

Media Relations: Publicizing Your Efforts



COMMUNICATIONS

Understanding and Getting Exposure in the Media

Launched in 1982 by Jim and Patty Rouse, The Enterprise Foundation is a national, nonprofit housing and community development organization dedicated to bringing lasting improvements to distressed communities.

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About This Manual

Why should you develop media relations?

In this era of scarce financial resources, nonprofit organizations cannot overlook the use of effective media relations as an essential tool in furthering the work of our organizations. The news media is a powerful, complex business that plays a major role in shaping public opinion, framing policy decisions, and influencing how resources are allocated to solve many problems facing our society. By learning how to tell a story in a way that will catch the media's attention — and knowing the rules of that game — nonprofits can increase awareness of and interest in their efforts and programs.

Media Relations: Publicizing Your Effort will help you understand the media's rules, how they work, what they consider newsworthy, and the mechanics of getting your news into newspapers and onto television and radio. It is designed for board members and staff of nonprofit community development organizations who are learning how to understand and use the media to promote their organization's message. It covers topics such as:

- Demystifying the media
- How the media works
- Developing media strategies and materials
- Managing crisis communications

This manual is part of the *Communication* series within The Enterprise Foundation's Community Development Library™. This series provides detailed information on all aspects of communications — from developing a central message to creating a comprehensive communications strategy. Other manuals in the series provide information to help you:

- Create annual reports, brochures and newsletters
- Develop action alerts
- Write marketing sheets
- Organize neighborhood tours
- Create a message for your organization and identify an audience

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Demystifying the Media

Many nonprofits wonder why they should even bother with the media. Why attract its attention at all since the media can turn on you as quickly as it helps you? There are many good reasons for nonprofits to seek positive media coverage:

- Raise awareness of your nonprofit and the housing or social issues that you work on.
- Tell the stories of the families and individuals who are helped because of the work your organization does.
- Attract more money and partners to your organization.
- Enhance your organization's reputation in your community.
- Build a network of contacts and relationships in the city.
- Influence public policy decisions or legislation.
- Prompt action by customers, government officials and donors.

Even more important to your objectives as a nonprofit is that the media's readers and viewers are more likely to view news stories by journalists as objective evaluators of your nonprofit's activities, impact and reputation. These audiences are more likely to believe this "objective" information about your organization than they will all the letters, direct mail and annual reports they receive directly from your nonprofit. As a nonprofit you still need to develop and use these other tools to distribute your message to your audiences.

A newspaper such as *The Washington Post*, which covers the nation's capital, can reach more than 800,000 readers *every day*. Even if you assume that no one reads every single article in the paper, that is still a lot of eyes reading about your nonprofit and the work you do. News on CNN is seen by millions of people. Most nonprofits' letters, brochures and annual reports do not come close to reaching this number within a year. Getting a positive story about your nonprofit in a newspaper or on a network of this kind can have a major impact on your credibility

when approaching donors, the organizations and businesses that will partner with you and the residents of your community.

WHAT IS MEDIA? WHO IS MEDIA?

If you make a list of what constitutes the media in your area, you will find many outlets that can deliver your message to the general public. Your list might include:

- Local television stations (news programs, talk shows, cable programs)
- Local radio shows (news programs, talk shows)
- Local daily newspapers (reporters, columnists, editorial board, letters to the editor, op-ed)
- Local weekly community newspapers (reporters, columnists, editorial board, letters to the editor, op-ed)
- Local magazines (reporters, columnists, letters to the editor)
- Industry newsletters (other nonprofits' publications)
- Minority and specialty publications and stations

Once you start developing relationships with the media, you will discover that, in most cases, these reporters and editors are very much like you: They try to do their job well. Their job is to get news and information about the community to their audience — the very audience that your nonprofit is trying to reach.

The media, with its newspapers, magazines, television stations and radio stations, reaches a large combined audience every day. Many of the audiences that are critical to your survival access information and news from the media each day. The audiences that nonprofits usually want to reach are:

- Businesses and corporations
- Local, state and national government officials
- Partners
- Customers
- Community residents
- Donors, lending institutions
- Policy-makers (local, state, federal)
- Volunteers
- Board members and staff
- Other nonprofits

THE MEDIA NEEDS US AS MUCH AS WE NEED IT

Because most cities have multiple media (newspapers, television and radio stations), nonprofits have many opportunities to make the kinds of connections that lead to positive news coverage by one or all of these forums. The large number of sources means that space needs filling, both in newspapers and on television and radio stations; your nonprofit provides a valuable service when you bring them an exciting story or help put a local face on a national trend. None of the media outlets listed above wants to be the last to publicize a local nonprofit that does exceptional work and makes a tremendous impact on the community.

Ironically, another aspect of the media that makes your nonprofit a solid candidate for coverage is the public's perception that the news they see and read is negative. Many media reporters and editors actively search for "good" news stories about the community to counter this criticism. The media also actively searches for stories that more realistically portray minority groups in order to quiet critics who charge that the media airs only stories containing stereotypical portrayals of minorities. Your nonprofit

and the people who use and benefit from your services may provide a source of positive news and information for the media.

Yes, the media has problems. There is the chance that you may be misquoted or misunderstood and that a positive story may turn into one perceived as a negative story. But keep in mind the incredible reach of the media, the size of its audience and the almost instant credibility a positive story can yield for your nonprofit. Working with the media *is* worth the risk. Its influence cannot be underestimated.

How the Media Works

WHAT GETS THE ATTENTION OF THE MEDIA?

Reporters are busy people. They appreciate how little time there is in a day that always ends with a deadline. You create goodwill and coverage if you do not waste their time. Nonprofits must understand how to communicate their news story to the media quickly and effectively. To do this, one of the first steps is to understand the ingredients that lead to good news stories.

Here are some things reporters look for:

- Contact name and phone numbers (daytime and evening)
- Location, address and directions (to an event)
- People who can illustrate a news story or event
- Spokespersons within your organization who speak clearly, write concisely and explain the story simply
- Personalities, ideas and activities that are off the beaten path
- Two to three days' notice of an event or activity
- Two sentences explaining what your organization does
- A story that will be interesting and informative to hundreds or thousands of people
- Thresholds or milestones that measure success
- Ordinary people doing extraordinary things

WHY DOES THE MEDIA TELL THE STORY IN A DIFFERENT WAY FROM NONPROFITS?

Newspaper and television reporters try to convey as much information as possible in a story. The more time they spend describing your organization, the less time they have to tell your story. To avoid this situation, they boil down a nonprofit's three-sentence mission statement into a single phrase.

Let's look at the following example from the Renaissance Community Development Corporation in Columbus, Ohio.

Their mission:

To facilitate holistic revitalization in the lives and environments of residents within Northeast Columbus through educational enrichment, home ownership, affordable housing and economic development.

Phrases used to describe this nonprofit in *The Columbus Post*:

- An outreach ministry of New Salem Missionary Baptist Church
- Established and operates the Wee Pals Child Care at New Salem Missionary Baptist Church
- Established in 1993 as an economic development and housing outreach ministry
- Faith-based community development corporation

Even when your nonprofit submits media releases, do not be surprised if the media mentions your organization in passing (perhaps at the bottom of the story) or generalizes the work that several nonprofits are doing (without mentioning your organization's name).

WHAT IS NOT A STORY?

Even though nonprofits have many good stories to tell, they sometimes shoot themselves in the foot — and permanently damage a relationship with a reporter or media outlet — because they pitch so many “non-stories.” A good test question before submitting a story: *Would thousands of people not familiar with my nonprofit be interested in hearing about this story?* The list below describes some of these non-story situations.

