

Tips for News Coverage

Generating publicity is a key factor in building public support for your Red Ribbon Week Campaign. Here are some tips for making the most of your media contacts:

Know all the media in your area.

Weekly newspapers, family magazines and student publications often show a great deal of interest in community activities and substance abuse issues. Don't overlook or undervalue these publications. Small publications are more likely to print your news release word-for word and may use photos that you provide to accompany an article. Radio and television stations also should be included on your media list.

Don't leave multiple phone messages.

Ask an operator or junior staff person when the reporters are usually in, and call then. Also find out how the media representative prefers to receive information, and contact them that way.

Have the right contacts.

Make sure you know whom to contact – including weekend staff – at media outlets. Here are some general guidelines:

NEWSPAPERS

Contact the City or Metro Editor for news stories and the Marketing or the Community Development Director for creative partnerships or public service announcements.

TELEVISION

Contact the Assignments Editor for news stories and the Promotions or Marketing Director for creative partnerships.

RADIO

Contact the News Director for news stories and the Promotions Director for creative partnerships or public service announcements.

WEEKLY PUBLICATIONS

Contact the Editor for news stories or public service announcements.

Have a clearly designated media contact.

This person must stay current with your plans, be knowledgeable about the drug and alcohol situation in your area and respond to media calls promptly.

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Tips for News Coverage (cont.)

When you contact the media ...

- Be concise.
- Accept that they're "always" busy.
- Leave a succinct and specific voice mail message.
- Give them enough lead time.
- Spoon feed them (give them a story that writes itself).
- Be fair.
- "Exclusives" as rewards or incentives may be OK — as long as they're above board. That is, don't give the impression that a release is embargoed until a certain date, and then give the story to one outlet for that morning's news. One article on page 10 of the New York Times is not worth angering Associated Press.
- Use plain English
Reporters are reporters. They may have been assigned to the metro desk yesterday; they may be writing about real estate tomorrow.
- Never patronize, but at the same time never assume that they have in-depth knowledge about your issue.
- Maintain control of the conversation.
- Know what public information is.
- Know what "off the record" means.
- Assume that nothing is off the record.
- Pay attention to the question.
- Don't let the reporter put words into your mouth. (It's their job to get a story. Some of them have a penchant for lines such as, "So, would you say that . . .")
- Think before you speak.
- Know in advance the points you want to make — stick to two or three points.
- Don't be too self-serving.

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Tips for News Coverage (cont.)

- Think about ways to turn their line of inquiry in the direction you want.
- “No comment” is a comment; “I don’t know” is not a sin.
- It’s OK to say, “This is an important issue and I want to be sure I convey our position precisely. Would you mind reading back what you just heard me say?”
- Never ask to see a story before it’s published.
- Never let a reporter get to you.
- If it doesn’t feel right—don’t do it.
- Research the reporter or outlet, if necessary, before granting an interview.

Follow up

- Thank the reporter if the story is even fairly good.
- Complain only if the story is factually wrong — and even then be professional — and remember that it’s a reporter’s job to get both sides of the issue, and it’s seldom worth it to fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel.

Other Ways to Get Coverage

- Ask your local radio stations and newspapers to run public service announcements to promote your Red Ribbon Week events.
- Write a letter to the editor. This gives you an opportunity to get your message across as you write it. Keep your letter short and tightly focused. Use facts and statistics support your point.
- Write an opinion column.
- Ask a local media personality to emcee an event or serve as the honorary chairperson of your Red Ribbon Week Campaign.
- Send your local media outlets a list of people on your staff qualified to speak as experts on certain subjects.