

# **MEDIA RELATIONS TOOL KIT**

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## **WORKING WITH MEDIA**

One of the best ways to build awareness of an issue or problem and gain support and resources for your efforts is ongoing media coverage. The media can play an important role in getting your organization's message out to the public. This tool kit is designed to explain some of the most commonly used media relations methods, provide you with useful examples and give tips on successfully working with the media.

### **FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL MEDIA RELATIONS**

- Identify your target audiences.
- Identify your key message(s). What do you want people to know? To do?
- Keep your message simple.
- Select several vehicles (such as print, radio, TV, web media) to carry the message.
- Convey your message with frequency.

## **ESTABLISHING GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA**

### *DO YOUR HOMEWORK - KNOW WHO TO TALK TO*

- ✓ Obtain current media directories from the public library.
- ✓ Check yellow pages under Newspapers, Radio Stations, Broadcast and Television.
- ✓ Research the names of writers and editors at the local newspapers.
- ✓ Identify the assignment editors at television stations and news directors at radio stations. They make decisions on which stories will run. Public service directors can also be helpful, as they usually coordinate community talk shows on the station.
- ✓ Blogs and bloggers are increasingly important media outlets. Keep track of the ones that cover your issue(s).

### *SPEND TIME EDUCATING THE MEDIA*

*Provide* the reporter with background information on the issues you want covered. Share some local and statewide statistics to reinforce your point.

### *POSITION YOURSELF AND YOUR ORGANIZATION AS A RESOURCE*

Being knowledgeable, professional and helpful is the best way to build and maintain a good relationship with a reporter. Anticipate and know the information reporters will want. Be prepared to localize national or statewide statistics with local statistics or anecdotes.

### *THINK FROM THE MEDIA PERSPECTIVE*

When you work with media on a larger scale by pitching stories or writing op-ed pieces, it is important to consider things from the media perspective. Here are some of the things an editor or reporter will consider when assessing the value of your story:

- Impact – How many people does the event or idea affect and how seriously does it affect them? To what extent is the information useful to their audience? Does anyone care?
- Proximity or locality – it is news only if it's happening within the media outlet's circulation or viewership area.
- Timeliness – Today's news may be stale tomorrow.
- Prominence – Names don't always make news. Still, happenings that involve well-known people or institutions are likely to be interesting even if not important.
- Conflict – Many reporters spend most of their time covering conflicts, such as in lawsuits, politics, or crime. Conflict is both a contributing and complicating factor in news.

### *KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "HARD" AND "SOFT" NEWS*

News can be any type of story that is of interest to your local media outlets. The key when considering sending a news story to the media is does it have a local impact? Your local media is only interested in stories for or about the community reader, listener or viewer.

“Hard” news is usually information that is previously unknown, a noteworthy event, a controversy, the release of a study and the like.

“Soft” news or “human interest” stories include individuals, organizations or families involved in something that may be of interest to the community.

### *MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS CHECKLIST*

To develop and maintain a good working relationship with the media:

1. Make their jobs easy
  - 4 Give them information that is accurate, thorough and within their deadline
  - 4 Schedule phone interviews at convenient times or in-person interviews at accessible locations
  - 4 Provide additional resources or references when appropriate
2. Make sure your spokespersons:
  - 4 Are accessible
  - 4 Always know what the facts are at the time
  - 4 Never lie when they don’t know or want to reveal the answer. (To a reporter, an official caught in a lie makes a better story than the truth.)
3. Tips for a good relationship with the media
  - 4 Respond in a timely manner to their inquiries
  - 4 Respect their deadlines
  - 4 Provide accurate information
  - 4 Don’t send “fluff” news
  - 4 Don’t call repeatedly about your event or story

### *HOW TO MAKE THAT FIRST CALL*

Before you call, be sure that you have researched the media to be sure your story pitch is a good fit. Be prepared to present your story idea clearly and succinctly. Prepare key message points. Write an outline to help your pitch. After you have reached the reporter on the phone, introduce yourself, your organization and your concern or issue. Before discussing the idea, ask the reporter if he/she has time to talk. If not, make arrangements to call back later.

