

Newspapers, magazines, radio and television are practical and effective ways to reach mass audiences with important messages about the effects of alcohol use in pregnancy. Today's media has great influence in shaping public awareness and opinion, and that is why many companies and public interest groups buy advertising space in newspapers and airtime on radio and TV stations.

Media relations is essentially about getting important messages to the public through the same media – but for free. Reporters and editors are always looking for a good story. The key is to provide them with relevant, interesting and factual information that is newsworthy.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when planning to work with media:

Media lists

Develop a media list, complete with names, mailing and email addresses, phone and fax numbers. It is important to keep it updated and to keep detailed notes (e.g. update contact names, RSVPs, record of phone calls, record of articles written, etc.)

Media preferences

Check with reporters to see how they wish to receive media releases, media advisories and/or feature stories (via fax, mail or email). Be sure to get a reporter's permission the first time you send materials via email.

Local story angle

To make your story relevant to your community, it is important to find a local story angle to appeal to media interest. Some suggestions include:

- Personal stories of families affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Putting a face to the disability can go a long way towards building awareness. If you have someone that is willing to share their story publicly, be sensitive to their privacy and respect their comfort level.
- If you are planning a community event to increase awareness about alcohol use during pregnancy in your community, share the details of the local activities.

Letters to the editor

The letters page is an effective and easy way to raise awareness about an issue. When writing a letter to the editor, remember to be clear, concise and focused. The letter should express your opinion on the subject matter and provide enough information to help readers clearly understand the issue and its importance. Try to keep your letter between 200 and 400 words, depending on the policy for letter submission at your local newspaper. Send your letter a week in advance. Follow-up with a phone call to ensure that they have received your letter and to answer any questions. Don't forget to include your name, address, daytime telephone number, and your credentials.

Media advisory

A media advisory is a simple way to inform local media about an upcoming press conference, briefing, or community event. A media advisory provides reporters with the information they need to plan and cover your event.

Below are some suggestions for successfully distributing your advisory:

- Send the advisory to local media outlets in your community one week before your event.
- Submit it to the calendar of events or "*daybook*," which is a daily listing of all events that the media are invited to attend.
- Ask for the advisory to be listed in the daily or weekly calendar listings of local newspapers.

Media Release

A media release (also called a press release) is written in journalistic form answering the "who-what-where-when-and why" of the issue and/or event. It should be easy to read, written in an active voice and in the present tense. Here are some other tips in writing a media release:

- Double space the text and print on only one side of the page.
- Put "For immediate release" or indicate the release time at the top of the first page.
- Be sure to include your name, phone number and email at the top of the release or at the bottom of the last page.
- Include a brief, descriptive headline.
- Include the city where the news is originating and the date.
- Have a strong lead paragraph that is newsworthy, and answers to as many of the five Ws (who, what, when, where, why) as possible.
- End all but the last page with the word "more" to indicate multiple pages
- Centre "-30-" at the very end, below the last line of text.
- Use a quote or fact that will grab the reader.
- Attribute quotes from a credible spokesperson throughout the release.

Follow up

After you email or fax the media advisory and/or media release, contact reporters by phone to determine their interest in attending the event or in writing a story.

- Call the assignment editor a week before an event, the day before the event, and then follow up after the event has taken place.
- If sending a media release, follow-up with a phone call to see if they have received the information and are interested in doing a follow-up interview.

Assume that everything you say is "on the record" even if you say something is "off the record." Don't assume that anything you say before or after the interview won't be included in the story.

Media coverage

It is important to monitor and measure your media coverage in order to correct misstatements and errors, to identify persons in the media who are attuned to prevention issues, and to replicate successful media strategies. You can measure the impact and success of your media coverage by tracking the amount of space or airtime the story received (e.g. ¼ page, 2 minutes radio airtime), where it was placed (front page of the local newspaper), and whether the content was positive, negative, or neutral.

For sample media advisory, media release, backgrounder, feature stories, FAQs and fact sheet, see:
http://www.beststart.org/resources/alc_reduction/alc_camp/index.html