

Brand Renovation

A do-it-yourself guide to updating your brand when your organization's identity evolves

Inside this guide find:

- Five clear signs that it is time for a brand renovation
- A four-step process that makes refreshing your brand as simple as possible
- A case study on how the Vermont Network used this process to update their brand and visual identity



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First off, what do we mean by brand?



Your brand is essentially your organization's identity.* It defines who you are as an organization, what you do (at a high level), and why it matters. It showcases the unique value you offer your stakeholders and what sets you apart from competitors and allies. It must feel authentic to you and also resonate with your priority audiences. It's an internal touchstone that is expressed externally and reinforced through messaging and all communication activities.

The core of your brand is the **brand promise**, a short statement that aims to capture the essence of your organization – the promise you make to yourself and your most important audiences. However, it's difficult to capture all the elements of an organization's identity in a brand promise without it becoming a brand paragraph. So in addition to the brand promise, there are three other key elements of your brand:

- **Unique niche** describes what sets you apart from allies or competitors working in the same field.
- **Values** are your core beliefs and often describe why you do your work.
- **Personality** describes how you approach your work.

Taking the brand promise together with the unique niche, values, and personality provides the most complete picture of your brand.

Having the core identity of your organization written down creates a stronger foundation for all of your work. It increases consistency across your organization by making it easier and more efficient for everyone to use the same words to talk about your work. And it gives you the starting point for building your strategic plan and communication plan. **To learn more about the connection between brand and strategic plan, download our report [Build on Brand](#).**

Is our logo our brand?

We define **brand** as your organization's core identity – who you are, the big-picture what you do, and why it matters.

We call things like name, logo, colors, tagline or other messages – and really anything else your organization says, does, or creates to reflect its identity – **branding**. These are important tools, but they are not your brand.

* Our definition of brand is influenced and informed by the work and ideas of Diane Tompkins and Alexis Sanford. We are deeply grateful for many opportunities to partner with and learn from Di and Lex over the years.



When is it time for a brand renovation?



As a general rule, you should refresh your brand every five to 10 years. Your brand doesn't change as often as your strategic plan, but needs to be updated to keep pace as your organization evolves.

A best practice is to review your brand every five years, and make any minor adjustments needed. Examples of minor adjustments include small wording changes or updating the explanations or examples that accompany your values and personality traits.

If your organization is going through more significant changes, and you answer yes to one or more of the questions in the sidebar, you may need a more thorough update. Examples of bigger revisions to your brand might include changing the focus of your unique niche or adding or removing values or personality traits.

Case study: Vermont Network

The Vermont Network is Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence. In 2016, they partnered with Springboard to clarify and write down their brand for the first time. At the time, the organization was making a **strategic shift** – from supporting members to deliver services to survivors of domestic and sexual violence to also working to uproot the causes of violence through cultural and policy change. "Articulating our brand for the first time helped us put into words how Vermont Network was evolving, start new conversations, and change the view of our organization by allies and constituents," said Sarah Robinson, deputy executive director of the Vermont Network.

Then in 2024, Vermont Network began preparing to launch a **new initiative** – a national leadership lab called Amplify that will extend their work beyond Vermont. "Since 2016, our work at the national level to uproot the causes of violence has grown. Amplify is the newest and most significant investment we are making to expand the collective leadership of the movement to end gender-based violence. It was essential for our brand to align with this continued evolution," said Robinson.

The rest of this guide shares the steps that Vermont Network took and the changes they made to renovate their brand and visual identity.

Five signs that you're ready for a brand renovation

1. Your organization is making a major strategic shift
2. Your organization is launching a new initiative
3. Your organization is sunsetting a significant area of work
4. Your organization has grown substantially
5. When using your core brand language in proposals, publications or other communications, you are having to rewrite it because it feels out of date

Four steps to renovate your brand



Step 1: Assemble a team to work on the update that includes senior decision makers and representatives of the organization’s core areas of work. Include at least one representative from your communication team if you have one. If brand updates require approval by your board, consider including a board member on the team as well. (If you don’t have the internal capacity to update your brand yourself, you can also engage a consultant as part of this team.) From the outset, be clear on whether the group will make a consensus decision on changes or if a single person, such as the CEO, will have the final say.

