Media Training Guide

PORTER NOVELLI

Many Minds. Singular Results.

Healthcare Georgia Foundation
grantmaking for health

About This Book

The media is a powerful influence on the world around us. By succeeding in getting the media to cover the health issues your grant/organization is addressing, you can encourage the people in your community to engage in certain healthy behaviors, increase dialogue on public policies that impact health and draw broad attention to the work of your organization.

Why did Tickle-me-Elmo and Razor scooters sell out during certain holiday seasons? Why do people clamor to see the latest movies or make reservations at the newest restaurant? Why do packages carry recycling labels? All this, to one extent or another, can be traced back to the influence of the media. We know you care about the issue your grant/organization is addressing – so we want to help you translate your enthusiasm to the media.

News doesn't just happen by accident. People make news. And people help get it covered every day by doing the things that are laid out in the next few pages. There's no mystery involved, just forethought and planning.

As you plan events, launch new programs or release new research, you'll want to work with media to increase exposure to –and participation in – your cause. By learning more about what reporters need, how to provide them with appropriate information, and when to consult with public relations professionals, you'll be instrumental in securing – and giving – successful media interviews and fostering favorable media coverage about the issues your grant/organization is addressing.

First, let's start by gaining some additional knowledge about the media we're targeting and understanding why we should work with the media in the first place.

Understanding the Media

It's no secret that the media plays a major role in both informing the public and forming the views of the public. That's why Healthcare Georgia Foundation had asked us to help you understand how to communicate effectively and accurately with the media.

Why Media Is Important

- Media can create broad awareness about a topic or issue – The media often sets the agenda for the topics and issues that will be propelled to the forefront of the public's consciousness. From stem cell research and the West Nile virus to the war in Iraq and Brittney Spears' marriage, the topics the media covers often become the same topics that are discussed and debated on the job, at the dinner table, in social meetings and around the water cooler.

- Media can drive attention to an event or a resource – Long-gone are the days when starting a phone tree was the best way to promote an event or resource. Now, the media makes it possible to reach hundreds, thousands, even millions of people in one effort.

- Media can educate the public – When it comes to complicated issues, or topics with multiple points of view, the media is often a great resource for educating the public and clarifying various perspectives. Depending on the specific media outlet (e.g., TV, newspaper, or radio), the media can help communicate the relevant points, factors, and components to educate your audiences about the topic of interest.

- Media can reach a specific audience – Media outlets have come a long way over the past few years – from one major newspaper per city and a few general TV stations to a vast array of media. These days, it's much easier to reach a very specific audience through a targeted media outlet. But there are also a multitude of venues, which means you need to make decisions strategically. Today's media outlets range from cable TV stations designed

specifically for food lovers, pet lovers and music lovers, to magazines that cater to teenage girls, fitness-driven men and homemakers.

What Are Media?

Some of the most popular, far-reaching media venues include:

- Television
- Radio
- Daily/Weekly Newspapers
- Magazines
- Online/Internet
- Newsletters

Find the Right Target

Once you understand that the media can be an effective outlet for informing, updating or exciting your target audiences, you should spend some time identifying the best outlets for disseminating your messages. Choose the best outlets for your messages with the following tips:

- Television – Watched by all audiences, has the highest impact, and often, the highest standards. Great for visual stories and in-studio interviews. Televisions stations are competitive; consider exclusives for largest outlets. Can be difficult to get coverage, and you are unlikely to get in-depth stories.

- Radio – Great for breaking, timely news with a human-interest element or community focus. Also appreciative of in-studio interview offers. Research has shown that radio is especially effective for certain groups, including Hispanics.

- Daily Newspapers – Reach opinion leaders and the general public; appropriate for in-depth stories, to alert community about events and activities and to highlight a community story; consider deskside briefings to encourage comprehensive stories. Best depth, but smaller and more well-educated audience.

- Local Newspapers – The best format for highly localized stories (local angles are a necessity); easy to place information and an excellent channel for regular communications. Often accept pre-prepared materials.

