

Make a Difference Day 2005 Media Guide

Building a Good Media List

Building and maintaining a good media list is the first step toward making media connections. The following are essential steps in the list-building process:

1. Conduct Research

Comprehensive media resources can be found in the reference section of your local library, and many are also available online. Some of the most reliable sources include *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media*; Bacon's directories of radio, cable/television, newspapers, and magazines; Hudson's directories, and the *News Media Yellow Book*.

For trade media and association publications, try the *Association's Yellow Book* and other reference books listing trade and professional associations. For events, try *Chase's Calendar of Events*, an annual directory of specially designated days, weeks, and months (such as National Youth Service Day). The best bet is to ask a reference librarian which media resources the local library carries and which of those will provide the required information.

2. Build A Media List

Media covers many different technologies and forms of communication. As a guideline, any comprehensive media list should include the following types of media outlets:

- Wire services (Associated Press, Reuters, etc.)
- Local and regional newspapers, both daily and weekly
- Regional and local magazines
- Local broadcast television news and talk shows
- Local radio news and talk shows
- Local cable television programming
- Special interest media, such as:
 - Ethnic publications and radio stations
 - College newspapers and radio stations
 - Community newspapers and calendar listings
 - Community newsletters
 - Trade and industry publications
 - Association publications

Once you have your comprehensive list of media outlets, you'll be able to select the outlets that make the most sense for the message you're trying to convey. Make an effort to obtain information regarding the demographics of the audience for each media outlet. This is one of the key factors in determining which medium will best serve your needs.

Keep in mind that most outlets have specific beat reporters. A "beat" is a topic or area that a reporter covers. Start by developing a media list that includes all beats that might be of interest to you, now and later. Think big and be creative; it's preferable to cast a wide net from the beginning rather than start small. You can narrow down your list later as needed.

Some sample beats that might cover Job Corps services and issues include:

- Workforce development
- Community affairs
- Education
- Children and adolescents
- Families
- Labor
- Politics and government

3. Target Contacts

For every targeted outlet and beat, gather the following information for each reporter or staff member:

- Name of reporter
- Title
- Beat(s)
- Address
- E-mail address
- Phone
- Fax

Many media outlets have their own Web sites; check these for names of specific reporters. For a local media directory, try contacting the local chapter (if there is one) of the Public Relations Society of America (<http://www.prsa.org>) or the local publicity or press club. Check the Yellow Pages or ask a local reporter for contact information.

The best way to confirm the names and contact information you've gathered is by making phone calls. It is also advisable to get the names of the following individuals:

- Assignment editor
- City editor or news director
- Bureau chief
- Daybook or daily calendar editor (also ask whether other media outlets subscribe to the daybook)
- Editorial page editor
- Features editor
- Public affairs producers

If possible, update the media list every three to six months, and always reference the date of the last update on the database file.

4. Create a Database

Many database programs are suitable for maintaining media lists, including Excel, ACT, Access, and Paradox. It is advisable to include the following fields in the database:

- Type of media (print, radio, TV, other)*
- Descriptor/qualifier (i.e. daily, weekly, cable, broadcast)*
- Title (Mr./Ms./Dr.)
- First name of contact
- Last name of contact
- Title of contact
- Name of media outlet
- Street address
- City*
- State*
- ZIP code
- Phone
- Fax
- E-mail
- Beat/area of focus*

- Comments (include demographic information in this section.)

*These fields should be searchable so that you can manipulate your list for specific outreach efforts.

Cultivating Relationships with Reporters

A critical factor in the success of any media strategy is forming personal contacts with reporters, assignment desk editors, public affairs directors, and other media representatives.

Some tips for building contacts:

- Ask all Job Corps staff whether they know any reporters and build personal relationships from their friendships.
- Join local press clubs if they take non-journalists as members, and attend meetings, volunteer on committees, and begin networking.
- Invite reporters to serve on panels at meetings and conferences. Most will not be able to write stories about the event if they are participants because of conflict-of-interest rules, but this approach is a good way to start a relationship.
- Pick up the phone and schedule a breakfast or lunch if the reporter has written about issues related to workforce development. Reporters are usually looking for new contacts.

Media outreach is all about relationships, and those relationships take time to build – so start today to build these connections.

Working with Reporters

Remember, reporters are always looking for stories, so they need you as much as you need them. Reporting the news is a fast-paced, high-pressure job, and reporters have little time to spare. Keep in mind that reporters want:

- The facts
- Accurate information
- Quotes
- Background or historical information
- Assistance with sources and research
- Honesty about what you can and cannot do
- An exclusive, if possible

Television reporters will also want to know what visual elements are available to make a good television story.

Pitching Stories

The key to generating a story is making a compelling "pitch." A pitch is nothing more than a concise case for covering a story – especially your best case for what makes your story newsworthy and relevant to the publication.