No one else is interested:

- In a typical media market (Charlotte, Santa Fe, Columbus), a nonprofit with a budget of \$175,000 hires a new executive director.
- A nonprofit with a \$1.2 million annual budget announces a \$20,000 grant it received from an anonymous donor.
- A nonprofit holds a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the building of five single-family homes in Pleasant View, a city of 200,000 residents.

Most similar nonprofits are doing the same thing:

- A nonprofit pitches a story about starting a home-ownership counseling program, but there are at least 30 other nonprofits in the city that not only have started them but have a track record doing home-ownership counseling.
- A nonprofit hosts a dinner to honor a hard-working board member who is not a well-known public figure.

Nonprofit Stories

Many nonprofits, especially in the community development and affordable housing development sector, have stories about human survival and the lack — or inadequacy — of the basic necessities of life. You provide shelter to homeless families and children; help families buy homes; run meal programs; offer training and employment opportunities to welfare recipients; and build affordable housing for low-income people.

As nonprofits, you already have the raw material for stories; ultimately it is the packaging that will determine whether these stories get in the media. The media is looking for several story types: success stories, stories that have impact or are unique; stories of well-known people or of general human interest, and stories that demonstrate proximity, a trend or conflict. The best stories — and the ones the media likes and will cover — always involve *people*. Combined with this key ingredient, establishing a relevant angle — as a way to hook an audience's attention — ensures more interest from the media. These story types are outlined below.

WHAT IS YOUR "HOOK"?

Success stories

The media readily runs stories about programs that are working and nonprofits that are successfully providing housing, food or services to the less fortunate in our communities.

Example

Mr. John Doe saved \$10 a month for two years in order to raise his portion of the down payment for the home he just bought for his family. He is one of 15 new families who were able to buy new homes in the Pleasant View section of the city. His path to home ownership through the Good Works Community Development Corporation included home-owner counseling, down payment assistance and mortgage financing.

Impact

What impact does your potential story have on your community? The greater the impact of your story, the greater chance it has of appealing to many people — and the media.

- How many community residents does it affect?
- How much money will this take away from single mothers each month?
- How many local residents are looking for work but cannot find jobs?
- How many homeless people are directly affected by the funding cuts in a local program?
- Who is affected by the work your nonprofit does? (A specific family serves as a very effective representative of the 200 families who are now able to buy their first home because of your nonprofit's counseling, down payment assistance and home-owner training programs.)

Example

Two hundred families, including the Chavez family, now have a place to call home thanks to a new training and job placement program developed by Good Works.

Unique or different

What is different or unique about the issues in your potential story? The questions that follow may help:

- What makes your approach to an issue (decreasing homelessness) different from that of other nonprofits?
- What is new, unique, best, worst, first or last about your story?
- What does your nonprofit do that no one else does?

Example

Good Works CDC today announced plans to provide housing for disabled adults, the first such residence in the county.

Well-known people

What has a locally well-known person done or said that would advance the work your non-profit is doing?

- Has a local businesswoman who is well-known throughout the community entered into a partnership with your nonprofit to develop a local employment alliance to train and employ community residents?
- Has a local millionaire bequeathed his fortune to you upon his death?
- Is a well-known person helping you announce a new program?
- Is there a board member who is prominent enough to generate coverage of an issue?

Example

Jane Fortune, president of U.S. Bank, will donate \$200,000 to help build homes for 200 community neighbors.

Human interest

Good news and bad news about children, families, mothers and seniors usually tug at the emotions of the media's audience.

- What success stories or horror stories need to be told?
 - Two hundred and fifty families have become home owners because of your nonprofit's home-ownership initiatives.
 - A profile describes how one family is six months away from losing public assistance and explains how this family is representative of situations that may be occurring across the community.
 - How does the closing of the community center affect Mrs. Jane Doe, a senior citizen who lives on a small fixed income?
 - How will funding cuts in after-school programs affect Tom Tommy, a 9-year-old whose parents work until 9 p.m. each evening?

- What universal concepts and values are involved in the story?
 - Good guys finish first
 - Greed
 - Good triumphs over evil
 - David vs. Goliath
 - Someone fights city hall — and wins
 - Selflessness and decency

Example

Tom Tommy, a 9-year-old whose parents work until 9 p.m. each evening, is just one of 50 neighborhood children who will miss the community center, which will be closed in two weeks because of the city's plan to consolidate facilities. Tommy will have to walk 15 blocks after school each day to the next closest after-school program, which provides only recreation, not space for children to do their homework.

Proximity

Bringing the national news to the local level always strikes a chord with the public. Find a local angle to a story currently in the local, state, regional or national media. The questions that follow may help:

- How will the federal welfare reform rules affect residents of the local community?
- How will a new state senate bill affect local affordable housing development?
- Does the issue tie in with other local, state, regional or federal stories currently in the news?
 - Welfare reform
 - Employment development
 - Child care
 - Social Security
- What is the impact on the local community?
 - How will state welfare reform legislation affect community residents who have no public assistance and no job opportunities?

- Has a respected research organization, local university or think tank done a study that validates the work you do?

Example

As she watches Congress debate Social Security funding from her home in Urban City, Mary Jones wonders whether she could stretch her check any further.

Trend

Explain the deeper meaning behind a group of current events or news stories. Explain how your program or situation mirrors what is happening regionally or nationally. The fact that the problems your organization is confronting or your accomplishments illustrate a larger phenomenon makes you appear more important to journalists and their audience. The questions that follow may help. Reporters often do not have time to sit back and analyze four or five different stories covering the same topic that may have run or aired. A nonprofit's ability to provide that information, to connect these events by what they have in common, will hook the media's attention.

- Do rising housing prices over the last two years mean that fewer renters are attempting to buy homes? Approximately how much in lost taxes does this trend mean?
- What local, state, regional or national trends are visible in the work you do?
 - Potential job applicants in urban areas and jobs in suburban areas
 - Increased need for applicants with computer skills
 - Decrease in the number of two-parent households or young mothers
 - Decrease in the number of affordable housing units being built

Example

The Good Works CDC begins its new van service between downtown and suburban Atlanta today to meet the transportation needs of inner-city residents who work in the suburbs. This program echoes a trend that can be found in many similar urban areas.

Conflict

The media likes a good fight. A story that shows David vs. Goliath, taking on the establishment, good or bad guys, is likely to capture a reporter's imagination. Just make sure your organization does not do itself harm in the process or create enemies. Describe the argument or the disagreement between the two opposing positions. Always consider the players in any conflict and what the potential consequences may be for publicizing conflict. The questions that follow may help:

- Are renters protesting outside the offices of a major for-profit developer?
- Has the mayor's office announced that the city will significantly decrease funding that provides services for the homeless in the next budget year?

Example

The Greater Washington Community Development Organization announced its plans to begin a needle exchange program, a move that drew pickets by the local conservative coalition.

HAVE YOU COVERED THE BASICS?

News stories need to answer the following questions in order to provide complete information to the public: who, what, when, where, why and how. Make sure you communicate the answers to these questions in any contact with the media. Use the questions below to help you in providing “the five W’s and the H” to the media.

Who: What people or groups are involved in the actions of the story? Who benefits?

What: Describe the situation that led to the story. What is happening now? What will happen?

When: When (time, day) do the actions of the story occur?

Where: Where does the story occur? What is the location?

Why: Why is this story important?

How: How will this happen? How do you already do it?

HOW ARE NEWS STORIES SET UP?

