



## **Developing Effective Media Outreach**

### **I. Planning**

The success of media relations and media outreach depends on the planning that you devote to it. The goal of your media relations efforts planning is to help reporters and media representatives better inform the public. Media outreach requires the same meticulous preparation and thought that you would devote to increasing membership, running your programs or ensuring the financial stability of your organization.

#### **a) Determine the goals and objectives for your media relations/media outreach program**

What is your purpose in disseminating your message? (e.g., education, persuasion, initiate change, mobilize action, publicize an event, generate support, etc.)

#### **b) Determine your target audience – by knowing your audience, you can prioritize the media sources that can generate the best coverage**

- Who do you want to receive your message?
- What message is it you want them to receive?
- How receptive are they to your message?
- What general level of knowledge does your audience have on the subject?
- What information will be new to your audience?
- What are the main objections your audience will have to your position?
- What are the demographics of your audience (e.g., age, education level, socio-economic status, political or social interests, etc.?)

#### **c) Identify target media**

Which media will best target my audience?

- Print (newspapers, magazines, newsletters, internal and trade publications)
- Television (news programs, talk shows, and public service announcements)
- Radio (news programs, talk shows, and public service announcements)
- News wire services (Associated Press, United Press, Reuters, etc.)
- Websites
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs)

If multiple media are appropriate, how do I prioritize them? How do I allocate resources to make best use of multiple media?



**d) Conduct an informal analysis of the media coverage on your organization, issue, program, etc. to date.**

How much do you know about the needs of the various media organizations and their professionals?

Do your research. Pay attention to your target media by diligently reading or watching the media. Decipher any coverage patterns that may be present.

**e) Analyze perceptions**

If you are using the media to communicate your position on an issue, take a pro-active approach to learning the perceptions of your community and/or industry on the issue. Assess the perceived urgency and importance of the issue to your community and/or industry. Keep in mind that the media will put issues into categories based on their level of urgency and importance to their readership.

**f) Establish a media relations committee**

Identify and designate people – staff and/or volunteers – to be responsible for developing and implementing a media outreach plan. Some of the functions of a Media Relations Committee would include:

- Develop and test messages
- Conduct and arrange training on working with the media
- Identify spokesperson(s)
- Assemble and maintain a media list (see below)
- Inventory media outlets and contacts
- Conduct outreach with media to create opportunities to promote the organization and its programs, positions, etc.

Ensure that one person is responsible for approving all activity on behalf of the committee.



## **II. Identify key media sources**

### **a) Assemble a media list**

Develop a comprehensive media list of sources that are important to your organization and establish ongoing relationships with your media contacts – before you need them and before they approach you unexpectedly.

Identify the most appropriate contacts for each media group at the community, local, state and/or national level. You can often obtain this information on their website or by looking at their publication(s) or postings. Your goal should be to identify the most appropriate contact to help you deliver your message.

- Media organization name
- Phone number
- Media contact name
- Fax number
- Title
- E-mail address
- Area of expertise/interest
- Circulation (daily, weekly, etc.)
- Address, city, state, zip
- Personal notes, contact log

### **b) Determine the types of media and categories of coverage**

#### **Print - Newspapers**

- Journalist (types of coverage)
- Environmental Reporter (responsible for environmental stories)
- Health Reporter (responsible for health related stories)
- Consumer Reporter (responsible for consumer issues)
- Lifestyle Reporter (responsible for local profiles and human interest stories regarding people involved with a local cause)
- City Editor (responsible for news taking place in your city; emphasis on community events; features on outstanding residents; local issues)
- Features Editor (responsible for human interest stories including: profiles of outstanding citizens; social trends; lifestyles; programs that benefit the community)



## **Print - Magazines**

- Photo Editor (responsible for events or backdrops that provide good photo opportunities)
- Managing Editor/Articles Editor (responsible for reviewing all incoming press materials and choosing which stories to cover)
- Environmental Editor (responsible for coverage of all environmental issues)
- Newsletters Editor (responsible for reviewing all incoming press materials and choosing which stories to cover)

## **Television**

- Assignment Editor (responsible for reviewing all incoming press materials and assigning stories to staff reporters)
- News Room/Desk (responsible for receiving all incoming press materials and story leads, passes information to editors)
- Health Reporter (responsible for health related stories)
- Consumer Reporter (responsible for consumer issues)
- Environmental Reporter (responsible for environmental stories)

## **Talk show**

- Producer (responsible for reviewing all incoming materials and choosing which stories to cover; also responsible for booking guests for the show)
- Determine if the show will be live or taped.
- Determine whether there will be a call-in session.