When planning pitch calls, it's important to respect reporters' deadlines and avoid calling at those times. In general, for all media, it is best to make pitch calls in the morning, though each medium has its own rhythms and styles. The more familiar you are with your contact and the outlet, the more likely they will respond to your pitch.

- Print reporters and editors at daily morning papers generally have a 3 p.m. or 4 p.m. deadline, although they can often file as late as 11 p.m. for a major breaking news event. Deadlines for print reporters and editors at weekly papers generally fall the day before publication.
- Magazines require that you plan far enough in advance, especially with a monthly publication, because it may take approximately six weeks before a pitch is responded to, and then another two to three months before anything appears in print. Still, magazine articles in special interest publications or in trade or professional journals are worth pursuing because they reach specific, key audiences that can be important to your center. When working with magazine editors:
 - Tailor each story to the specific audience for that magazine.
 - Determine who will be the decision-maker for your story. Check either the masthead information in the print version or go to the magazine's Web site, if available. The online version usually has a page for contact information and may even include detailed instructions for submitting story ideas. It may be an assignment editor, a section editor (education, jobs/economy, human interest features, etc.), or possibly a writer with an interest in a specific area who will be receptive to your idea.
 - Usually, send the information in written form, including the various elements that might be helpful to creating a story that fits the magazine. For instance, a slickly produced and glossy magazine may be more interested in visuals than a publication more focused on a specific editorial mission or audience appeal.
- Radio deadlines are constant throughout the day, so keep in mind a particular reporter's on-air schedule and call the reporter or producer between broadcasts, well before he or she goes on air. Other tips for working with radio include:

- All-news stations have full news staffs, including editors, and should be among the first outlets contacted.
- Stations also offer public affairs talk shows and call-in programs on issues of interest to the community. Producers rather than hosts are generally the best contacts for these programs.
- There are many radio stations that do not carry news at all, so be sure to do the homework when compiling a radio media list so that your efforts are not wasted.
- Wire services such as the Associated Press write stories for distribution to many newspaper, radio, and television outlets. Tips for working with wire services include:
 - Send press releases and media advisories to the nearest wire service bureau and/or its local "stringer" (a freelance reporter in your area).
 - Keep in mind Reuters Daybook and the Associated Press Calendar. These are published Monday through Friday, with short accounts of breaking stories and upcoming activities such as press conferences, conventions, speeches, and hearings. Reporters often use this calendar to determine their story of the day. To get an event listed, submit the information via press release or media advisory three to five days in advance. Follow up with a telephone call. Materials should be addressed to the Daybook Editor or Calendar Editor.

3. Television

Television has its own rules and rituals, all of which are important when you are trying to get the word out about your center. Television news deadlines vary according to the newscast or program. When working with television:

- Make sure to call well in advance of each broadcast. Never call an hour before the newscast. This will do more harm than good.
- Watch the local news programs to become familiar with the reporters, their interviewing styles, and the types of stories they typically cover.
- Remember that television news is a visual medium and take into account potential visual elements. For example, students interacting at a Job Corps center will have more appeal to stations than will footage of news conferences or "talking heads."
- Keep messages for television short and simple. Television news usually reduces complex stories to 30- or 60-second segments. Lengthy explanations usually end up as short, edited "sound bites" lasting, on average, 8 seconds.

Television news departments, in particular the assignment editors, make preliminary coverage decisions late in the day on the day before events are scheduled.

Final decisions are made each morning for that day's rundown. When talking to an assignment editor or reporter:

- Schedule your event before 3 p.m. if possible so that coverage will appear in the day's primary broadcast.
- Inform the assignment desk and reporters of scheduled events several days in advance with a media advisory or phone call.
- Make follow-up calls the day before the event is to take place.
- Place calls before 4 p.m. to avoid the deadline rush.

Whenever a television program airs a segment about your program, be sure to tape it. Having a copy will help with future marketing efforts, and outside video services can be costly.

Using the Right Tools to Connect with the Media

After the media list is finalized and your message, audiences, and communications goals are determined, the next step is to decide how to best communicate the story to the media. Consider the following media outreach tools when determining the best option for your organization.

Press Releases

A press release "releases" information to the news media, providing sufficient background and context for a reporter to develop a story. Releases can be sent before or after an event or announcement. Releases always include the name, phone number, and e-mail address of the contact person issuing the release and close with a paragraph that provides a general overview of the organization issuing the release.

Media Advisories

A media advisory is a condensed version of a press release, usually providing just the who, what, where, when, why, and how of a particular newsworthy item. Advisories are often used to alert the media to upcoming events. Like releases, advisories always include name, phone number, and e-mail address of the contact person issuing the advisory.

Note that electronic communication, which includes everything from sending e-mail pitch messages to communicating via Web sites to distributing on-line press releases, quotes, and updates, offers new ways to connect with the media.

