

Affordable Housing
Tax Credit Coalition

Grand Opening Guide



For



LIHTC DEVELOPERS

FORWARD

The Affordable Housing Tax Credit Coalition has developed this Low Income Housing Tax Credit ***Grand Opening Guide*** to assist developers with planning the opening of Section 42 Tax Credit properties.

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Thanks,

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SECTION I: GETTING STARTED

Congratulations on your new LIHTC property! In order to promote your new property, you will want to have a Grand Opening event. As a new member to the neighborhood, you will want your neighbors to know you as a great addition to the community. Therefore, with proper and timely planning, your Grand Opening event will help you convey this positive image.

In preparing to open your property for business, there are literally thousands of details to consider. One of your most important components will be the **Grand Opening** event. This event is an extremely important tenant marketing activity for your property. You want this to be outstanding. It represents you to the community and to your future tenants.

You might ask, “Where do I start? How do I pull this together?” We have compiled this handbook to help you through the whole process of your Grand Opening. We hope you find all elements of this handbook helpful and that you use it as a reference and refer to it often.



Time

Great planning takes time. It is essential that you allow yourself, and your team, enough time to effectively coordinate all the components of a first-class property Grand Opening. Although you may feel three to six months is a reasonable amount of time, nine months to a year is not at all excessive for your planning.

One of the many things you will do in the planning stage, and one of the first things, is to decide on your committees and the committee chairs. To do that you will need to decide the different parts, or categories, of your event. For example – you will definitely have a food and beverage category, therefore, you will have an F & B committee. Other categories you will want to include will be hospitality, entertainment, sponsors, vendors, public relations, etc. You can have as many committees as you need to cover all aspects of your particular event. You then need to elect a chairperson for each committee. You will also need a main, or, Grand Opening Chairperson, to oversee all of your committees, similar to a general manager, if you will. Have a list of tasks ready for each new committee so they know immediately what their responsibilities will be and can begin brainstorming or researching to fulfill their committee obligations.

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Time (Cont.)



Make sure you use your committees to the fullest. They are in place to make your Grand Opening the best it can be. Assign as many tasks as you can to your different groups so your time can be used to manage the project itself and see that it progresses toward the completion date, as expected. You must learn to delegate, delegate, delegate and have full confidence in your committees and the committee heads. And, remember, give yourself enough time. It's all about the planning.

If you know other developers who have gone through the Grand Opening process, you might consider asking them for advice. Let them tell you the highlights and the pitfalls of having a Grand Opening. What was their experience? How much time did they allow for planning? What worked well for their committees? How were they received in the community? Were their local vendors helpful? Hopefully, your property is not a direct competitor to another developer. If it is, you will want to discount this advice!

SECTION II: WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?

When you plan an event like a Grand Opening, you must have a purpose in mind. Why are you doing this? What do you hope to accomplish? What are your “**want to’s**”? We know of at least seven.

Right away you know that:

1. You **want to** - introduce your property to the public.
2. You **want to** - increase awareness and educate the public about your property type.
3. You **want to** - let them know who can benefit from your housing development.
4. You **want to** - build strong relationships with tenants, community leaders, area vendors, the “power holders” in your area and the community in general.
5. You **want to** - draw potential tenant traffic into your property.
6. You **want to** - create a unique celebration that attracts positive media coverage about your property and conveys the many benefits of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program.
7. You **want to** - thank contractors, elected officials, lenders, syndicators, investment bankers, lawyers, accountants, your employees and committees, etc., who made your property possible.

We are intentionally leaving the rest of this page blank for any additional “want-to’s” you may have in mind. Jot them down now or you may forget them.

SECTION III: DEVELOP YOUR PLAN

Choose a Date

You need to give this very careful consideration. Take a look at your potential market. There are several theories as to the timing of your event. We will site two examples here and this will give you food for thought in using one of these theories or developing one of your own.

Theory 1. Some people feel that because most people are working during the week, that the best time for you to schedule your Grand Opening event is probably on the weekend. In that case, you may want to begin on a Thursday evening with an invitation only, VIP night (more on this later), reception or dinner. Your VIPs will be people like the mayor, your city officials, heads of local companies, a local talent, local celebrity or perhaps a local sports figure.

Then on Friday, during the evening, or Saturday or Sunday, during the day, you can have your Grand Opening for the general public (again, look at your market and decide what would make the most sense for them).

Theory 2. The second theory for timing your event is to have your opening on a Tuesday or Wednesday evening. The feeling being that Thursday is too close to the weekend and that people will be doing different activities. Plan to start early (around 4:30, 5:00pm) with the idea that people are likely to stop by on their way home from work.

Both of these options have been implemented successfully. It's really up to you to decide the better fit for your market. When deciding on the timing of your event, take into account your project completion date and remember to give yourself plenty of time for adequate planning.

You will find that many companies choose to have a two or three day Grand Opening event. Some may even do a four day event, but you have to be very careful about overkill.



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Choosing The Date (cont.)

Points to remember:

- Take into account your target market and look at the calendar for any holidays, especially religious holidays, that may affect attendance at your event.
- Don't schedule on a long weekend. People will likely have other plans.
- What time of the year is your opening? Should it be inside or outside?
- If it's outdoors, then you need to consider a tent in case of bad weather.
- If it's outdoors, you need to also be aware of any potential construction noise, or other noises, that may affect your opening event. Your months of careful planning can be ruined very quickly by one noisy jackhammer!
- Avoid Monday evenings, people are not in "full bloom" on Monday.
- Research to make sure your event doesn't coincide with any other local event or neighborhood happening. That would spell disaster. You may want to make this a task of your PR committee.