The media, especially newspapers, puts the information it considers most important at the beginning of the story with relevant but less important information at the end. This may mean that the details you consider most important (how the financing works) are at the end while the summary of the basic facts is near the top. All stories should answer who, what, when, where, why and how.

The following is a story that appeared in the Columbus, Ohio, daily newspaper, *The Columbus Dispatch*. This is an example of a news feature story, a story based on hard news facts that is presented in a manner that will make it more appealing to the readers by using real-life examples and experiences. Note that the nonprofit organizations doing the majority of work and providing the necessary services that make this program successful are not referenced until late in the story. Note the sorts of details that the reporter felt were important — how many people wanted to get help (250), the nature of the help (getting a good job and getting off welfare), how many people got it (48).

Sample

NONPROFIT NEWS STORY

Praised program nets jobs for the poor

*By Barbara Carmen
Dispatch City Hall Reporter
March 12, 1997*

For two days, 250 people stood in line at one of Columbus' most poverty-plagued apartment complexes, hoping they had the right answers and drug-free urine.

[LEAD/HUMAN INTEREST]

The word was out last October at Greenbrier East — good jobs, with bus rides and child care arranged, were available to those who passed the interview with a Groveport distribution center. It was a ticket off welfare, a chance for many to boost their monthly income from a \$341 government dole to an \$1,800 paycheck.

[HUMAN INTEREST AND TREND]

"They lined up, some waiting seven hours for an interview," said Jonathan C. Beard, executive director of the Columbus Compact Corp.

Eventually, 72 were offered jobs. But many failed the drug screening tests.

[HUMAN INTEREST AND TREND]

Of the 48 who ended up with Christmas-season jobs, half are still working at Distribution Fulfillment Services, a warehouse shipping center for the Eddie Bauer-Spiegel stores, 6600 Alum Creek Dr.

[SUCCESS STORY]

"Some of the Greenbrier residents have now moved out. They're off welfare. They have their own cars," Beard said. "This has worked."

[SUCCESS STORY]

The program is one reason Columbus earned a gold star last week from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Columbus was singled out as one of 10 cities to most successfully develop the newest federal anti-poverty program. It's called Enterprise Communities.

[PROXIMITY]

In October 1995, the Clinton administration announced that six cities — the nation's most seriously troubled — would be designated "empowerment zones" and given \$100 million each. Another 66 cities, including Columbus, won more modest \$3 million federal grants as "enterprise communities."

[PROXIMITY]

Friday's announcement was the federal government's first evaluation of the program. Columbus was heralded because of programs such as the one at Greenbrier, which is between Bexley and Whitehall near Port Columbus.

[PROXIMITY]

(continued on next page)

Columbus was ready to roll after nabbing the grant in 1995, said George Arnold, the city's development director.

"In Columbus, we have years of establishing relationships with people. As a community, it's easy to sit down and talk with each other and say, 'How are we going to attack these problems?' Because it's Columbus, we can get things done." The city, armed with \$3 million in federal money and a \$1 million state matching grant, set up the Columbus Compact to run its enterprise community program.

The nonprofit group, which has 26 trustees, works with communities to develop programs.

Unlike previous government anti-poverty programs, the enterprise community project isn't a government-knows-best effort, said Patrick Grady, Columbus' economic development administrator. "We're looking for systematic changes. I think this will work long term," he said.

[SUCCESS STORY]

The Columbus Compact focuses mostly on creating jobs and healing neighborhoods and families. When it was announced, Mayor Greg Lashutka said he hoped to create 295 new jobs.

[WELL-KNOWN PEOPLE]

Distribution Fulfillment Services, which plans to hire 1,000 more workers, will be back at Greenbrier in March, said John Gregory, executive director of the Greenbrier Assistance Center.

[IMPACT]

The center, with the help of the Compact, set up a bus service to Groveport. And now it has nabbed a state grant to teach job skills to welfare recipients.

[SUCCESS STORY]

"We're showing it's OK to push people off welfare, but you have to make sure there's a community there," Gregory said. "It's about taking those first steps."

Reprinted with permission from *The Columbus Dispatch*.

Sample

MEDIA ALERT

Now let's look at how the story might have come about. Below you see a media alert that might have gotten the reporter's attention to write the story you just read.

A media alert announces an upcoming event and should be used only to preview a press conference or an event you want the media to cover. (Note: Media alerts should be sent out on organization letterhead with contact phone numbers listed at the top or bottom.)

MEDIA ALERT

- Who:** Greg Lashutka, mayor of Columbus
George Jones, regional administrator, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Jonathan C. Beard, director, Columbus Compact Corp.
Five former welfare recipients who have full-time jobs
- What:** U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development recognizes Columbus for its successful job placement program that matches area employers with local, low-income residents needing jobs and related services.
- When:** March 8, 1997 at 11:00 a.m.
- Where:** Greenbrier East, 3312 Main St.
- Why:** HUD has selected Columbus Compact Corp. as one of 10 model job training and placement programs in the nation. The program was created in 1995 using \$3 million in federal "enterprise community" funds, plus \$1 million in state funds, to set up this anti-poverty program. Last October, 48 people from Greenbrier East landed seasonal jobs through the program, and half of them are still working in those jobs.

For more information, contact Jane Doe, Columbus Compact Corp., 555-1234

STORY STRATEGY CHECKLIST

Nonprofits that are new to dealing with the media can use the following checklist to develop a story strategy for getting news into the media.

What is the story?

- Summarize the story (message) you want to deliver through the media in one or two sentences.

Why do you want to publish this story?

- Increase name awareness
- Change government policy
- Influence the community to act
- Recommend solutions to problems
- Explain a community issue
- Publicize a specific event
- Advance a goal or initiative
- Appeal to donors who will give money

What “news hook” will make the media interested in this story?

- Success stories
- Impact
- Unique or different
- Well-known people
- Human interest
- Proximity
- Trend
- Conflict

How will you get “people” into this story?

- Line up a family or individual affected by the events in the story.
- Identify someone who was or is helpful in making the program or service possible.

Audience

- Who do you most want to reach with your message? (Rank the top three in order of importance to your nonprofit.)
 - Customers (or potential customers)
 - Community residents
 - Voters
 - Donors
 - Banks and financial institutions
 - Local, state or federal policy-makers

Partners and allies

- Should you include other constituents or partners in your story?
- Will this involvement strengthen your message *or* present too many messages?

Are there certain media outlets that would be especially receptive to your story or critical audiences?

- Minority-owned publications or stations
- Nonprofit industry newsletters
- Local talk shows

Do you have contacts at the media outlets you need to reach?

- List the names and phone numbers of your contacts at the outlets

Timeline

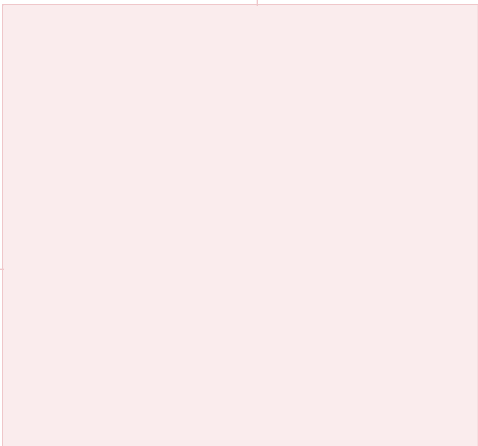
- When would media coverage be most helpful to the goals, initiatives or events you are trying to publicize?
- What is the earliest date that you can gather a strong, persuasive body of background materials to strengthen your story?