- **Monthly Magazines** – Specifics vary based on type. Trade publications will focus on studies, outcomes and professional information, but most magazines run features, human-interest stories and "softer" news that is not time sensitive. Lead time can be 3-6 months.

- **Internet** – Fast becoming popular for reaching "captive" audience; often highly targeted. May accept prepared materials.

- **Newsletters** – A good vehicle for reaching a very targeted audience through a medium they expect and trust. A newsletter is usually concise and brief, containing news and current events that are geared toward a particular organization or group with common interests. Often best done in partnerships.

Each form of media has its own unique qualities. It is important to think about your story and target the best outlet(s) to communicate with your audience:

Media	Benefits
Television	• Watched by ALL audiences • Visual stories • Most competitive to get coverage • Short stories, not a lot of depth
Radio	• News with a community focus • Good for targeting very specific audiences
Daily/Weekly Newspapers	• Reaches opinion leaders • Appropriate for in-depth stories, promoting community events & highlighting community stories • Local angles, pre-prepared materials good for smaller newspapers
Magazines	• Specifics vary by type • Opportunity to run "softer," human-interest stories • Less time-sensitive; 3 - 6 month lead time, not good for "breaking" news
Online/Internet	• Popular for reaching "captive" audiences • May accept prepared materials
Newsletters	• Good for reaching very targeted audiences through a medium they trust • Concise and brief

Making the Story News

News outlets are defined by that first word: *news*. Understanding what makes news is helpful in creating effective pitches (a pitch is when you call someone in the media and give them an idea or hot topic for a story). The following checklist may help you select some of the strongest elements for your pitch:

- **Is it new?** Focus on what is new and newsworthy about your story. Examples of good media hooks can be "firsts," anniversaries and significant milestones. Can you say something that hasn't been said before? Do you have a new, innovative approach?

  Is there a recent event to which you can tie your story? For example, if a national story breaks about a new study on an issue your grant/organization is addressing, take the opportunity to call your media contacts and remind them of the local activities and people in the community who are benefiting from your efforts.
- **Is it "hard" or breaking news?** Hard news, such as new data, current day events and activities, and breaking or dramatic events never fail to get the media's attention.
- **Is it local?** How does your story affect people in your community? How does the same issue affect people nationally? Can the local story be tied to the broader, national angle?
- **Is it a famous – or prominent – person?** You don't necessarily have to have a celebrity (though it helps), but known people make news. Consider a well-known community leader or a local politician.
- **Is it a common problem?** Mass media needs mass appeal. When available, use data to explain how common the health issue is: how many people are affected.
- **Is it visual?** News is often visually appealing – do you have a story that works on TV? Are there photo opportunities or spokespeople that make great backdrops for your story?
- **Is it personal?** Media love stories about local people and their impact in the community.
- **The wildcard factor.** We can't always predict it, but sometimes the media covers off-the-beat stories and features (e.g., unusual world records, pets, New Year's babies, etc.)

Letters to the Editor

Believe it or not, the letters to the editor are the MOST READ part of the newspaper. So, if you see a story you don't like, one that you do, or you want to "build" on a story you read, respond with a letter. Many people will get your message.

In the letter, don't forget to be clear on:

- Who the letter is from
  - ⇒ Include names of letter authors (individuals or as a group)
  - ⇒ Hometown (Many papers won't run your letter unless you give them some information about yourself.)
- What do you want people to know about this issue?
  - ⇒ Reinforce your mission and key messages
  - ⇒ How they have addressed/or need to address the issue locally
  - ⇒ Keep it short. Most editors limit letters to 400 words, but the shorter the better.

Op-Eds

Newspapers run op-eds opposite their editorial page (hence the name). While the editorial page tells you what the paper thinks about something, op-eds give you that same opportunity. And you don't even have to wait for the paper to run a relevant story to send one. But, if your timing is good, you're more likely to get published, so it does make sense to tie your op-ed to a recent event, if possible.