Again, either of the theories can work well. It's up to you to decide what will work best for you.

Decide On Your Budget

How much money are you going to allocate for your Grand Opening? This is important, as your committees will need to know how much money they have to work with to get the job done properly. For instance, before the decorating committee can proceed with planning your decorations, they need to know what amount is allocated to them. It will determine just how extensive the decorations will be, as well as what materials they will use. You also want them to keep in mind that this project is for Affordable Housing, so while you will want to have your area nicely decorated, you won't want to go overboard and have it look ostentatious.

So, as you can see, it's important to define your budget up front. Your committees need to get started right away on their assignments, and knowing the monetary amount allotted for their job will get the ball rolling. If your committees are delayed in the beginning, they may lose enthusiasm and you don't want that to happen. Keeping up the spirit is key to your success. You will need to decide the amount you invest based on what you want to accomplish, which you outlined earlier in Section II.

Know Your Target Market

Part of the planning for your Grand Opening will include advertising (more on advertising later). Who are the people you are trying to reach with news about your property opening? Who are your potential tenants? Where do they live now?

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Know Your Target Market (cont.)

You will also want to determine the following:

- Are my target tenants 60% or 50% of median income? What are the demographics?
- Are my target tenants mostly young families, middle-aged people or the older population?
- Is this target group mostly in one area or scattered in several areas?
- In what area do I need to focus my advertising to reach the most potential tenants?

You have many community resources that can help you identify your market. These resources are also in a position to spread the word about your property. Your community resources may include the local schools and teachers, police officers and fire fighters, or the local religious centers, along with their respective ministers, priests, and rabbis.

Determine where the local shopping areas are and what stores are there. Everyone has to eat and shop for food. What grocery store serves the neighborhood? Does the store carry lots of ethnic foods? If so, what ethnicity? This will help you in developing a “picture” of your target market.

To Theme Or Not To Theme

Deciding to have, or not to have, a theme for your Grand Opening is something you need to determine early in the planning stage. That way, when it goes to committee, the decorations people will know right away what type of decorations they should look for and your food and beverage committee will have an idea how to plan the menu. It will also influence the look of your invitations as well as your advertising.

Some things to consider when deciding on a theme may be:

1. Are you in an area of town that has a lot of interest in sports? If so, you may want to do a sports theme.
2. Is there a current fad sweeping the country, such as Texas Hold'em poker? Then maybe you want to do a timely casino theme (We're not suggesting gambling here, just using an example.)
3. Is your opening near a holiday? For instance, if its near Valentine's Day you could play up the love theme. Love your spouse, love your new neighbor, etc.

Use your imagination. It can be anything you want and you may come up with a unique idea that your guests can happily and easily relate to. People love to have fun so make your event something they really want to attend. Be creative! The sky's the limit!

SECTION IV: COMMITTEES

Designating Your Committees

Deciding what committees to have, and how many, is determined by the very nature of a Grand Opening. Right away you know you need to have an overseer, a main chairperson that everyone reports to. This is the “general manager” that we mentioned earlier.

You also know you will need to have a food and beverage committee to plan your menu, an advertising committee to spread the word of your event, a public relations/media group to relate your good image to the community, and a decorations committee to transform your area into something special. Do you plan to have entertainment? Then you need an entertainment committee. Also plan on having a hospitality group and an operations committee.

Committee Outlines

The following information will need to be streamlined according to your needs, but it will get you started on deciding what committees you need and give you an idea of what sort of responsibilities you may want to assign to them. You will also want to expand the assignments as there is, as you will see, a lot more ground to cover. That will become apparent to you as you move forward in your planning.

Grand Opening Chairperson

1. Help organize and oversee all committees.
2. Hold joint meeting of all of your committees. Go over your events carefully so they will know exactly how you want the whole project to unfold.
 - a. Events
 - b. Timelines
 - c. Budget
3. Oversee all Grand Opening events.
 - a. VIP night
 - b. Ribbon Cutting ceremony
 - c. The Grand Opening
4. Prepare and maintain budget.
5. Create a checklist for each event & review/revise/update often.
6. Meet weekly with your committee heads to ensure they are on top of everything and that plans are progressing accordingly.
7. Make sure committees are adhering to their timelines.
8. Be pro-active during planning and actual events. You don't want any surprises.
9. Make sure your committees have follow-through after your events (things such as written committee reports, provide thank you list to Hospitality Committee, etc).
10. Collect reports from committees and compile a total summation.
11. Monitor expenses to ensure the budget is being maintained.
12. Always support your committees, offer yourself to assist in anything they may need help with, show respect and give thanks.

Food and Beverage Committee

1. Designate Chairperson.
2. In initial meeting, determine all events requiring food and beverage. Don't forget your entertainers or behind the scenes people. They need to eat, too!

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Committee Outline (cont.)

3. Co-ordinate with the decorations, entertainment, and operations committees to determine a basis for your menu.
 - a. Is there a theme that should be followed?
 - b. If so, should food and beverage have an ethnic bearing?
 - c. What will the floor plan be, what tables do you need and where will they be located in the available space?
4. Contact a local restaurant to see if they would be a sponsor.
 - a. Helps your budget
 - b. Gives them visibility

Decorations Committee

1. Designate a Chairperson.
2. Determine if a theme will be used so you can develop your plan around it.
3. Design an invitation to go with the theme.
4. Meet with the food and beverage, entertainment and operations committees to co-ordinate the floor plan, configure the space and decide if there will be a stage.
5. Will there be buffet tables for the food or food stations and what size are they?
6. Are there tables and chairs available for the people who are eating?
7. Brainstorm with your committee about what decorations would work best.
8. Make vendor list for your supplies.
9. See if vendors want to donate items or services in exchange for their name or logo in your ads.
10. Think about size, placement and appropriateness of their names/logos in your ads.
11. Co-ordinate lighting with entertainment and operations committees.