Resources

- What resources do you have to devote to getting this story in the media?
 - Board member with public relations experience
 - Volunteer with marketing or public relations experience
 - Personal and professional relationship with a media contact
 - Marketing and public relations expenses for consultants
- What staff person will develop the story, serve as liaison with the media or hire consultants to do so? When will they begin developing this story?
- Is your list of area media contacts up-to-date and complete with information about all media outlets and the names, titles and responsibilities for the news staff? Do you need to develop such a list?
- Are your spokespersons fully briefed on the issue? What else do you need to do to make sure they are prepared?

Symbols

- If your audience remembers only one idea from your story, what do you want it to be?
- Can this message be stated in one sentence? With a picture? With a slogan?



Media Strategy

ARE YOU READY FOR A MEDIA STRATEGY?

A media strategy is your nonprofit's plan for accessing the power of the media. This strategy lays out the steps your nonprofit must take to get media coverage, assigns responsibilities and measures your success. It is a useful planning tool to improve your standing and identity in the community — if you are prepared to devote the financial and staff resources to develop and implement it. Having a media strategy in place also prepares you for crisis management, increases your credibility when you ask for funding and gives you more clout when approaching elected or appointed government officials.

WHAT IS IN A MEDIA STRATEGY?

Situation analysis

Evaluate your current environment to determine if you need to build a positive image or improve a negative one. Consider the following questions:

- How do you want your nonprofit to be perceived?
- Describe the way your nonprofit is currently perceived. Ask people. Do not assume you know.
- Describe your current reputation with customers, government officials, donors and community residents.
- Has your nonprofit ever been quoted or mentioned in the press? Compile a clip file of all instances where you have been mentioned in the media (positive and negative).
- What result do you want from media coverage? What do you want people to do?

Audiences

List the audiences that are critical to your nonprofit's survival and prioritize them based on their importance to your current situation. If you want your city council to change a policy that affects your low-income renters and housing developers, then you need to reach local policy-makers, their constituents and portions of the business community. Some common audiences (current and potential) for community development nonprofits include:

- Businesses and corporations
- Partners
- Customers
- Community residents
- Lending institutions, donors
- Policy-makers (local, state, federal)
- Volunteers
- Board members and staff
- Other nonprofits

Goals

What does your nonprofit want to accomplish by reaching newspaper, television or radio audiences? This section describes what you hope to accomplish through your long-term media strategy. This is a statement of your vision, not of measurable and quantifiable objectives. Goals might include:

- Increasing name recognition for your nonprofit
- Raising awareness of an issue
- Attracting more high-profile partners
- Improving fund-raising ability and capacity

Objectives

Objectives, which are measurable and specific, provide milestones for tracking your progress. Describe the practical steps necessary to accomplish the goals you listed above. The objectives section of your media plan should answer: Who will do it? What is the expected result? What is the projected time frame? To what goal is it tied? What resources are available to accomplish it?

Sample objectives include:

- Develop a strategy for producing press releases and following up with editors that yields three newspaper or television stories during the next 12 months.
- Create a fact sheet that discusses the impact the welfare reform laws will have on your city's low-income population to include with a media kit.
- Schedule your executive director on two local radio shows to discuss your program for linking former welfare recipients to local businesses.
- Publish a guest editorial in your local daily newspaper.

Media Strategies

List and describe any strategies to help you achieve your objectives. Samples include:

- Identify news stories in your nonprofit's work or accomplishments.
- Develop a calendar of all potentially newsworthy events and stories you anticipate during the next 12 months.
- Prioritize your nonprofit's current and upcoming stories.
 - What tools would best deliver these stories to the media? (media release, media advisory, marketing kit)
 - What staff member is responsible for implementing your media strategies?
 - What is the staffing, timeline, budget?
 - What are the steps required to accomplish this strategy?

Evaluation

During this step, your nonprofit measures objective factors or results in order to determine how you are doing. Appraising results (increased name recognition) proves whether your nonprofit now has better name recognition and whether the audiences who received your message then acted on it. Since it is expensive to validate the results of some goals such as increased name recognition, many nonprofits measure the following types of objective factors:

- Total number of articles or stories
- Evaluation of the tone of the article (positive, negative or neutral)
- Potential audience who may have been reached by the message (circulation or audience numbers from newspapers, talk shows, television or radio stations)
- Number of times your nonprofit was called for comment for a news story
- Names and phone numbers of reporters you have met or talked with on a story
- Behavior changes (crackhouse was closed, bill was passed, funding increased)
- Instances when the story you pitched was the story that appeared in a newspaper or on television

Your nonprofit should also explicitly state who will monitor the impact of media strategy efforts throughout the year. Once you begin collecting this information, particularly newspaper or magazine articles, put them to use on bulletin boards, and in newsletters, funding proposals and media packets.

Media Mechanics

OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

The tools and strategies used by nonprofits to contact the media involve an established process which, if mastered, usually leads to or improves media coverage. The following pages outline descriptions and tips on using these common methods. If you are bringing in outside consultants, they can assist you with any of these items and may already have contacts with the publications and stations in your city. But the examples in this manual will help you do it yourself.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

As you develop or fine-tune your media strategy and plan, think about how to build a long-term relationship with the media. Involve your senior staff and board of directors in a discussion of how to establish relationships with local reporters and media representatives. Some good techniques for building these relationships are:

- Invite reporters and editors to your events. (Do not expect news coverage every time they attend.)
- Include reporters on your mailing lists for brochures, annual reports, etc.
- Invite reporters and editors to lunch or offer to meet with them in their office.
- Plan a tour of a neighborhood or housing development specifically for a reporter, even if no story is planned. (The reporter may come up with a good angle that you have not considered or may call you later to pursue a story.)
- Offer news tips you observe or hear in the community (even if they do not promote your nonprofit).
- Read or listen to a particular reporter's stories and send a brief note or email when you enjoyed a story or thought it was well done. Flattery works.
- Watch local television shows, listen to local radio public affairs shows and read daily, weekly or monthly publications.

- Keep an eye on national morning and evening news shows and read major newspapers to learn what kinds of stories the media writes about. This practice also helps determine if your nonprofit can provide a local angle for national issues such as welfare reform, declining interest rates or the sale of homes to first-time buyers, etc.

Your nonprofit also should assign a staff member to track the reporters who cover the kinds of stories you would like to see written or aired about your organization. Once you have identified specific reporters, put them on your mailing lists for your newsletters, annual reports and brochures. Also, send your story ideas — in the form of press releases, news advisories, media kits — directly to these reporters.

The relationships you build now may help you when negative stories happen. The reporters you have a relationship with — who know the positive side of your story — may go the extra mile to balance negative news with positive comments about the work you do. These “allies” inside media outlets also may guide you to the right reporter, editor or columnist when a story falls outside their regular coverage.

Media Guide and Media List

Description:

Media guides are directories of television and radio stations, newspapers, magazines and newsletters listed by city or geographic region. These guides provide detailed information on each media outlet: names, titles, fax, telephone, address and email addresses for publishers, editors and reporters, talk show hosts, news and assignment directors, columnists, anchors and critics. Whether you have access to a media guide or not, you should create a media list for your organization. It gives you a handy reference to media contacts you need as well as creating mailing labels at the push of a button. Media lists include each media outlet in your city or geographic region. For each media outlet you should include the name of the organization, address, phone and fax numbers, as well as the names of reporters and editors assigned to areas critical to your work (metro, style, health, business, transportation, editorial).