Op-eds are longer than letters to the editor (about 800 words). Check your paper for info on where it should be sent and what format it prefers (fax, mail, email, etc.). And only send it in to one paper at a time – sending the same piece to more than one media outlet can ruin your chances of securing any placement.

Key Messages

Before giving a media interview, you should decide on 2-3 of your most important messages and prepare "talking points" that support them during your interview. The media want short "soundbites" from you about why your issue is important and what the solution is.

Key messages encapsulate what you want the public to know about your organization, grant and/or issue you are addressing. Space is provided below to add your key messages as you develop them within your organization.

Core Message Platform

About the organization:

→ Message One:

→ Message Two:

→ Message Three:

→ Message Four:

→ Message Five:

About the grant:

→ Message One:

→ Message Two:

→ Message Three:

→ Message Four:

→ Message Five:

About the issue:

→ Message One:

→ Message Two:

→ Message Three:

→ Message Four:

→ Message Five:

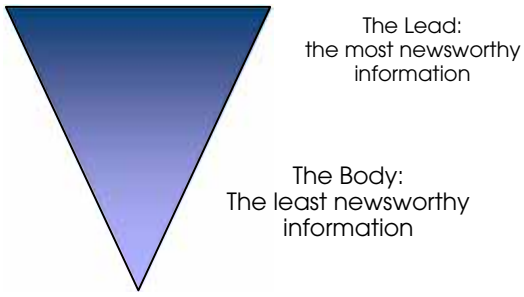
Writing for the Media

First impressions are everything when appealing to the media. Getting the media's attention is the most important factor in media relations, and you only have a few seconds to grab it. Whether in a telephone pitch or in the lead paragraph of a press release, the first few seconds are critical.

As grantees and members of not-for-profit organizations, learning to present information for media can be a bit of a challenge. It is very different than how we usually tell our story. We tend to begin by explaining all of the facts around the issue, building a case for why the listener should care. Once we have them convinced the issue is important, then we share the information that is most important – whether it is a behavior we want them to change, a policy to adopt or a program to fund.

Writing for the media is exactly the opposite: you start with the conclusion – the most important or newsworthy information – and then provide the supporting facts. This format serves two important purposes. You catch the reporters' interest with the most interesting information up front, enticing them to keep reading or listening. You also increase the likelihood that if the space for the story is limited, your key components are covered.

This style of writing is called the **inverted pyramid** format.



How do you decide which information to put first? You use the guiding questions under "Making the Story News" section.

Media Tools

The most commonly used tools to reach media are releases and advisories.

- Media release – a written statement distributed to the media, intended to gain media interest to write a story. An important note in writing the release: the goal is to get a reporter to pick up the phone and call for more information. Make sure you have included enough information to cover the issue, in case the reporter does not call; but don't try to answer every question a reporter might have.

- Matte release – a release that is written for the media to run with minor modifications. Where a media release should be written to entice a reporter to call you, a matte release should be written as a complete article. Matte releases are primarily used to reach out to smaller outlets, with fewer reporters and less time to develop their own in-depth stories.

- Media advisory – an announcement of an upcoming event for media to promote and/or attend. Advisories are like invitations, announcing the date and location of an event. They are used to reach out to community calendars, alerting the community and the media to an upcoming event.

- Media Kit – a tool to give a reporter containing recent releases, company or issue fact sheets or other background information for use in crafting a story. A media kit is an evolving document, comprising static information about your organization, fact sheets on relevant issues or services your organization offers and dynamic content, including recent media releases.

Building Relationships

The following principles will help you build strong, ongoing relationships with your local media.

1. Identify the Right Reporters

This is the easiest step towards getting media coverage. Start by just watching TV and reading newspapers and magazines, which you likely already do. When you notice reporters who cover issues relevant to your organization (health, children and family issues, education, or the community), write down their names. Once you've done this, you've created a "media list." Call the stations and papers to get the reporters' names, addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers and email addresses.

Knowing who is covering your stories is important. Typical media outlets include network TV (like ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX), radio stations, and daily/weekly print newspapers. But are there other outlets that you should consider for your "media list?" For instance, have you considered public television, locally published magazines, and neighborhood newsletters? These are all great avenues as well.