Entertainment Committee

1. Designate a Chairperson.
2. Meet with decorations, food and beverage and operations committees to co-ordinate floor space/plan, lighting needs and any planned stage.
3. Based on results of above meeting, decide with your group what entertainment would work and what is appropriate.
4. Maintain budget.
5. Plan activities for children.

Advertising Committee

1. Designate a Chairperson.
2. Meet with your committee and divide into teams:
 - i. TV and radio
 - ii. Print media (newspapers)
 - iii. Mail options
3. Review budget and get cost estimates from each media.
4. Try to focus on forming a relationship with your media people. Who are the important ad people? They can help or hurt you.
5. Design your ads or have the ad people give you suggestions.
6. Have a timeline to ensure your ads are viewed/heard/read at the most opportune time.

Public Relations

1. Designate a Chairperson.
2. Have a committee meeting to brainstorm your approach/plan.
3. Choose a person to head up relationships.

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Committee Outline (cont.)

4. Contact your Chamber of Commerce.
5. Write press releases.
6. Meet sponsoring vendors to show/tell them the opportunities that may be available.
7. Develop committee relationships with the press and city government.
8. Create positive image.

Hospitality

1. Designate a Chairperson.
2. Meet with the operations, entertainment, decorations and public relations committees to see if they have any needs for hotel, transportation for VIPs, etc.
3. Any special needs for your event? Do you need to be ADA compliant? (ie, wheelchair accessible, bathrooms.)
4. Do you need “signers” for the deaf or hard of hearing?
5. What about pictures? You need to record your event and get your power people pictured with your sponsors, vendors and neighborhood people.
6. Responsible for thank you letters and gifts.

Operations

1. Designate a Chairperson.
2. Meet with food and beverage, decorations and entertainment committees to determine what their needs are in relation to the available space.
3. Plan the event area considering tent construction, lighting, logistics and timing of any set-up such as stage, tables chairs, etc. When can set-up occur? What about tear-down after the event?
4. Do you have a load off dock or space for the delivery trucks?
5. Do you need a sound system?
6. Do you have an emergency plan? What if there is a fire? A heart attack victim?
7. Do you need to get permits or licenses of any kind?

As we mentioned earlier, this is just a portion of what you may need to cover but it will get you started. Do your own thinking, trust your chairs and committees to develop and fine-tune their respective tasks.

SECTION V: ADDING THE EXTRA KICKS

The whole idea behind your Grand Opening is to gain recognition, to be well thought of by your community, to be remembered in a positive light and to know that your guests had a great time. If they did have a great time, then they most definitely will remember you and your property. If they themselves do not end up as your tenants, they may end up as indirect marketers for your property. They do that by telling a friend or family member who may need appropriate, desirable, yet affordable, housing. They will remember your Grand Opening and the wonderful impression you made. That will be significant.

Ways To Add The Extra Kicks

1. Have a decent menu. Don't try to save \$100 on food. It will cost you more in the long run. People love to eat and they love to eat GOOD food. The poor menu, and not your property, will end up being the topic of conversation and will start you off on the wrong foot. People will think if you skimmed on the food, maybe you skimmed on your construction. They may feel you didn't think they were important enough to serve a nice menu. Their impression of you will not be positive. Plan to have great food.
2. Have some entertainment. It doesn't have to be costly. There are lots of very talented, struggling, local entertainers who want the exposure, or even the practice, of performing.
3. Have promotional items – pens, writing pads, refrigerator magnets - you always want your guests to leave with something that has your logo and contact information on it. That way they can get in touch easily, if they want, and it keeps your name in front of them.
4. Have lots of banners and balloons. They are easily seen, not too expensive and are used all of the time for these events because they attract people. They are a proven addition.
5. See if you, or a team or staff member, can think up something totally different and unique that will really impress people or contribute to their fun. Brainstorming can bring amazing results.
6. Involve a charity? A good idea or not? (refer to the following paragraphs)

Charity

Promoting goodwill in your community can be an excellent addition to your Grand Opening. A fundraiser or goodwill promotion tied to your event, adds to the likelihood of increased press coverage. The event may draw TV cameras, or your area newspaper may even place an event photo in their next edition.

However, you need to tread carefully here. Involving a charity in your event can take on a negative spin if it is perceived you are **only** doing it for the publicity. Your efforts toward a charity have to be sincere. Some companies have ended up with an unpleasant surprise when their efforts were done just for the sake of publicity. When you have the spirit of helping a worthy organization, and because of it, end up with some favorable press, then it becomes a benefit for the charity as well as for your property.

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Charity (cont.)

If you decide your intentions are sincere and you want to choose a charity to work with, determine if any fit in well with your business. Habitat for Humanity would be a good example since they build houses for families unable to afford to purchase a home. Since you are in the building business, you could donate all of the building materials for one house. Or enough lumber to build two houses.

If you are located in a community that has a high incidence of a particular disease, such as diabetes, or cancer, that would also be a good charity to tie in with. The charity could have a representative present at the Grand Opening who would have a chance to meet people in the community and disseminate information to your guests that describes the disease and points them in the right direction for various sources of help. It may be a way to reach people that are reluctant to seek medical attention.

Every community has children and you would expect that the tenants who will be occupying your property will have children. A charity such as Make A Wish, that grants wishes to children suffering terminal illnesses would be appropriate. The cost of granting one wish is \$5,000 and you could possibly sponsor two wishes.