Do:

- Find a way to access this information through your local library, Chamber of Commerce or United Way.
- Monitor new media outlets (television or radio stations, newspaper or magazines) that open in your area.
- Include in your media lists contact information and deadlines for any publications or stations that list community events (network stations, cable stations, radio stations, television stations) in your area. Include:
 - Editorial staff lists
 - Talk show hosts
 - Trade journals
 - Neighborhood newspapers (daily, weekly)
 - Alternative newspapers (ethnic, gay publications)
 - Newsletters

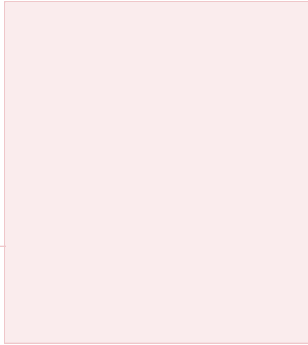
Don't:

- Forget to use this information when trying to get stories into the media.
- Send a release or letter addressed generically to “Editor.”

Other Pointers:

- Update lists regularly because reporters covering a particular subject or beat may change.
- When compiling this list, keep in mind reporters or media outlets that seem to cover the kinds of issues you care about and specific reporters with whom you, your staff or your board members have connections.
- Community development can be covered by reporters under a variety of subjects:
 - Business
 - Housing development
 - Economic development initiatives
 - Employment development programs
 - Urban Affairs
 - Urban housing
 - Transportation trends
 - Community News
 - Local business features
 - Zoned coverage for a particular portion of the city or county
 - Neighborhood news
 - Education
 - The state of schools in poor neighborhoods, communities
 - State Government
 - Effect of state policy changes on lower-income persons in your community

- Health
 - Effects of poverty on community health
 - Description of social service needs
- Ethnic Affairs
- Consumer Reports
- Religion
- Architecture
- Housing, Development and Real Estate:
 - Banking
 - Transportation
 - Employment trends, needs
 - Retail issues
 - Personal finance
- Seniors
- Transportation



Media Kit

Description:

A media kit is your introduction to the media in your city and community. Remember, you only get one chance to make a first impression. Select only information that shows the best side of your nonprofit. A media kit highlights several different views of your nonprofit's operations through the marketing sheet, annual report, brochure and positive newspaper articles. Once the package is compiled, creating additional copies for mailing or handout is easy. This kit can also be modified with more information, or less, as appropriate for the audience.

Do:

- Include a list of contacts and phone numbers for your nonprofit so the media can follow up for more information. (Dial each number before you print this sheet to make sure it is correct.)
- Include your business card with your name, your nonprofit's name, address and phone number.
- Include a one-page fact sheet or marketing sheet.
- Include your annual report or brochure.
- Include photographs that apply to the kind of story you are pitching.
- Include one to three positive news story clips.

Don't:

- Include generic information on housing, economic development or community development issues.
- Be afraid to be aggressive.
- Offend.

Other Pointers:

- Include a press release, if applicable.
- When mailing your media kit, include a personalized letter to reporters that mentions a story they wrote or broadcast. Place a follow-up call to make sure they received it.
- Try to arrange a 15-minute visit, lunch or courtesy call to present the media kit in person. Always collect a business card from the media person you meet.

The following pages include explanations of the various tools used to convey your message to the media — such as media alerts, fact sheets and op-eds — and a list of dos and don'ts to consider as you implement them. See *Communications: Getting the Word Out*, another manual in the *Communications* series of the Community Development Library, for more information on many of the tools mentioned here. The manual details their advantages and disadvantages, appropriate audiences, specifications and examples of regional costs.

Media Alert

Description:

A media alert announces an upcoming event and should be used *only* to preview a press conference or event you want the media to cover. The alert groups information into who, what, when, where, why and how. This format forces you to answer all the pertinent questions and enables reporters or editors to quickly scan it for pertinent details.

Do:

- Include answers for the questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? in each media alert.
- Limit the alert to one sheet of your nonprofit's stationery.
- List a contact name and number for the person at the nonprofit who can answer questions about the media alert.
- Email or fax the alert to specific reporters, news directors and assignment editors no more than five working days before the event.
- Follow up the media alert with a phone call the day before your event.
- Provide a map and directions.

Don't:

- Include too much information or a quote.
- Use more than one page.
- Send it at the last minute.
- Send it to the wrong reporter.
- Neglect to mention "well-known" people who will be joining you. If they have not confirmed their attendance, list them as "invited."

Sample

Date: date of release
For immediate release

Contact: your name
your phone

MEDIA ALERT

Write a headline with a very strong, active verb that describes your event/announcement.

What: Describe briefly, in one or two sentences, what you are going to be doing at your event/announcement.

Who: Who is going to be there? List recognizable names, organizations.

Where: Location of the event, including street address. Attach directions, if needed.

When: Day of the week, date, time.

The first paragraph of body text can explain in more detail the information you included in the *what* category.

A second paragraph, if you really cannot keep the first one short, can go here.

Finally, add your mission statement.

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(The pound symbols tell the reporter that this is the end of the story.)

Sample Media Alert

Date: Oct. 26, 1998
For immediate release

Contact: Clare Smith
410.555.2524

MEDIA ALERT

Enterprise Foundation, Rouse Company and Howard County Executive celebrate opening of Harper House

What: The Enterprise Foundation and The Rouse Company will celebrate the opening of Harper House, a \$2.2 million renovation project that upgraded and improved Abbott House, one of the most noticeable structures in Columbia.

Who: Howard County Executive Chuck Ecker; County Councilwoman Mary Lorsung; Bart Harvey, Enterprise CEO and chairman; Anthony W. Deering, Rouse Company chairman, president and CEO; and Juanita Robinson, Harper House Tenant's Association president.

Where: Harper House, formerly Abbott House, 5495 Cedar Lane, Harper's Choice Village, Columbia.

When: Wednesday, Oct. 28, 11 a.m.

The opening of Harper House marks the end of a \$2.2 million renovation and the beginning of a partnership with The Rouse Company to help Enterprise acquire, preserve and improve affordable housing in Columbia.

The Rouse Company established a five-year, \$500,000 grant to support Enterprise programs and efforts. Both national organizations are headquartered in Columbia and share the same founder, the late James W. Rouse.

Renovations and improvements to the former Abbott House included installing new roofing, weatherproofing or replacing all windows in the building, installing new kitchen cabinets and fixtures in each of the building's 100 apartments and improving handicapped access to the building's public spaces.

(Directions from I-95: Take Route 175 West toward Columbia. Route 175 becomes Little Patuxant Parkway just beyond the exit to Route 29. Continue on Little Patuxant Parkway and bear right at fork to Governor Warfield Parkway. Turn right into Twin Rivers Road. Right at Harpers Farm Road. Left at Cedar Lane. Left into Harper House parking lot. Tours are available immediately following the program.)

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Fact Sheet and Marketing Sheet

Description:

A fact sheet provides specific background, facts and statistics about the nonprofit (mission statement, list of services provided, organization description) or about an issue (employment development efforts, homelessness and housing development). The marketing sheet is a more general explanation of what is happening in your city and community and how the work you do complements that and addresses some of the identified challenges being addressed by your organization in the community. For more information, see *Marketing Sheets: Promoting Our Program* in this series. Think of the fact sheet as a very quick overview of your organization and the marketing sheet as a narrative that fills in the blanks and better explains the information contained in the fact sheet. Both should be printed on your letterhead.

Do:

- Keep the information brief and to the point.
- Brag about your nonprofit's activities and accomplishments.
- Use strong, descriptive writing.
- Make sure all information you provide is accurate and up-to-date.
- Break up the information you provide with bullets, bold or italic writing and small graphics.
- Make these pages visually appealing.

Don't:

- Exaggerate any of the information you provide in a fact sheet or marketing sheet.

