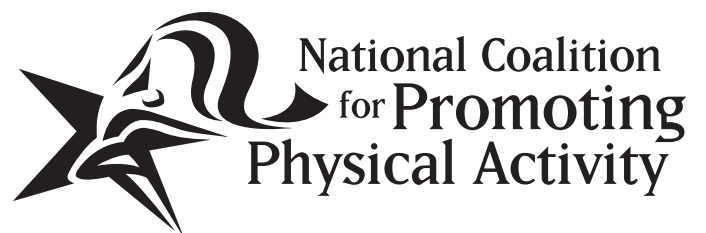


Active Communication

A GUIDE
TO REACHING
THE MEDIA



Media Relations AND COMMUNICATIONS

Reaching the Media: Steps to Get Your Message Out!

You are not alone...everyone is looking for good publicity. This makes it difficult to get through to those who can tell your story to the public. But, it's not impossible—following a few small steps can yield huge gains.

Step 1: Media List

- Put together a media list. A media list is a comprehensive listing of media outlets (newspapers, magazines, radio, and television stations) and contact information for editors and news directors. In some areas, you may be able to purchase a media list that has already been assembled. At your local library, seek out sources such as the Editor and Publisher Yearbook, which lists the editors in the daily and weekly newspapers.
- Don't forget to check your local neighborhood papers as well. Check the paper's masthead for contact information.
- Call television and radio stations and ask to whom you should send your information.

Step 2: Contacting the Media

- Decide WHAT and HOW you want to publicize: an event, publicity for organization programs, success stories, new board members? What's the best way to do this: media release, press conference, PSAs, etc.?
- Get to the point. Keep your contact focused on specific objectives. Don't mix multiple objectives. The easier you make it on the editors to figure out what you're saying, the more likely you'll get the coverage you want.
- Be selective in what you send out. Don't overwhelm editors with too much information on your organization. They can call your designated media spokesperson for more information.
- Develop a personal relationship with the reporters who routinely cover the subject matter that your organization works with.

Step 3: Follow Up

- Once you've sent your information out, be sure to follow up. Call the contact person and ask if they've received your information. Be prepared to send them another copy. Editors receive huge numbers of press releases and announcements every day. By contacting editors personally, you can better ensure your organization's message will get out to the public.
- Now those personal relationships with reporters will come in handy. Call and pitch your story to them.

Afterthoughts...

Remember to keep copies of the news coverage you generate. Citing media coverage examples to potential sponsors, members, volunteers, and funders shows that your organization is professional, worthy of attention, and provides a benefit to the community.

DEVELOPING A Communications Plan

Communications is critical to how your organization interacts with its community—especially your target audience, the individuals or organizations you want to utilize the benefits or programs you offer.

Follow These Steps to Creating a Successful Communications Plan

Step 1: Review the Current Situation

- What are your organization's goals and accomplishments?
- What communications or publicity efforts have generated good results in the past? What is the best way to get your message out to the public?

Step 3: Determine Your Target Audience

- *Based on your answer to the question about what you want to accomplish, determine who would benefit most from this effort:* Who needs to know about your work, services, programs and goals?
- *Review past experiences to help determine your target audience:* Was a narrowly defined program more successful than a broadly based program?

Step 2: Determine What You Want to Accomplish

- *Review the answers to the question about your organization's goals:* How can you reach those goals? What resources do you have at your disposal to accomplish this?
- *Determine your overall message:* What should people know about your organization? Why is it important? Why should they get involved?

Step 4: Determine Your Budget

- Your organization's budget will determine how you communicate.
- *Get the most bang for your buck:* Choose the most effective means for your organization to communicate its goals.
- Use your money wisely and never forget that word of mouth is free.

Step 5: Commit Your Plan to Paper

- Write it down and be consistent in applying its provisions.
- Revise as results dictate.

Communicating WITH THE MEDIA

Ways to Get Your Message Out.

There are several ways to get the word out about your organization and its activities. The following are the most common types and their formats

Media Alert

- A simple one-page fact sheet that alerts the media to an upcoming event. It does not have to include every detail—just let them know your event is coming up!
- Send your alert out to media contacts three to four weeks ahead of the event.

Letters to the Editor

- Letters to the editor of your local newspaper are a good way to express your views on an issue while at the same time conveying information to the public. Local television and radio stations may also have forums for audience opinion as well.
- To better your chances of getting your letter accepted for publication:
 - Your writing must be clear, concise, and understandable: short sentences and simple words!
 - Include your name, address, and phone number so the editors can confirm that you are the individual who sent the letter.
 - Be positive: emphasize your point by highlighting how people can act to better the situation.
 - Always send in an original, signed copy. Most papers will not publish a letter that is not signed.

Radio and Television Public Service Announcements (PSA)

- Radio and television stations are required by law to air a certain number of public service announcements free of charge.
- Call the radio and/or television station and ask for the public or community affairs contact. Send this individual a brief letter about the day and your organization. Be sure to follow up with a personal phone call.
- PSAs require concise writing – stick to the basics. It should be written to be read aloud in a normal pace within 10 seconds. In some instances, a radio station may accept a 30 second spot.

