



Making the Most of the Media

Grantee Communications Guide

April 2009

Caring Across Communities **CAC**



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Foundation

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION TO WRITTEN MEDIA

Introduction

Most organizations today recognize that working with the media can be a highly effective method of sharing information with audiences important to their ongoing success. By developing and maintaining positive relationships with the media we can achieve greater awareness of our program's work, attract new partners and new advocates, and increase public support even as we enhance opportunities for long-term sustainability and success.

And every time your program is covered by the media, you are supporting the Caring Across Communities program as a whole.

The question is: how do we take the potential represented by strong media relationships and use it to promote the work of our programs and of Caring Across Communities?

Most people today have a good sense of how the main types of media – television, radio, newspapers, the Internet, newsletters and specialty magazines – work. In addition, we all recognize that certain media types are better than others for sharing information with our audiences.

From invitations to the media to visit your site, to crafting press releases that reflect your program's successes, to responding to journalists who have written relevant pieces, there are many ways to build beneficial relationships with the media.

That's why, to be successful in our media relations efforts, it's necessary to apply a strategic approach. Such an approach allows us to accurately determine:

- Who our audience is, and what their opinions and attitudes are
- What types of media will reach which audience most effectively
- How we should shape our message for different types of media

Even for programs that feel the pressure of finite human resources and limited time, there are several relatively simple ways to undertake media activities that can pay big dividends.

In this guide, we will focus on local newspapers, magazines and social media.

Every time your program is covered by the media, you are supporting the Caring Across Communities program as a whole.

Local Newspaper Overview

Newspapers provide relatively up-to-date coverage of national and local stories. Placing your story in a newspaper is a well established method of reaching supporters and decision makers.

There are typically two types of newspapers in your community—daily and weekly.

These are divided into distinct sections, including local news, important national stories, features, editorials, columns, Op-Eds (which stands for Opposite Editorial, an indication of where these pieces usually appear) and letters to the editor.

Daily newspapers targeting larger metropolitan areas focus on a wider variety of news, and may even have localized editions tailored to the regions they serve. They typically have larger staffs than weekly publications and gather information from a variety of sources.

Daily newspapers rarely publish information exactly as submitted, preferring to allow their editorial staff to use submitted information as the basis for writing their own stories.

Weekly papers are more commonly located in smaller communities where they focus on local news. Weeklies have smaller staffs and, as a result, are often more open to publishing materials as submitted.

Irrespective of whether the publication is daily or weekly, newspaper editors and reporters are always on the lookout for good stories. That's where you come in: by providing information on the “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” “why” and “how” of the story.

Specifically

- Who is the story about and whom does it affect?
- What is happening, what makes it newsworthy?
- When is the story occurring? Did it happen already, is it ongoing, or will it happen in the future?
- Where is the story taking place? Is it national or local?
- Why does this story matter? Why should readers care?
- How does this story affect the community? How does it affect the nation?

Beyond highlighting relevant stories for newspapers, another great option for gaining coverage is through Op-Eds and letter to the editor. Op-Eds or letters to the editor can be written by, or for, you to express an opinion on issues of particular importance to your organization. The same criteria listed above apply, but there is greater opportunity to promote or challenge a distinct point of view.

Magazines Overview

Magazines usually focus on particular sections of the public, reporting on stories from a point of view they think will be most interesting to their audience.

Special interest or community magazines in your area will often be very receptive to what your program has to offer, particularly in relation to what you are doing for the community.

Unlike newspapers, magazines require a much longer lead time for their stories. Often, a story will appear several months after it is presented or pitched to a magazine journalist or publication. This requires you to plan far in advance for the types of stories that are most suitable for magazines.

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Social Media Overview

When we talk about Social Media, what do we mean?

Simply put, Social Media means using electronic and Internet-based tools to share and discuss topics of interest. It is integrating technology and social interaction through words, pictures, videos and audio. What makes Social Media different from traditional media is its dependence on interactions between and within its audience.

For our purposes in this guide, we use the term Social Media to refer to blogs, discussion boards, wikis (such as Wikipedia) and community sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. In the material that follows, we specifically give tips on blogging, but the principles outlined below are applicable to all forms of social media.