2. Introduce Yourself to the Local Media

Media are busy people, so it's good to keep your call short, and when a reporter answers the phone, always ask "is this is a good time?" in case he/she is on deadline. If you get voicemail, consider leaving a brief message and your contact information – then follow-up, but don't pester reporter if they don't return your call. If you do get in touch with a reporter, keep in touch. A follow-up letter will remind the reporter about your conversation. After you call a reporter, record the outcomes of your conversation in your media log, noting the reporter's particular interests. This way you can refer to your notes before calling a reporter the next time and will be familiar with his or her preferences.

3. Respect Their Deadlines!

Reporters live and breathe by their deadlines, so knowing and respecting them is the first step in building a strong relationship.

Television

- Give them several days advance notice for events, if you can.
- Try to call before their editorial meeting (generally around 9 a.m.).
- Avoid calling prior to and during news programs (11 to noon, 4 – 7 p.m., 9 – 11:30 p.m., 4 – 6 a.m.). Producers are crazy putting stories together.
- Note that final decisions about coverage are not made until that day due to the "breaking news" nature of television.
- On the day of the event, follow-up first thing in the morning to remind them of your event.

Radio

- Many of the rules of television apply, since radio is also a "breaking news" format.
- Just like TV, checking in "day of" is suggested if you have an event planned, but a "heads-up" in advance of your event is appreciated.

Daily/weekly publications /Internet

Despite declining readership and the American public's shift to television as its primary source of information, newspapers remain a critical and influential medium. Newspapers originate much of the day's news, and they are more likely to have reporters with specialties, i.e., health, medicine, education, government. They cover the news in greater detail than do their electronic cousins. By its very nature, print does a better job of handling complex stories or issues involving ideas, concepts and intangibles.

Calling newspaper media

- Contact newspapers at least five to seven days before your event.
- In general, call daily newspaper reporters between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. (after 2, they write their stories).
- You can be more flexible with weekly reporters, though "no calls after 2" is a good rule of thumb.
- Follow up calls on Friday can be most successful, as this is when journalists are most relaxed in terms of their schedules and may be receptive to speaking with you. If they like your story, they may present it (as it is fresh in their mind) to their editors in their Monday morning editorial meetings.
- Many daily newspaper reporters receive several calls from people with ideas like you, and screen calls via voicemail. Leaving a message is optional, but if you choose it, make yours brief (no more than 30 seconds) and clearly articulate your name and number. In many cases, however, it's preferable

to be patient and catch reach a reporter "live" unless your story is too time sensitive.

Monthly magazines

- Magazines have long "lead-times" – the time before they go to press – so you can be fairly flexible with your pitches. It's still best, however, not to call in the late afternoon.
- Because of these lead-times, it's possible to find out what a magazine has planned in terms of coverage via its editorial calendar. You can find calendars online or by calling magazine ad departments and requesting a media kit. After all, if your story corresponds with the calendar, you've got an extra news hook!
- Some magazine editors have half-day Fridays, so rule out Friday afternoon pitches at least six to eight weeks before publication.
- If a magazine reporter agrees to do your story, be sure to check in periodically (without harassing a reporter) to determine when it will be published and whether it's still on the "docket." Schedules are prone to change in the long-lead world!

3. Create a media kit

No matter how prepared you are, no matter how long the interview, you will not get the opportunity to cover everything with a reporter. A media kit, a collection of information you give a reporter, is a way of ensuring that the reporter gets all of your information. Media kits can include a variety of materials: fact sheets or brochures on your organization; its history, mission, activities, and initiatives; issue-specific information related to the topic of the story; and even materials from partner organizations working with you on the topic.

A good media kit is used by a reporter to prepare a story or interview and to answer any questions that arise when writing a story. When introducing yourself to the media, always offer to send a kit so the reporter can become familiar with your organization. If a reporter calls you to schedule an interview, offer to send a media kit in advance (if there is time). Always take one with you to an interview and several to an event where the media may be present.

