

## Working with the news media

The news media can play a vital role in helping you provide your community with information about your association. Understanding and working with the news media is especially crucial as associations deal with complex issues in an ever-changing society.

Why do we need to foster a good working relationship with news media representatives?

- ✓ By developing a relationship based on trust, we will have more opportunities to encourage news media coverage of “good news,” not just controversial or bad news.
- ✓ The news media can help us achieve our goal of providing the community with an ongoing, solid core of information about associations.
- ✓ The news media is a valuable communication channel that reaches parents, non-parents, senior citizens and others in your community on a regular basis.
- ✓ Radio, television and newspapers can all play a major role in encouraging support and cooperation for change.
- ✓ The news media can provide a quick way to thwart rumors and misinformation.

Why should we adjust to media needs? Most of us realize that radio stations, television stations and newspapers are not promotional mouthpieces for associations. Their primary purpose, in most cases, is to deliver hard news as quickly and efficiently as possible, particularly in large metropolitan areas. Space or airtime is tight and associations are generally not considered a top priority. However, news media, particularly the rural or suburban newspapers and radio/TV stations, may be interested in regularly covering association happenings. Our goal should be to make this coverage as easy for them as possible.

How can you find out what is happening that might be newsworthy?

- ✓ Set up a news network within your association that is responsible for relaying newsworthy activities to the community relations office or designated spokesperson.
- ✓ Distribute news tip sheets which ask staff and customers to submit ideas.
- ✓ Request news tips through association newsletters.

How can you make the news media aware of stories that are representative of your association?

- ✓ Provide news tips to radio and TV stations and newspapers on a daily or weekly basis.
- ✓ Provide a biweekly media tip sheet that summarizes 10 possible story ideas and furnishes the name and phone number of someone to contact for more information.
- ✓ Provide story ideas on your association’s Internet home page.
- ✓ Hold press briefings whenever there is a need to explain details of a story to all reporters at the same time. (Know the deadline schedules of all news media in your area, and schedule briefings at times that will allow reporters to meet those deadlines. If your area is covered by a large number of news organizations, vary the scheduling of such briefings so that you don’t always favor one newspaper over another or one electronic medium over another.)
- ✓ Provide reporters with ideas for colorful feature stories which editors can use to fill extra space or air time.

What are some common characteristics of a good news release?

- ✓ Be brief and describe who, what, where, when, why and how. Remember, you are competing for an editor’s attention with stacks of other news releases and paperwork.
- ✓ Use an easy-to-read, quickly recognizable format.
- ✓ Discard jargon and acronyms and use language that is clear and concise.
- ✓ Provide supplemental materials for complicated information, such as test results, budgets, restructuring, and new legislation.
- ✓ To increase credibility, share bad news just as quickly and just as accurately as good news. In other words, present information directly and honestly when a crisis occurs.
- ✓ Don’t waste an editor’s time with promotional “puff stuff.” Be sure information is newsworthy.
- ✓ Alert reporters to programs/events that tie in with national or local holidays or events.
- ✓ Clearly identify all individuals and locations in still photos or videotape. Also, make sure that appropriate release forms have been signed for any still photos or videotape that you produce or authorize.
- ✓ Be sure information is timely.
- ✓ Know and respect deadlines.

Additional ways that associations have successfully worked with the news media:

- ✓ Publish the association's annual school report as a supplement to the local newspaper and print extra copies for distribution to residents who don't receive the newspaper.
- ✓ Prepare a monthly report for use as a community service by radio/television stations.
- ✓ Produce television programs on topics such as favorable statistics, restructuring or the association's mission, which can be aired on a local cable channel. Consider including time for questions from a panel of journalists and distributing a written summary of the main points to local newspapers.
- ✓ Prepare a brief but catchy video that shows your association in action.
- ✓ Arrange for reporters to interview members of your executive team on pertinent, timely issues.

*Adapted from an article written by Ann Hagen, communications consultant for CommunicationPlus*