

Appendix 6-A

Media Guidelines

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The guidelines shown here are excerpts from the American Public Health Association Media Advocacy Manual. See http://www.apha.org/news/Media_Advocacy_Manual.pdf

PLANNING YOUR MESSAGE¹

Before you can begin your advocacy, you need to have a plan. You need to know what the message is that you are trying to get across and you need to know any actions you want to be taken by the public, by other organizations, or by legislators.

First, establish what your overall goal is. Are you trying to motivate the community to take action on an issue? Advocating for a policy or law? It is important that you have an overall goal before you start so that you can target your audience through the use of the media. Here are some questions to ask yourself when developing your overall strategy.

- **What is the problem you are highlighting?** This could be the importance of reading with children or one-to-one relationships with children and youth, or problems such as underage drinking, tobacco use, etc. Try to narrow your problem to a specific population. For example, if you start out trying to end all cigarette smoking, you will have a hard time developing a solution and gaining support. But if you narrow it down to underage smoking, you will have an easier time of coming up with a solution. Similarly, adults can support young children in specific ways that are not appropriate to youth.

- **Is there a solution to it? If so, what is it?** Again, try to narrow this down to a specific population. If you are trying to combat underage smoking, you could advocate for stricter laws for those who sell tobacco to minors. To support young children, you could give specific suggestions for everyday positive interactions and opportunities.

See the Search Institute² and similar national resources for ideas on specific actions that parents, neighbors, faith communities, schools and employers, can take to support children, youth, and

REMEMBER!

Media research reveals that episodic stories about poverty tend to attribute poverty to individual behavior...“she should have finished school; he should get a job” and attribute success to individual characteristics ...“she overcame adversity.”

In contrast, when thematic stories highlight the *context* of poverty (growing unemployment, lack of quality child care, limited job training), readers/viewers are more likely see how poverty is related to social, economic, and community conditions and policies that can be changed.

Aim messages to identify the social, economic, community and other context changes that will improve people’s lives.

families. Look at specific resources for actions to advance support for diversity and inclusion across ethnic, gender, and ability groups.³

- **Who can make the solution possible? Whose support do you need to gain in order to make the solution happen?** You may need to target lawmakers, employers, schools. Think about what organizations and people need to act to reach your goal. If you're targeting lawmakers, you will use different language than if you're trying to target the general community.
- **What do you need to do or say to get the attention of those who can make the solution happen?** Do you want to use the media to get your message out by having a press conference or briefing? Or do you want to use advertising to get the attention of the public?

Remember, not all advocacy requires the use of the media. Sometimes it is easier to get your message out through marketing and advertising, than through press releases and conferences.

Once you have defined your overall goal, then design the message that you want to get out in the public. You want your message to be simple and clear. You should point out the problem you are addressing, why your intended audience should be concerned with this problem and what should be done about the problem.

Make your message powerful - persuasive and compelling. You will need to say something compelling to get the attention of the public. Try to create a message that is new and put a human face on it. By humanizing the issue, your issues will have a greater impact on the public than if you just state statistics.

CONTACTING THE MEDIA

Creating a Media List

Before you begin to contact the media in your area, you should familiarize yourself with the local media. Watch the evening broadcasts and read the paper daily to get a feeling for how different stations and papers cover public health issues. This will give you an idea of who would be most likely to cover your story. Find out which reporters cover public health and track them to see how they cover the issues and if this is the type of reporter you would want to cover your story.

It is also important to think about the audience that the station/paper reaches. You want to make sure that you use the best outlet to reach your intended audience. If you want to mobilize the community, look at a local paper whose readers are mainly in the community you are trying to reach. If you are trying to get the attention of legislators, you may want to find a paper that covers politics and reaches a broader audience. If you want to send a message to your peers, you may want to try a trade magazine (i.e. Non-Profit Times, Healthcare Business Magazine).

Once you know what papers or stations you want to reach, you should create a list of media contacts. This list is perhaps the most important tool for conducting media advocacy. Developing such a list takes time, and it should continuously evolve. You need to get contact information. You will need the names of reporters, editors or producers, their address, phone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail addresses so that you will be able to send them your information in the format most appropriate for the type of story. Also, some reporters read their e-mail - others do not. It pays to find out which type of format your key reporters prefer. Keep all of this information for future reference.

To get this information, call the station or paper and ask. Find out who covers a certain "beat" or the issue area. If you are not sure who you need to talk to, you can ask to speak to the news or assignment editor.

News Releases

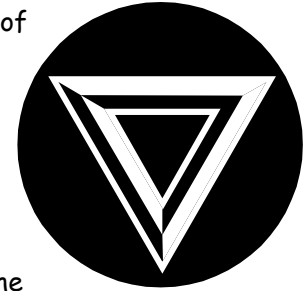
Many reporters gather information for upcoming stories from news releases. The news release tells the reporter the "who, what, when, where and why" of a news story. Reporters receive many news releases, so your release should quickly grab the reporter's attention and convince him or her of the issue's news value.

