

Media Relations¹

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This publication about media relations strategy development is the first of a four-part series on media relations. This series also covers working with the media, news releases and public service announcements, and media interview skills.

Introduction

Media relations is a strategy of working with the news media in order to disseminate information about an organization's events and activities to local news outlets, such as newspapers, television and radio newscasts, and magazines. A media relations plan consists of such components as contacting reporters directly, writing news releases and public service announcements, knowing how to answer questions that reporters ask, and providing photo or video opportunities for photographers and videographers to shoot. The primary goal of any media relations strategy is for you to serve as a credible and trustworthy source of information for the news media. Ultimately, the goal is to present a positive message for the news media to communicate to a specific audience.

Developing an effective news media relations plan for your organization can

- *Enhance the public's knowledge and understanding of your program, event, or activity.* Members of the public usually do not know about a topic until they hear about it through the news media. Media relations helps spread awareness about your program, event, or activity.
- *Build credibility in your program, event, or activity.* People perceive that what they see in the news media is important.
- *Extend the reach and increase the frequency of your message.* Using the news media may mean your message reaches people in your community as well as across your state.
- *Possibly recruit new members or support for your program.* Some people will learn about your organization through news stories and may be interested enough in the activity that they want to join. The news media may also help you garner more support for your organization or for the activity your organization is conducting.

Developing a Media Relations Strategy

Media relations is all about building relationships. You must develop a media relations strategy in order to build an effective relationship with the news media. This relationship does not happen by itself. You have to take the initiative by visiting or calling reporters instead of having reporters come to you first. Below are some suggestions for mapping out your media relations plan:

- *Set specific, realistic, and measurable goals.* It is unrealistic to expect that every news release you send or every phone call you make to a reporter will result in a front-page story. You should establish realistic goals. It may be that

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you set a goal of publishing one story every quarter in a newspaper. Maybe the goal is to get a notice of an upcoming activity on a television station's community calendar. Be sure that the goal is something that can be measured so that you can evaluate if you were successful. For example, perhaps the goal is to increase attendance at an event from the previous year when you did not have a media relations plan.

- *Decide on your approach to accomplish your goals.* Will you communicate through news releases, personal visits to reporters, or on-air television or radio interviews? Which form of news media do you need to use to reach your target audience? Remember that you use the news media to reach the general public, but a "general public" audience is very broad. It usually is better to identify specific audiences to try to reach. These audiences could be children, teenagers, agriculture producers, teachers, parents, or older adults. Each specific audience accesses information differently. Some audiences are more likely to watch early morning television programs. Others may hear their news on country music radio stations. Still others may only read a newspaper. Use the news media that your audience uses most.
- *Decide who is responsible for handling news media requests.* Who will answer reporters' questions? It could be your organization's president or public relations manager or someone else. Whatever the situation, everyone in your organization should know who handles the calls so as to be able to direct reporters to the correct person.
- *Become a reputable and dependable expert source.* News reporters are likely to report favorably about your organization if you have established a relationship with them as honest and timely in your interactions with the news media. You should also contribute news items to let reporters know what is going on in your organization.
- *Maintain a directory of reporters in your area.* Find out submission guidelines for news releases, photographs, public service announcements, and other materials, and enter that information in your directory. Some places may want all items submitted through e-mail, while others may want a printed news release. Update this information at least once a year.
- *Provide informational materials to reporters on a regular basis.* Examples of these types of materials include news releases, public service announcements, brochures, and photographs. Sometimes these items, when grouped together, are called *media kits*. Many media kits are now posted to organizations' web pages for reporters' easy access.
- *Get to know the reporters in your area and what topics they cover.* Depending on the story's topic, a story might be covered by an education reporter, a business reporter, or a science reporter. Contact the reporters personally and follow up with phone calls, e-mails, letters, and personal visits.
- *Explain your needs to reporters personally.* This is especially important if you need a good deal of exposure in a short time. However, remember that you are asking for free time or space. Any time or space that is given to you is better than none.
- *In addition to contacting reporters, you may wish to send information about your event to the public affairs director or promotions director at your local newspaper or television and radio stations.* Many television and radio stations have a calendar of events that is aired once or several times a day. Newspapers tend to list community events once a week. Stations and newspapers are more likely to publicize the event if it will impact large numbers of people.
- *Integrate social media.* This is a relatively new process in media relations. Using social media, such as Facebook, blogs, and Twitter, is becoming more popular as organizations try to reach news reporters. Social media also allow your organization to bypass the news media and go directly to interested audiences who may subscribe to your social media site.
- *Be ready to go on the air early.* Many television and radio stations invite guests to discuss their upcoming events on the air. However, these interviews usually are early in the day. Be ready and willing to appear during early morning hours if asked.
- *Develop public service announcements (PSAs).* Many television and radio stations air PSAs throughout the day. Radio stations are much better about airing PSAs because they do not take much time to produce. Talk radio stations also have more time to fill and usually are more likely to air PSAs.
- *Write news releases.* News releases, explained later in this publication series, are stories written like a regular news story. Their purpose is to provide reporters with the basic information they need to cover a story.

Additional Information

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