

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

The media are important partners in raising communities' awareness of sexual assault issues. Media attention not only raises awareness and educates, it helps influence decision makers, funders, and potential supporters. The following are some tips and ideas about working with the media, and were partially adapted from:

- *Partners for Prevention: The Media*, The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse
- *Campaign Kit*, California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Sexual Assault Awareness Month 1999
- *News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media*, by Lawrence Wallack, Katie Woodruff, Lori Dorfman, Iris Diaz; Sage Publications, 1999
- *Strategies for Action*, The National Center for Victims of Crime, 1999 National Crime Victim's Rights Week

Set Goals and Objectives for Your Media Efforts

The first step in planning a media strategy is to identify your goals and objectives. Your goal may be simply to educate the public about the importance of preventing sexual violence or to let the public know about the services you provide.

Define the Audience

Decide whom you really want to reach -- state or local "opinion" leaders, policy makers, or the general public. This will help you determine which news format will work best for your message.

Develop a Relationship with Reporters and Editors

Look within your organization for people who know local reporters, editors, station managers, etc. Ask that person to meet with the reporter/editor they know to discuss *Sexual Assault Awareness Month*. If no relationship already exists, develop one. Discuss what type of coverage may be given to *Sexual Assault Awareness Month*, for example:

- Feature articles on the prevalence of sexual assault, services available in the community, or local events designed to raise awareness about sexual assault.
- Conduct interviews with prominent people about their views on sexual assault or with advocates and board members at your program about the important work they do.
- Include editorial pieces on local legislation, local responses, etc.

Also, ask the media person for advice on how to ensure coverage of *Sexual Assault Awareness Month*. Offer to help the reporter/editor with story ideas and/or in

researching information. When the media report on sexual assault issues let them know how you felt about the coverage. Remember to thank reporters and news organizations for a job well done.

Provide the Media with Information

Provide information, but not too much! Make sure the information is clear, concise and includes the name and phone number of a person to contact for more information. Highlight the most important points. Organize according to priority.

Write a News Release

A news release should be limited to one page and printed on your agency's letterhead. Following is a list of all the elements that should be included in a news release (see sample in this guide):

- Date
- Contact name and phone number
- Short headline, all capital letters
- What is happening, who is involved, where and when it is happening
- Why this event is significant — emphasize the local relevance
- Quote from an expert or local official emphasizing the significance of this event
- More details on the event
- Brief (one-sentence) description of the organization involved in the event
- ### at the bottom of the page to indicate the end of the release

Develop Talking Points

Identify the key points you want to make. Take a stand and present a solution. Include relevant factual information and statistics as well as specific action steps you want to encourage people to take. Be concise. Phrase statements in such a way your most important messages can be communicated in less than 15 seconds. Prepare to deliver your talking points verbally by practicing saying them out loud – but avoid memorizing them verbatim. If you do, you run the risk of sounding rehearsed, uninteresting, and unnatural.

Pitch Stories, Not Issues

The media are looking for stories that will catch an audience's attention. Typically they want the "human interest" angle. Point out the personal relevance of your story to their audience. Emphasize the unique and compelling nature of your event. Stories that involve one or more of the following elements may be considered more "newsworthy:"

- Broad interest
- Controversy or conflict
- Injustice
- Irony

- Local relevance
- Personal perspective
- Breakthrough or historical event
- Anniversary or seasonal relevance
- Celebrity involvement
- Eye-catching visuals

Produce Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

PSAs may be recorded for radio or television; or they may be written for print media, including newspapers, newsletters, or bulletins (see sample PSAs in this guide). Attempt to contact local radio and television stations and speak to the public service director or station manager. When you contact the station, try to ask the following questions: Do you accept PSAs? Would you be interested in developing an ongoing public service campaign with our organization?

Prepare Media Kits

Collect a packet of information that you can distribute to the media. Compile materials and place into an easy-to-use file folder or booklet.

Materials should be clear and concise. Typically, a media kit includes:

- News release (see sample in this guide)
- Agency brochure
- Fact sheet on common statistics
- Reproducible pictures or graphics
- Business card and/or rolodex card with name of contact person

Note: A tip for planning: when reporters cover a story, they typically require information immediately in order to keep their coverage newsworthy. Have several media kits on hand that you can distribute to the media on demand as opportunities arise.

Ways to Partner with the Media

- Distribute news releases
- Sponsor a public forum or news conference
- Submit letters to the Editor
- Ask your local newspaper to include a special insert
- Appear on public affairs television or radio programs
- Provide local TV or radio stations with public service announcements