Press Release

- There are six critical pieces of information to include in a press release:

- 1) **Who you are.**
- 2) **What you are doing.**
- 3) **When you are doing it.**
- 4) **How you will do it.**
- 5) **Where you are doing it.**
- 6) **Why you are doing it.**

- Basic press release format includes the following:

- Place the date and the phrase “For Immediate Release” in the upper left corner.
- Below this phrase, put your contact person’s information and phone number.
- Compose a short headline that describes the press release content and GRABS the reader’s attention.
- Begin your first paragraph with your dateline “Washington, D.C.”
- Write using short, declarative sentences and double space the lines.
- Link the facts of the project or event to

a need in your local community. Using real-life examples helps make the human connection. Highlight benefits to the community.

- Put the date, time and other time critical information in the first paragraph.
 - Add in a quote from the Executive Director or a board member about the event or program in your second paragraph.
 - Details on the event or program go in the third paragraph.
 - The final paragraph covers basic organizational information, i.e. who you are, history of the event or program.
 - Limit your press release to 2 pages at the most. Place the word “more” at the bottom of the first page if the release is longer than 1 page and be sure to put your organization’s name at the top of the 2nd page. Insert “30” at the end of the release to signify the end of the release.
 - Proofread, proofread, proofread.
- A press release should go out about 2 weeks before the event.

You will be much more effective in getting your message across if you have some basic knowledge of the reporters and editors who are writing and editing the stories. There are some differences between basic types of media. Understanding these differences can help you get the most out of your media relations work.

A Basic Guide

Newspapers

Weeklies

Almost always need articles to fill space. They are very likely to use your press releases and pictures. So, send them early and often.

Dailies

Most dailies are morning papers, so the optimum time to get something to them is between 10 am and 3 pm. Afternoon papers are printed in the morning, but editor would generally like to get as many stories in as possible the preceding afternoon to avoid next morning's time crunch. As a general rule, dailies are less likely to rely on news releases and will generally use their own photographers.

Regardless of whether you're dealing with a daily or a weekly paper, take the time to get to know the writers and editors that deal with your topic area, as well as the paper's editorial slant.

Radio

Your first order of business is to find out which stations in your area have news operations. With the exception of large cities, radio news departments tend to be small. Get to know members of the news department. Also, more than other types of media, radio is often targeted to specific demographic groups based on their music format.

Because the format demands sound, press releases are not of much use to radio stations beyond alerting them to the event. Be sure your organization creates opportunities for radio coverage, i.e. speeches, press conferences. You may also want to participate in call-in shows that are relevant to your topic.

Television

Television can be the most difficult medium to work in. TV stations usually have fewer reporters and so their time and willingness to do a story may be strained. To attract television coverage your story must have good visual features as well as a news angle. Deadlines involve working within the constraints of morning, noon, and multiple evening broadcasts.

How to Write a Press Release

A press release is one basic way to reach the media by providing detailed information on your organization's views, activities, and events. There are six critical pieces of information to include in a press release: who you are, what and when you're doing it, how you'll do it, where, and why you're doing it.

Basic Format of a Press Release

- Print the release on your organization's letterhead.
- Place the date and the phrase "For Immediate Release" in the upper left corner.
- Below this phrase, put your contact person's information and phone number
- Compose a short headline that describes the press release content and GRABS the reader's attention. Center it in bold type on the page.
- Begin your first paragraph with your dateline. The dateline identifies where the news originated. For example, "WASHINGTON, D.C. Senators approved a 900% increase in physical activity funding..."
- Write using short, declarative sentences and double space the lines.
- Link the facts of the project or event to a need in your local community. Using real-life examples helps make the human connection. Highlight benefits to the community.
- Put the date, time and other time critical information in the first paragraph. Strongly and concisely summarize the facts—who, what, when, where, and why—in the first paragraph.
- In the second paragraph, insert a quote from the Executive Director or a board member about the event or program. Be sure to identify the source of all quotes.
- Details on the event or program go in the third paragraph.
- The final paragraph covers basic organizational information, i.e. who you are, history of the event or program.
- If your release goes beyond one page (two pages maximum) type "-more-" at the bottom of the first page.
- At the end of your release, type "#####" or a "-30-" to indicate the end of the copy.

Rules To Live By

Don't Editorialize

Stick to the facts.

Follow a News Writing Style

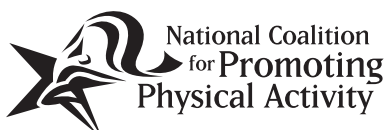
Short, concise sentences.

Proofread!

Mistakes undermine your credibility.

Timing is Critical

Know and respect the media's deadlines.



GUIDELINES ON Holding a Press Conference

A press conference is a great way to generate media coverage. It relates valuable information and offers the media an opportunity to ask questions on your event and organization. However, because you're "on the spot", preparation is essential.