## **Radio**

- News Director (responsible for reviewing all incoming media materials and choosing stories to cover on the air)
- Determine if the show will be live or taped.
- Determine whether there will be a call-in session.

## **Newsire Services**

- Journalist (types of coverage)
- Bureau Chief (responsible for reviewing all incoming press materials and choosing stories to cover)
- Photo Desk (responsible for assigning news photographers to cover events and other photo opportunities; also distributes photo submissions)



### **c) Determine media timeline**

Each media outlet has different time lines for stories. Develop a media timeline as part of an overall organizational schedule and strategy so you have a guide for when messages should be created and sent to the media. Be sure you know and meet the deadlines of the reporters to whom you are reaching out.

### **d) Build relationships with the media**

Do not wait until you need media support. It is important to build relationships with the members of the media before crises arise

## **III. Establish your message and spokesperson**

### **Establish key messaging**

Messaging is a very important aspect of implementing your media outreach. A message is a one or two sentence statement that can be delivered in approximately 15 seconds and which is easily understood, free of jargon and suggests some action on the part of the listener or reader. Your messages should be written in positive language, in a way that conveys your point of view. You will need to determine the most appropriate tone for your message – authoritative, warm, warning, etc.

Maintaining consistent key messages is imperative to your success. Incomplete or incorrect information can create unjustified concern and jeopardize your credibility. To help facilitate the dissemination of accurate and relevant information to an audience and members of the press, create documents that briefly summarize your mission, objectives, activities, etc). These materials should be compiled and included in media kits, which become reference tools for generating a good story. Consider materials you may need to support your message, such as statistics or other data. Create or obtain fact sheets, background pieces, and other tools that can be distributed to the media.

Before transmitting any information through any media, test it for believability, acceptability and feasibility.



## **Designate your media spokesperson**

Selecting the appropriate spokesperson for your program is critical to ensuring consistency and accuracy of your message.

This individual(s) should be seen as a resource for the media professionals, someone who is an expert and directly entrenched in the program issues. Your spokesperson not only needs to be knowledgeable but also open to interviews and comfortable appearing on camera and in photos, and/or being quoted.

An effective media spokesperson should:

- Be someone of authority to be accepted as speaking for the organization
- Have technical knowledge or experience with your issues
- Have presentation skills that are consistent with the image your organization wants to portray
- Possess excellent communication skills
- Maintain their calm under pressure
- Be perceived as highly credible by the news media and the public
- Be comfortable in dealing with the unexpected and surprises

If your designated spokesperson lacks these qualities you can:

- Create talking points
- Provide formal media training and/or briefings on what to expect and how to respond to media inquiries
- Provide opportunities to practice prior to interviews and conduct practice runs

Where necessary, you may need to provide technical experts to the spokesperson to familiarize him/her to answer certain types of questions.

## **Assemble Media kits**

A media kit is designed to be distributed to members of the media at news conferences, campaign launches and at times of other major announcements. Media kits usually include the following:

- Press release with your logo or other significant visuals
- Background information (provides the context, chronology and supportive explanations)
- Fact sheet with statistics and other pertinent data (one page, hard facts, not opinions)
- Biographies of your spokesperson or other newsmakers
- Frequently asked questions with the answers
- Organization contacts
- Key news articles



## **Determine the need for media events**

Sometimes a media event can provide members of the press with a special opportunity to see your organization or program(s) in action and capture key images and interviews.

It is a great way to reach multiple mediums in an appealing and memorable fashion that highlights all major points of a story.

To determine whether or not a media event is appropriate for your organization or program, think about the following:

- Magnitude - How many people are impacted by your program?
- Newsworthiness - Compared to all other activities taking place in the community or industry, how important is this at the given moment?
- Locality - Is the story relevant here?
- Visuals - What interesting imagery, action, interviews are available?