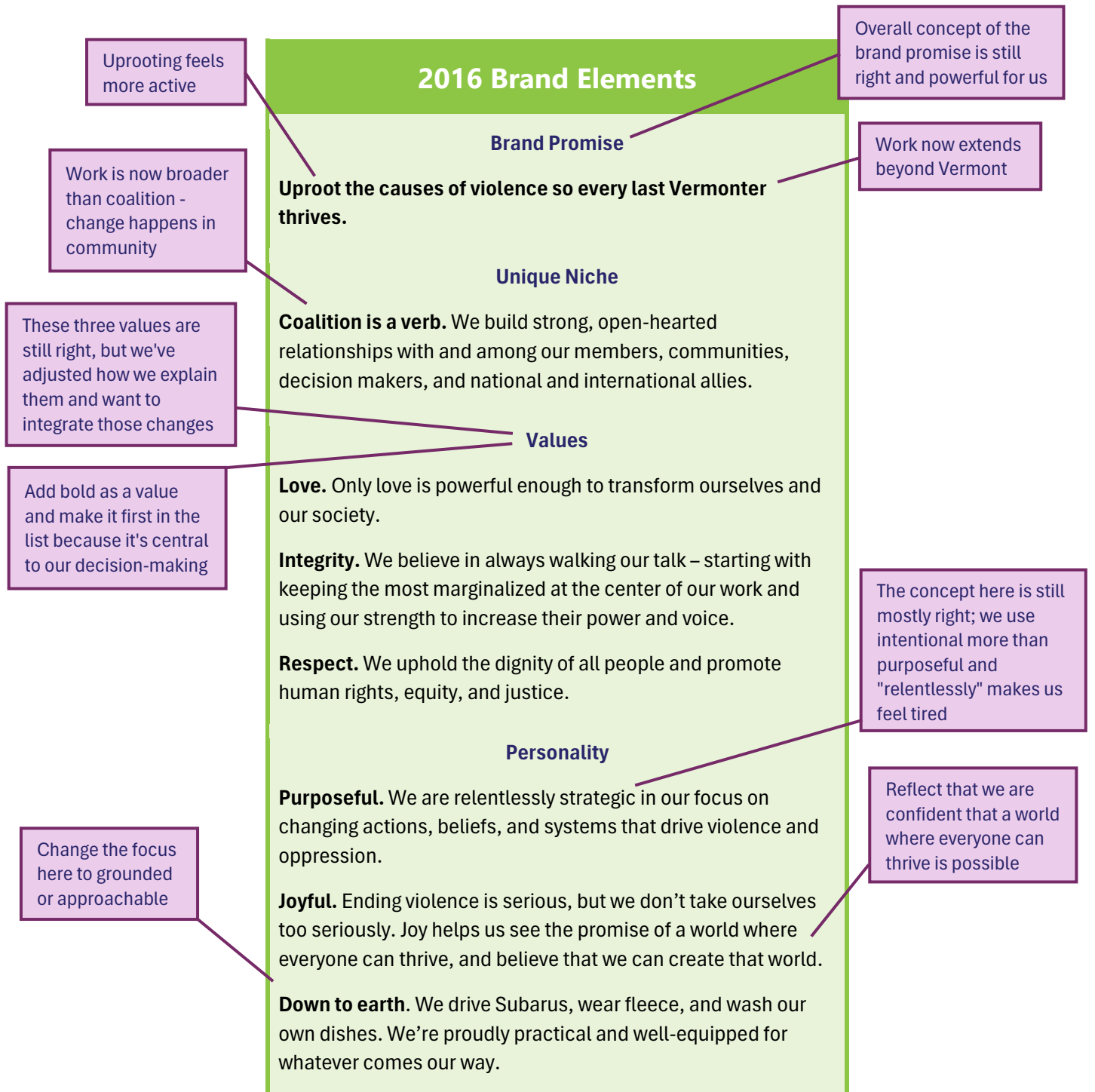
Vermont Network’s brand renovation team: The organization’s executive director and deputy executive director represented the organization as a whole. The director and two staff of the new leadership lab brought the perspective of the new area of work. Two members of Springboard’s staff facilitated the team.

Step 2: Hold a meeting in person or via Zoom. For minor updates, your meeting may only require an hour. If a more significant update is likely, you will want to schedule a couple of hours to talk through the changes that are needed. At the meeting, answer the following questions. Sharing these questions in advance of the meeting will allow the team to gather their thoughts ahead of time.