Other Pointers:

- Provide context for the issues you cover in a fact sheet ("A Need in the Community," "A Community-Led Response," "A Look at Our Community.")

Op-Ed

Description:

Opinion editorials are written by local citizens and usually address hot topics expressing strong opinions about community issues. This is an especially good way to reach politicians (local, state and national), who read these opinions to identify the issues important to voters and constituents. Op-eds differ from letters to the editor in that they can be longer and there are fewer of them. As a result, they tend to be awarded by the publication to people perceived as having “standing” on an issue — politicians, academic experts, community leaders, etc. Op-eds, editorials and letters to the editor increase name recognition of your nonprofit and its programs and services. These are often well-read sections of the paper, especially by policy-makers at all levels. In this format you can express your opinion directly to the public.

Do:

- Read the kinds of opinion editorials published by your newspaper before contacting its editorial staff about submitting an op-ed.
- Submit a letter of inquiry to see if the publication is interested in your topic.
- Establish a relationship with the editors by following up with a telephone call to see if they are interested in your idea.
- Ask for the minimum and maximum number of words for your op-ed (generally 700 words) once your idea has been approved.
- Double-space your guest editorial so that the editors can make notes on it when they review and edit your text.
- Include a headline that sums up the issue and the position taken.
- Use personal stories and persuasive writing when you are writing about the pros and cons of your issue.
- Ask a staff member who has never read the document to edit and proofread it.

- Include your name, phone and fax numbers and email address.
- Double-check the facts you provide.
- Send a cover letter requesting that your op-ed be printed. Describe your organization and let them know you are a nonprofit.
- Send your op-ed piece again even if it was rejected the first time.

Don't:

- Send the same editorial to two newspapers covering the same market at the same time. Generally, try the largest and most credible first.
- Libel or slander any person or group.
- Send a handwritten editorial.
- Expect your op-ed to run the same day that the media receives it. It may take a week for it to run.

Letter to the Editor

Description:

Like op-eds, a letter to the editor can be used by citizens to express an opinion on a current subject or to set the record straight about a situation. Letters to the editor are more numerous than op-eds and are generally shorter. The advantage for nonprofits and their constituents is that they are more available as a forum to “regular” members of the public. Op-eds, editorials and letters to the editor increase name recognition of your nonprofit and your programs and services. These are often well-read sections of the paper, especially by policy-makers at all levels. These formats allow you to express your opinion directly to the public. Remember that your letter may be edited for space and style.

Do:

- Ask a staff member who has never read this document to edit and proofread it.
- Submit a letter that is one and a half pages or less.
- Ask others in your community to write a letter to the newspaper on the same topic.
- Use the same clean language that you would allow your mother to hear.
- Respond promptly with a letter to the editor in those instances when the newspaper covers your issue (homelessness, hunger, poverty, unemployment).

Don't:

- Wage a personal attack on an elected official, a local personality or a reporter in your letter.
- Make unreasonable arguments in your letter.
- Send the same letter to two newspapers covering the same market at the same time. Generally, try the largest and most credible first.
- Libel or slander any person or group.
- Expect your letter to run the same day it is received. It may take a week for it to run.

Other Pointers:

- Find community activists to write on your behalf. Board members and volunteers are also appropriate authors.

Press Release

Description:

The press release is one of the best ways to get the attention of the news media in the format they prefer, explaining the whos, whats, whens, wheres, whys and hows of a potential story. Nonprofits can distribute media releases to many outlets by mail or fax. Press releases can also be targeted to publications based on the audience they serve. If your release turns into a news story — one of the best ways to get objective confirmation of your nonprofit's credibility, professionalism and success in doing its work — it can then be copied and distributed with other communications materials such as the media kit.

Do:

- Write a headline and first sentence that grabs the media's attention. If you do not catch their interest with these two items, chances are it will be thrown in the trash.
- Use a headline with active verbs to sum up the main point of the story.
- Put your most important information first (unique, conflict, impact). Generally, include who is involved, what is the news and why it is important.
- Include facts, statistics and any other supporting data that prove that your story is true.
- Include a standard paragraph that describes your nonprofit and the work you do in *every* press release.
- Send pictures, graphics, charts and graphs if you have them, because visual items may encourage editors to publish your story.
- Keep the length of your press release to two double-spaced pages.
- Print your press release on your nonprofit's letterhead with the chief contact person's name and direct telephone number at the top, above the headline.
- Suggest possible photo opportunities or other methods to illustrate or film the event for TV.
- Identify and coach people who can illustrate or explain your release. Reporters will always want someone else to quote.
- Use reasonable, natural-sounding quotes.

Don't:

- Be surprised if what appears on TV or in print bears little resemblance to your press release.
- Cram everything you have to say into the first sentence of the press release.
- Include every detail in your press release. You want to encourage the reporter to call you to get some of the details.
- Mislead or include information that you know is false or inaccurate.
- Exaggerate or embellish.
- Forget to have someone other than the writer proofread the press release.
- Forget to include the date, address of your nonprofit, an email address if you have one and a contact name for more information.
- Overuse the press release. It should be used judiciously for topics and events that are truly newsworthy to people beyond your organization.

Other Pointers:

- The contact information you provide on a press release should include day and evening phone numbers; reporters often work non-standard business hours.
- Keep in mind the following:
 - Is your news really new?
 - Is it really the greatest thing since sliced bread?
 - Use the KISS philosophy — Keep It Simple, Sam.
 - Avoid acronyms, abbreviations, nonprofit jargon and too many numbers.
 - Write the way you talk. Read your release out loud. If it does not sound conversational, rewrite it.

Sample

Date: date of release
For immediate release

Contact: your name, phone
and email address

Headline: Use short, catchy headline.

A subhead is not necessary, but can be used to add zip to your headline.

YOUR TOWN, State — In your lead paragraph, the absolutely most important item, the reason why you are all gathering together, is written here: Be brief, be catchy, be accurate.

In the next two paragraphs, explain your lead sentence. Always emphasize why this is important to people or how it will impact people.

Use quotes. “This quote should be written as people actually speak. It should be no longer than two sentences and should be included in the talking points for the event,” said your CEO, chairman or mayor.

Write a transition paragraph that explains why everyone else is attending. This is a good time to identify the partners, donors and elected officials joining you and add quotes from them.

You can add another paragraph about the program or provide a timeline for the project. Start wrapping up the release at this point.

Be sure to include your mission statement and your web page address, if you have one.

(Please note: Tell the reporters that you have a chart, graph, map or drawing of the project or a copy of the report for their information. Do this at the bottom and put it in italics.)

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Sample Press Release

Date: Oct. 28, 1998
For immediate release

Contact: Clare Smith
410.555.2524/email address

Enterprise Foundation, Rouse Company team up to improve affordable housing in Columbia

ROUSE COMPANY CREATES \$500,000 GRANT TO SUPPORT PROGRAM

COLUMBIA, Md. — The opening of Harper House today marks the completion of a \$2.2 million renovation project and the beginning of a partnership with The Rouse Company to help The Enterprise Foundation acquire, preserve and improve affordable housing in Columbia.

The Rouse Company established a five-year, \$500,000 grant to support Enterprise programs and efforts. Both national organizations are headquartered in Columbia and share the same founder, the late James W. Rouse.

“Jim Rouse’s original goal was for Columbia to be a complete city, one where people of all incomes could afford to live,” said Anthony W. Deering, chairman and CEO of The Rouse Company. “We see this grant to Enterprise as a way of helping achieve that goal and honoring Jim’s commitment to the community.”