Remember that while journalists write for a living – it is their job – the vast majority of bloggers blog as a hobby. They don't get paid, and their satisfaction comes from connecting with others, sharing their insight, and inspiring, entertaining or educating their audience.

This tells us that we need to respect what they do – and that our goal should be more than just to respond to what they write, but to become a resource for them to utilize. They often need ideas for content or information to fill space in their blog, and we can deliver those things to them.

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SECTION 2

BASIC MEDIA OUTREACH PROCESS

Whether the objective is to raise awareness of your program, promote a specific event, highlight accomplishments or generate support, a defined media outreach process can help your program reach a broad range of people – including prospective funders, local and state officials, and potential partners. This is true irrespective of the type of media being approached.

An effective process can generate print and electronic coverage of your program, and help cultivate relationships with local reporters, leading to ongoing interest in your program. Such a process must address two basic questions:

What Are Your Objectives?

Determining your objectives will determine your message, as well as what media to target. When determining your objectives, keep the following in mind:

- What are you trying to do?
Are you interested in increased program awareness, building public support for your program, or is your objective something else?
- Who are your audiences?
- What are the main messages you want to communicate?
- Do you have a spokesperson that can be made available if necessary?
- Are there others that can speak on behalf of your program?
'Third-party endorsements' from community leaders or partner organizations can be valuable in proving your story has wide implications, and is important to the community.

What is Your Timeline?

Consider your program's calendar of events, the program timeline, and your local community calendar to determine if scheduled events and activities can support your effort to gain media coverage for your program.

Consider the following questions to determine the timing of media opportunities:

- What activities and events are already planned to take place throughout the year?
- Which activities traditionally attract most media attention?
- What activities or events can best showcase your program's strengths and its contribution to the community?
- Which activities involve collaboration with other organizations, businesses, or community members?
- Will studies or results be available that you would like to promote?

Once you have determined your objectives, opportunities and resources, you can set a strategy and develop a rough timeline. This strategy will help you determine what, how, and when to communicate with the media and involves:

- Identifying which media reaches the audiences you want to communicate with
- Finding the right journalist to approach about your story
- Determining how to pitch or package the story
- Agreeing on key messages and spokespeople
- Setting a timeline for your outreach
- Having a process for tracking and follow-up

SECTION 3

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

This is an essential part of getting your messages out. Strong relationships with reporters help position your organization front and center within your community. It helps you gain coverage of your organization's activities and gets your message into stories that relate to the valuable work you are doing.

If you want to draw a reporter's attention to neglected needs in the community and how you're helping to meet those needs, a well-developed rapport will enable you to do that. It will also increase the likelihood that the reporter will contact you for comments on other stories.

Bear the following in mind as you begin to build the media relationships that can benefit your program:

Homework Is Unavoidable

Once the right reporters have been identified read their stories and learn as much as you can about the news outlet where they work. Does the reporter have a specific beat or do they focus on several different areas? How big is the media outlet where they work? Do the reporter's stories get picked up by other publications?

Reporters Seek Numbers And Data

A reporter's job is, first and foremost, to present the facts. When thinking about your story, include a method for collecting any data a reporter may find interesting. For example: How many children and/or families did your program assist in the last month/year? Has there been any information collected showing improvements in the functioning of children assisted by the program? How widespread is the need the program responds to?

A reporter's job is, first and foremost, to present the facts.

You Need A Team

Communicating with the media is a team effort. Remember, any member of your team could be quoted by a reporter, so be sure that each member is well versed in the message platform, appropriate talking points, or knows how to respond when contacted by reporters.

A Media List Saves Time

Your list should contain the appropriate editors or journalists to contact. Begin by reviewing recent editions of local publications to find out which reporters are covering what topics and "beats."

Develop Your Pitch Points

These are the main ideas that you will focus on to sell your story. Taking previous points, and bearing in mind the journalist's desire for numbers and data, you should have 4 or 5 main pitch points to share with your media contact. The CAC message platform and your communications plans are good resources for developing pitch points.

Decide When To Pitch:

Determine the lead times (how much notice is needed) of your media targets. For instance, if an event is taking place call the media one to two months in advance. Also, many newspapers have longer lead times for their health, business and events sections. This allows them to spend more time on a story, and to effectively parcel out the finite space in the publication.

