

ImPRESSive

A MEDIA TIP SHEET FOR ADVOCATES

Summer/Fall 2003

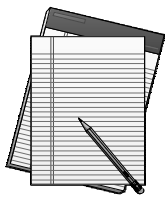
BUILDING A MEDIA PLAN: HOW & WHY YOU SHOULD PLAN EARNED MEDIA STRATEGY

Building a media plan is important to developing effective media outreach for your organization. Be it opinion leaders, lawmakers, or the general public, having a well-planned media strategy will allow your organization to get its message out to your constituency or the audience you most want to reach. Unanticipated events will arise, and your organization will have to respond to them, but it is necessary to create a media plan that centers on your organizational goals. Building a media plan will position your organization in the forefront of legislative battles by creating a strong public presence.

There are two types of media plans. First, it is important to develop an overall media strategy for your organization. This plan must be centered on your organization's goals and a strategy for meeting them. The second type of media plan is one developed for a specific issue or campaign. If your organization is launching an effort to battle cuts in services or funding to the state's Medicaid program, it is important to develop a media plan to guide your troops into battle. A well-planned media strategy will help your organization get out front on an issue important to your organization and constituents.

This ImPRESSive explains how and why it is important for your organization to build an earned media strategy that meets your objectives and fulfills your organization's overall or campaign-specific goals.

FIRST STEPS



Before you begin creating a media plan, it is important to take a step back and think through your organization's overall strategy. You must be able to identify your short- and long-term goals. Identifying these goals will allow you to focus

your efforts and determine what strategy would be most effective for achieving them.

It is important to define specifically what you want to achieve with your media outreach. Whether you are developing an overall plan advocating an expansion of the Medicaid program or are responding to specific attempts to cut funding in your state, it is important to

ImPRESSive

Writers:

Kati Anderson
Kelly Schwinghammer

Layout:

Anita Watts

Editor:

Ingrid VanTuinen

Readers are encouraged to reprint **ImPRESSive** materials, giving credit as follows:

“Reprinted from **ImPRESSive**, Families USA, 1334 G Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005-3169.”

Please send us a copy.

Tell us what you think...

ImPRESSive is a series of tip sheets providing media guidance to advocates. Please contact us with your comments and questions.

Phone: 202-628-3030
Fax: 202-347-2417
info@familiesusa.org

For an additional copy, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

ImPRESSive
c/o Families USA
1334 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005.

identify what goals or outcomes your organization expects to achieve with its efforts. Typical goals include passing a piece of legislation, preventing the passage of legislation, educating the public, and giving voice to people affected by the issue.

The next step is to determine the target of your media outreach. Remember, the media is never a target; it is a conduit through which you can reach different target audiences. Some examples of targets include lawmakers, voters, opinion leaders, community leaders, and women. Be sure to maximize your resources by planning your outreach for a desired target audience.

Finally, it is important to identify the news and craft your message. Before you start your media plan, determine what reports, surveys, or briefings your organization can produce that will put a new spin on the issue. Include these elements in your media plan. Also, summarize any complicated issue in two or three main points to formulate your message. Construct your media plan so that these points are the focus of your media outreach.

Organizational Goals Worksheet

- ~ **What** are my organizational goals?
- ~ **Who** do I want to reach in order to achieve these goals?
- ~ **How** will the media help me reach this target audience?

DEVELOP A PLAN OF ACTION



October 2003						
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Once you have determined the goals, targets, and message of your media strategy, you can begin to develop a media plan. There are two ways to

conduct press outreach—you can either be proactive or reactive. While there will always be instances when you must react to unanticipated events, you must be proactive with press outreach as well. Remember, press coverage always works best when it is part of an overall strategy or campaign.

The first step in developing a plan of action is to determine your calendar of events. Work backwards on a calendar from the end date, for instance the end of the legislative session, to determine the timing and sequence of any efforts. First, take your calendar and determine events that happen every year that your organization can use as a tool to get your message out. These events might include annual reports, state budget releases, bill introductions, or the start of the state legislative session. You should plan to use these existing hooks to generate press for your organization. After looking at your calendar, you can get a feel for when things are going to heat up or what the battle is going to look like during the course of your plan.

After you have determined what annual or anticipated events you intend to work around, you should determine what reports, surveys, or briefings your organization can produce that will put a new spin on the issue. Include these in your media plan as part of a broader media strategy for your organization or your issue-specific campaign. These events or releases can help you draw attention to your issue and get your message out in an effective way.

Next, plan to do some preemptive press outreach to get the media thinking about the issue and perhaps even writing early. Some ways to do this include planning a letter-to-the-editor campaign or scheduling an editorial board meeting with your spokesperson to discuss the issue. This will not only allow you to get the media thinking and writing about the issue, but it will also establish your organization as a credible resource to reporters.

If you are developing a media plan for a specific legislative or public relations battle, you may want to plan a launch event. Most political or other major issue campaigns host a launch event to announce their campaigns. There is no reason why you cannot do the same. As part of this launch event, you can announce a petition-signing campaign or an effort to ask your governor to support a campaign, for instance to “leave no child in the cold.”

