Crafting Your Advocacy
Message for the Media

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Advocacy

- The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal
- The act of taking the problems that one faces day to day and pursuing their resolution outside their usual place of presentation
- Advocacy seeks to change upstream factors - laws, regulations, policies, and institutional practices
Media Advocacy

Disseminating advocacy relevant information through the media
- Print
- Online
- Radio
- Television

Aims
- Affect action
- Increase awareness
- Change or affect policy decisions
- Provide a different perspective
- Highlight issues and solutions
Types of Planned Media Advocacy

- Press Releases
- Letters to the Editor
- Commentaries
- Opinion pieces
- Interviews
- Email blasts
- Web postings
Types of Unplanned Media Advocacy

- Commentating on a breaking story
- Providing expert information
- Being asked to give a statement
You Can Be an Advocacy Star
Media Advocacy Steps

1. Make sure your issue is newsworthy
2. Choose the right venue
3. Frame your message
4. Create media material
5. Prepare the media spokesperson
6. Engage the media
Newsworthy

- Follow current events to determine what the community and news agencies are interested in.

- Ask yourself
  - Does my issue seem relevant to the community?
  - Do I have a hook?
  - Can I put a human face on my issue?
  - Who and how many people are impacted?
  - How does my issue relate to current events?
  - What is new and interesting about my issue?
  - Is there conflict, intrigue or opposition to my issue?
The Right Venue

- The message
- Your resources
- Experience
- Comfort
- Target audience
Framing Your Message

1. First, know how the media has been framing your issue
2. Then, identify how you can shed new light on the issue
3. Offer solutions
4. Use sound bites
   - Short and catchy
   - 1-2 sentences
   - Gets the point across
   - Helps identify the most important point
Create Media Materials

The Press Packet
- The issue
- The perspective
- The solution
- Your organization

Fact Sheets

Business cards

Photos and bios

Important research
The Right Person for the Job

The spokesperson needs to

- Be well versed in the content
- Know the sound bites and important points
- Cool under pressure
- Be able to highlight the community connection
- Speak clearly
- Be able to handle questions under pressure
- Be skilled at reframing
- Utilize people’s strengths
Engage the Media

- Don’t wait for the media to contact you
- Establish a relationship with your institution’s media representative
- Make the first contact
- Have information in hand to pass along
- Offer to comment on current issues
- Offer a different or unique perspective to the one the dominates in the media
Maintain Your Media Relationship

- Follow up
  - Send a thank you note
  - Business cards
  - Fact Sheets
- Offer your services for the future
- Pass along relevant information to your media contact
- Be seen as the expert
Media Advocacy Venues

- Press Release
- Letter to the Editor
- Opinion Piece
- Commentary
- Interview – print, radio, television
- Internet and e-mail
Press Releases

- Gives reporters and editors the basics of who, what, where, when and why

- Standard format
  - Organization’s name
  - Contact information
  - Release date
  - Headline
  - Body
    - First paragraph should be the most powerful
    - Use quotes
    - Keep it simple
    - Use a tag at the end
Letter to the Editor

- Simple and effective
- Keep it short – within the typical length (250-300 words) of what the paper published to keep it from getting tossed or slashed
- Refer to other articles in the paper
- Be concise
- Give contact information
Opinion Piece

- For the opinion editorial page of paper
  - Op-ed
- Opportunity to provide an extended argument or rationale
- Need to be timely, topical and focused for the readership
- Obtain the paper’s guidelines
  - Usually 700-800 words
- Meet with the editor
  - Be ready to sell your issue and yourself
Commentary

Written commentary for journals is usually requested/solicited

Opportunity to take the readership past the results presented in the study

Can frame the issue and highlight the importance of certain aspects of the research

Format dictated by the journal

Shorter commentaries can take the form of a letter to the editor
Interviews

- Familiarize your local options – morning and evening news shows, talk shows, local papers and radio stations
- Make the first contact to the host or producer
- Prepare for live versus taped interviews and find out if there will be call in questions or whether you will get the questions in advance
- Prepare prepare prepare
Keys to a Good Interview

- Assume that everything is on the record
- Speak in a clear and audible tone
- Don’t get defensive
- Be concise
- Avoid jargon
- State your main points first
- Reiterate the important points
Keys to a Good Interview

- **Dress the part**
  - Avoid solid black or white and/or loud or striped clothing
  - Consider wearing a lab coat if that is what you wear to work

- **Look at the interviewer**
  - Don’t stare into the camera unless instructed to do so

- **Avoid excess body movements**
  - Sit upright
  - Use facial expressions
  - Limit hand movements
  - Don’t rock or wiggle
The Internet

Email
- List-serves
- Information on email signature

A vast frontier
- Blogs
- Online news agencies
- Fast and breaking news
“If you don’t exist in the media, for all practical purposes, you don’t exist.”

Daniel Schorr
National Public Radio