

Media Outreach

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The first step to effectively reach the media in the community is to create a list of media outlets and key reporters who may be interested in PTA's efforts. Creating the list is as easy as watching the news or reading the newspaper.

Keep a record of the reporters covering education, school, youth, and family issues in the local area. This research will make the job easier when coverage is desired.

The phone book is a good place to start looking for contact information. (Also contact the county office of education or school district public relations coordinator.)

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Before speaking to the media, make sure to understand and concisely convey the answers to the following questions:

- What is the problem?
- What is the solution?
- How will the solution impact the school and the children in it?
- What does the PTA want the media to report?
- Who supports PTA's efforts? Why?
- Who opposes PTA's efforts? Why?

MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

Plan important points and make them early and often. Remember, an interview is an opportunity to tell PTA's story and to make our case. Prepare PTA points in advance, and use every question as an opportunity to address PTA's agenda (Talking Points 6.1.1, 259; Communicating with Confidence 6.1.4, 259).

The PTA representative is a guest and an authority who has been approached because of holding a leadership position. If the reporter asks questions difficult to answer or outside the representative's area of expertise, the representative



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should say, "I don't know, but I will get back to you in time for your deadline." In the meantime, consult with officers/chairmen who have the needed expertise.

Speak in a language everyone understands. Jargon, organization lingo or abbreviations that may be familiar to PTA members may have no meaning to the general public.

Be positive, not defensive. Take the trouble to present the PTA's point of view in a positive manner. Resist any temptation to attack other organizations. Accusations or any perception of conflict by the reporter may pre-empt the rest of the interview.

Tell the truth. Factual information is a must. If a statement is made that is not true, refute it immediately and politely. Always correct the information in an informative and helpful manner.

Be brief, especially for broadcast (television or radio). Broadcast news is frequently presented in "sound bites," short, succinct phrases that capture the essence of a program or position on an issue.

Keep statements or responses to a couple of short sentences. Make the point as often and as logically as possible. It may feel repetitive, but when the interview is edited, the clearest or most emotional statement is likely to be the one that is covered in the news.

SPEAKING IN SOUND BITES

When developing answers to the questions above, it is important to keep messages short and simple in order to attract and sustain the attention of the audience. Whether speaking with a potential member, the media, or the school board, use **sound bites** to hold the audience's attention. Here are some tips to help planning:

Speak to shared values. Stress themes that the majority of people care about.

Talk about what is at stake. Who is affected? What does this mean to people's lives?

Use reasonable language. Do not be afraid to take a strong position, but be sure to use mainstream language. Do not use jargon or acronyms.

Evoke pictures. If it is possible to make people see what one is talking about, the point will be more memorable and have more impact.

Take a stand and present a solution. The best messages do not just describe

the problem, they also say what should be done about it.

-Adapted from Berkeley Media Studies Group and We Interrupt This Message.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

One of the most important places in the newspaper is the □Letters□ page. Through a letter to the editor, one can reinforce a PTA message and concisely state the PTA position on an issue. The printed letter can be copied and distributed to help others get a clear idea of the position.

In fact, getting the PTA position into the newspaper through a letter to the editor often gives that position additional credibility. Here are some tips to consider when writing the letter.

Explain why you are writing. If you are responding directly to an article you read in the newspaper, state the article's headline and publication date.

Focus the message. Limit content to the one key point for the readers to remember.

Take a strong position. Editors look for fresh facts, honest statements of opinion, and creative points of view. Use facts and statistics to illustrate the urgency of the PTA point of view.

OPINION EDITORIALS

Opinion pages are read closely by a community's decision-makers. Opinion pieces (called □op-eds,□ because they are placed on the page opposite the editorial page) provide an opportunity to flesh out an argument for the importance and relevance of an issue and the proposed solution.

Planning the Op-Ed

- What is the subject to be covered in the op-ed piece?
- Is there a local ally who could co-sign the op-ed?
- What important examples or stories can be used to illustrate the importance of the problem?
- What is the specific policy solution PTA wants to advocate?
- What two or three key points would help to convince people that this is the right action to take?
- What compelling facts or statistics help to make the case?
- What metaphors or images might help to reinforce the point?
- Which official PTA position statement, convention resolution, or issue-related guidelines apply? (Where We Stand 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 130-212.)

CREATING NEWS

News does not just happen, it is created. Here are five tips that may increase the PTA's chances for getting news coverage.

1. Make the story visually compelling. A picture is worth a thousand words. When planning an event for the media, identify visuals that illustrate the topic. Is the unit trying to increase funding for school facilities? Why not take reporters on a tour of rundown classrooms? Point out the problems. Demonstrate the need for funding.
2. Piggyback on breaking news. Are schools a major issue in an upcoming election? Be prepared to be one of the experts and demonstrate that the PTA is a voice on the issues being debated. Take advantage of opportunities that can increase the profile of PTA.
3. The events to anniversaries and annual events. The fall is "back-to-school" time for most schools. PTA membership enrollment campaigns are successful during this time period, in part because everyone is in the "back-to-school" mindset. Think about other events or dates related to schools and children that traditionally receive coverage. Find a way to tie the unit programs to those dates.
4. Special events. Announce speakers' forums, cultural events or other activities that may be of interest to a large audience. Invite local VIPs and let the media know who will be coming.
5. To attract an editor to a story, one needs a "hook" or "angle." Tell the story in a new way. It is not news to just say that California schools need more arts teachers. However, one can make it news if the only art teacher in the school just retired. A hook takes a story that has been told a hundred times and provides a new angle for telling it.

How the story is presented will determine whether the editor will assign the article to a reporter or throw it away.

MEDIA ADVISORIES

To draw attention to an event before it happens, consider issuing a Media Advisory between seven and ten days in advance. The structure is the same as a Press Release and is sent to local news media. Emphasize date, time and locations of the event and how to obtain more information.

PRESS RELEASES

At times, the unit will want to draw media attention to PTA activities in the

community. To alert the media, it is best to use a traditional press release format. It is important to use the news release to concisely answer the questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

News writing style is brief, simple, and to the point.

All news releases need to be approved by the president before being sent to the media.

Whenever appropriate, incorporate news from current publications and news releases of the unit, council and district PTAs, and State and National PTA.

A news release should be faxed a couple of days before the event, with follow-up calls the day before the event. However, discuss the advance lead time required with the local newspaper page editor; smaller newspapers may require a longer lead time. Include a hard copy of the release in the press kit on the day of the event (Sample Press Release Fig. 6-3, 274).

Each paragraph should not exceed four to five lines.

Double-space the text if mailed or faxed.

The whole release should not exceed a page and a half.

Do not split paragraphs between pages.

Use the traditional format illustrated in Fig. 6-3, 274.

Every release should carry the PTA representative's name as the contact for further information, telephone number, e-mail address, the date and, of course, the name of the PTA.

For More Information

Wallack, Larry and Lori Dorfman, Katie Woodruff, and Iris Diaz. *News for Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media*. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999.)

PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Date)

CONTACT

(Name), (Phone Number), (E-mail)

(HEADLINE: KEEP IT SHORT & USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS)

1st paragraph: Briefly explain what is happening, who is involved, and when and where it is taking place.

2nd paragraph: Why is this event significant and newsworthy?

3rd paragraph: Quote from an expert involved that emphasizes how significant the event is.

4th paragraph: More details on where and when the event is happening, if necessary.

5th paragraph: Other pertinent details including, speakers' names and affiliations, as well as descriptions of any visual details of the event that will provide photo opportunities for reporters.

MORE (if release goes to a second page)

(to indicate the end of a release)

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