Abbott House, at nine stories, is an example of Columbia’s and Jim Rouse’s cutting-edge vision for affordable housing. It is the only building in Columbia and one of the first in the nation to be named an “operation breakthrough” building by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The designation in 1971 recognized the earliest efforts to provide quality, affordable housing.

“We are here today because the vision, commitment and foresight of Jim Rouse is a part of all of our lives,” said Bart Harvey, Enterprise CEO and chairman. “This partnership and our ongoing efforts in Columbia are a tribute to Jim through the company and foundation he created.”

Renovations and improvements to the former Abbott House include:

- Installing new roofing
- Weatherproofing or replacing all windows

— more —

- Replacing all kitchen cabinets and fixtures in each of the building's 100 apartments, most also receiving new appliances
- Improving handicapped access and installing air conditioning in the building's public spaces
- Refurbishing all elevators, the laundry room and hallways

All improvements and renovations were done after consulting with residents on the needs for Abbott House. The redevelopment took almost one year to complete. HUD provided a \$4.8 million grant for purchase of the property, renovations to the development and related closing costs.

Howard County Executive Chuck Ecker and County Councilwoman Mary Lorsung joined Enterprise and Rouse Company officials for the event.

Harper House is one of three developments being developed by Enterprise Homes Inc., a subsidiary of The Enterprise Foundation, in Columbia.

Sierra Woods in Long Reach and Stevens Forest in Oakland Mills consist of 160 and 108 garden-style apartments and townhouse rentals, respectively. Renovations to both sites began in January and should be completed by the end of the month.

Headquartered in Columbia, Md., The Rouse Company was founded in 1939, became a public company in 1956 (NYSE:RSE) and, on January 1, organized and began operations as a real estate investment trust (REIT). Through its numerous affiliates, the company operates more than 200 properties encompassing office, retail, research and development and industrial space in 25 states, the District of Columbia and Canada. The company is also the developer of the planned communities of Columbia and Summerlin, Nevada.

The Enterprise Foundation is dedicated to rebuilding neighborhoods and providing opportunities for people to take control of their lives and their communities. Enterprise works with a vast network of more than 1,000 nonprofit organizations to improve America's urban neighborhoods through housing, jobs, safety and a variety of support services. Enterprise has raised and committed \$2.3 billion in loans, grants and equity to build or renovate 86,000 apartments and houses. Providing homes for hundreds of thousands of people makes Enterprise the nation's community development leader. The Enterprise Foundation was launched in 1982 by Jim and Patty Rouse.

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Press Conference

Description:

Press conferences are one way of generating news coverage and political interest in your work and highlighting successful programs. Since audience and content are entirely within the nonprofit's control, these events allow nonprofits to get their message out in the style and length they prefer. Events expose media and others to neighborhoods and issues they might not ordinarily see, especially if they are held at one of your developments.

Do:

- Call a press conference only for major announcements or when a well-known person is joining your nonprofit for an announcement about a major program, initiative or milestone.
- Choose an appropriate site for the press conference that matches the story (a child care initiative could be done at a day care center or elementary school). Make sure every location has plenty of parking and is accessible to the handicapped.
- Coach speakers before the media conference. Provide talking points for speakers.
- Notify and invite partners, donors and board members.
- Choose an appropriate time and day of the week for the event. Do not schedule it too close to reporters' deadlines.
- Limit the number of speakers.
- Invite at least one person or family who will directly benefit from the announcement.
- Prepare an agenda.
- Send a media alert two to three days in advance. Call the media the day before and the day of the event.
- Distribute a media kit, which includes a press release, at the conference.
- Set aside time for speakers to answer question from reporters *after* the event.

- Think visually when setting up your press conference. (Television cameras and newspaper photographers need strong pictures to accompany stories.)
- Provide a flat, stable surface for speakers and radio microphones.

Don't:

- Schedule press conferences if the news does not warrant them.
- Schedule a press conference when a press release will suffice.
- Let the press conference last more than 30 minutes.

Other Pointers:

- Make sure that the lighting is bright for indoor media conferences.
- Make arrangements for a podium and a microphone.
- Leave space in the room for camera stands.

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Description:

A public service announcement (PSA), published free by the media, is a message or information that is deemed important to the public. Television and radio stations, though required by law to air PSAs, choose the time these announcements run, which is seldom in prime time. Station managers have broad discretion in determining what is appropriate or meets the definition of a PSA, so the guidelines may vary. Information for your radio PSA can be handwritten when you approach a station; television spots may require more production but stations usually provide this free of charge. Nonprofit organizations should very carefully weigh the benefits of producing PSAs and the likelihood that these announcements will be aired. Your organization needs to have a clearly defined mission and goal for generating PSAs that would be deemed newsworthy and benefiting everyone who tunes in to that TV or radio station. An emergency blood drive would qualify for a PSA campaign. A neighborhood block party probably would not.

Do:

- Call the public affairs manager of a station or newspaper to discuss its PSA policy or request a written copy of the policy.
- Discuss with the public affairs manager whether the station or newspaper sponsors PSA campaigns using personalities. If so, discover the issues or requirements to participate.
- Ask the public affairs manager of a radio station whether your nonprofit can provide “read only” copy of your PSA.
- Determine what your nonprofit wants to accomplish with this PSA.
- Decide what specific message, theme or image you want to convey to the public.
- Identify the demographic group you want to reach. What radio station serves this demographic?

- Identify the deadlines (within your nonprofit and at the station) that affect when and where your PSA will run.
- Determine how you want the public to respond to your PSA (call you, write you). Is your nonprofit prepared if there is a significant public response?
- Tell these stations you are a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization.

Don't:

- Demand your PSA be aired at a particular time — especially prime time.
- Send PSAs that are really free advertisements or promotions for your programs.
- Confuse a PSA with a press release.

Other Pointers:

- Ask the station or newspaper whether it has a community affairs or public affairs talk show. If so, what are the guidelines for booking guests?
- Also ask the station or newspaper whether they have a community bulletin board where your nonprofit could post or list events and activities.

Dealing With the Media

PITCHING THE STORY

In baseball, the pitch is everything. A fastball straight down the middle certainly will get a batter's attention, but a curveball, low and outside, might be more interesting. The same principles apply to pitching a story about your nonprofit to the news media. An interesting event or story about your nonprofit has a greater chance of being heard and reported if you have a direct conversation with a reporter. This conversation, the story pitch, needs to follow certain rules and guidelines so reporters hear what is important to your organization in a way that does not waste their time, appeals to their sense of news, and understands and respects what they cover.

Some tips to help you successfully pitch your stories to the news media:

Planning your call to the media

1. Call at least one week ahead of time so reporters will have time to collect background information and sell the story to their editors.
2. Compile statistics, examples and stories that add concrete details to your story. Be prepared to talk about this evidence when you talk to a reporter.
3. Be prepared to provide the names and phone numbers of people affected by the issues in the story that the reporter can contact for quotes.
4. If you are assigned to pitch stories to the media, read the paper, watch television news programs and listen to radio news shows to find out what the media looks for.
5. Remember that radio shows book guests at least one full week before broadcast but sometimes two to three weeks in advance. Television shows, especially public affairs shows, usually book guests one month in advance.

During your call to pitch your story

1. Do not call on deadline, when you are least likely to keep the attention of reporters or editors. (When developing your media lists, collect information on their deadlines.) If a reporter is on deadline, immediately offer to call back at another time.
2. Assume the reporter or editor received your press release or media advisory, but explain your story fully anyway. Be ready to fax it again (verify the number).