General Guidelines to Follow

Planning and Conducting a Press Conference

- Schedule the conference with the media's deadlines in mind. Pick a day and time when the media isn't preoccupied with a pre-scheduled event. For example, local media often must cover city council meetings. Avoid scheduling your press conference at times that conflict with such events.
- Be aware when you schedule your event, another story could break and cause the media not to attend.
- Notify the media no less than 48 hours in advance. It's best to send out a media advisory a week before the event. Call the media at least three times before the event.
- When pitching your story, give the media a news angle. Highlight the news value of your event.
- Choose an appropriate location. Try to find "on-site" locations that capture your message. However, be sure the location is convenient for the media to reach and secure permission to use the site in advance.
- Prepare and rehearse the event. Your speaker should be thoroughly knowledgeable on the subject, your organization, and any materials made available to the media.
- Be as hospitable to the media as possible. Make it easy for them to attend - provide directions to the location, have coffee available, and be sure they can move their equipment in and out easily.
- Review location logistics in advance. Locate electrical outlets. Arrange for a podium. Check your sound equipment.

The Day of the Event

- Distribute news releases and/or media kits before the conference begins and arrange a table or location where extras can be picked up. [Note members of the media that are absent and have the information delivered to them after the conference.]
- Start on time and be sure to finish the conference before interest begins to wane. Allow an hour for the news conference. This breaks down to a 10 minute opening statement and 20 minutes for questions/answers.
- You may want to record the conference so you know what was said.
- Be sure to monitor your news coverage to see how your story played.

TIPS ON WRITING A **Letter to the Editor**

Writing a letter to the editor of a local or statewide newspaper is an effective way to express your view on an issue while also providing valuable information to the public.

Tips on Effective Writing

Letters to the Editor

- Focus your letter on the issue you feel is most important. Avoid trying to explain everything in one letter.
- Be sure your letter is easy to read and concisely expresses your point of view. Use short sentences, short paragraphs, and simple words to express yourself.
- Include your name, address, and phone number at the end of the letter. Most papers will contact you to confirm that you were the person who sent the letter.
- Send an original copy and sign your letter. Papers will generally not publish unsigned, original letters.
- Keep your letter positive. Emphasize how to help rather than focus on what's wrong. Never be rude or threatening, which only serves to hurt your cause.
- Target your letters to areas where you believe little coverage of the issue is available. Try to imagine your audience and write your letter in consideration of what their concerns might be.
- Do not be discouraged if your letter is not printed immediately or even at all. Larger newspapers receive a large volume of letters or may limit the number of letters they print per topic. Think of it this way, if you get even ONE letter published you've reached THOUSANDS of people.

How to Give an Interview

Interviews are a great way to get your organization's message out. With thoughtful preparation, you can position your organization's message in the media.

General Guidelines to Follow

Interview Tips

- Always walk into an interview with thorough knowledge of the topic and your organization.
- Be prepared: develop a list of points you want to make and rehearse these answers. Try to anticipate difficult questions and prepare a positive response.
- Emphasize these main points during the interview by highlighting or flagging them with statements like “The key point is...“or” The most important thing to remember is...”
- Bring a personal element to the interview. Use brief, personal stories to demonstrate your points. Develop metaphors or analogies to express the message.
- Avoid using jargon and technical terms.
- Answer the tough questions: honesty is the best policy. If you do not respond to a question you will seem evasive. Worst-case scenario: state that you are unable to answer the question and give a reason.

Media Outlet Form

Radio TV Print Other: _____

Outlet Name: _____

Contact Name: _____ Position Title: _____

Phone: _____ Cell Phone/Pager: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail: _____ Website: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Print

Publishes: *Daily* A.M. _____ P.M. _____ *Weekly* _____

Deadline: *News* _____ *Photos* _____

Circulation/Coverage Area: _____

Audience Demographics: _____

TV/Radio

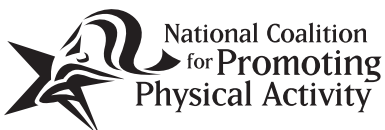
News Programs: _____

Program Time: *Mornings* _____ *Afternoons*: _____ *Evenings*: _____

Other: _____

Deadlines: _____

Network Affiliation: _____ Provides PSA Time: Yes No

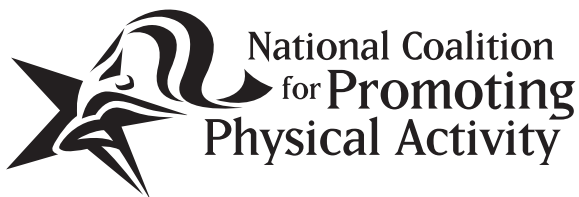


Our Mission...

To unite
the strengths

of public, private, and industry efforts
into a collaborative partnership to

inspire Americans to lead
physically-active lifestyles
to **enhance**
their health and
quality of life.



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