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## **MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDE**

### **Overview of Media Relations in Healthy Communities Programming**

Conducting a targeted media relations (also referred to as public relations) effort that complements your program's overall communication plan is one of the most effective ways to reach your intended audiences. Such an effort involves using the news and public affairs programming in your area to present healthy communities information.

Keep in mind that members of the media are, for the most part, members of the community. They will be interested in what you are doing both as private citizens and in their professional capacity. As they become familiar with and appreciate the role that public health plays in their community, they will be more likely to report on it. Whenever possible, you should include them in your programming. For example, members of the media, especially publishers, may be appropriate to serve on committees or task forces.

To help you develop appropriate media activities and messages that are consistent with your program goals and objectives, you should first evaluate what your group is trying to accomplish by communicating with the public. When planning your media relations efforts, review your healthy communities communications plan and ask yourself:

- What is the goal that you want to accomplish?
- What is your target population?
- What messages must be developed and conveyed to effect the desired changes in your target audience?
- What types of media outreach would be efficient and cost-effective for accomplishing the above?

### **Understanding the Media**

Regardless of the types of media and activities you choose to use, the keys to effective media relations are simple. They include: (1) understanding what the media want in a story; and (2) making sure that the information is provided to them in a clear and timely manner.

Reporters and producers all seek similar story elements: audience appeal; issues that stimulate debate, controversy and even conflict; stories that generate high ratings and increased readership; and fresh perspectives on an issue. They dislike and avoid stories that have been duplicated by a competitor or are inaccurate or incomplete, as well as people who are persistent even after a story has been rejected.

## Types of News Media

See the table below for types of media and the differences between them in the way they work.

Media Types	How They Work
Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is a highly visual medium</li><li>• Use backdrops that visually portray the importance of your message</li><li>• Graphics are often used by TV producers as part of segments</li><li>• Is brief (30-60 second segments)</li></ul>
Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use 10-15 second “soundbites.” (Be aware of tone and firmness of voice – a lack of hesitancy in responding to questions adds to credibility.)</li></ul>
Newspaper and magazine articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide more in-depth treatment of a subject</li><li>• Print reporters may use direct quotes from press statements</li></ul>

## What to Include in News/Press Releases and Articles

News releases can be as short or long as can be afforded and should answer the following questions:

- Who is involved?
- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Why or how did it happen?

The first paragraph should briefly answer these questions in one or two sentences, especially since most reporters decide whether or not to read the rest of the release based on the first paragraph, and print editors tend to cut the article from the bottom up. A contact name and telephone number should also be included so that reporters can easily call for more information.

Feature releases can be used when you have a “soft” news story. Soft news might include success stories you’ve achieved through your healthy community project, including examples, anecdotes, and quotes. Feature releases can be three to four pages in length and should capture the story you want to pitch. A colorful heading is also important.

Some suggestions for feature releases include:

- A profile on an active community member stating what has he or she has done and why
- What opposition exists toward your project and why
- Fund-raisers and projects that local groups organize in support of creating healthy communities
- Exceptional healthy communities activities supported by a local business

## **Media Kits**

A media kit is a collection of information prepared especially for the media. Often organizations have a standard media kit that includes informational materials that serve as an introduction to the organization. For major news events, the standard kit should be supplemented with current information relating to the event.

Examples of materials that might be included in a standard kit are:

- Business card that includes your name, department, phone number, e-mail address, and perhaps some key issues you face so that the media can easily contact your agency
- Brief, one-page biographies of key agency officials and/or spokespersons
- Photographs and camera-ready graphics, such as charts and logos

Supplements for the basic kit for a special event/program include:

- News release(s) on the program
- Biographies of people (speakers, panel members, etc.) relevant to the program in which you are trying to interest the reporter
- Copies of relevant written materials, such as the report being released, statements to be given at a news conference, speeches, etc.

## **A To-Do List for Inviting Media to Events**

### ***Before the event:***

- Contact the reporters who cover community events and pitch the event as a future story.
- Call community calendar reporters at area newspapers and TV, cable, and radio stations, asking them to place a calendar notice.
- Hand-deliver or mail invitations to the event two weeks in advance.
- No more than two or three days in advance, call each editor and reporter and ask if he or she plans to attend. Explain special photo opportunities.
- The day before the event, call the media again to politely remind them about the event.

### ***During the event:***

- Set up a media sign-in table with media kits.
- When the reporters arrive, set up interviews with the right people and escort media to the appropriate spokesperson.
- Have someone from your agency take photos to accompany articles in newsletters and other publications and for your own files.

### *After the event:*

- Send an immediate news release to any reporters who were unable to attend.
- Send follow-up letters to the editors of local newspapers. Thank the community and inform them of your success (e.g., monetary amount of donations raised for your important cause, community alliances forged, number of volunteers recruited, etc.).
- Write a follow-up article for inclusion in appropriate community publications. Illustrate with photos from the event.

### **Tracking and Monitoring Your Media Relations**

Track your media contacts. Try to keep a record of all contacts your group has with the media, such as phone calls. A good idea is a simple form that all staff and volunteers must fill out if they speak to a member of the media. Examining the media contact forms can provide answers to questions, such as how many media inquiries do you receive in a week, a month, or a year? Are they increasing or decreasing? Adjust your communications plan to achieve your desired results.

### **Sustaining Media Interest in Special Events and Healthy Communities Efforts**

Coverage of your healthy community special event can be extended by planning in advance a system for measuring the results of the efforts, such as: (1) how many people participated; (2) how much media coverage you have received; and (3) how many volunteers have been recruited. Post-event news releases can then focus on these achievements.

To build excitement and encourage broad media coverage:

- Look for ways to tie in with other healthy communities campaigns around the country or world. Use some of the websites listed in the “Resources” section of this workbook to learn more about what other communities and cities are doing.
- Take the event "on the road" by co-sponsoring a series of similar events in different areas.
- Consider having a radio or TV station cosponsor the event, which generates community goodwill for the station as well as potential free publicity for your event.
- Use the healthy communities theme for the event to attract both media and public attention. Use it on all publicity-related materials, from invitations to media kits, buttons, and banners.
- Allow plenty of planning time when selecting your date and time. Choose a time when your most important audiences will be available and make sure your date does not conflict with other events.