News releases generally follow a standard format. The format is designed to give the reporter or editor all the information he or she needs quickly. By following the same format, all pertinent information is in the same place and easy for the reporter to find. The following is the standard format for a news release:

**USE THIS
5- STEP
STANDARD
FORMAT!**

- STEP 1. **Organization name.** The name of your organization should be at the top of the release. Use organizational letterhead if possible.
- STEP 2. **Contact information.** Below the name of your organization, put the name and phone/fax number and/or e-mail address of the person the press should contact to get more information. This is usually located on the top right-hand corner.
- STEP 3. **Release date.** This tells the reporter when the information in the release can be published or broadcast. The release can be for immediate release to the public, in which you can put "For Immediate Release" on the top. The reporters can also hold the information until a certain date. For this, you would need to put "Embargoed until (release date and/or time)." The release date is usually located on the top left-hand corner.
- STEP 4. **Headline.** The headline is important. It is a short phrase summing up the essence of the release. This will run under the contact information and above the body of the release.
- STEP 5. **The Body.** This is where you will tell the reporter/editor the "who, what, where, when and why" of your story.

The body of the news release should follow the “inverted pyramid style of writing” in which the conclusion or most important information goes first, followed by supporting information. Don't count on the reader to read the entire page—give the most important information first.



- **The first paragraph, the lead, should be the most powerful.** This is where you should tell the most important information of the release, in order to get the interest of the person reading it.
- **Keep your sentences and paragraphs short and use plain language.** Don't use acronyms or jargon. Also, you should try to keep your release short, one or two pages double-spaced should be enough.
- **Use quotes if possible.** This puts a human face on the news you write. The quote should substantiate the lead, be from a significant person and add a piece of information. Try to put a quote high in the release, within the first three or four paragraphs.
- **Finish your release with a “tag.”** This is usually one paragraph of “boiler plate” information to fill in information holes such as a paragraph description of your organization or the goals of the work you've highlighted in the release.

If you have a tagline, use it here too. Tag lines are powerful “verbal logos.” Some well-known taglines are: *Take the Time; Cherish Every Child; MADD - Mothers Against Drunk Driving; Communities that Care.*

- **End.** Reporters/editors look for a symbol at the end of the release to tell them there is no more information. If your release is more than one page, at the end of the first page, type —more— to signal the release continues on the next page. At the end of the release, type —30—, END, or ###. Center this at the bottom of the page below the tag.

News releases can be mailed or faxed to reporters. Call the reporter to make sure that he or she has received your release or that the right reporter has it. Remember, reporters are often busy meeting deadlines so make your call brief and to the point.

Letters to the Editor

A letter to the editor is the simplest way to communicate an opinion to the general public. The chances of having the letter printed greatly increases at smaller or less prominent newspapers or magazines. On average, many local papers publish up to 80 percent of the letters they receive.

Write to the point, specific letters that are the length the newspaper tends to publish. Longer letters are more likely to be discarded, and if not discarded, the editor will decide what information will be cut in order to fit the length requirements.

Short, pithy pieces are best. Before you begin writing your letter, look at the editorial pages of different newspapers. Often, specifications on writing letters to the editor will be on this page. If not, follow these general tips for writing your letter.

- **Be brief and concise.** Focus your letter on just one concept or idea. Limit yourself to 250-300 words.
- **Refer to other stories.** If possible, refer to other articles, editorials or letters the newspaper has recently published. This should be done as soon as possible after the article was published. This will increase its chances of being printed.
- **Include contact information.** Include your name, address and phone number so the paper can contact you with any questions. Also, include any titles and degrees that are relevant to help the media know you have expertise. And make sure to refer to your organization in your letter.

¹ See the American Public Health Association (APHA) website for great information on media advocacy, including the full copy to the Media Advocacy Manual excerpted here. http://www.apha.org/news/Media_Advocacy_Manual.pdf

Also see:

Weinreich, Nedra Kline. (1999). *Hands-on Social Marketing: A Step-by-Step Guide*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. <http://www.social-marketing.com>

This is a great guide - very readable with lots of examples. Highlights the principles for developing an overall strategy, target audiences, goals and objectives, and evaluation.

Wallack, L., Woodruff, K., Dorfman, L. and Diaz, I. (1999). *News for a change: An advocates guide to working with the media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Pp. 130-135.

<http://www.sagepub.com>

² The Search Institute <http://www.search-institute.org>

³ For example, see Werber S., *Cultural Competency and Gender Specific Services Resource Guide*. Oregon Commission on Children and Families and the Oregon Youth Authority. April 2001. www.ccf.state.or.us

<http://www.girlspecificprogram.org/index.html>