Question	Vermont Network’s Answers
How has the brand been working for us? What’s been working well? What could work better?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall, it has given us internal and external clarity on who we are and we still receive positive feedback from audiences.• Our scope of work, understanding of the connections between oppression and violence, geographic focus, and team have all expanded – and we want the brand to reflect this.
What parts of the brand still feel current and right?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The brand promise still feels very right!• The three values are also still on track, but we need to integrate some updates in how we talk about them.
What parts feel off-base and why? How can we adjust them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our unique niche is broader than coalition – community is a more appropriate scope for our work.• The biggest area for change is our personality traits – all of them need some refinement to reflect how we work now.
Is there anything we should drop and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the brand promise, drop the focus on Vermont because our work extends beyond our state now.
Is there anything important missing that we need to add?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We’ve added bold as one of our values.• We’re missing something about our role as innovators on the leading edge of our movement.

Vermont Network's answers to these questions clearly reflected the need for a more thorough brand update.

Put your brand in a Google Document or paste it into a Mural board so that you can capture feedback easily and participants can see their contributions during the discussion. Here's what Vermont Network's feedback looked like after this meeting:



Step 3: Make revisions that address the team's feedback. Designate one person on the brand renovation team to take the lead on revisions. A logical choice is someone with a communication role. If you don't have communication staff, select someone who is a strong writer. Use track changes or a different color text to highlight what's changed and keep a clean, original version of the brand in the document for reference.

Share the revisions with the team for review. Ask them to focus on what changes they like, what changes need adjustment, and if anything was missed. Make a final round of edits if needed, review the final draft with the team, and agree to call it final. Here's what Vermont Network's brand looked like after incorporating the revisions:

2024 Brand Elements

Brand Promise

Uprooting the causes of violence so every last **Vermont** person thrives.

Unique Niche

Coalition Community is a verb. We build strong, **open-hearted** relationships with and among our members, **communities**, decision makers, and national and international **partners** **allies**, because **collective action accelerates change**.

Values

Bold. We take courageous action to build a world free from violence.

Love. ~~Only love is powerful enough to transform ourselves and our society~~ We choose open-heartedness and believe in a limitless and powerful greater good.

Integrity. We ~~believe in always walking our talk – starting with~~ **hold ourselves accountable for** keeping the most marginalized at the center of our work ~~and using our strength to increase their power and voice.~~

Respect. We ~~uphold the~~ **honor every last person's full humanity and right to** dignity ~~of all people and promote human rights,~~ equity, and justice.

Personality

Purposeful Intentional. We are ~~relentlessly~~ **fiercely** strategic in our ~~focus on changing actions~~ **efforts to challenge** habits, beliefs, and systems that drive violence and oppression.

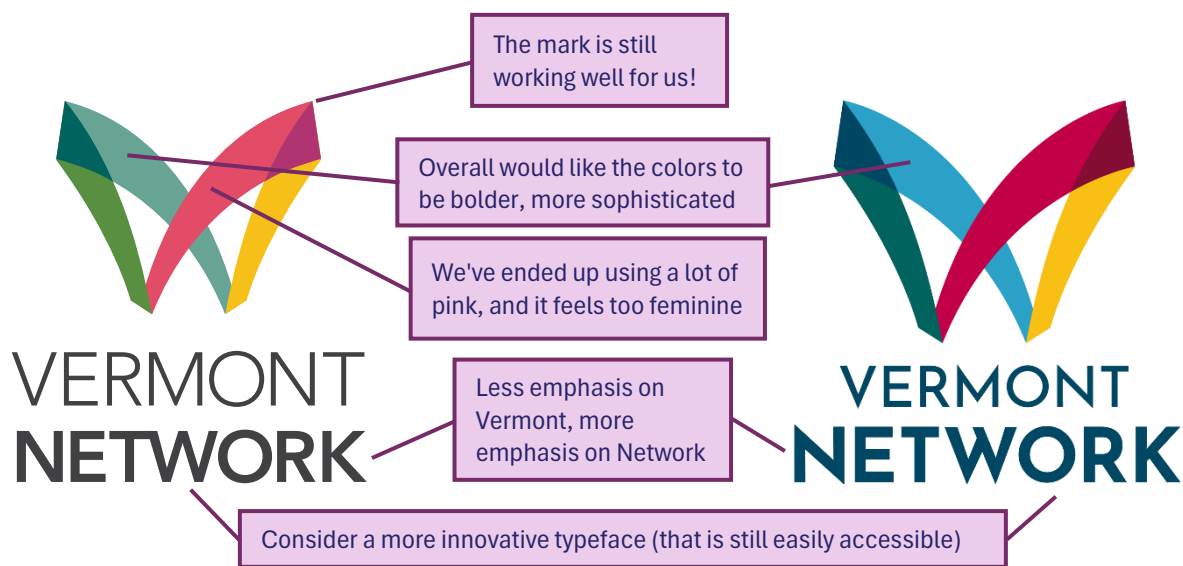
Creative. We embrace innovative approaches, learn from failure, and are energized by exchanging ideas with our community.

