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Communications Techniques & Strategies

I. Why do you want the media to talk to you?

- More people will learn about your project
- More donations
- More partners
- More volunteers
- Publicity will help you succeed

II. Who are the media?

- Broader definition of “media” than ever before
 - Traditional media outlets, such as newspapers, radio, and TV, are being increasingly supplemented by, and often replaced by, web-based content, including news websites and blogs.
 - Despite drop in subscriber base, newspapers continue to attract key audiences and are important to cultivate
 - Newspaper subscribers tend to be older, more educated and higher income, and are good targets for project support initiatives.
 - Younger, educated, affluent individuals may not subscribe to print versions of daily newspapers, but tend to keep up with local news electronically, through newspapers’ websites.

III. How do you reach the media?

- Create a media list that is both complete and accurate:
 - Current contact information for each media outlet (*update twice per year*)
 - i. Correct spelling of reporter/editor
 - More than one contact per outlet
 - i. Assignment Editor
 - ii. Features Editor

- For blogs, specialty radio and TV shows (e.g. *Good Morning Richmond*) and local/regional magazines, identify the producer or editor in charge of features and breaking news.

IV. How do you create a comprehensive media list?

- Go to the library and check for either Bacon's or Burrelle's media list (*Online access to each can also be obtained for a fee through <http://us.cision.com> or <http://www.burrellesluce.com>*) In the hard copy versions media outlets are listed by city – simply copy the pages you need and call each media outlet to confirm the information is correct.
- Use Google. Search www.google.com using the following key words “media listing (name of city/state)” – again you'll need to call to confirm that info is correct.
- Identify blogs that are relevant to your project and become an active participant
- Once you have created your list make sure you update it every six months (*a great project for a volunteer or intern*).

V. Now you have their names, but they need yours too!

- Create a Source Sheet for use with the media that includes:
 - A link to your organization's website, if you have one
 - Your project/organization primary contact (*include work and cell numbers*)
 - Brief description of organization and mission
 - Key statistics about your project (*hours/days of operation, services provided, demographic profile of individuals served, data on number of patient visits, number of patients, etc.*)

VI. Next Steps

- Make personal contact without “selling”
 - Look for common interests
 - Provide source sheet
 - Encourage call or visit to your organization
 - Contact the media when you have a news or feature story to pitch
 - News is time sensitive, important, has a broad appeal
 - Features are interesting or unique stories, may have a seasonal tie, can be “pitched” well in advance

VII. How to handle a media interview

- Be a great resource
 - Bring supporting data and interesting examples
 - Keep your answers brief
 - Relax, Smile
 - Take as much time as you need
- If you need to correct an answer – stop, pause and start from the beginning.
- If you don't know the answer, say so – then try to get the reporter in contact with someone who does.
- If you are nervous...
 - Practice in front of a mirror
 - Avoid distracting habits, clothes or vocalizations
- Print copies of any print or web stories or blogs and get transcripts of any radio/TV interviews
 - Send copies of all media coverage to VHCF and to your employees, volunteers and supporters

News Rules

1. Be brief and be gone! Media Alerts and Fact Sheets are the best tools

Media Alert

- Who, what, when, where, why
- Should be sent in advance of event
- Grabs their interest
- Lists a contact person (*important to have 24 hour contact phone, preferably cell as well as office*)

Fact Sheet

- Bulleted summary of key facts
- Includes only essential information
- Indicates why your story is important
- Contains hard data
- Provides anecdotal data in brief form
- Lists a contact person and contact information

2. Give them what they want!

- When they call, meet their deadlines
- Make sure they have what they need to cover you

3. “Pitch” to the right person

- Is it a visual story?
 - If it’s emotional or compelling and has “action” that would make good video, pitch local TV using a fact sheet.
 - Make sure you work with the assignment director or health reporter.
- If it’s less interesting but still visual, go for a photo...
 - Take it yourself using a digital camera
 - Size to 5 x 7 and save at high resolution as a JPEG
 - Email as a color photo (*the editors can change it to black and white if they choose to use it*).
 - Include a caption when you send it including the date of the event, the names and titles of the people featured a brief description of what went on at the event, and the contact person’s name/number/email address.
 - Email it to the photo editor at the local newsletter and include it with copies of your news release
- Send a news release timed for release the day of the event giving the details of the news you’d like people to know
 - Send the news release both electronically, via email to your contacts, as well as via the mail – particularly if it includes visuals (*photo*)
 - In addition to announcing your news, include background information on your project (*a copy of your fact sheet*) and contact information.
 - Some ideas for news releases are:
 - A tie-in that your project has with a “day” or “month” – e.g. cancer screenings available at your free clinic as part of National Cancer Awareness month.
 - A significant new donation to your project
 - A milestone, such as opening a new facility, adding new care giving staff, expanding hours or days of operation, or expanding services

- Other milestones could include achieving a new level in terms of total patients cared for (*or total patients*) either during the year or during your project's history

4. Follow up!

- Always send a follow-up to the reporter/media that covered your story, thanking them for their interest and offering to be a resource for them on future stories.
- If they got something wrong, never be critical. If it was a serious error (for example, saying that your project served 250 people last year, instead of 2,500), ask print/web sources if they would mind correcting the figure so that the information is correct for the future.
 - Newspapers and magazines will print an “errata” correcting the information and will usually change the back copy online to correct it, so that future stories concerning that issue will be correct.
 - Radio and TV sources do not air corrections, so drop them a polite note via email (*or in the mail*), thanking them for their interest and kindly correcting the fact/s in question.

Getting publicity is important to the success of your project. Make the commitment. You'll see the results!