Media Preparation Checklist

Organizational tools

Has your organization developed a key message platform?
Do you have a database of reporters covering issues of importance to your organization?
Have you identified controversial issues, if any?
Have you prepared "boiler plate" language – a short paragraph that describes the purpose of your organization? This should be used at the end of your releases, as well as in interviews.
Does your organization have a media kit?

Writing for the media

Have you identified the most important piece of information and included it in the lead?
Is your story newsworthy (be sure to review the "Making the Story News" section)?
Do you know your call to action?
Did you give the reporter a reason to call you for an interview?

Preparing for a pitch

Have you identified the target audience and the best media to reach them?
Have you identified the right reporters and angles for the story you are promoting?
Have you identified 2 to 3 key messages for this specific outreach?
Have you prepared your pitch – what you are going to say – and practiced delivering it?

When Media Calls

Your pitch worked, and now the reporter is interested! When working with the media, remember these basics:

- **Be responsive.** Call a reporter back as soon as you can, or make sure someone else does.

- **Ask questions about the interview**. Is it TV, radio, print or online? Is it live or taped? What's the angle – is the focus on you, your grant, or a specific health issue? Who else has the reporter talked to for this story? It's more than OK to ask all the questions you need to feel comfortable and prepared.

- **Introduce yourself.** Use your title and role when speaking with media to establish credibility.

- **Negotiate the agenda.** Make sure that you ask what the reporter wants to cover and give your input. And if the reporter has no specific agenda, feel free to set one that satisfies you.

- **It doesn't have to happen right now**. You don't have to do the interview at that exact moment. Tell the reporter you will call back (at an agreed time) when you've had time to prepare.

- **Get prepared.** Think about questions reporters might ask and how you want to answer them. Decide on a couple of points that you really want to get across during the interview and make sure you say them early.

- **Identify 3 key messages.** Prepare and practice three key messages to convey during the interview. Insert one of these messages into every answer. If you answer a dozen questions and remember to get your own objective in only a few times, there's a good chance your message will wind up on the cutting room floor. Reporters are used to hearing repeated messages from experienced interview subjects. It's part of the game.

- **Practice/role play…if time allows.** First priority is meeting the reporter's deadline. If time allows, do mock interviews with your colleagues or agency to practice getting message points across.

- **Think short soundbites.** TV and radio need soundbites lasting only 7-10 seconds and clear, concise language also works best in print. The better your soundbite, the more likely your messages are to get on the air!

- **Realize that you are under no obligation to answer every question.** Reporters are bound to ask the toughest questions. You are not bound to answer. You need not respond to questions which touch on patient or client confidentiality, legal issues, proprietary matters or personnel problems. If you can't answer, tell the reporter why. Never just respond "No comment."

- **Relax!** Everyone has a tendency to get nervous when the camera light comes on. Just remember that you know more about the issues your grant/organization is addressing than the reporter asking the questions. That's why YOU are being interviewed. Be yourself, be confident and you'll do great.

- **Ask when the story is going to run, if possible**. You'll want to pick up the paper or set your VCR to have copies for your files, and to highlight in materials for membership and staff!

Bridging

Finding opportunities when you don't think you have them

With all of the media coverage of controversial issues, it's inevitable that you will be asked some questions that you don't want to answer – or that don't relate to your message. These situations, though uncomfortable, aren't always a bad thing. With practice, you can turn them into another opportunity to reinforce key messages.

Through a technique called "bridging," you can acknowledge the interviewer's question while reiterating a separate – and often more important – message. Once you've learned how to bridge, you can stay in control of the interview and communicate your key messages at the same time.

Bridging Example:

Interviewer: Why should schools have to fund P.E. when we hear that children spend 4 to 6 hours per day watching television? Shouldn't parents assume responsibility for their children's activities?