## MEDIA RELATIONS TOOLS

Following are descriptions and tips for using the most common media relations tools. Always include a contact name, phone number and e-mail address (if applicable) to make it easy for interested reporters to obtain more information.

**Media Advisory/Media Alert**-is used to invite media coverage of an event or issue, these are brief one-page written notices that alert the media of an upcoming “hard” news event, such as a news conference. Advisories should be sent or faxed two or three days before an event and should be followed up with a phone call. Advisories include the *who, what, where, when* and *why* of your event. (see Sample Media Advisory)

**News Release**- contains more information than a media advisory and reaches more media outlets efficiently. Releases may announce an upcoming news event or respond to a current issue or story you would like covered. Post-event releases provide information about an activity or event that recently occurred. All key information should be included in the first two paragraphs. Include quotes from key spokespersons for your organization and local community leaders. Only send releases when you have real news. This increases your organization’s credibility and your chances of getting your releases read. (see Sample News Release)

**News Conference** - should be used when you have a story with interesting visuals or need to get information out to many media sources at once. News conferences should be held in locations that are easily accessible to the media and are relevant to the message you are presenting. Make sure that the site offers adequate electrical, audio and visual access for reporters. Choose times and dates that are convenient for reporters. Be sure to check for other conflicting newsworthy events, as you don’t want to compete for media attention. Alert the media of a news conference by sending out a media advisory two or three days before the event. Choose spokespersons carefully. Prepare their remarks, if possible. Make sure all spokespersons (five at the most) restrict their speaking times to two to five minutes each and are available after the news conference to answer questions or be interviewed one-on-one.

**Calendar Listing** - a modified, brief news release designed to give community calendar editors (TV, radio, print, web) the basic information about your event, usually to invite the public’s attendance. Whenever possible, send calendar releases one month in advance to ensure inclusion in community calendars. (see Sample Calendar Listing)

**Print and Broadcast Editorials** - are used to respond to a recent editorial, event or news story, make a point, state a fact, or offer an opinion. Your organization may choose to write a “letter to the editor” or a guest opinion editorial and mail it to the local editorial page editor. Opinion pieces and letters to the editor should always have a fresh or original point of view, not simply affirm an earlier opinion. Letters should contain no more than 300 words and be typed and signed. Be sure to include a contact name and phone number. To place broadcast editorials, send a letter to the news director at the station indicating interest and follow up with a phone call.

**Five tips for writing a letter to the editor:**

1. Check with your local media outlet to inquire about guidelines on length, deadlines and whether the letter will be edited. Editors will likely choose a few short letters rather than long ones. Be concise.
2. Write immediately when you see a topic of interest, one that can be tied to domestic violence issues.
3. The letter should be factual. Support statements with localized statistics and facts.
4. Stick to the issue. Avoid partisan or divisive remarks.
5. Don't send generic letters. Editors will not use them.

**Radio and TV Talkshows** - a format for guests to present issues and concerns of interest to the community. Identify the most appropriate programs for reaching your intended audience. Contact channels to see if they can incorporate your topic on any upcoming show. Many radio talkshow interviews can even be conducted by phone. To place a spokesperson on a talkshow, send a pitch letter to the talkshow producer and follow up with calls.

**Public Service Announcement (PSA)** - an effective and cost-efficient way to reach the public. They are generally 10, 20, 30, or 60 seconds long and are aired on radio and television free of charge as a part of community relations by the stations. To inquire about placing a PSA, call the station's public affairs director inquiring about the station's PSA policy. Different stations have different requirements; the local Broadcasters' Association provides a list of PSA requirements and preferences of each station in your area. Competition for PSA placement is fierce. Be sure the topic is timely. Plan far in advance as PSA calendars book quickly.