When using electronic communication to send releases or other correspondence, always include an e-mail address and Web site. Do not attach a document in the e-mail unless you are sure the reporter will be able to open it. Do not use "press release" as the e-mail subject; use the actual event or activity in the press release as the subject to get the reporter's attention.

Pitch Letter

A pitch letter is a compelling letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine or the producer of a television or radio show that summarizes the most important aspects of a story and explains why it is newsworthy. Pitch letters are useful when a story is not time-sensitive.

Media Call

To be effective, all written media communications should be followed up with phone calls to the appropriate reporters, editors, and producers.

A media call is a quick call to pitch a story directly to a reporter or editor. Consider the most appealing way to present the story and develop a succinct message to convince the editor why it is important and newsworthy (the pitch). Be aware of reporters' and editors' schedules and deadlines when timing the call. Ask first if they are "*on deadline*" before *starting the pitch*.

Press Kits

Press kits are a package of materials related to the story being promoted to the media, whether that story is an announcement or an event. Press kits typically include a press release, background on the organization issuing the release, biographies, and name, phone number, and e-mail address of the contact person.

Press Conferences

Press conferences are events held to announce significant news to the media. The announcement is usually delivered by local officials such as a Center Industry Council Chair, VIP, or Community Relations Council Chair. These events require careful planning and should only be called when there is something truly important to announce. As they are not visually compelling, press conferences must have real newsworthy content to attract television.

Daybooks and Calendar Listings

Daily activity logs are maintained by wire services and media outlets. Information included in wire service daybooks may be picked up by all media outlets that subscribe to that service. Local calendar listings, on the other hand, are handled

by each individual outlet, so listings must be sent to every targeted publication or station on the list. While doing your research, determine which media service or outlet maintains the media daybook for your local community or city. If your event is free and/or open to the public, be sure to include that information in the calendar listing.

Some media outlets accept calendar and daybook listings only by U.S. mail, others only by e-mail or fax. When building the media list, make a note of each outlet's preference for receiving daybook information and include that information in your database in the "Comments" section.

Fact or Tip Sheets

Fact or tip sheets are usually brief, one-page overviews of an organization, services the organization provides and the people it serves. A fact sheet serves to introduce the reporter to the organization, its mission, and membership by outlining the "who, what, where, when, why, and how" of the organization. Fact sheets should always be included in a press kit and, in most cases, as an accompaniment to a press release.

Finding Your Voice: Editorials and Other Opinion-Shaping Tools

Newspapers usually have set aside space for readers to share their comments and ideas. Members of your Center Industry Council or Community Relations Council should be encouraged to submit letters to the editor and opinion pieces on a regular basis.

Op-Eds (Op-Ed means opposite the editorial page)

Newspaper editorial pages offer a strong platform from which to advance your message. The op-ed piece should be timely and provide a unique perspective on an issue that is currently important. Generally, op-eds should run from 500 to 800 words, but to increase the chances of being published, contact the editorial page at the publication for exact specifications.

Op-ed articles should be persuasive, well-thought-out, well-written, relatively short, and authored by the Center Director, a Center Industry Council or Workforce Investment Board (WIB) member, a parent of one of your students, or a person who is relevant, high-profile, or preferably both. Additional tips for writing op-eds include:

- Express complex ideas simply; avoid academic and technical language.
- Make major points quickly.
- Make your point-of-view known no later than the third paragraph.

- Refer to the other side of an issue fairly, but do not equivocate in support of your claim.
- Reference your personal experience with the subject; provide examples.
- Read published op-eds for hints on tone, style, and length.

Letters to the Editor

A letter to the editor usually appears on the editorial page or the last page of the first section of the newspaper. These letters are usually a reaction to a story or editorial that has appeared previously. While most run 300-500 words, check with the editorial page to get specifics.

Editorial Board Meetings

Meeting with the editorial board about an issue of importance to the organization can be a useful media relations tactic. Editorial boards usually consist of some or all of the following people: the publisher, the editor-in-chief, the managing editor, the editorial page editor, and editorial writers. Find out the name of the editor of the editorial page and call him or her directly or write a convincing letter about why the board should meet with you. Inquire before meeting with an editorial board if the paper has already taken a position on Job Corps or similar programs or has been unsupportive in the past so you can prepare to deal with the board's concerns.

Your Expertise

One of the best ways to establish relationships with the media is by establishing expertise in a particular area or areas. Get to know news people and maintain strong relationships over time. Read their stories, see where their interests lie, offer story ideas that reflect this knowledge, and become familiar with the outlets where they work.

Become a reliable resource and let reporters know your background and areas of expertise. Provide media-friendly materials such as photos or statistics that reporters can use. Attend press events and make your presence known. Once you're known as the expert in a specific area or areas, your expertise may be called upon for everything from a quote to a radio feature on a specific subject to a panel discussion on a television talk show, so be prepared.