



## BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

### THE MEDIA

#### IDENTIFY

- **Types of media.**

Includes: print, television, radio and new media (e.g. blogs, media web sites, video hosting, podcasts, etc.)

#### STUDY

- **Monitor the media.**

It is important to be aware of what news is out there about developmental disabilities and the sector in which it appears.

- **Know the media.**

Cultivate relationships with the media as you go along. Keep a list of your local reporters, editors and columnists, noting those that are favorable/unfavorable about inclusion as an issue.

#### COMMUNICATE

- **Respond to the media.**

Methods include: letters-to-the-editor, op-eds (i.e., guest columns and “My View” columns), editorial board meetings, feature articles, etc.

- **Inform the media.**

Get the right message out by continuously reviewing our key messages and staying *on message*.

- **Choose the right media.**

Become familiar with your local media and its relevant past news coverage and appropriateness for our issue.

## **THE SPOKESPERSON**

- **Be effective.**

Drive home your key messages. These are the main messages and themes we want to communicate with our audiences.

- **Be consistent.**

Memorize your key messages. Message consistency allows us to speak with one voice and lends itself more credibility.

- **Be prepared.**

Do not give an interview on the spot. Allow time to review key messages and familiarize yourself with the issues and our agenda.

- **Be knowledgeable.**

Have background information at your fingertips including statistics, authorities or experts, analogies or comparisons and/or personal experiences. Prepare fact sheets to leave behind. Most importantly, never say anything without having the facts to support your statement

- **Be accessible.**

Return phone calls and e-mails as early as possible and be aware of a reporter's deadline.

- **Be confident.**

This is your story to tell and your passion to share. Let this shine through in the interview.

- **Be in control.**

Stay direct, positive and pleasant. Remember that you are the expert and the reporter is seeking information from you. Don't be misled into providing more information than you intend. Stay on message.

- **Be an advocate.**

Remember that you are promoting the value of our cause. This is your opportunity to get the word out about our efforts and/or the needs of people with disabilities.

## **WRITING A LETTER-TO-THE-EDITOR**

Letters-to-the-editor are an important part of communicating key messages and opening the doorway to building a relationship with the media. Directly expressing your views through your local newspaper can lend our issue more credibility. Following are several tips for writing and submitting a letter-to-the-editor.

- **Know when to write.**

A letter-to-the-editor is generally written in response to a recently published article. The purpose of writing the letter is to respond to a story that is relevant to our issue and to express your view on the issue (e.g., inclusion and services for people with developmental disabilities). You can say “bravo” to an article you agree with (e.g., implementation of inclusive classrooms), contest an article that you disagree with (e.g., recent service cuts to people with developmental disabilities), or use an article that is loosely connected to our issue to provide more information.

- **Be brief.**

Many newspapers have a word-limit for letters-to-the-editor. Check the newspaper’s web site for guidelines. In most cases, the letter should be no more than 200 words. Open with a sentence and reference the article to which you are responding and the date it ran (e.g., re: “Title of article,” date it was published).

- **State your point.**

State why you agree/disagree with the article and support your position with key messages, facts and/or statistics.

- **Be honest.**

Only make statements that are true and you can back up.

- **Give your name.**

Papers will not publish letters by “Anonymous.” Contact information is generally also required and sometimes your e-mail address will be published.

- **Submit it soon.**

In order to maintain relevancy, submit your letter within five days of the article’s publication.

Most letters-to-the-editor can be submitted online via the newspaper’s web site or e-mailed to a designated e-mail address (e.g., letters@yourpaper.com). Check the newspaper’s web site for guidelines on submitting the letter. If the letter must be e-mailed, paste your letter and contact information in the body of the e-mail. Be sure that the letter is e-mailed from the author’s personal e-mail account.

## **INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES**

“**Blocking**” means deftly avoiding an unwelcome or inappropriate question.

“**Bridging**” is making a smooth transition from an undesirable topic to one fitting your agenda and messages.

## **USEFUL TRANSITIONAL PHRASES**

- That reminds me...
- What that means is...
- Let me put that in perspective...
- It's also important to note that...
- Before we get off this subject/topic, let me...

## **INTERVIEW DOS & DON'TS**

- **Do** memorize and rehearse your key messages so you can easily insert them into your responses.
- **Do** discuss and determine the type and content of questions you will be asked and which you are comfortable answering.
- **Do** “flag” key points with phrases like, “The most important thing is...” or “I think the bottom line is...”
- **Do** speak in easily understandable terms. Avoid jargon.
- **Do** use facts and figures as appropriate to reinforce your main points.
- **Do** use illustrations and anecdotes to “humanize” and explain your topic.
- **Do** be sensitive to reporters’ deadlines.
- **Do** be yourself. Reinventing yourself for an interview can compromise your credibility.

\* \* \* \*

- **Don't** over answer. When you are satisfied with your reply, stop.
- **Don't** be afraid to pause. Taking a few seconds to think will seem longer to you than to the audience or reporter. Remember that your comments will be edited and pauses (or do-overs) will be cut out. (And, it's usually okay to ask for a do-over in broadcast interviews.)
- **Don't** allow yourself to be provoked. Keep cool.
- **Don't** fake an answer if you don't know. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will provide the needed facts in a timely manner, or refer him/her to another source.
- **Don't** assume the reporter knows more about your topic than you do. Usually, the reverse is true. You are the expert.
- **Don't** assume the interview is over until the reporter is gone.
- **Don't** speak “off the record.”
- **Don't** lie to a reporter. Ever.

## **INTERVIEW ATTIRE AND ETIQUETTE**

- **Dress conservatively.**

Don't wear white and avoid loud colors or intricate patterns (e.g., herringbone).

- **Be on time.**

Arrive at the interview site early so you can acquaint yourself with the program's crew and set. You'll be more comfortable for the interview.

- **Minimize distractions.**

Remember to turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices and focus only on the interview. Also, never chew gum.

- **Act natural.**

Speak at your normal voice level and gesture naturally. Avoid nervous movement, such as foot-tapping, swiveling or rocking in your seat, clenched fists, etc.

- **Make eye contact.**

Direct your answers to the reporter. Never look directly into the camera.

- **Be conscious of time.**

Make sure you get a chance to cover the areas you believe to be the most important and sum up your main points before time runs out. Remember your key messages.

## **CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

Every organization or media relations effort is vulnerable to a crisis. Preventing the crisis is your best bet. But, stuff happens – be prepared for any crisis that might come your way.

### **There are three steps to crisis prevention:**

- Anticipating the potential crisis.
- Prioritizing the types of crises.
- Considering the worst-case scenarios for each crisis.

### **When dealing with a crisis it is important to remember these key elements:**

- Tell the truth.
- Identify an organization spokesperson.
- Brief all spokespeople.
- Build positive relationships.
- Develop a crisis communication plan.

**Good Luck! ☺**