Think of other charities that may be pertinent to your community or target tenant base – The Heart Association, Cystic Fibrosis, The Kidney Foundation. Your options are limitless.

SECTION VI: GETTING THE WORD OUT – ADVERTISING

Advertising Vehicles

What media avenues are available to you to let people know about your property and your Grand Opening? You have many choices, any of which, if used properly, can help you to do a great job of promoting your big event.

Television

You can choose Local Broadcasting or Cable TV. You need to decide what is best for reaching your target audience. What are your local stations and what is their viewership? Much of TV viewing has now been diluted by the many options people have. They may have satellite TV, pay-per-view or video tapes. So collect your facts. Your station advertising representative should have information available to you concerning their viewer demographics, their “best time” to advertise, their costs for a 30 second spot. You want to determine how many times you want the spot to run to be effective.

Some **advantages of local Broadcast TV are** - that it reaches about 98% of all US households. People spend more than 7 hours per day watching TV (mostly between 6:00pm and 12:00am). The current generations grew up with TV so it’s a part of their life.

Some **Cable advantages are** – cable now reaches 68% of all US homes. Advertising costs are less expensive than regular television and advertisers can more easily target specific consumer groups, according to their programs of interest.

For both Broadcast and Cable television, pay close attention to your news broadcasts, especially the 5:00, 6:00 and 10:00pm news (local). These time slots probably have the most viewers. People also tend to watch the early morning news shows while getting ready for work. They want to know what news has happened overnight.

See what local shows promote or feature local affairs and stories about local “heroes”. Does your area have any locally produced talk or public affairs shows? Have your Advertising Committee check into it.

Internet

While Internet advertising has now climbed into the billions and literally jumped about 670% since 1996, you have to keep in mind that it is limited to those people who own a computer and who are also able to connect to the Internet. If you are promoting your Grand Opening for Affordable Housing, this may not be the most effective use of your advertising dollar.

However, let’s look at the other side of the coin. There are some advantages to advertising on the internet. Online advertising has gone from basically zero in 1993 to over \$3 billion today and is still growing. Even though your market will be those who need affordable housing, consider the fact that many in that group may have been able to find a way to have a home computer, or they may have access to one from work. Establish a website, if you don’t already have one. Have pictures of your project with basic information about the Grand Opening – what, where and when. Talk about the prizes or drawings you will have at the

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Internet (cont.)

Grand Opening. Potential tenants could read what advantages your property may provide for them. You could have a link from another website that you have determined is a popular site with your target group. You can feature logos of your sponsors or local businesses on your site. They love the extra exposure. If you provide an email feature, your website visitors can email you any comments or questions they may have. You can update or change your ad at any time, so if one approach is not successful in attracting customers, you can decide to switch to information that may be more effective.

Radio

Radio listeners are loyal. They spend a high amount of time listening, have good ad recall and message retention. It is easy to determine which one or two stations fit your target demographics. It is the only medium that has over seven years of uninterrupted revenue growth. Drive time spots, morning or evening rush hours, are great times to catch listeners. Studies show the ear is superior to the eye – people remember more if they hear it than if they see it.

Radio can also be outstanding in combination with other media. You can combine it with newspaper ads, Broadcast TV, Cable and just about any other media, for increased frequency of your message. It increases product awareness, in this case, about your project and its Grand Opening. Consumers spend 85% of their time with ear-oriented media such as radio, but only 15% of their time with eye-oriented media such as newspapers and magazines.

Outdoor

Billboards, public benches, bus interior and exterior ads, bus shelters, grocery store carts – all of these venues hold possibilities for your advertising. If your target market includes regular users of public transportation, you may want to consider placing an ad on the bus or subway interior, where it is seen day in and day out for an extended period of time. This type of advertising is economical and often effective.

Your Advertising Budget Helpers

Sometimes, if your information is viewed by the media as providing a service to the public, they may run it as a Public Service Announcement (PSA) thereby negating or minimizing your advertising costs.

The PSA

Know the media people that serve your area. If they feel your property is beneficial to the community and of interest to their viewers/listeners/readers, they will be invaluable in helping you to get the word out. They may decide to run a Public Service Announcement, which costs you nothing. If you are providing an event (your Grand Opening), that also benefits a charity, it can make for a great story. Low Income Housing Tax Credit properties are full of human interest stories so some of your local shows presenting community happenings or news, may want to add that to their programming. Did you know that the founder of Starbucks grew up in government housing in the Bronx? A very interesting story.

Circulars and Flyers

Develop a nice looking flyer with good information about your Grand Opening. Make it festive and fun and let them know it will be fun for the whole family, not just for the adults. Along with the when, where, how and why, be sure to include there will be food, games, a giveaway, a raffle, prizes, promotional items and mention that it benefits a charity, if you have teamed up with one. Also mention any sponsors, or have the sponsors' logos appearing on the flyer.

Once you have designed your circular, you might wonder – “how do I get it out to people?” Certainly you can post it on the grocery store bulletin board for starters. If there are offices nearby, you can go to the parking lot and place them under the cars' windshield wiper blades. Leave them in office building lobbies or restaurants. Do not hire the local person on the corner to do your distribution. That is the best way for your flyers to end up in the trash. You've gone to a lot of trouble to design your circular so you want it to reach the people. Hire a company that does this as their business. It's not expensive and well worth the investment.

Marriage Mail

Another form of distribution is Marriage Mail. Your circular can be grouped in an envelope with the circulars from other vendors and mailed to a particular zip code you think may be a good market area for you. You can get discounts for volume and/or frequency of your mailings.

