

### How-To Media Kit

#### WHEN TO USE THE MEDIA

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➤ **Announcing your dialogue-to-change program**

Use the news media to spread the word about your program and to recruit facilitators and participants.

**News releases** are the most common method of informing the media of newsworthy activities and soliciting their coverage of them. News releases are distributed to the news media through a **media list** that you develop. **Public service announcements** are another way to raise awareness of your program.

➤ **Generating news coverage of kickoffs and action forums**

Media should be invited to attend the event through a **media advisory** and a news release. You may also want to hold a **news conference** or **media availability** just after the event to answer any questions reporters may have about the process and results to come.

➤ **Managing media coverage of ongoing dialogues**

During the time the dialogues are meeting, there are a number of media activities to consider in order to generate awareness about the process. These could include:

- Inviting reporters to attend a dialogue. If you do pursue this,

make sure you establish some ground rules with respect to the confidentiality of the discussion participants. You do not want the free flow of ideas at the dialogues to be inhibited by the possibility of publication of participants' comments.

- Sending out news releases to keep reporters up-to-date on the scope and progress of the program.
- Placing coalition leaders on radio and TV talk shows.
- Placing op-ed pieces in newspapers.

➤ **Promoting coverage of program results**

You will want to promote ongoing media coverage of the results of your dialogue-to-change program. This will keep the community and participants informed about the positive outcomes of the effort and encourage future use of dialogue-to-change efforts to address other pressing community issues.

Consider the following activities:

- News releases about tangible results.
- Follow-up calls to key reporters to keep them abreast of what has happened and to request stories about the results.

- Continued placement of spokespeople on radio and TV talk shows where they can talk about the results.
- Visits to editorial boards to showcase the program and its results.
- Op-ed pieces and letters to the editor

### **MEDIA RELATIONS TOOLS**

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#### ➤ **Press packet**

One of the first things you will want to get ready for your media relations effort is a **press packet**. A press packet is a folder that contains background information and facts on your program. You can give it to reporters when they cover events related to your program or if they call you requesting background information. Items you might want to include in your press packet:

- background information on the dialogue-to-change program
- specific information on your program
- names and biographical sketches of coalition members
- fact sheets

#### ➤ **Media list**

A media list is a list of reporters or editors at all the media outlets that you would like to cover your program. It is important that you get your news releases in the hands of the right people to generate coverage. The list should include the names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers of reporters or editors at newspapers, radio and television stations, magazines and newsletters in your community.

Identify targeted media outlets and reporters by reading local newspapers, including neighborhood and special-audience papers, magazines and newsletters and listening to radio and TV news and public affairs shows. Ideally, you will develop a relationship with key reporters.

- Use media guides such as Cison or Burrelle's media directories that may be available at your local library.
- Ask anyone in the coalition if they have a media list that would be worth sharing with you.
- Use the phone book and media web sites as other sources of contact information.
- Continue to update your list as you gather new information or when new reporters cover your program.
- Store your list in a computer format that will allow you to print labels or envelopes for mailing your releases

#### ➤ **News release**

News releases announce something that is newsworthy and of interest to the media. They are written in a journalistic style called the "inverted pyramid," which simply means that the most important information is included at the beginning, with less important information to follow. They should be

written objectively and give all sides to an issue. Editorializing should only be done in quotes attributed to individuals.

- The first paragraph, called the lead, should include the “who,” “what,” “when,” “where” and “why” of what you want to say.
  - Subsequent paragraphs should expand on this information in a descending order of importance with the least important information at the end of the release.
  - Your news releases should be as short as possible – one double-spaced typed page - and rarely longer than three pages.
  - Make sure all facts are accurate in your release.
  - Include a contact name and telephone number for reporters to call for further information.
  - Distribute your news releases to your media list about one week before you want to generate news coverage.
- **Public service announcements**  
You may want to use **public service announcements** on local radio and TV stations as a means to recruit volunteers. Public service announcements (PSAs) are brief on-air announcements that some radio and television stations run as a community service. They might be an ideal way to help recruit facilitators and participants for your program. The announcements are selected for airing for a specific period of time.
- Find out if any of your local radio or television stations air public service announcements. You can do this by calling the stations and asking for their public affairs or community affairs directors. If they do air them, find out the lengths they prefer - usually 15 seconds, 30 seconds or 60 seconds - and any other requirements.
  - Write the announcements so that they conform to the required timing. The best way to check the timing is to read the copy aloud with a timer. Keep the language simple and make sure that it is written for the ear since it will be read on air.
  - Send the PSAs to the appropriate person at the station. Include a cover letter indicating why you are requesting they run them and specify the time period during which you would like them to air.
- **Media advisory**  
A **media advisory** alerts the news media to an event in order to solicit their coverage of it. It is brief and includes the “what,” “when,” “where,” “visual opportunities” and “contact information” for an event. The media advisory should be accompanied by a news release giving more detailed information about the event.
- One week before the event, mail the media advisory and accompanying news release to each media outlet on your media list.