## **IV. Conduct active media outreach**

### **Making the pitch**

Media professionals are always on deadline and have little time for long story pitches. Remember that you are not the only one trying to get a reporter's attention. The most effective way to begin sharing a story with the media is by telephone and email. Be aware of the preferences of individual media professionals, since some may prefer to receive news releases by fax or email instead of the telephone. Regularly submit letters-to-the-editor and op-eds to local newspapers and mobilize your members to write letters and contact the media as well.

### **When talking with media professionals, remember to:**

- Never agree to give a media interview without reading the morning newspaper.
- Know the style, format and position of the media representative with whom you are dealing.
- Find out what the story is that the media representative is seeking. Don't get drawn into a conversation prematurely. Determine the reporter's angle on the story or his/her approach.
- Ask the reporter what triggered his/her interest in the story.
- Have two or three primary messages that you want to make during the interview. Have the facts you need to back up your points.





- Invite the reporter to look at your materials (e.g., your website, media kit, etc.) for more information.
- Sound enthusiastic about the story you are proposing.
- Do not allow the interviewer, reporter or moderator get you off track. Keep coming back to the points that you want to make.
- If you don't know, be honest and follow up with an answer later.
- Avoid responding to "off-the-record" questions.
- Avoid saying "no comment."
- Avoid technical jargon.
- Maintain a sense of calm and a sense of humor.
- Never say anything you don't want printed or broadcasted.
- If possible, try to get an audio or video recording of the radio or television appearance. Play it back and critique your performance. Have others do the same. Use that as an opportunity to perfect your presentation for the next media appearance.
- Always follow up any conversation with an email and another phone call.

### **Staging a media event**

A media event is an extremely useful (but not required) tool for drawing media attention to generate publicity and awareness around your programs, issues, positions, etc. Media events are like press briefings, with the added responsibility of providing compelling visuals (e.g., photo opportunities, interviews, demonstrations, etc.) to appeal to a variety of media types. In addition to any one-on-one press briefings, a media event is an efficient and quick way to achieve multiple impressions across several mediums.

### **Holding news conferences**

News conferences are a fast way to get your message across to the greatest number of media outlets. If you decide to stage a news conference, start planning for it several weeks in advance of the actual date of the event. Decide where to have it, who will speak, how many individuals will speak, how long their statements will be, how their statements will complement each other, how much time will be allotted for reporters' questions, and how long the overall conference will last.

If you are planning on television coverage, try to have your news conference in a location that will provide dramatic visuals and preferably in the morning. This allows reporters to meet their deadlines for newspapers and for prime time television and radio newscasts at 5:00 or 6:00 p.m.





Send a media advisory out to all daily newspapers, radio and television stations a week in advance of your news conference. A media advisory is a brief, one page description of the event. Be certain to include the heading “media advisory”, FROM: (your organization’s name, address, phone number, email address and media contact person), DATE, EVENT: (news conference on \_\_\_ (subject), date/time, location and address of the event). Follow that with a brief description of the issue to be addressed. Then list the scheduled speakers for the event.

Try to avoid holding your news conference on the same day as another “breaking” event such as a City Council, Governor’s, Mayor’s or Congress member’s new conferences unless you’re trying to piggy back on an issue that is being discussed in those sessions that relates to your issue or position.

Have a media sign-in sheet and ask reporters to fill in their names, the media they represent and their contact information. This will help you in building an effective media list and will help you to know whom to contact the next time you have a news conference or media event.

After the event, monitor the radio and TV stations to see the footage or their newscasts. You can also tape the radio or TV newscasts and have a video or audio record of the way your event was covered. Read the local newspapers to see how they covered your event.

If invited media did not attend, follow up and offer to send them a press kit and arrange a follow-up interview.

## **Media follow-up**

Even the most compelling story requires active follow up efforts. Once you have established an appropriate contact with the media, continue to check in regularly to maintain interest around your story and program. The only way to gauge their interest for your story is to follow up.



## **V. Follow-up and recap**

Again, the follow-up process is important to maintain constant contact with media as well as solidify the success of your outreach. Even after you have successfully pulled off a great campaign, it is imperative to keep in touch with media contacts and monitor your progress with a program recap.

Wait no longer than a week following your media event, and preferably less. Be prepared to provide any additional information to the media.

## **Archives**

As news and feature stories begin to appear, begin to catalogue media coverage and create a document that traces the progression of your media campaign. An archive of media materials and tracked coverage should be developed for future use and reference for your program.