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# Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

## Branding helps with recognition

**By Barry VanderKelen**

Marketing experts say that branding is an important activity. But the definitions of it vary widely.

To help clarify what is meant by branding, I spoke with Bob Tobin, a principal with the marketing firm Williams Group of Grand Rapids, Mich. Williams Group works with nonprofit and for-profit companies throughout the country.

Tobin defines a brand as what is easily recognized and valued for the unique contribution an organization makes to the community. Donors are attracted to the brand because they perceive they can have a valuable impact in the community through the organization.

The three elements of a brand are identity, message and performance.

Identity is what people recognize about the organization, in addition to the logo.

Message is the promises about programs and services that the public perceives from the organization.

Performance is the experience a person has with the organization. When the experience is consistent with the perceived promises, the identity is strengthened.

The organization has the opportunity to create a selffulfilling loop that builds loyalty and attracts people.

Organizations may undertake the process of rebranding for many reasons.

Nonprofits are constantly evolving as they adapt to the needs in the community related to their missions.

Over time, they might outgrow their identity and need to update

their brand. For example, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is now known as the Y.

Some organizations may need to reposition themselves in order to reach new audiences; Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County is easier to comprehend than the old name of the organization, which was Economic Opportunity Commission of San Luis Obispo County.

Lastly, an organization might have technical competence but needs to connect emotionally with constituents. The Land Conservancy created a warmer, more inviting brand that reinforces its core competencies.

Rebranding should not be undertaken on a whim. Clear, measurable goals will allow the branding process to meet the needs of the organization.

### Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

### Nonprofit Business Column of *The Tribune*

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*The Tribune* publishes the column every other week in the Business Section. Each column is reprinted as a one-page handout for use by local organizations at [www.slocf.org/nonprofit\\_strategies.php](http://www.slocf.org/nonprofit_strategies.php).