You should also include other earned media events in your plan. Plan your calendar around themes on which your organization would like to focus. These themes should have a unified message, but should also highlight the different facets of this message. For instance, you may want to plan a press conference to an-

Possible Events to Add to Your Calendar

- ~ State of the State Address
- ~ State Legislative Session
- ~ Governor’s Budget Release
- ~ Bill Introductions
- ~ Annual Report Releases

nounce the release of a report your organization has authored or to highlight the introduction of a bill. For more ideas on planning other earned media events, see the Fall 2002 ImPRESSive, *Finding the Hook: Getting Press Attention without a Traditional Press Conference*.

Grassroots organizing can also be an element integral to your media plan. You can start a letter-to-the-editor drive to support your issue-specific campaign. Letters to the editor are a common way to respond to events, but they also provide the opportunity to raise the issue and demonstrate that the issue at hand has strong support in the community. Staging a radio call-in campaign is yet another way to get your message out. When incorporating grassroots efforts in your media plan, it is important to set specific targets and goals of achievement. You should set goals for any letter-to-the-editor or radio call-in campaign so that you can evaluate them when these efforts are completed.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



There are a number of other factors to take into consideration as you develop a media plan.

1. Resources. Determine the resources you have available for media efforts. This will help you to establish realistic goals. See the Resources box for questions you may want to ask as you develop your plan.

2. Time. The next element to take into account when developing a media plan is the element of time. Determining your timeline, opportunities, and limitations will enable you to organize and prioritize your activities. You should

Resources

- § What materials do you have to help you carry out a successful media strategy?
- § What staff is available to help you carry out your media plan?
- § How much staff time can you devote to media-related activities?
- § What is your budget for media relations?
- § Can partnering organizations provide assistance and resources?

consider whether there are any specific projects that you would like to publicize or any studies or results you would like to promote throughout the duration of the plan.

In addition, you should use existing hooks to get your issue in the media. For instance, you may want to latch on to the publication of a government or think tank report by releasing a statement highlighting your support for or opposition to its results. Other time considerations include working around yearly events. Be sure to work backwards on a calendar to determine the appropriate timing of your media outreach.

3. Media Outlets. There are a number of different media outlets that you may want to consider using for your media outreach. These outlets include newspapers, magazines, wire services, and television.

SAMPLE MEDIA PLAN

Goal: Cut Medicaid Cutback

Targets: Govenor and State Legislators

Target Media Outlets:


Print State Capitol Paper
Largest circulating papers


Radio Talk Shows
NPR


Television Evening News in State Capitol

Additional Activities:

Letter-to-the-Editor campaign
Op-Ed placement campaign

 *Newspapers.* Letters to the editor allow you to respond to a story the paper has printed on the issue. Op-eds provide another effective way of expressing your opinions in the newspaper. Finally, editorial board meetings are good forums in which to explain your issue. Plan to meet your local paper's ed board once a year, and prepare a packet of informational materials to supplement your visit.

 *Magazines.* Magazine editors tend to look for “the big picture” and analysis of events and issues rather than straight news reporting. Most magazines work with a lead-time of several months.

 *Television.* Television offers an opportunity to reach large and varied audiences. Remember to always pitch stories that have a visual element to television reporters and to contact them to cover special events.

More Tips...

➤ Preparation

Preparation is key to being able to successfully put your media plan into action. Also, be prepared to handle anything that may come up, whether or not it interferes with your planned media outreach.

➤ Flexibility

Be flexible, and do not be afraid to adjust your approach as events and ideas change.

➤ Review Your Media Plan Often

Be sure to go over your media plan frequently and make any necessary adjustments or changes.

CONCLUSION



Building a media plan is essential to being in the forefront of the issue or campaign you are planning. Whether developed to be consistent with your organizational goals or to a specific campaign or issue, a plan will provide you with basic guidance and strategy for your press outreach. As you build this plan, remember to first identify your goals, targets and message. After this is completed, start to figure out the best way to get your message to your audience in order to achieve these goals. A media plan will help your organization to maximize its resources and time in order to effectively get your message out to the media.



Next **ImPRESSive**:
Coming in Winter 2003

**Preemptive Media Outreach:
How & Why You Should
Reach Out to Reporters
Before the Story Happens**

In the next **ImPRESSive**, learn how to get reporters interested in a story before it happens.

ImPRESSive

Back Issues:

- * Staging a Successful Press Event: The Ins and Outs of Putting Together a Press Conference, Spr. 2003
- * The Story Bank: Using Personal Stories as an Effective Way to Get Your Message Out, Win. 2002
- * Finding the Hook: Getting Press Attention Without a Traditional Press Conference, Fall 2002
- * On the Record & Off the Record: Controlling the Story, July 2002
- * Building and Maintaining Relationships with Reporters, Apr. 2002
- * Tips for Interviews - Part III: Television, Jan. 2001
- * Tips for Interviews - Part II: Radio, Dec. 2000
- * Tips for Interviews - Part I: Newspaper, Oct. 2000
- * Getting Your Message Into National Stories, June 2000
- * How to Shift Focus on a Story, April 2000
- * The Art of Story Banking, July 1999
- * Getting in the Editorial/Opinion Pages, Mar. 1999
- * Creating Working Media Lists, Dec. 1998
- * Drafting a News Release, Oct. 1998

All issues of **ImPRESSive** are available on our Web site at www.familiesusa.org.