**Follow up and Monitoring Efforts** - keep the issue alive by writing letters to columnists and responding to articles and editorials. Make follow up calls to ensure your news release, calendar release or opinion editorial is read. Tracking the placement of a story is an important part of any media relations campaign. As media monitoring can be time-consuming, it may be an ongoing project for interns or volunteers. Clipping services are available; check your local directory for selection and fees.

**Web sites and Email** – The Internet provides another important medium to increase public awareness of your issue. While Internet access for all socio-economic groups is still a concern, most media have access. Include your organization's web address on your communications materials. Be sure to keep your web site current. Link to resources related to your organization's mission and purpose.

**SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY**

*Use the following format to alert media of upcoming events. Language should be enticing and in the future tense. Media advisories should be sent via fax or e-mail two or three days prior to the date of the event. Remember that weekly publications need more time to plan than daily publications. Always follow up to confirm receipt of fax, answer any questions the reporter might have, and confirm attendance at your event. Call media the morning of the event to remind them of time and location.*

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(YOUR LETTERHEAD)

**MEDIA ADVISORY**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

(Date)

CONTACT: (Name)  
(Organization)  
(Phone number/email)

(Women's Shelter to Open June 17)

**WHAT:** A ribbon cutting ceremony for the Sunshine Shelter for Women and Children, a 24-bed emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence. The new, \$2 million facility is the only shelter to serve the west side of Capitol City. It was funded by private donations and a state grant. The Sunshine Shelter for Women is operated by the Sunshine Foundation, which provides critical services to families in crisis, including shelter, job training, legal services and emergency health services.

**WHO:** Ribbon cutting participants:

- Mayor Jane Doe, a long time supporter of efforts to build the Sunshine Shelter.
- Sunny Shine, M.D., executive director of the Sunshine Shelter
- Mary F. and her daughter, Brittany F., victims of domestic violence, who will speak about the importance of crisis shelters. (Note: Their full names will not be released.)

**WHEN:** Thursday, June 17, 2009  
10:00 AM

**WHERE:** Sunshine Shelter for Women & Children  
1010 South Any Street  
Capitol City, CA 90000

Free parking for media along Any Street in marked spaces.

WHY: According to Capitol City Police, there were 400 incidents of domestic violence last year, resulting in

- X fatalities
- XXX trips to the hospital
- XXX missed days of work and school
- Other statistics

VISUALS: Tours of the new facility, which features an onsite health clinic and family center.

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES (or NOTE): *List any opportunities for reporters to interview key spokespersons before or after event. Specify in-language spokesperson(s), if available.*

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**SAMPLE CALENDAR RELEASE**

*A calendar release is a modified news release designed to inform community calendar editors about an upcoming event, usually to invite the public's attendance. Calendar releases should be sent out one month in advance.*

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(YOUR LETTERHEAD)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Date)

CONTACT: (Name)  
(Organization)  
(Phone number/email)

Dec. 15 Gala to Benefit Sunshine Shelter

(CAPITOL CITY, Calif.)—A gala silent auction will be held Saturday, Dec. 15 at the River Club, 100 Riverside Drive, from 7 to 10 p.m. Guests will enjoy a gourmet dinner and dancing to the Steve Jones Orchestra. Auction items include film and television memorabilia, vacations, tickets to sporting events, and spa packages. All proceeds will benefit the Sunshine Foundation and the new Sunshine Shelter for Women & Children. Tickets are \$100. For reservations or information call (XXX) XXX-XXXX or visit [www.sunshineshelter.org](http://www.sunshineshelter.org).

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**SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Date

CONTACT:

(Name)

(Organization)

(Phone number/email)

**Mayor Doe Opens Sunshine Shelter for Women & Children**

CAPITOL CITY, Calif. (June 17, 2009)—Mayor Jane Doe officially opened the new Sunshine Shelter for Women & Children this morning, bringing the first emergency shelter of its kind to the west side of the city.