More Speed, Less Haste:

If the story is an opportunistic pitch (e.g. one that is not tied to a planned event) then you need to develop your pitch very carefully. Even while you need to move quickly to take advantage of the media's interest in a particular topic of relevance to your work, you cannot forgo the due diligence required and expect to achieve good results.

Share The CAC Briefing Kit:

Providing the right reporter with information on your program should be your first step in introducing your program to the newsroom. This keeps you from having to cold call reporters and also allows them to have your contact information handy.

Customize the CAC Briefing Kit to demonstrate the resources your organization can provide. Also consider including or re-purposing materials already developed by your program:

- One-page backgrounder on your organization
- One-page fact sheet that relates to your work as part of CAC
- Previously published news clippings that mention your organization (be sure they are positive)
- Your contact information

Pick Up The Phone:

Prior to sending your briefing kit, give each reporter a call. Rather than simply asking whether they are interested in your kit, use this opportunity to introduce yourself and your organization and how you can be a resource. Let them know that they can contact you if they have questions about topics that relate to your program. Keep the focus primarily on your role as a resource in this relationship-building phase.

Reporters may also be interested in seeing your program in action.

Meet With The Reporter

For those reporters you seek to form a good relationship with, finding the opportunity to meet is the next step in building a relationship. Consider inviting the reporter to lunch or coffee, especially if you live in a smaller media market.

Reporters may also be interested in seeing your program in action. You could schedule a site visit of your program facility or project.

What To Say And Bring To A Reporter Meeting

Allow the reporter to ask questions. This is their time to explore the issues and pose the questions they've never had a chance to ask. Bring a briefing kit.

Don't control the conversation. You're building a relationship so the conversation should be a back and forth on what each of you do, activities in the community, and how you can be a resource to each other.

SECTION 4

MAINTAINING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

Be A Good Resource

In order to establish yourself and your program as a credible resource to reporters, you need to provide them with the information they need by their deadline. When they call, take the request, ask what their deadline is, and get the needed information back to them within that time frame. This will improve the chances that they will keep your name and number at hand.

Provide Up-To-Date, Newsworthy Information

Make a point of keeping reporters in the loop about what's going on with your program. Be sure that you confine your updates to what is timely and newsworthy so your calls to reporters don't simply become a general update, or begin to lose their value.

SECTION 5

SAMPLE WAYS TO GET MEDIA COVERAGE

Letters To The Editor Or OP-ED

Letters to the editor are one of the most read sections of a newspaper, and among the easiest places to secure coverage – making them a perfect venue for your message.

Remember to keep your letter short (150-200 words) and refer to an already published story.

Op-Eds are more time consuming but also give you more column space to get your message out. Make sure your Op-Ed is timely, well-written, and takes a particular point of view.

Seasonal Tie-In

Holidays are excellent times to reach out to the press for two main reasons:

They are typically slower news days, and the holiday season is a good time to talk about those that these times of year can impact negatively.

Reporters are always looking for stories around Thanksgiving, Rosh Hashanah, and Christmas, for example.

Beyond the holidays, look at the calendar for seasonal events such as the annual “back-to-school” time to highlight your efforts.

Commemorative days and months – such as National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day, and others – provide another useful media hook.

Piggyback On A National Story

Many national news stories have a local angle. For example, if a big study is released, you can demonstrate how it impacts the local community.

SECTION 6

MORE ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

It is important to bear the following in mind when we think about monitoring, responding to or approaching bloggers and other social media writers and influencers:

- Technical knowledge about social media is not a necessary element of effectively building relationships with bloggers.
- It is not necessary to be a blogger yourself in order to participate in online conversations.
- In essence, you are building a relationship with someone who has influence within online communities and dialogues.
- That means you need to show that you care about who they are, what they're writing about and what their readers/contributors are interested in.
- You certainly don't have to agree with what they say, but you do have to respect their right to say it.

Of course, your content must also be relevant and topical. So when reaching out (whether taking the initiative or responding to a post) to a blogger or other social media author, remember to:

Be Relevant

Seems simple and obvious, and yet it is often the biggest hurdle to jump when contacting bloggers. Review previous posts and ask yourself whether this blog is relevant to your audience or influential enough to reach across multiple audiences.