- The day before the event, fax the advisory and news release again to your media list.
- The morning of your event, call the reporters and television assignment editors on your media list and suggest to them why their coverage of the event would be of interest to their readers or viewers. Answer any questions they may have and thank them for their time.
- Be available to take any call-backs from reporters with questions about the event.
- At the event, welcome reporters at a press check-in table where you can get their names, who they represent and answer any of their questions. Tell them what to expect during the event - names of speakers, people they may want to interview, etc. Offer them another copy of your news release if they don't have a copy with them.

➤ **News conference or media availability**

A **news conference** is used to announce breaking news of such importance that you want to announce it simultaneously to reporters and be available to answer their questions immediately. News conferences should only be held when the news is compelling enough for reporters to show up. Just because you hold a news conference does not mean reporters will attend!

A **media availability** is structured the same way as a news conference, but is understood by reporters as more of a convenient opportunity for them to ask questions of spokespersons than to be alerted to breaking news.

- Announce a news conference or media availability to the news media through a media advisory that you fax to them.
- Set up a room for your news conference or media availability. Have a table or podium for the speakers and chairs for reporters. Leave room in the press seating area for television camera operators to stand with their camera tripods.
- Have reporters check-in at a press table. Keep track of who attends and what news organization they represent. Do not allow individuals who are not from the news media to attend.
- Hand out any necessary factual or background information to reporters when they check in.
- Have one or two key speakers who give brief remarks (five minutes or

less). They should speak from a podium or table that can accommodate reporter's microphones. They should introduce themselves and have well-planned remarks that include the most important messages.

- After the remarks are completed, have your speakers take questions from reporters one at a time.
- Announce an end to the questioning when appropriate.
- Have spokespeople offer to make themselves available individually to reporters at the close of the session.
- Audiotape the proceeds with a tape recorder for your future reference.

### ➤ **Opinion pages**

One way to increase visibility for your study circle program is to have it featured on the opinion pages of your community's newspaper. There are three ways to appear on the opinion pages: in *editorials*, *letters to the editor* and *op-ed pieces*.

#### **Editorials**

Editorials are opinion articles that appear on the editorial page of the newspaper. They are written by editorial writers and usually express a point of view on a given issue. You can try to generate editorial support for your program by:

- Writing the editor of the editorial page explaining why the program is important to the community and including background information to support your case.
- Requesting a meeting with the editorial board of the newspaper to

present an overview of your dialogue-to-change program and why it merits the paper's support. The editorial board of a newspaper usually includes the publisher, senior editors, editorial writers and sometimes reporters who cover a particular issue. You can request the meeting through a letter and follow up with a call.

- If a meeting date is arranged, be thoroughly prepared for the meeting by taking along background information in press packets for the attendees and having the points you would like to cover clearly in mind.

#### **Letters to the editor**

Letters to the editor appear on the opinion pages of newspapers and serve as a way for readers to express their opinions about important issues, recent news coverage or editorials. They are an important part of the public dialogue about issues and can impact public-policy decisions. You can suggest that program participants or coalition members send letters to the editor around the time of the kickoff.

- When writing letters to the editor:
- Make them timely.
- Stick to one main point.
- Keep them short, typically 50-200 words.
- Send them to the address indicated. There is usually an address box on the editorial page that lists this information.

### **Op-ed pieces**

Op-ed pieces are opinion articles that appear opposite the newspaper's editorials and are written by guest writers. They express an opinion about an issue and are longer and more in-depth than letters to the editor. To try to place an op-ed piece, you can contact the editorial page editor with your idea for such an article. Be sure to have your subject and supporting arguments well thought out.

When writing an op-ed piece:

- Keep it to no more than 750 words in length.
- Reflect a strong point of view on a timely issue.
- Include supporting evidence to back up your stance. Two or three convincing facts are all that are needed.

### ➤ **Media talk shows**

The appearance of someone from your dialogue-to-change program on a radio or television talk show is another great way to spread the word about your program. Television talk shows usually have guests appear in person, while guests on radio shows may either visit the studio or call in on the telephone.

How to place someone as a talk show guest:

- Identify a good spokesperson for the program.
- Send a letter to the producer of the program stating why the show's listeners would be interested in hearing about your program and some

background on the spokesperson.

- If a date is arranged, make sure your spokesperson listens or watches the program before he or she appears on it so she knows what to expect. Your spokesperson needs to be prepared to answer questions and make key points about the dialogue-to-change program during the interview.