With 24 beds, an onsite emergency health clinic and a family center, the new facility will serve women and children who are victims of domestic violence, Mayor Doe said.

“We have been working diligently to bring a shelter to this neighborhood for three years and today we have realized this important goal,” Mayor Doe said. “This is a critical resource for women and children in crisis.”

For Mary F. and her daughter Brittney, whose last names were not released, the opening of Sunshine Shelter brings hope and help. The victims of domestic violence a year ago, Mary and Brittney had to travel 20 miles across town to find emergency shelter.

“I was far away from my job and Brittney’s school; it was very difficult for me,” Mary said. “It is good to know that Sunshine is here now, for other women like me.”

The Sunshine Shelter for Women is operated by the Sunshine Foundation, which provides critical services to families in crisis, including shelter, job training, legal services and emergency health services.

“Thanks in large part to the efforts of Mayor Doe, we open our doors today so that women like Mary and children like Brittney have somewhere to turn in their darkest hours,” said Sunny Shine, M.D., executive director of the Sunshine Foundation.

The new, \$2 million facility was funded by private donations and a state grant.

For more information about the Sunshine Foundation or the Sunshine Shelter for Women & Children, visit [www.sunshinefoundation.org](http://www.sunshinefoundation.org) or call (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

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## INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

### **GENERAL SKILLS**

In today's environment, every professional who deals with the media must take advantage of every opportunity to reach their target audience with his/her organization's key messages. The trick is to do more than "hold your own" with the media. You must seize the moment to communicate your message instead of simply answering questions.

Your message should consist of two or three main points that will leave a lasting impression on the audience. Think of these key messages in terms of short, catchy "sound bites" that can be edited down to 10 seconds, 30-40 seconds and 1-2 minutes with anecdotes and other supporting information. Don't be afraid to reiterate these key messages several times.

If necessary, prepare a brief information sheet that provides more in-depth information to the reporter or audience members. Easy to read graphics, logos and photos can help convey your messages also.

Prior to your interview, stage a mock interview with co-workers, give a presentation to a local business organization, or pursue a feature idea with a reporter. Interviews will become easier with practice and you will become more adept at stating your key messages in a variety of situations.

Remember -- every presentation and interview leaves a lasting impression. Make sure you are prepared to be persuasive, credible and relaxed.

### **SENSITIVITY**

Because of the sensitive nature of the issue of domestic violence, there may be times when you must ask media professionals to exercise caution. If you are making victims of domestic violence available for interviews, you may wish to request that the media omit their first or last names, or not show their faces. Make these requests up front, so that you can respectfully decline the interview if the media outlet does not wish to comply.

Another important responsibility for your organization is avoiding stereotypes about domestic violence and/or correcting any misinformation in the media. For example, reporters may not be aware of the prevalence of domestic violence in gay relationships, or about incidences of violence against men. If you feel a reporter is helping to promulgate misinformation or stereotypes, you should respectfully correct the information, ideally providing correct information in writing. (You can always promise to send additional information after the interview.) Be prepared to end the interview if necessary.

## **BRIDGING**

Bridging is an important tool used to get back on track and back to your key messages when you are asked a difficult question or a question you do not want to answer.

Some transition phrases are:

“What’s really important here is that...”

“I’m glad you raised the issue...it provides me a chance to set the record straight...”

“Let’s put this into context...”

“I’ve heard that, but the real issue is...”

“The larger issue is...”

“Let me underscore that...”

“I can’t speak to (issue)...what I do know is...”

“I need to get back to you on that. What I can tell you now is that...”

## **BROADCAST**

In any interview situation -- but especially in a television interview – preparation, posture, body movement and even where you sit -- contribute to the success of your interview.