Direct Mail

This is more expensive than other forms of print but you can definitely target your specific market. You would develop a mailing list and send your promotional information directly to your potential customer. One way to develop your mailing list would be to use tenant lists from your other affordable projects. Those tenants may have family and friends that are looking for affordable housing. Include your neighborhood vendors, store managers and send to the local recreation center. Your mayor, city officials and local Chamber of Commerce should be included in your mailing. They will know the community well.

Bulk Mail

Using bulk mail is also one way to “get the word out”. However, there is a qualification for getting the bulk mail rate. You must have a minimum of 200 pieces to acquire a permit. You can work with a bulk mail company that would do your assembly and mailing for you, or, if your staff has the time, you can opt to do it in-house. You can use the bulk mail envelopes or choose the bulk mail postcards (much less expensive than the envelopes). It depends on how much copy you want to include in your promotional materials. Having a lot of copy may prohibit you using the postcards as they may not provide enough room. With bulk mail you can send your mail within a certain mile radius of a particular zip code. Since your information will be the only item in the envelope, you will not have competition from other products as you would have in marriage mail. However, marriage mail is about ½ the cost of bulk mail. Once again, you will have to look at your options and decide what will work best for you and your property.

SECTION VII: “NEW KID ON THE BLOCK” SYNDROME

“A Beautiful Day For A Neighbor.” Mr. Rogers said it best in his song, and that is exactly how you want your new community to feel about you and your Affordable Housing property. You want the local dignitaries, populace and vendors to have a positive reaction to whatever change you are bringing to their area. This needs to be stressed to everyone on your staff, on your committees and anyone else associated with your development. This positive profile should be a main objective of your Public Relations Committee. Make Mr. Rogers’ words into a reality!

Overcoming the “New Kid On The Block” Syndrome

To do this takes finesse. You definitely don’t want to start out on the wrong foot or you may never be thought of as a “true” member of the community, you’ll always be the outsider. This is where public relations come in. Your PR committee should be like a well-oiled wheel and get things rolling right away. They need to develop positive relationships with your city officials, with the community “power-holders”, whether it’s the town “hostess with the mostest” or the local hero or sports figure. They definitely want to get to know the local media folk to ensure good press, and they should be meeting the neighborhood vendors, talking to them about the area and how glad you are to be a part of the community. They need to make sure they invite these important people to the VIP night as well as to the Public Grand Opening.

Chamber of Commerce

One way to belong and make sure you overcome the NKOTB (new kid on the block) syndrome is to join the local Chamber of Commerce. This will almost ensure you become a full-fledged card carrying member of your community. The COC has a wealth of information about your area and contacts that will help you in your endeavor. Remember, the Chamber wants you to succeed. They want you to be a positive addition to the city or town of which you have now become a part. The Chamber is on top of everything that goes on, or is going to go on, in your town. They will aid you in any way they can to help you rise to the top. Use their resources. If they feel positive about you and your project, believe me, they will spread the word to the local community. They have great resources that will be at your disposal. As a member, you will also have many discounts available to you, which will include, among other things, mailing lists. They can clue you into, or put you in touch with, the best advertising people. They will also provide sponsorship opportunities. When your business becomes a member, all of your employees automatically become Chamber members, and can take advantage of all of the discounts – things such as special events, books, tradeshow, insurance publications and more.

When your PR committee is up and running, make sure they contact neighboring towns and invite those officials also. Others to include in your invitation list would be the local fire departments and police departments. Hospitals are also good places to post your Grand Opening. Put a notice in the cafeteria, also go to local businesses and see if they can post the information in their lunch room.

SECTION VIII: DEVELOPING SPONSORS

How Do You Develop Sponsors?

Having sponsors is a very important aspect of planning your Grand Opening. How do you get them? First, you might take a look at the companies whose supplies you bought to construct your property. They may love to send a company representative to your Grand Opening to set up a table with company brochures and products, or to give a demonstration, if appropriate. See if they can have a “give-away”, something like a pen or memo notes with their logo/name on it.

See if any of your sponsors want to donate a raffle prize. People love prizes so this is always a good draw. Have them fill out entry blanks with name, address, phone, email, etc, and with those entry forms, you will have built a new mailing list for yourself that may be helpful for your next project.

Check with your community vendors and stores. They want you to be successful. An occupied housing development means more consumers, which ultimately translates into more sales for their stores.

Make sure your guests go home with some promo item, or items, that are imprinted with your company name and logo, your name, the address and phone, and any other pertinent information you feel they should have in order to contact you or to remember you by. You want them to become familiar with that information.

(Following are two sample letters. The first is one you might initially send to a vendor to see if they are interested in helping you with your Grand Opening. The second is a sample thank you letter to send to your participating vendors.)

Sample Vendor/Sponsor Letter

Date

Contact
Company
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear _____:

You may have heard that our company is opening a new housing development in this neighborhood, bringing much-needed affordable housing to this area. Our new LIHTC (Low Income Housing Tax Credit) property will have its official Grand Opening on *(date)*. To announce the opening, we are having a week-long Grand Opening Celebration, including a VIP Party, a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and a Community Celebration.

To make our event a success, we need the help of local businesses and community leaders. Your assistance in providing give-aways and/or door prizes for attendees would be greatly appreciated. Please let us know what help you are willing to provide by *(date)*. If you are providing merchandise, please send it to *(name)* at *(address)*.

This may be an opportunity for you to demonstrate or show your product or service. You may also want to have samples and/or product brochures available for the attendees. If you plan to do a demonstration or have product samples, please let us know what set-up requirements you have, if any, that we can assist you with.

Hopefully this will be the beginning of a great partnership between our two companies. For more information regarding our Grand Opening Celebration, or our company, feel free to contact me at *(phone number)*.