You: *The number of hours children watch television does appear to be increasing, which is one of the reasons our fitness program is so important to the health and wellness of children in our community…*

"Helpful" Transitional Phrases

- That's an interesting question; let me remind you, though...
- Before I forget, I think the audience would want to know that...
- Before we get off that subject/topic, let me add...
- That's not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is...
- That's a good point, but I think your audience/readers would be interested in knowing that...
- Let me answer you by saying that...
- Let me give you some background information...
- Another thing to remember is...
- While _____ is certainly important, don't forget that...

Do's And Don'ts

Do:

- Know the right reporters for the issues your grant/organization is addressing.
- Be enthusiastic. Speak with enthusiasm and convey your passion!
- Use numbers and statistics sparingly. Focus on the importance of the issue at hand rather than getting bogged down in prevalence details.
- Remember reporters are on deadline. Be sure to respond quickly to requests for additional information or interviews. If possible, respond within the hour (if you cannot provide information in that time, call the reporter and let him or her know). Always ask when a deadline is and be sure you're back in touch in advance.
- Be honest. If you don't know an answer, say so and offer to find out. If you can't find out, acknowledge that, too, and try to direct reporters to someone who can help them.
- Illustrate your points with colorful examples of people you've encountered or who have benefited from the work your grant/organization is doing (but be careful not to be indirect or repetitive).
- Be prepared to provide information and answer in-depth questions once a reporter is interested in your story. Feel free to refer to materials if interviewed on telephone.
- Talk informally with television reporters as the camera is being set up. Ask again about their questions, and prime the reporter with your views on the issue.
- Always behave as if the camera were on.
- Stay calm – you are in control of the exchange.

Don't:

- Speak "off-record" – there is no such thing.
- Say anything you wouldn't want to read in the newspaper or hear on the air.
- "Bug" reporters. If they reject a story, wait until a later date.
- Pressure them to do a story by "going over their head" to the editor.
- Reply "yes" or "no" as an automatic reaction (this is how misquotes happen). Back up your replies with qualifying statements.
- Offer reporters old news. If you've just seen a similar story in the paper a couple of days ago, forget it.
- Call reporters when they are nearing their deadlines (usually after 2 p.m.).
- Use humor too often or in a disrespectful manner. Sometimes jokes weaken your credibility and don't translate well in the media.

- Use jargon, acronyms or technical terms. If a sixth grader wouldn't understand it, don't say it.
- Speculate, guess or conjecture.
- Speak for someone else, including Healthcare Georgia Foundation.

The Little Red Light is On... Now What Do I Do?

Television Interviews

Television interviews are the most challenging of all because they involve not only an exchange of information in response to a reporter's questions, but the element of performance. Studies indicate that **how we look in a television or personal appearance is far more important than what we say**. Our gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice, according to UCLA Professor Albert Mehrabian and others, account for far more than the words we speak, yet we usually fret over the words and think little about how we look.

Of course you must be prepared with facts and your own objectives for a television interview. But if your words are not consistent with what people see – facial expressions and gestures – your words or messages can get lost.

Before the Interview

- Watch the program on which you'll appear, and assess the interview style and direction of stories.
- Check out the "set" and become familiar with where things are located.
- Use preparation time to set an agenda.

Speak Clearly, Concisely and Convincingly

- Use simple sentences and active voice.
- Maintain a moderate pace (watch your speed!).
- Use conversational language and descriptive, colorful words.
- Draw a verbal picture.
- Be brief – most soundbites are between seven and 10 seconds.
- Localize your comments for local stories.
- Tell the viewers what you want them to do.
- Maintain steady eye contact with the reporter. If your eyes dart back and forth or wander around, the audience will be MUCH less inclined to believe what you say. Focus intently upon the reporter's eyes. During a discussion program, address responses to the host or the person asking the question.