- Arrive early and discuss the interview with the reporter before your interview begins. Find out what the reporter wants to learn and what questions they might have.
- Never sit between two interviewers. Sitting in the middle places you at a disadvantage, because you must constantly turn your head from one side to the other to answer questions. Sit to one side of two interviewers, especially if they are apt to be hostile.
- When you take your seat, be sure you are sitting erect and straight in your chair.
- Do not lean to one side or the other, or slouch as if folded in the middle.
- Keep your eye contact with the reporter or interviewer. Do not glance at the camera while you are responding to an interviewer’s question. The camera should be ignored unless you are told otherwise.
- Avoid sudden body movements (such as standing up or leaning back in chair) that may take you out of the camera range.
- Keep your answers short and succinct. Avoid technical language and statistics. Instead use anecdotes to convey your message.

## **PRINT**

The following are additional points to consider in preparing for a print interview:

- Know who is interviewing you and why. Find out the reporter's correct name, purpose of the story, the publication and when it is distributed, etc. Most reporters will give you the general line of questioning if you request it.
- Anticipate questions and prepare for them.
- Prepare responses. Crisp, punchy, straightforward answers are best. Do not memorize the answers, except for key phrases. Remember the two or three key points you want to make and make them.
- Practice responses with an associate before the interview.
- Avoid responding to a question with "no comment." If you are unable to answer a question, say so and why. If you don't know an answer, it is okay to say so. Simply offer to provide the information requested at a later time. Find out when the reporter's deadline is and make every effort to accommodate it.
- Don't answer hypothetical questions (What if...). Do say: "I don't want to speculate..." but then bridge that comment with a remark such as "...but I can say that we're prepared to..."
- Do listen carefully to questions.
- Do not debate or spar with a reporter, but politely correct wrong facts or assumptions.
- Cite third-party experts or statistics that support your view.
- Do not repeat inaccuracies or deny allegations. Instead, state your position clearly and concisely. (You may be quoted out of context.)
- Remember, "off-the-record" statements sometimes do get published.
- Don't lie to the media.

## **OVERCOMING NERVOUSNESS**

It is natural to be nervous before going before the camera. Every professional spokesperson experiences some kind of “butterfly” feelings before a performance. What can you do about it?

- Practice a few relaxing exercises before you go on -- rolling your neck, swinging your arms, stretching.
- Take a deep breath, hold it for 3-5 seconds, and let it out slowly.
- Stand naturally with your feet shoulder-width apart, your hands loose and relaxed. Then shake your hands and arms, letting the vibration work itself into the rest of your body.
- Think of nervousness as a way of ensuring you are alert for the interview.
- The best way to combat nervousness before the camera is to come prepared for the situation by knowing your subject matter and the major points you need to make.
- Many times, the talk show host will spend a few moments before the program begins talking with you about the subjects to be covered. This also provides an opportunity to “calm down.”
- Remember, whether the camera is on or not, everything you say is subject to being quoted or noted. Do not make comments in the green room, during commercial breaks, or after the program, that you would not make on air.
- One final point, reporters prefer to interview authentic people who can speak from experience and know the issues, and your organization – be yourself.

## **PERSONAL APPEARANCE**

What a speaker looks like should never overshadow what he or she has to say. A speaker's appearance, however, can help make the message more convincing and not distract from what you have to say.

Keep these points in mind as you prepare for a public appearance:

- Dress simply and appropriate for your profession.
- If a suit is appropriate, wear a dark suit with a solid color shirt or blouse. Avoid white, which tends to reflect light onto the face of the person who is wearing it. Solids show up better than patterns.
- Socks for men should be knee length. Men's bare legs should not be showing.
- Do not wear bright and large prints or flashy jewelry, which can be visually distracting.
- There should be no bulky items in pockets.
- For major television appearances, use powder, professionally applied. A dusting of powder on your face will help avoid shine invariably caused by bright lights. It will also fix any tendency men have toward a "five o'clock shadow."
- Do not wear hat or sunglasses, even if outdoors.
- When seated, keep jacket buttoned, but pulled straight to avoid wrinkles.
- Make sure your general appearance is neat before you go on camera. Don't rely on your interviewer to advise you.