Personalize

An email without personal reference is a good way to end up in the wastebasket. Be honest about who you are in any comments you offer and provide thoughtful insight that is of value and relevance to the author and his audience.

Make It Brief

Keep your correspondence short. Most bloggers have no interest in writing long stories, so summarize the information you are providing. And make sure you answer the question the blogger will ask: "Why are they sending this to me?"

Be Persistent

Don't be offended or give up if a blogger doesn't react the first time you reach out. Be courteous and smart about repeat attempts though.

Responding to social media posts

Resist the urge to respond to every posting. A judicious approach to engaging with social media outlets is best, especially as it can be difficult to accurately assess the relative importance of one outlet versus another.

If you do feel strongly about the need to respond to a posting, you should respond quickly – within the first 24 hours of the posting, ideally, and no later than 48 hours after.

Developing and submitting a quality response

- If you see a posting or comment that warrants a response, make sure that the communications team is notified immediately. By including all of us, you maximize the opportunity that we can be involved as you develop your response.
- Transparency is everything in the blogging community. When you respond, don't hide who you are, your vested interests, or the source of your expertise.
- An effective response does three things: it addresses an argument (or arguments), responds or presents a different point of view, and offers facts, quotes, logic, and/or expert opinion to support that view.

- A good comment will probably be no more than 3 paragraphs in length – anything more than that, and you probably need to look again at why you're responding, or consider sending an email direct to the blogger.
- If the comment is shorter than 3 paragraphs it may be difficult to say anything of worth, and if it's much longer than that, chances are, we should be using another avenue to communicate.
- Responses should seek to advance and inform the discussion – they should not be judgmental or pejorative in nature.

Following up on your response

- Be prepared to follow up on the response. Once it's been posted, others can react to it, and those responses should also be monitored.
- However, if the responses are inappropriate or combative, it is entirely correct for us to bow out of the conversation.
- Send a follow up email to the communications team to notify them of your posting/response.

SECTION 7

IF THE MEDIA CONTACTS YOU

If you are contacted by the media, or if you have reached out to them and they have responded, here is a clear process for you to follow:

- Get the journalists name and affiliation
- If they contact you unexpectedly, ask: “What story are you working on?”
- Always ask: “What is your deadline?”
- Promise to get back before (not on) deadline

Send an email with the above information to:
Olga Acosta Price: oaprice@gwu.edu

Dealing With Media Interviews

When dealing with the media, whether they have reached out to you or you have contacted them, you need to be aware of what their motivations and their concerns are. Bear in mind that, in the main, journalists are:

- Professionally curious and skeptical
- Competitive
- Deadline-driven
- Neither a friend nor an enemy
- Always a reporter first – nothing is ever off the record
- They need you just as you much as you need them

Journalists Must Also

- Grasp a lot of information quickly
- Juggle stories simultaneously
- Get it right
- Tell a story relevant to their audience

It's also important for you to be clear about what you want to say and try to use whatever questions you are asked to say it... don't get so fixated by the questions you are asked that you forget to make your points. Also, never say anything you wouldn't want to read in the newspaper, see on television or hear on the radio.

Remember, you have the right to:

- Know the topic
- Know the format
- Buy time
- Take time to answer the question appropriately
- Correct misstatements
- Use notes
- Record the interview

You do NOT have the right to:

- Know the questions in advance
- See the story in advance
- Change your quotes
- Edit the story
- Expect your view to be the only view
- Demand article be published

Ten Tips When Dealing With The Media

1. Use simple, direct answers
2. Repeat yourself
3. Pause
4. Shut up
5. Avoid jargon
6. Don't say "no comment"
7. Don't repeat negatives
8. Tell the truth
9. Keep your cool
10. Be yourself

Caring Across Communities

With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 15 sites across the U.S. are implementing a new school-centered model of mental health care to help meet the needs of immigrant children and youth. Caring Across Communities engages schools, families, students, mental health agencies and other community organizations to build effective, easily-accessed services and enable a better future for adolescents.

For more information about Caring Across Communities, visit www.healthinschools.org/ and click on Immigrant and Refugee Children.

To support the work of the 15 Caring Across Communities sites, this Communications Guide was prepared by Worldways Social Marketing. www.e-worldways.com