Appearance Counts

- Remember that you personify your organization. You don't want to look like a stodgy corporate CEO!
- Colors that are too dark or too light tend to bleed on camera. Medium shades (light blue, grays and browns) are best.
- Patterns, plaids, florals, checks, stripes or polka dots distract viewers. These can "dance" on camera.
- Big jewelry of any kind is too distracting. Avoid reflective pieces and jewelry that "jangles."
- Wear simple make-up (for women) and wear make-up if asked (men).
- Watch skirt lengths for sitting (for women) and wear socks to the knee (men).
- Keep clothes neatly pressed, and sit on those coattails, if you have them.
- Keep hair in place.
- Smile. When you smile your body language says, "I'm confident and comfortable in what I'm saying, and you can believe and trust me." Unfortunately, smiling is not always an easy thing to do, and we tend not to. To compound the problem, television is a two dimensional medium, and it flattens our faces, making any smile even less apparent. You must exaggerate your smile if you want it to be seen.
- When sitting, lean slightly forward in the chair, with feet flat on the floor. If you tend to rock back and forth when standing, put one foot slightly ahead of the other. Let your hands hang naturally at the side. If you use hands to gesture, do it as you normally would, but move gestures to shoulder height (not in front of your face). Avoid sudden movements.
- Avoid wearing glasses unless you must. They tend to reflect studio and outdoor lights, and make it difficult for the viewer to see your eyes. If you have contact lenses, wear them in preference to glasses. Never wear dark glasses, or glasses which are heavily tinted or light sensitive.
- If the story is happening or about a location, go to it. If the story is about a hospital or clinic, be seen in front of it. The crew will have to go there to get shots of the activities, so you'll help them and, at the same time, appear concerned and interested by being at the story.

Newspaper Interviews

Despite declining readership and the American public's shift to television as its primary source of information, newspapers remain a critical and influential medium. Newspapers originate much of the day's news, and they are more likely to have reporters with specialties, i.e., health, medicine, education, government. They cover the news in greater detail than do their electronic cousins. By its very nature, print does a better job of handling complex stories or issues involving ideas, concepts and intangibles.

When responding to a print reporter, know before the interview begins what information the reporter wants, how you fit in the story, who the reporter has talked to, etc. Be prepared to offer greater detail and substantiating documents. Print reporters who are working on longer stories are likely to want copies of reports, letters and other data which support or explain your position or actions. An interview with a print reporter may be as short as a few minutes and completed by phone, or an hour or more, in person, in your office. That is governed by the type of story, the deadline and the role you play in the story. Prepare for the interview by asking beforehand what it is about, who has been interviewed, etc.

For the newspaper interview, it is perfectly acceptable to have notes or other documents at your fingertips. While anything you say may be used, the reporter will likely be looking for good quotes. Remember to restate your objectives and to focus on your agenda as you respond to questions.

Some reporters will tape record the interview. Regard that as an advantage. It helps the reporter focus on your answers and improves your chances of being quoted accurately. Feel free to make your own tape recording of the interview if you wish to have a record. A good reporter will not object.

Should you inadvertently misstate a fact or offer incorrect information, correct it as quickly as possible. And don't ask to review the story before it is printed. Most newsrooms have policies which forbid that.

Radio Interviews

Radio provides the American public quick and very brief accounts of the most recent news developments. (Obvious exceptions are programs such as National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," which provides some of the best in-depth broadcast coverage available.) Radio news is characterized by its immediacy and its brevity. When a radio reporter calls, you won't have long to think about

your answers and you won't have much time to give them. Chances are you'll get an unexpected call from a reporter who wants a quick comment now and is not willing to wait. If you can't or won't respond, the reporter will go somewhere else.

- **News Interviews**

If you do accept a call from a radio reporter for an interview, expect the reporter to be taping the conversation. (Many states require that you be notified of the fact you're being taped. If the reporter doesn't ask, you should inquire.) Speak in a normal tone of voice, and be expressive. Remember that the listener's image of you is determined by your tone of voice. Be brief and simple. You'll have only a few seconds, and radio audiences aren't interested in complex, detailed answers.

- **Talk Shows**

Many radio stations broadcast long-format talk shows, which deal with contemporary local issues. While these programs are often broadcast early Sunday, the relatively small audience might include a high proportion of decision makers. Before agreeing to appear, ask who will be on the program, what issues will be covered and how you fit in. If possible, listen to the program to learn its format, host's habits, etc. When you appear at the studio, be early, and be prepared. Have your own messages and get them out at every opportunity. Avoid being argumentative or hostile. Make your points in an animated and friendly voice, and be polite and gracious.

