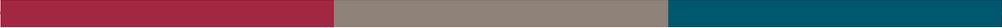


July 2017



Effective Public Relations



JOHN R. OISHEI FOUNDATION



*Presented by the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York
and The John R. Oishei Foundation as part of an ongoing collaboration
designed to expand and improve local nonprofits'
communications capabilities.*

PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A COMMUNICATIONS TOOL

There are multiple ways that we get news today – on our smart phones, through social media, and through more traditional mediums such as newspapers, television, and radio news shows. It is often the way that we learn about companies and organizations and some of the interesting and unique things they are doing. News coverage can be an effective way to raise awareness of your organization and to promote specific programs or upcoming events. Also, as more news organizations push their news out through digital channels in addition to more traditional ones, the ability to reach wider audiences is enhanced.

While reporters may, at times, contact your organization for a story, more often than not, a pro-active, targeted approach is necessary to get the attention of reporters to educate them about your organization and encourage news coverage.

Every organization has a story to tell. When considering what kind of "news" you have, consider sharing the following with your local news media:

- Significant donation/funding announcements
- Events
- New leadership or other significant new hires/promotions
- Innovative programs
- Significant successes or impacts of programs
- New data that highlights an issue/impact
- Profiles of key staff, volunteers or program participants
- Awards/honors for the organization or individual staff members

BENEFITS OF NEWS COVERAGE:

There are a number of advantages to gaining publicity for your organization. News coverage can:

- Build a public profile of your organization both when news coverage appears, and in a more lasting way through searchable media news sites that archive stories.
- Reach new audiences beyond those who have a relationship with your organization.
- Promote upcoming events.
- Highlight programs, people, and impacts of your organization.
- Be used as a marketing tool when shared with new audiences as a means to highlight the organization.

STEP-BY-STEP MEDIA OUTREACH

There are some general steps to take to ensure your news reaches the right reporter and has a chance of being covered by the media.

There are no guarantees that the media will cover your story, however, being proactive in communicating with the media can help to raise your profile, build relationships with local reporters and gain publicity for your organization or program.

Below are recommended steps to take when announcing "news":

PREPARE BEFORE you contact the media:

- Make sure your organization's leadership is comfortable with the idea of speaking to reporters and that there is someone available to act as spokesperson. Keep in mind that the media generally will not share an advance copy of the story with you so there is some risk involved in trusting a reporter to get the story right.

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- Consider timing as well – make sure that you are equipped to handle an interview or to speak about a specific program when you reach out to the media so that you can take advantage of any interest and to avoid wasting a reporter's time if you can't follow through.
 - Determine your "news hook" or the most important/interesting aspect of your announcement and draft a press release with all of the pertinent details (see included sample)

CONTACT the media:

- Target appropriate media outlets including daily or weekly newspapers, television news, radio news shows or news blogs/websites. Consider where your organization or event is located and include news outlets that cover that location.
- Research appropriate reporters, editors, or producers at news outlets that are most likely to cover your news. For print reporters, this may include the reporter who covers non-profit organizations, the City Desk or business reporters if appropriate. Check the media outlet website to determine the "beats" of various reporters and their contact information. Local broadcast outlet's usually request that you send information directly to the newsroom.
- Draft a press release highlighting the most important information early in the release. Be sure to answer the essential questions journalist ask, including who, what, where, when, and why.
- Include contact information on your press release so that the reporters can reach you for more information or to set up an interview. Be sure to determine who will act as spokesperson for your organization and handle any interviews.

- Email your release to targeted reporters or news desks. It is easier for the reporter to read quickly if it is in the body of the email rather than included as an attachment. Feel free to send it to more than one reporter to ensure that your news gets noticed but make sure the reporters targeted are likely to cover your news. Don't forget your email subject line – make it interesting and catchy so that the reporter wants to open it, rather than hit "delete."

FOLLOW UP with the reporters:

- Reporters get hundreds of news releases each day so it is important to follow up by phone a short time later or in advance of an event. This will ensure receipt of the information and give you an opportunity to "pitch" your story and to inquire as to whether the news outlet plans to cover the announcement or event.
- Be prepared to tell the reporter why the event/announcement is important, how it will impact the community and why their readers/viewers will have an interest in the topic.
- Even though a reporter may tell you that they intend to cover the news, keep in mind that there are no guarantees and reporters frequently have to change their plans depending on other breaking news that may arise.
- If a reporter is interested in covering the story, ask if he or she would like to set up an interview or if they need any additional information. If the reporter plans to attend an event, be on hand at the event to greet the reporter, set up any necessary interviews and provide any additional information.
- Be sure to ask if they have a deadline so that you can meet their needs within the available timeframe.

