed and eventually the preferred alternatives will be selected and refined. Once a logo has been chosen, a style guideline should be established which prescribes a color palette, certain typefaces, layout guidelines, ways the logo should be used, and more. This creates a consistent style for the brand and helps build brand identity.[22] After the brand has been tested, it is ready to be launched.

Using Branding to Advance Partnerships and Increase Funding Opportunities

Philadelphia Green Schools can use brand democracy to strengthen existing partnerships. Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel refer to brand democracy as "the extent to which an organization engages its board, staff, members, participants, volunteers, supports, and other stakeholders in both defining and communicating the brand identity."[23] During the branding process, participative engagement must be used to get stakeholders on board with regard to the brand's identity. This is an important technique for creating "brand ambassadors" who believe in the brand and can help connect multiple entities under one brand.[24]

It may seem daunting to come up with a single brand for a program like Philadelphia Green Schools that will have so many partners, each with their own degree of autonomy. Capturing brand identity, that is, the "who, what, and why" of an organization can appear more complex when there are multiple "whos, whats, and whys." However, participation of stakeholders within the Philadelphia Green Schools model program during the branding process will allow partners to identify connections between them as they define and learn how to communicate the brand. Including the various partners throughout this process can build consensus amongst them early on, create an authentic brand identity, and make the process itself more representative and transparent.[25]

A continuation of brand democracy is brand affinity. According to Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel, brand affinity refers to "the way in which an organization extends its sphere of influence beyond the organization itself, in order to maximize social impact."[26] In this way, brand affinity can not

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[21] "Designing a Brand Identity," Creative Market, accessed December 9, 2015, https://creativemarket.com/blog/2013/07/23/designing-a-brand-identity.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel, *The Brand IDEA*, 83.

[24] *Ibid*, 84.

[25] *Ibid*, 82-87.

[26] *Ibid*, 97.

only help strengthen existing partners but also build new partners because it extends the brand and brand assets to include a variety of external partners. Armed with its brand identity, initial partners of Philadelphia Green Schools can identify new partners, reach out to them, and use their brand to attract them. Brand affinity can help achieve the mission and maximize the impact of Philadelphia Green Schools. Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel explain: "By focusing on a greater shared goals, they [partners] are simultaneously achieving their own mission and helping others achieve theirs, resulting in greater overall impact."[27] For example, making brand assets and tools, such as photos, stories, and templates, available to partners creates trust and transparency while also encouraging collaboration to drive impact.[28]

There are a number of ways that utilizing a single, successful brand, made up of multiple partners, can help increase funding opportunities for Philadelphia Green Schools. Interviews of nonprofit organizations by Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel revealed that donors actually prefer to fund collaborative efforts over an funding an individual organization. An increasing number of funders even require collaboration amongst partners.[29] Thus, facilitating partnerships helps to achieve the mission of the brand, as funding is necessary to put a mission into action.

Funders often encourage their grantees to develop a clear mission and an explicit brand management strategy.[30] Foundations, according to Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel, "essentially work through partners to achieve their missions, and must therefore build their brand to attract the right partners and then help those partners shape progress toward a common goal."[31] Foundations do not just want to fund organizations, they want to bring organizations together to work towards a larger social issue and encourage brand democracy and affinity. At the individual level, a single donor can become an active brand ambassador for an organization not just by funding it, but also by promoting to others, especially on social media.[32]

Next Steps for Branding Philadelphia Green Schools

This paper is meant to make the case for branding Philadelphia Green Schools as a means of implementing its mission, advancing existing partnerships, creating new partnerships, and increasing opportunities for funding. While the branding process can be timely and costly, the literature shows how valuable the process is for a for-profit company, nonprofit organization, and the like. Once the initial partnerships for Philadelphia Green Schools are solidified, the entity should embark on a branding process. An outside consultant will likely need to be hired for this, unless a partner possesses the ability and desire to manage such a process.

The eventual branding of Philadelphia Green Schools will not be starting from scratch. Students from Ecological Urbanism, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology course taught by Anne Whiston Spirn and Mami Hara, have laid the ground work for this effort by devising a possible name, tagline, and vision for the program. I have designed an example logo that incorporates the

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[27] *Ibid*, 100.
[28] *Ibid*, 145.
[29] Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel, *The Brand IDEA*, 98-99.
[30] *Ibid*, 175.
[31] *Ibid*, 164.
[32] *Ibid*, 175.

concept of neighborhood transformation into the green schools model, and also an example infographic that hopes to promote the brand and follows a style guideline.

Name: Philadelphia Green Schools

Tagline: Green Schools, Thriving Neighborhoods

Vision: A Vision for Green Schools

1. Improved schoolyards incorporate stormwater management and creative play spaces
2. Teachers utilize the school grounds and surrounding neighborhood for environmental and place-based education, and incorporate real-world problem solving and service learning into the curriculum
3. Schools are accessible hubs that actively engage and provide resources to community members of all ages

The particular program elements of a green school will be guided by the vision of the neighborhood in which the school is located. Each school will engage a diverse set of partners from the broader Philadelphia community within the schools' organizational structures for both funding and programming.

Logo:

Infographic:

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