- **Listener Call-in Shows**

These programs build an audience of regular listeners and callers. Hosts are often strong advocates of a particular political or philosophical persuasion, and the programs thrive on controversy, no matter how contrived. Before accepting an invitation to appear, ask yourself or your Public Affairs Office if you're likely to be playing against a loaded deck. If so, consider the invitation carefully. Having accepted, know in advance what issues are expected to be discussed. (Remember that callers can change the direction of the program.) Callers are not required to play by any known rules, and they can raise irrelevant or false issues. Don't respond in anger or frustration. Remain cool, and make your points in a polite but firm way. Retain your dignity, no matter what others do.

Interview Checklist

Before

Do you have preparation materials?
Did you set objectives or an agenda?
Have you tailored your information for the outlet's audience (e.g., general consumer, educational)?
Do you know your call to action?
Have you identified controversial issues, if any?

During

Did you introduce yourself, with title and role?
Are you sticking to your agenda as best as you can?
Are you unclear? Don't be afraid to ask!
Did you ask for contact information for future stories? Do you know what other areas interest this reporter?

After

Did you meet your objective?
How well did you cover your agenda?
Do you know when the story/segment is going to run?

Media Glossary

Assignment Editor: the person who tells the reporters what stories to cover. Most television and print assignment editors make story assignments by mid-morning.

Backgrounder: a fact sheet that provides information to reporters and spokespeople. Reporters often use the information in backgrounders to "flesh out" their stories.

B-roll: the supporting video for a TV news story. B-roll is rolling video that plays while the reporter talks about the event. An example of B-roll might be footage of kids playing at the exhibits.

Caption: information that appears below or next to a photograph and explains the shot.

Media Log: the notebook where you write down information about each time you call, fax, or e-mail a reporter.

"**Pitching a Story**": the phrase used when you call a reporter, producer or assignment editor to give them your hot idea for a story. The key to success is to contact the media at the appropriate time and to convince them your story is newsworthy.

Press Kit: a folder that contains a set of information useful to reporters.

Press Release: a sample news story for reporters describing your news or event.

Soundbite: a statement from a person that is incorporated into a news story. A soundbite expresses a complete thought and usually runs for 7-10 seconds.

Wire Service Daybook: the daily roster of events that a wire service maintains to keep reporters informed about upcoming news and events. Wire services are an excellent way to get media coverage for a story that has broad national appeal. If a story does get picked up by a wire, such as the Associated Press, both national and local newspapers are more likely to run the story. To get your news, story or event covered by a wire service, contact the "daybook" editor.

In Summary

As you are working to increase awareness and action within your community about health and wellness issues, the media (and especially news media) can be a powerful partner. By better understanding the media and how to use it to amplify your voice in the community, you will be able to reach a greater number of people with your messages. And the more people you reach with your messages, the greater impact you will have in your community.

Here are just a few things you should remember:

- Learn as much as you can about the various types of media – TV, radio, print, etc. – and think strategically about which one (or combination) is best for your message.
- Familiarize yourself with the criteria for what defines "news," so that you can develop an effective plan for "selling" your story to local news outlets (referred to as pitching a story).
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper – or submit an op-ed.
- Monitor local news media to identify who covers health-related issues and what they write about.
- Once you identify local health reporters, pitch them your ideas about the importance of covering the issues your grant/organization is addressing at the local level.
- Develop a packet of materials/information that you can leave with reporters – either after a meeting to pitch them a story or after they've interviewed you.
- As you work with the news media, be particularly mindful of their deadlines.
- In preparation for an interview (live or taped), narrow down your main messages (no more than three for any one interview) and practice saying them out loud.
- Familiarize yourself with a number of transitional phrases so that if the interview strays from your main message, you are comfortable with ways to get re-focused.