A Media Relations Primer

How to Use the Media as Part of Your Public Education Campaign

June 12, 2013
What Is Media Relations?

- Developing good relationships with reporters and editors who cover the work and activities of your organization
- Understanding the needs and interests of the media
- Providing the media with accurate and compelling information and knowledgeable individuals who can answer questions, enabling reporters, producers, and other media professionals to produce good stories
What Do the Media Need: News

- The Unusual
  - Man Bites Dog
  - Something that has never been done before.
- Something with Big Impact
  - Large Numbers
  - Raising an issue that affects 100s of people
- Well-known people (local or national)
  - Leonardo DiCaprio, your mayor, Congressman, local TV personality
- Ordinary people doing extraordinary things
What Do YOU Need: Messages and Stories

- Clear, compelling messages give you the best chance to get your story told right
- Messages are ideas that you want to convey
- Messages are not sound bites, but sound bites reinforce and help convey messages
- Messages must be repeated often to make impact
- Stories help drive your message home; put a human face on your issue, create an emotional connection
- Tie your issues into stories in the news
Media Relations Tools

- Use the Web to conduct research:
  - about reporters and their interests
  - to add context to your own issues
- Press Releases/Press Advisories
- Pitch Letter; Email
- Press Kits (Increasingly online newsrooms)
Media Relations Tools: The Press Release

- Name and Contact Information at the Top
- Catchy Headline
- Dateline
- Compelling First paragraph
- Supporting information
- One to two pages maximum
- Boilerplate about your organization or national campaign
Media Relations Tools: The Press Release
Use the Inverted Triangle to Organize

Who, what, where, why and how

Supporting data and detail

Quotes

Detail
Media Relations Tools: The Media Advisory

- Good tool to promote an event
- One-page summary of the event
- Written in bullet format
- Particularly useful for communicating with radio, T.V., or other digital outlets
Media Relations Tools: The Media Advisory

- Contact Information at the top (bottom if online)
- Headline
- Who
- What
- Where
- When
Media Relations Tools: The Pitch Email

- Short, two paragraph email designed to pique a reporter’s interest in your story
- Accompanies a press release or advisory
- Allows you to target your story to a particular reporter’s interest
Media Relations Tools: Tips on Pitch Email

- Subject line needs to grab attention: “5,000 people to rally against homelessness” vs. “Homeless rally on March 1”
- First sentence should engage the reporter and make him/her think, “Now that’s an interesting story” or “I never knew that…”
- Short sentences that get right to the point
- No hype
- Give enough information to stimulate interest and make the reporter want more information
- Connect to issues that the reporter has covered or has a known interest in
- Let them know you’ll be following-up
Pitching the Story

- Target the media outlets you most want to reach.
- Do your homework and identify reporters who are interested in your issues by:
  - Visit the outlet’s website and doing a byline search of articles written by the report in the last 6 to 12 months.
  - Conduct Google News searches.
  - See if the reporter is on LinkedIn or Twitter or other social media site and see what they are talking about.
  - See if the reporter has a blog.
- Target reporters who have covered your issues in the past.
- Find out how reporters like to get information (email, Twitter).
- Develop a pitching script.
- Identify photo/picture opportunities.
- Be sensitive to reporter deadlines – pitch in the morning when reporters are less likely on deadline.
- Be persistent, but not a pain in the neck.
The Interview: Preparation

- Establish your goals and objectives for the interview.
- Review your key messages.
- Think about what you want the audience to remember from your interview.
- Do your homework on the reporter—look for past stories they’ve written.
- Try to anticipate questions.
- Think about sound bites that express your messages and that you can have ready to use.
The Interview: During

- Stay on Message. Repeat your key points frequently.
- Use the reporter’s questions as a springboard to your message points.
- Bridge to your points: “Yes we are concerned about the cold weather and its impact but the issue we have to focus on is proposed legislation that would end homelessness….”
- Answer questions briefly and honestly.
- Stay true to your goals and objectives for the interview.
- Stay cool and do not lose your temper.
- Never disparage your opponents; disagree but do not mock.
The Interview: During

- Emphasize and prioritize what you think is most important.
- Ask for clarification if you don’t understand the question.
- Don’t volunteer more information than was asked for.
The Interview: Special Tips for Radio and TV

- Wear comfortable, business-like clothing.
- For women: avoid loud, bold plaid or heavy jewelry that might make noise or distract.
- For men: avoid white shirts (camera lights will make you washed out) and loud ties.
- Keep your answers short.
- When on television, sit forward and smile when you respond. It will make you look warmer.
- Befriend the camera man and sound engineer. They can help you look and sound good.
- Don’t be afraid to say you’ve never done TV or radio. Ask where to look, how far you should be from the microphone.
The Interview: After

- When the story appears, let the reporter know what you liked about the story.
- If there is a factual error, call the reporter, calmly explain what the error was and ask for a correction. Don’t ask for a correction of a headline unless it’s factually wrong. You may not like the tone but if it’s not incorrect, leave it alone.
- Track and analyze media coverage to see how well your messages played, how the media framed them and where your story appeared.
- Update your media list.
- Stay in touch with reporters.
- Do not send reporters gifts.
- Do not ask to see a story in advance.