

**IMPROVING MEDIA RELATIONS**

**SOME CHALLENGES WE FACE**

-New Pew Research Center/Knight Foundation research on how people learn about their local community indicates that there is not much public interest in media coverage of social services.

(to download the full report: http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Local-news.aspx)

-Media outlets, like all businesses in this economy, have less staff doing far more work.

-Your organization may not have a PR person on staff, or may be working with a volunteer PR person whose attention isn’t fully focused on your needs.

**STRATEGIES REQUIRING A MODEST INVESTMENT OF TIME BUT NO $$$**

1. Know your local media. Read the newspaper, watch the local TV news broadcasts, listen to the all-news or talk radio stations, see who’s writing online in your town. Identify those whose stories/beats relate to your org’s work. Set up Google Alerts with a range of key words not limited to your org’s/leader’s name (also an excellent way to track your media hits).
2. Never send your releases to every email address on a media outlet’s website; it’s incredibly annoying! Target, target, target. While relationships with key individual reporters are very important, making a friend of an assignment/planning editor is equally vital and can save lots of time on your end.
3. Treat media as you would any other client, by delivering excellent service. Identify their needs and interests. Be polite and professional, not pushy. Don’t make multiple follow-up inquiries, but do return their calls or emails instantly (that surprises and pleases them!). Send press releases that are well written, fact-checked and proofread by at least two people; sloppy stuff diminishes your credibility among those whose goal is accuracy.
4. Understand that your story pitch is fascinating and important to you, but may not be to a reporter or editor. Sometimes your story IS the story, sometimes it may be part of a larger story and sometimes it’s just not going to fly at all. A new program or service may be of interest, but whenever possible, identify people/experiences that can bring that program to life for the reporter and his readers/viewers.
5. Generate goodwill by being supportive. Make certain your local media know they can call on you to help identify a source or offer assistance on stories that will NOT mention your org/programs. When you do get coverage, use your org’s own Facebook or Twitter to share links to those stories.
6. Don’t be coy or elusive. A major complaint of journalists is when PR’s default position is as gate-keeper/roadblock to newsmakers/officials. Of course media requests need screening, but frank talk and facilitation are the best traits a PR person can have. Most reporters even appreciate the ‘I honestly don’t know’ or ‘I just can’t say’ as opposed to the freeze-out.
7. Communicate with media for reasons other than story pitches. Drop a complimentary email on a nice story, even if it doesn’t relate to your work. ALWAYS send a quick “thank you” email when you do get coverage. Friend/follow reporters on Facebook and Twitter and “like” or comment on their posts.
8. Set up meetings with the editorial boards of your local media outlets. In addition to presenting the work of your org, ask questions about their needs/interests/important issues they are covering, or community-service campaigns they are presenting. Inquire about submitting guest editorials. Write letters to the editor – keep the tone positive.
9. Do your best to ensure that your leader/spokesperson is informed, articulate and succinct. This can be a challenge – not everyone is able to condense their thoughts into 15-second sound bites or pithy quotes at the drop of a hat! At minimum, seek free media training resources online for your leader, stage mock interviews and offer constructive criticism.
10. Ask for feedback and assistance. Your board members and other influential supporters may have done business with media reps or socialized with them, and so can help you make that connection. When they are off deadline, ask your media contacts for advice and constructive criticism about your PR efforts, or how you might reach out to a major-market or national media outlet.

Feel free to contact me with questions!

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