Joyful Hopeful. ~~Ending violence is serious, but we don't take ourselves too seriously. Joy helps us see the promise of a world where everyone can thrive, and believe that we can create that world.~~ We believe unequivocally that a world where every last person thrives is within reach.

Down to earth. ~~We drive Subarus, wear fleece, and wash our own dishes. We're proudly practical and well-equipped for whatever comes our way~~ **approachable, enthusiastic about working alongside anyone in pursuit of our vision.**

Step 4: Share and integrate your updated brand. If your updates were minor, you may just need to share the new version with your staff. If you made more substantial changes, you'll also need to update your [core message](#) or visual identity (your logo, color palette, fonts and other visual elements of your branding). Those updates may in turn necessitate changes to your website, printed materials and other communication channels to make sure everything is aligned with your brand.

The changes to Vermont Network's brand were significant enough that they decided to refresh their logo and color palette as well so that their visual identity would reflect and reinforce their updated brand. Our longtime design partner, The Creative Industry, created [Vermont Network's 2016 logo](#) and again worked with them to update it in 2024.



A key action here is training your staff to use the updated brand. For Vermont Network, this included sharing the updated brand and visual identity at a staff meeting and breaking into teams to tackle different places where it needed to be integrated, such as email signatures. Vermont Network staff also practiced using the updated brand language verbally ahead of an important fundraising event.

We're here if you have questions

We hope this guide makes the process of updating your brand clear and accessible. You know your organization's identity best – pairing that intrinsic knowledge with this straightforward process should set you up for success. If you get stuck, have questions, or need a hand, please give us a shout at hello@springboard.partners. And if you use this guide to renovate your brand, we'd love to hear how it went!

About Springboard Partners

Springboard helps nonprofits and foundations use the power of communication to do more good. Together, we've worked with the nonprofit sector for more than 30 years, and we understand the challenges these organizations face getting clear, getting coordinated, getting attention, and getting people to take action.

Our woman- and Latino-led team works with nonprofits to identify the specific challenges they face and craft and implement solutions that allow them to reach their goals. We've helped small local organizations maximize their social media impact, worked with national advocates to shape news coverage of high-profile policy debates, and partnered with foundations to facilitate the communication of grantee networks worldwide.

Our services include nearly everything foundations and nonprofits need to communicate powerfully – from the fundamentals of helping organizations strengthen their brands and develop strategic and communication plans to meeting essential communication needs like holding more productive meetings, running advocacy campaigns, and improving media relations. Learn more at www.springboard.partners.

About Vermont Network

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence works to uproot the causes of violence so every person thrives. The Vermont Network is a membership coalition. Our members are 15 independent, non-profit organizations in Vermont which provide direct services to victims of domestic and sexual violence. At the Vermont Network we:

- **Grow changemakers.** We offer leadership development and mentoring for advocates, convene a biannual statewide conference and bring activists across disciplines together to make change.
- **Connect communities.** We support organizations to align, respond and take action. We exchange resources and strategies with the community working to end violence and oppression so we can all become stronger agents for change.
- **Elevate voices.** We engage in public policy advocacy and organizing to advocate for and embody changes in policies, institutions, and ultimately our culture.
- **Support the margins.** We grow statewide direct services programs to serve marginalized survivors such as incarcerated survivors, and victims who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Throughout our work, the Vermont Network builds strong relationships with and among our members, decision makers, and national and international partners, because we believe that collective action accelerates change. Learn more at www.vtnetwork.org.