- Monitor the media outlet to see if a story appears and don't hesitate to send a thank you to the reporter for the story.
- Share the link to your news item on your website, social media sites and in your email newsletters to gain greater exposure for the news coverage. Follow the media outlets social media sites as well and be sure to share the story if it is posted digitally.
- If there is a factual inaccuracy in the story, contact the reporter to see if it can be corrected for any digital versions that may appear on the news organization's website.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF MEDIA OUTREACH

DO:

- Be proactive. Communicate regularly with the media about your events, programs, successes, and other agency news by contacting reporters via press materials, phone calls and emails.
- Target the right reporter. Learn which reporters are likely to cover your news by checking the media outlet's website and by watching/reading the media outlet to get a better idea of the specific "beats" of reporters.
- Follow up. Don't hesitate to follow up with reporters by phone to ensure receipt of your written press materials and to pitch your story.
- Respect deadlines and respond quickly. When working with a reporter on a story, ask about his or her deadline and make sure you respond in a timely manner. Many times, you may only have a very short time frame to provide information or you may lose the opportunity to be part of the story.
- Be prepared. When talking to reporters, make sure you have all the pertinent information about the story you are trying to pitch. Be prepared to tell the reporter why the item is of importance to his or her audience.

- Be a resource. Reporters are always looking for new stories and people who can share information, so don't hesitate to reach out to a reporter with information that can be helpful to them even if it is not about your agency.
- Develop a relationship. Reporters are people too so take some time to get to know them and learn more about the types of stories they cover. In some cases, you may have a specific reporter who covers non-profits or the specific area your organization works in so having a positive connection can be very helpful.

DON'T:

- Send a press release and expect it to be covered no matter what. Reporters are inundated with information so it may take several emails or calls to make sure the information has been received, and to determine the reporter's interest in covering.
- Say things that should not be shared. Remember that there is no such thing as "off the record," so don't share information that should not be available to the public or that could be harmful, even if the conversation is not a formal interview.
- Be a pest. While proactive follow up is often necessary, realize that if your calls and emails are not being returned, it is probably because the reporter is not interested in your story.
- Expect to see the story before it is printed or airs. Most media outlets will not give you a chance to approve a story.
- Get discouraged! Not every story will be covered, but continuing to communicate with reporters and media outlets will help to raise your profile and provides a better chance of future media coverage.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: (Organizational Contact)
(phone/email address)

THE HEADLINE SHOULD INCLUDE THE MAIN NEWS YOU WANT TO COMMUNICATE

Sub-headings can add more detail or newsworthy items.

(LOCATION), (Date), -- The first paragraph should state the "news" clearly and directly. Be sure to mention the organization by name and any other key players. Avoid promotional or flowery language, as reporters will be looking for the basic facts to determine whether or not this is a story that has value.

The second paragraph can add more detail such as specific impact of the news, more detail about an event or anything that supports the overall news.

The third paragraph can include a quote from a key person such as the leader of the organization or a participant. The quote should help to support the benefits/impact of the news and the role of the organization. Since this is a quote, you have more opportunity to add complimentary language or to call out an organization for their great work.

Add more paragraphs as necessary to tell the story but try to keep the press release to no more than one or two pages.

The last paragraph should be an overall description of the organization that includes its name, mission, location and website address.

SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY (FOR EVENTS)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(DATE)

Contact: (Name/Title)
(Phone/Email)

(Organization Name) to Host (Event/Program) to Benefit (Add details)

WHAT: (A short description of the event/activity including event or program title, focus and the benefits.)

WHEN: (Date and time. If possible, add an end time so media know specific time parameters)

WHERE: (Add location title and full address)

WHY: (Add details about the purpose of the event/program)

WHO: (Add information about hosting agency, participants and sponsors)

MEDIA: (Add details if necessary on specific times of event that are particularly newsworthy or that may offer strong photo/broadcast appeal)

MORE INFORMATION: Add information on agency website address, RSVP information or other source of more detailed information.

ABOUT: Add agency description including mission, audience served and website.