Sincerely,

Signature

Typed Name
Typed Title
Company Name, City

Sample Vendor Thank You Letter

Date

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear _____,

I am writing to thank you for your participation in our LIHTC Grand Opening Celebration. The people who attended really loved the *<item donated>* you provided. Thanks in part to you, _____ people attended the celebration, and we received _____ applications from prospective tenants. We expect our occupancy to be at _____% soon...all of which will be potential customers for you!

If there is anything I can do for you, please contact me anytime at *<phone number>*. I hope that this event will mark the beginning of a mutually beneficial relationship between our two companies.

Sincerely,

Signature

Typed name

Typed title

Company Name, City

SECTION IX: YOUR EVENTS

VIP Night

This is the event preceding your Grand Opening event. For instance, if you are holding your Grand Opening on a Saturday, you may want to have your VIP night the Thursday evening before.

This event will include your mayor, your governor, your councilman, the city planner, police captain, fire chief, chamber members, the press people you have formed relationships with, your staff and committees and anyone else you feel should be included. Make sure these people are also included on the day of your Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting ceremony. Here is your outline for this event.

- This is an “invitation only” event
- Send 4 weeks ahead w/ rsvp
- Call prior to make sure still attending
- Pick menu
- Decide on location, time, day
- Ensure you have any signers, wheelchairs or other special needs required
- Have photographer

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

- This event takes place at the beginning of your Grand Opening event
- Invite city government
- Have Mayor cut the ribbon
- Have photographer to record the event
- Have food setup
- Have entertainment
- Large scissors, 2 stanchions & ribbon
- Your circular or ads should include that there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony
- Ensure you have any signers, wheelchairs or other special needs required

The Grand Opening

- This is the day you have been preparing for. Everything should be in place and ready to go. You want this as near to perfect as possible. Remember, you are going to be making an impression. You want it to be positive.
- Do your site set-up as early as possible. You want to allow time to make any necessary corrections or adjustments. Have everyone arrive early.
- Do you have parking available?
- Are there adequate restrooms?
- If it rained the day before and is muddy, are you prepared with a temporary walkway?
- Make sure to do a sound test.
- Are you prepared for any medical emergency that may arise?
- Electric & water available?
- Vendor setup?
- Staff communication – need walkie-talkies?

LIHTC Grand Opening Guide

The Grand Opening (cont.)

Need an MC?

Someone to help vendors with set-up and to answer any questions they may have.

Make sure you have some staff as “fill-ins” in case anyone is sick or unable to attend

Arrangements for paying entertainment?

Staff clear understanding of event?

Where is staff eating? Entertainers?

Speech to include a thank you to staff, committees, hosts, sponsors, vendors and celebrities.

Property tour?

Clean up

Ensure you have any signers, wheelchairs or other special needs required

For this Grand Opening consider a moon bounce for the kids, a “fishing pond” for prizes and a clown that twists balloons into shapes of dogs, cats, and other animals. Have someone come to do face paintings or fake tattoos.

SECTION X: TIMELINES

Nine to Seven Months Before the Grand Opening

1. Choose, and meet with, the person who will be your General Manager or, otherwise known as, the Main Chairperson.
2. Identify your event facility or location, ie, does your property have a large community room, or some other space, that would be appropriate? Are you holding your event in a tent outside of your building? Do you have enough space for a tent?
3. Discuss your events – VIP Night, Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and the Grand Opening event - and what your expectations are.
4. Ask your head chairperson to create a list of invitees and have it ready by your next meeting.
5. Also ask him/her to prepare a list of all local businesses. (The Chamber of Commerce should have this information.)
6. Discuss the budget.
7. Call a meeting of your entire staff and create your Grand Opening committees. This can be done by providing a list of committees and letting people sign up according to their interests or talents.
8. Go over your plan, events and expectations. Stress the Mr. Rogers theory of being a good neighbor and how that sets the stage for success. Get your teams excited.
9. Have the committees breakout into their respective groups to choose their committee chairperson and decide the date for their first formal committee meeting to get the ball rolling.

Seven to Five Months Out

1. Meet with your Grand Opening Committee.
2. Make sure the GM has created, or had your hospitality committee create, a master invitee list from which to work. This is the heart of your events. If possible, make an excel spreadsheet. Have columns for Name, Title, Company, Address, City, State, Zip, Phone, Attending Yes, Attending No, Date Invitation was Mailed & any other columns that give you pertinent information.
3. Identify and meet with potential sponsors.
4. Decide what vendors may like to be a part of your event (donating promo items, giving a demo, etc.) and then pay them a visit to become acquainted and lay the groundwork for becoming that “good neighbor” we mentioned.
5. Decide on your entertainment and activities.
6. Determine what advertising venues make the most sense for you. How do you best “get the word out”?
7. Reserve photographer.

Five Months Out

1. If you have decided on the invitations, order them and your “Save The Date” cards.
2. Send out Save the Date Cards for VIP Night, Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and Grand Opening.
3. Your respective committees should decide on:
 - a. Decorations
 - b. Any promotional items either by your company or other vendors

LIHTC Grand Opening Guide

Timelines (cont.)

- c. Food and beverage
- d. Entertainment
- e. Family activities
- f. Sound system for each event

(Keep in mind to allow plenty of time for items ordered. Imprinting always takes longer. You also want to allow time for corrections. One group we know ordered a banner and when it was delivered it was all misspelled! Luckily, they had enough time for the order to be corrected and reshipped. Also remember to unpack any ordered items to check for accuracy and any defective items you should not be charged for.)

