

## EXERCISE CASE STUDY

# *Soroptimist International of the Americas: Using White Papers to Raise Awareness about Issues Affecting Women and Girls Worldwide*

## **Introduction** .....

In nineteen countries and territories, Soroptimist International of the Americas (SIA) works to improve the lives of women and girls. SIA club members strive to accomplish this goal by participating in a wide variety of programs and local projects that involve education, employment, healthcare, disaster recovery, and the prevention of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sex trafficking.<sup>49</sup> The term “Soroptimist” is a combination of the Latin words *soror* meaning “sister” and *optimus* meaning “best,” which loosely translates to “best for sisters.”

## **History** .....

The parent organization, Soroptimist International, was founded in 1921 as “a world-wide volunteer service organization for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and

throughout the world.”<sup>50</sup> The vision statement for the organization is to “[b]e the leading international organization of business and professional women united through volunteer efforts to enable women and girls to live their dreams, take control of their lives, and live according to their own values.”<sup>51</sup>

The worldwide organization consists of four divisions (or federations): Soroptimist International of the Americas (SIA), SI of Great Britain and Ireland, SI of Europe, and SI of South West Pacific. The organization’s world headquarters is located in Cambridge, United Kingdom.<sup>52</sup> Today, with over 95,000 members in more than 125 countries, the organization donates time and money to local projects and international efforts to make the lives of girls and women better. The SIA “was formed at the Washington, DC, conference in 1928.”<sup>53</sup>

## Challenge<sup>††</sup>.....

Soroptimist has been researching and publishing white papers on issues important to women and girls for several years. Each year, new white papers are added and existing papers are updated to ensure that information is current. Soroptimist white papers focus on topics important to Soroptimists and women and girls worldwide. Currently, Soroptimist white papers are offered free of charge on the Soroptimist website (<http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/SoroptimistLocalClub-Projects.html>).

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The specific goal of Soroptimist white papers is to raise awareness of issues important to Soroptimist and to influence others to work to improve the lives of women and girls in local communities and throughout the world. Also, the white papers help to promote Soroptimist as an expert on international women’s issues and as an organization addressing those issues.

## Strategy .....

Soroptimist white papers can be used by Soroptimist members and clubs in a number of different ways. This resource contains a number of suggestions for club use. In addition, it includes abstracts for each of the current papers, the URL address, significant dates with which to use the white papers, and suggestions for other federation resources to use in conjunction with the papers.

## Soroptimist Club Use for White Papers

### 1. Educate Club Members

Using white papers as the center of a club program meeting is a simple and easy way to educate members about an issue of interest to them. Some specific ideas are:

- A club can design a quiz on the white paper and give awards to those members scoring the highest. It can appoint a member to lead the discussion.
- A club can email the white paper to all members prior to the club meeting. It can have a member-led discussion—like a book club.

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<sup>#</sup>Raising Awareness about Issues Affecting Women and Girls Worldwide, Soroptimist White Papers. © Soroptimist International of the Americas. Reprinted with permission.

- A club can hand out or email a white paper to all members. It can ask members to read the paper, highlighting information they did not previously know. Go around the room asking each member to discuss what she learned.
- A club can use the white papers to launch a discussion about ideas for new club projects. After presenting the information in the paper, members can brainstorm about ways the club could address the issue in the community or worldwide.

### 2. Promote Soroptimist Programs

Because white papers focus on topics important to Soroptimists, frequently a tie exists between federation projects and the white papers. When promoting Soroptimist programs in the community, a club can use the white papers to give depth to an argument about why the programs are important. For instance, white papers are available on women and education (Women's Opportunity Awards), women and disaster relief (the Soroptimist Disaster Grants for Women and Girls), domestic violence in the workplace (Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence), and women and trafficking (Soroptimists STOP Trafficking). The white papers can help the club to promote the importance of Soroptimist programs in the community. If applicable, the club can use the white papers to promote local club projects as well.

### 3. Educate the Community

White papers can serve as the centerpiece of awareness activities in the community. For example, if a club wants to present a program to a local school about women and education, it can use the white paper as a starting point to build a compelling case about the importance of women's education.

Oftentimes, club members are asked to speak on topics important to women in their local communities. To find out important background information about a topic—and what Soroptimist is doing about it—these members check to see if Soroptimist offers a white paper on the topic.



Soroptimist Home Page

Courtesy of soroptimist.org

### 4. Interest the Media

The best time to announce these white papers is when related topics come up in the media . . . White papers can be used to create impressive opinion editorials or letters to the editor around these dates or when the topics are in the news. In addition, if the club is holding an event and inviting media, it can include a white paper addressing the theme of the event in the press kit.

### 5. Strengthen Advocacy Efforts

When the club chooses a position to advocate for or against, the Soroptimist white papers can provide the information needed to prepare an advocacy

statement and plan a campaign. It can provide the background information needed to build a coherent argument and an effective campaign.

## 6. Raise Funds

Donors want to know why their contributions are needed and where they are being used. If the club is holding a community event or giving out federation awards, it can appeal to the audience to support the Soroptimist programs. It can distribute white papers that correspond to the topic of the event or the award. For example, if the club is disbursing Women's Opportunity Awards, it can distribute the Women and Education white paper in order to educate donors about the importance of the award and to provide information about what Soroptimist is doing to ensure women's access to education. Or, if the club is holding a breast cancer event, it can hand out the "Breast Cancer and Low Income Women" to possible donors. White papers can also be given out to donors as a thank-you. If a donation is received from a community member who was responding to a specific club project, the club can send that person the white paper on that topic, along with a thank-you for the donation.

## Results .....

The Soroptimist's cumulative impact has been significant. According the organization's 2009-2010 *Program Impact Report*, "more than \$2 million was distributed through federation programs, helping more than 10,000 women and girls live their dreams of a better life."<sup>54</sup> Soroptimist participates and funds programs to ensure their strength and effectiveness. For example, recipients of their Women's Opportunity Awards, who have typically suffered hardships such as poverty and abuse, receive skills training and education so that they can find employment and reclaim their lives. Soroptimist also provides Disaster Grants for Women and Girls around the world, offering funding to rebuild homes and lives after natural disasters strike. These programs, along with numerous other awards, grants, and programs, have made SIA club members an important part of the international effort to improve the lives of girls and women.

## Review Questions for Soroptimist International of the Americas Case Study

1. What are some of the ways SIA uses white papers to raise awareness about issues affecting girls and women?
2. How might this organization's white paper strategy and tactics be applied to other organizations or companies?
3. What are some of the possible drawbacks to using white papers in an attempt to influence people?
4. How could SIA use article directories and e-books to further raise awareness about issues affecting girls and women?

49. *Soroptimist International of the Americas Program Impact Report (2009-2010)*, Soroptimist. Retrieved July 2, 2011, from <http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/ProgramDocs/GeneralInformation/English/ProgramImpactReport.pdf>
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54. *Soroptimist International of the Americas Program Impact Report (2009-2010)*, Soroptimist. Retrieved July 2, 2011, from <http://www.soroptimist.org/members/program/ProgramDocs/GeneralInformation/English/ProgramImpactReport.pdf>