

MANNA: An example of mission expansion done right

Matan Barnea, Hadiyah N. Muhammad and Keri Salerno
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Summary

MANNA's mission is to improve health and deliver nourishment to people in the greater Philadelphia region living with life-threatening illnesses by delivering nutritionally-sound meals and providing counseling. However, this was not always MANNA's mission. Like other organizations, MANNA's mission changed to reflect changing times and circumstances.

The process MANNA undertook was multi-faceted, including the initial realization that their original mission was being addressed through medical advances and an increase in public awareness of HIV/AIDS, the subsequent identification of additional in-need communities, the development of a strong communications plan for their board and stakeholders, preparation for loss of support, and successful execution of a pilot of their new programming. These steps should serve as an effective road map for any organization considering mission expansion or change.

MANNA's mission is to improve health and deliver nourishment to people in the greater Philadelphia region living with life-threatening illnesses by delivering nutritionally-sound meals and providing counseling. However, MANNA's mission was not always so broad. Like other organizations, MANNA's mission and scope changed to reflect evolving need and circumstances. The successful expansion of MANNA's mission in 2006 can serve as a model for other organizations considering mission expansion or change.

MANNA was formed in 1990 by 7 members of The First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia to help nourish men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS. By the late 1990s MANNA had delivered 2 million meals, moved its offices and distribution center to its current location at 2323 Ranstead Street, and begun what would come to be their signature fundraising effort, Pie in the Sky. At this same time, years of medical research had provided tools to better manage HIV/AIDS, and leadership within MANNA began to identify other individuals with life-threatening illnesses that could benefit from their services. So MANNA began to consider expanding its mission.

MANNA's board, led at the time by Richard Keaveney, began discussions around mission expansion. Keaveney and others believed the circumstances were right for MANNA's mission to expand to include all people living with life-threatening illnesses. The potential expansion forced all involved to face difficult questions, such as:

Could MANNA deliver a meal to someone living with HIV/AIDS, but not the individual living 3 doors down dying of cancer? Would expanding MANNA's mission take needed focus off of the HIV/AIDS community?

If Keaveney and his supporters were to succeed at all, the mission expansion process would need to be slowly and carefully executed. The first step was getting the board's buy-in, followed by the staff and finally the community. Immediately the concept of mission expansion received resistance. The strongest resistance came from the LGBT community who felt that MANNA was abandoning them and abandoning HIV/AIDS. There were also those opposed to mission expansion in general.

Keaveney began a communications campaign with the board and community to convince detractors that this was the right thing to do and that MANNA was not walking away from HIV/AIDS or the LGBT community. One talking point Keaveney utilized was that people living with HIV/AIDS often had other debilitating illnesses such as cancer. Therefore, MANNA was already serving those with diseases other than HIV/AIDS. Keaveney reached out to the LGBT community by pointing out that ill members of that population that did not have HIV/AIDS still needed nourishment but could not receive MANNA's services under its existing scope.

The communications strategy, along with a personal interaction Keaveney had with a friend, was enough for him to convince the board to approve a pilot. MANNA

formed a partnership with Abramson Cancer Center to begin delivering 30 patients nourishing food. The pilot approach, involving a small sampling of cancer patients, yielded positive results. The pilot's successful completion convinced the board and staff to expand MANNA's mission to include all individuals living with life-threatening illnesses. However, there were still a few holdouts in the community. Some eventually returned to support the organization but others elected to continue to focus their efforts on HIV/AIDS or LGBT organizations and issues.

Organizations exploring mission expansion or change should be prepared to lose support during the process from community leaders, other organizations and/or funders. If an organization is not prepared to do so, then it should not embark on mission expansion or change.

Why was MANNA's mission expansion so successful? According to Leslie R. Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant in their book, *Forces for Good*, one trait of a high-impact nonprofit is adaptability (2008). The book states that, to be high-impact, a nonprofit must be asking, reflecting, looking and listening to find a gap(s) between the organization's vision and its results. In addition, Crutchfield and Grant mention that nonprofits must be aware of changes in markets, public policy, advocacy, environments or other factors that influence the organization's vision, mission or results and be prepared to adapt to them. Keaveney and the team at MANNA

proved adept at these qualities. They noticed other individuals with life-threatening illnesses were not being provided nourishing food, and recognized that science, government and society had stepped up to address the HIV/AIDS crisis. Therefore, a gap existed. They saw an opportunity to increase their service, impact and vision, and took it.

In addition, Keaveney's strategy of starting a pilot with the Abramson Cancer Center follows Peter C. Brinckerhoff's recommendation in his book, *Mission-Based Marketing*, that, "Incremental change is less painful. Less pain means less resistance" (2003) Brinckerhoff also discusses the need to have a "change agent" who is the driving force and lead advocate for any change an organization is about to go through. It is this person's duty to advocate to the board, staff, supporters and stakeholder groups about why the change needs to occur. For MANNA, Keaveney ably filled the role of change agent while the organization determined if a mission expansion was going to occur or not. As mentioned above, an organization needs to be prepared for not all of its supporters to agree with a mission expansion or change and for these individuals to abandon the organization. Brinckerhoff also discusses the need for organizations considering mission expansion to be strong and prepared for this to happen.

MANNA's process of realizing their original mission was being addressed through medical advances and an increase in public awareness around HIV/AIDS, identifying

an additional need, developing a strong communications plan for their board and stakeholders, preparing for loss of support and running a pilot of their new programming should serve as an effective model for any organization considering mission expansion or change.

References

Brinckerhoff, P.C. (2003). *Mission-Based Marketing: An Organizational Development Workbook*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Crutchfield, L.R.. and H.M. Grant. (2008). *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.