4. Make sure you know who your media contacts are and that you have a list with all of their contact information.
5. Be sure to have adequate office supplies in case you are doing any in-house printing (paper, colored ink cartridges, etc).
6. Begin advertising negotiations.
7. Review plans/check budget.

Four Months Out

1. Compose press releases.
2. Follow up on all promo items to make sure they will be on time.
3. Create your list of prizes and giveaways.
4. To the extent possible, start agendas for your events.
5. Order any additional furniture or equipment you may need.

Three Months Out

1. Display an "Opening Soon" banner.
2. Start having regular staff meetings to make sure all committees are on track.
3. Identify and assign staff on-site responsibilities.

Two Months Out

1. Mail invitations.
2. Determine security needs.
3. Order name tags and holders.
4. Determine any Special Accommodations.

One Month Before the Grand Opening

1. Finalize the press release (See examples found in the Appendix).
2. Mail invitations.
3. Print program/agenda booklet.
4. Conduct regular staff meetings to inform employees of all activities.
5. Work with newspapers to prepare ads for publication.
6. Define radio and/or TV schedule.
7. Finalize menus.
8. Send a confirmation letter to all vendors and sponsors.
9. Verify decorations, order additional decorations if necessary.
10. Create list of prizes and giveaways.
11. Make a list of rental items needed and place order.

LIHTC Grand Opening Guide

Timelines (cont.)

12. Network with local businesses and invite them to your event.
13. Pass out flyers to neighboring businesses.
14. Review plans and verify that you will stay within your budget.
15. Confirm participating VIP's (Mayor, etc.).
16. Confirm entertainment and activities.

Two Weeks Before the Grand Opening

1. Run newspaper ads, radio spots and television spots for your upcoming grand opening.
2. Confirm arrangements for vendors and/or sponsors.
3. Walk through Grand Opening agenda with staff.
4. Verify that there will be enough food and beverages to accommodate the expected crowd.
5. Run newspaper ads, radio spots and television spots.
6. Confirm photographer.
7. Review plans and verify that you will stay within your budget.

One Week Before the Grand Opening

1. Make sure newspaper ads, radio and television spots are running (see above).
2. Display all Grand Opening banners.
3. Prepare decorations.
4. Confirm participating VIP's (Mayor, etc.).
5. Clean up your location and prepare for the event.
6. Walk through agenda with staff.
7. Contact the marketing department to discuss status.

Morning of

1. Prepare checks for performers, or for any one requiring them on that night.

Post Event

1. Collect any reports from your committees (budget, evaluation, etc)
2. Prepare final financial report on budget
3. Have a lunch or gathering for your committees to thank them

Of course, these lists are just exemplary and you will have more to add when your timeline is customized to your specific needs.

SECTION XI: PRESS RELEASE EXAMPLES

Press Release: Grand Opening of Non-Profit Computer Training Center

Masaba Project

2418 West Vermijo Ave.
Colorado Springs, CO 80904
November 12, 2000

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Greg Aten
Phone: 719-444-0849
Phone: 719-632-7423

Grand Opening Of Non-Profit Computer Training Center

The Masaba Project of Colorado Springs will hold the Grand Opening of their new computer training facility at 1016 East Las Animas Street, Colorado Springs on Saturday November 18, 2000, at 2 pm.

The Masaba Project is a non-profit organization run by Native American volunteers, which has provided a safe haven for homeless families since 1994. The program offers support for emotional and physical needs as well as life skills education to help families get back on their feet and stay on their feet.

At the computer training facility the Masaba Project will teach the members of these families how to build and repair computers. Those skills will help family members get higher paying jobs and achieve job security. In turn, the facility will distribute the computers to needy families through local agencies.

The Masaba Project will hold a reception afterwards at 3 pm Saturday, November 18, at Moreno Manor, 1025 East Moreno Avenue, Colorado Springs.

The Masaba Project runs several rental homes and apartment complexes, including: Bumble Bee House, Moreno Manor, Abeyta Abode, The Second House, Galvin Garden Apartments, and Conway Coves Apartments. The apartment complexes provide transitional housing. Once a family is established and working, the Masaba Project places them in a rental house, if one is available. The Masaba Project also assists hundreds of outreach families with food, clothing and other necessities.

The computer training facility, like all the charitable work of the Masaba Project, is not supported by government funding, but is the result of the donations and efforts of many private individuals and organizations. Besides the tireless work of the Masaba volunteers, there have been numerous recent substantial donations.

Inferno Film Productions gave a boost to the Masaba Project in March 2000 when they dedicated one night's showing of their feature film, "Dragon and the Hawk" to the Project. Boxes were set up to

Press Releases (cont.)

Press Release: Grand Opening of Non-Profit Computer Training Center

Page 2 of 2

collect clothing and canned goods, and all proceeds from ticket sales for the night were donated to the Masaba Project. Household goods, sweats and other warm clothing, all of which had been used as costumes and props in the movie, were donated by Inferno Film Productions to the Masaba Project.. Nyx Net, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization which runs the world's oldest public access internet service, donated used computers, monitors, desks, chairs, and shelving materials for the computer training facility.

Trygve Lode, who is the President of Nyx Net, and who played the villain in "Dragon and the Hawk," also personally donated a large quantity of computers, cables, monitors, building materials and funds for the creation of the computer training facility, in addition to donating blankets, clothing, and household goods for the families of The Masaba Project.

Rising Star Communications of Colorado Springs, which develops and markets self-improvement and leadership training seminars, provided tools, materials, and volunteers from their classes to do the finishing work on the interior. They also painted the exterior of the building the computer training facility is located in and provided and installed an exterior storage shed.

The Friendship Assembly of God Church in Colorado Springs has also provided financial support throughout the project.

Relevant websites:

Nyx Net www.nyx.net

Trygve Lode www.trygve.com

Inferno www.inferno.film.com

Rising Star www.rismgstarcolorado.com

http://www.trygve.com/pr_masaba_20001113.html

LIHTC Grand Opening Guide

Press Releases (cont.)

USDA Rural Development—Success Stories

Outline of Need:

Residents of Princeton (Gibson County), a small, rural town in southern Indiana, face a challenge shared with many such communities across the nation - - - lack of affordable rental housing.

How Rural Development Helped:

USDA Rural Development makes Rural Rental Housing loans to finance building construction and site development of multifamily quarters for people with very low, low and moderate incomes. Some units are reserved for people with disabilities and/or people age 62 years and over.

The Results:

A new apartment complex in Princeton is the result of a financial collaboration between the Community Action Program of Evansville (CAPE), Inc., the Indiana Housing Finance Authority (IHFA), the Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB), and USDA Rural Development. Together with the financial investment made by CAPE's Brumfield Place Limited Partnership, IHFA awarded tax credits and a grant of \$200,000 for this project. FHLB contributed a grant of \$225,000 and USDA Rural Development made an \$810,000 low interest loan. USDA Rural Development also designated 12 units of the project eligible for its rental assistance to help tenants meet monthly expenses. In Indiana, there are nearly 600 rural rental housing complexes with approximately 14,000 apartment units financed by USDA Rural Development.



The complex has 8 three-bedroom units and 16 two-bedroom units. The residents will also enjoy an onsite community room, laundry and office building. At the ribbon cutting, Harold Galloway, President of the CAPE Board of Directors said, "A great need has been filled by this development, but there remains much more for us to do. We have just begun." Alice Weathers, CAPE Executive Director, added, "Our goal was to create a beautiful, as well as an affordable, housing development and we did!"

(February 2004)

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/stories/in-20040202-princeton.html>

LIHTC Grand Opening Guide

Press Releases (cont.)

1998-11-12 Media Release - Apartment Complex Brings Affordable Housing for Seniors

MEDIA RELEASE

Release No. 98-11-30 Nov. 12, 1998

Contact: Dave Bryan, Public Information Officer

(816) 759-6658

Apartment Complex Brings Affordable Housing For Seniors

[Kansas City, Missouri] The Red-Wood Gardens grand opening brings more affordable housing for seniors to Joplin. The grand opening for the complex at 1501 Rex Avenue in Joplin will be held Nov. 16, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The Red-Wood Development, Inc. \$3.4 million facility was partially financed by Missouri Housing Development Commission through a \$958,700 HOME mortgage and a \$270,000 HOME surplus cash note second mortgage. The development also received a \$194,561 federal housing tax credit and a \$175,105 state housing tax credit. The seniors development consists of 48 one-bedroom and eight two-bedroom units for seniors. Four of the units have been built specifically to house handicapped seniors. The units will rent at \$235 per month for one bedroom and \$310 for two bedrooms.

"The state, through MHDC, is committed to building partnerships that will bring safer, decent, affordable housing to Missouri's low and moderate income individuals, senior citizens and families," said State Treasurer Bob Holden, a member and former chairman of MHDC. "I'm pleased the state is playing a role through MHDC to help finance the construction of Red-Wood Gardens, which will serve low and moderate income seniors in the Joplin area."

Other Joplin businesses participating in this development project include Parrish, Jacobs, Risenmy & McPherson; Turk & Giles, CPAs, P.C.; Anderson Engineering, Inc.; Bell Management, Inc.; and the City of Joplin. Commerce Bank in Joplin provided construction financing.

NOTE TO MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES: State Treasurer Bob Holden, MHDC Commissioner H. Darrell Waisner and MHDC Executive Director Richard Grose are scheduled to attend the grand opening ceremony. Contact Brenda Brand, Red-Wood Development, Inc., for more information concerning the development or the ceremony at (417) 624-4144.

http://www.mhdc.com/media__releases/1998/1998-11-12.htm

LIHTC Grand Opening Guide

Press Releases (cont.)

STATE HOUSING AGENCY ANNOUNCES GRAND OPENING OF AFFORDABLE APARTMENT ... Page 1 of 1

For Immediate Release

August 24, 1998

8/24-8

Contact: Heather Tindall

512-475-3964

Brian Montgomery

512-475-4542

STATE HOUSING AGENCY ANNOUNCES GRAND OPENING OF AFFORDABLE APARTMENT HOMES IN EAST AUSTIN

WHO: Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA); Decker Lane Partners, LP; and SDC Austin Communities.

WHAT: Grand Opening Celebration of *Gardens of Decker Lake Apartment Homes* in east Austin. Refreshments provided.

The apartment complex was built, in part, through funds from the 1996 Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) allocation administered by TDHCA (\$820,324 credits awarded). There are 200 units, of which 25 are handicapped adaptable. One, two, three, and four-bedroom units are available, ranging in price from from \$430-1,000 per month. Amenities include: On-site childcare, clubhouse with fitness equipment/workout room, swimming pool, wading pool, full-court basketball court, playground and equipment, controlled access security gates, and security cameras throughout the property.

WHEN: Tuesday, August 25, 4-7 p.m. Dedication program begins at 4:30 p.m. Media may tour the facility starting at 1 pm. For a tour, contact Darla Miles, Capstone Management, at 646-6715.

WHERE: 7000 Decker Lane, Austin, Texas (across the street from the Travis County Exposition Center).

<http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/pr/pr67.html>

SECTION XII REFERENCES

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Unique Selling Proposition
Media Plans
Promotions: Do They Have A Place
Tips On Negotiating Rates