Example

Hello, I am Jane Doe from the Good Works Community Development Corporation and I have a good story for you about how local nonprofits will respond to the city council's new legislation on the placement of homeless shelters. Is this a good time to talk?

3. Know the name and editorial responsibilities of the person you are calling, and ask for them by name.
4. Be prepared to summarize your story in 30 seconds. Explain your story to reporters in the same way they would tell it to their readers, listeners or viewers. Emphasize the newsworthy elements such as the conflict, the significance to the audience and connections to other stories currently in the news.

Example

We are holding a candlelight vigil on Tuesday night outside the mayor's home and we're bringing 50 homeless men, women and children from area shelters to speak to the mayor in his environment. They will explain that "the homeless are people too" and that they would like to have a roof over their heads every night, just like his family. We want him to veto the legislation that would prevent homeless shelters from being placed within two miles of single-family home neighborhoods.

5. Offer to provide any information that will make the reporter's job easier (photos, residents to contact, statistics, Internet research, executive director biography, etc.).
6. Show emotion and passion about the issues you would like to see covered, but do not get lumped into a category with "fanatics" whom the media distrusts and avoids. You do not want to be perceived as too aggressive or bullying.

After you pitch the story

1. Fax another copy of the press release or media advisory. Losing press releases in the clutter of a newsroom is easy.
2. Be persistent — but not a pest — to the reporter you contacted. If she tells you that she is working on multiple stories right now, but would like to do a longer feature story on your issue, make sure you contact her again in a few weeks and send any information she has requested in the meantime.

TIPS ON DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

- Always return reporters' phone calls. It shows that you understand the deadlines they are facing.
- Provide as much information as you can and direct them to others who may be able to help them with more details.
- When initiating a call, ask whether the reporter is on deadline — then get right to the point of the news story you would like to see in the paper.
- Pitch a story to one reporter at the newspaper at a time. Two different departments assigning reporters to the same story wastes resources.
- Never say anything to a reporter you would not want to see in the paper. (Ignore everything you have ever heard about "off the record.")
- Expect journalists to be skeptical or cynical. They are taught to be the devil's advocate, to report both sides of an issue and to always question assumptions.

- Contact the newspaper well in advance of your event and use the time between this first contact and the event for follow-up.
- Do not let a reporter's skeptical or cynical attitude get in the way of communicating effectively with the reporter. Do not take it personally. Always be professional and persistent. Never become argumentative. Remember: You are trying to build relationships. If a reporter likes you on a personal level, he or she will be more willing to take your call, listen to you and cover your event.
- Try not to waste anyone's time. Know whom you should call or talk to you before you get on the phone:
 - **Newspaper:** Look for the *beat reporter* who covers your area (housing, economic development, urban affairs). Or ask for the *city editor*; this is the person who generally makes decisions on what is covered and who will cover it.
 - **Television:** Always ask for the *assignment editor*. TV stations do not have as many reporters as newspapers, forcing TV reporters to cover a wide variety of topics and events. The assignment editor is the person who makes those decisions.
 - **Radio:** Get to know the *news editor*. This person has the same responsibilities as the TV station assignment editor.
- Do not ever go "off the record." A reporter will always come back "on the record" with tougher questions. And he or she can use that information if another source will say it on the record. If you are embarrassed or afraid to have your name appear behind a statement, do not say it. Staying on the record also builds credibility and relationships with reporters.
- Do not volunteer information that is not requested. This tip is especially important when responding to negative stories or during "crisis management." The less you say, the less likely you are to be misquoted or misinterpreted. Always answer a reporter's question. "No comment" reads and sounds like "I'm guilty."

- Do not become an “anonymous source.”
- It is rarely appropriate to provide any one reporter an “exclusive.” Giving one reporter a day’s advance notice to report or air a story will anger other reporters in your community. That is the quickest way to make sure your nonprofit’s events and information go to the bottom of the “to do” list. Ninety-nine percent of what your organization will do is not worthy of an “exclusive.”
- Do not be afraid to admit you do not know something. Tell the reporter you will find the information and call him or her back. Providing the wrong information is much, much worse.

WRITING TALKING POINTS

Talking points deliver your message to an audience in a conversational, concise manner. They are the most important, most fundamental way for your spokesperson to get your ideas across to the media.

Where a formal speech follows a single theme and functions as a complete unit, talking points include several pieces of information that are each understandable on their own or as a set of statements. All the statements are focused on your message.

Talking points do not even have to be written in grammatically correct English, but these points *must* make sense — especially to those unfamiliar with your industry or its jargon.

Before you write, draft an outline of important points that need to be made, consistent with your message. Then decide who should make them. Who would be the most appropriate speaker to make each of the points listed on your outline? The most important points need to be made by the most important person on the podium. For example, the program director should describe how the program will work in a way that supports your message. The board president takes a much broader approach, emphasizing how the program will benefit the community. The donor then sends the message of how financing made the program possible.

Flesh out each point in your draft talking points, adding supporting documentation. Keep statistics limited. All you really need is one or two sentences per talking point. Explain the point in greater detail as you continue, but remember to keep the tone conversational. Show how each point illustrates the topic at hand and supports your message.

The most important point to remember when writing talking points is: Know your audience!

Consider the topic of providing home-ownership opportunities for low-income people in your community. Would you write the same talking points for the Rotary Club as you would for the board of directors at Bank of America? In each case you make the same points, but you tailor them for each audience. And remember: Never talk over — or under — your audience.

Here are some sample messages:

- All people deserve a decent, affordable place to live.
- Good Works helps people achieve that goal.
- The Good Works home-ownership program is a realistic way to address the need evident in our community.
- This program works.

Here is how you might present them to the Rotary Club:

- A strong, vital community is important to all of us.
- Rotary, like Good Works, has been working toward improving our community in many different ways.
- One of the primary goals of Good Works is to make sure all people have a decent, affordable place to live.
- The Good Works home-ownership program addresses a need in our community to help people afford and purchase their own homes.
- Home ownership has many benefits, including strengthening our community’s economic base.
- This program works.

Here is how you might present them to the bank:

- The Good Works home-ownership program addresses a need in our community to help people afford and purchase their own home.
- We have helped 35 families buy homes. Not one family has defaulted on a loan or missed a mortgage payment.
- Home ownership stabilizes a community, encourages businesses to open and provides a number of investment and financial opportunities.
- Home ownership for low-income families is an investment that makes sense. It's an investment in people. It's an investment in capital. It's an investment in our community.
- This program works.

SPECIAL TIPS FOR BROADCAST INTERVIEWS

1. Define your message: What's the issue? And what do you want to happen?
2. Know the interviewer and your audience: What do you know about the person who will interview you? What is his or her interviewing style? Have your colleagues been pleased with their coverage in the past? If not, why not?
3. Know your audience: What audience does this media outlet reach? What information is this audience interested in?
4. Keep it simple: Use simple, clear concepts to explain your message.
5. Practice the three R's: Rehearse, role-play and revise so you get it right in front of hundreds or thousands during the interview.
6. You are part of the message: Your tone, facial expressions, clothes and body language send as strong a signal as your words. Show calm passion about the issue and reasonable arguments to handle opposition. Avoid shrill attacks on the interviewer, the opposition, the media, etc.
7. Control the interview: Remember the message *you* want to get across during the interview. Use the appropriate questions to keep hammering on your message and the two to three central points that reinforce your message.
8. Practice patience: If the interview is not going the way you think it should, do not quit and do not complain. Just try harder.
9. Nervousness is normal: Even after you have prepared for the interview, you may need to use relaxation techniques that work best for you.
10. Act as if the interviewer is your friend: Anyone who views this interview should think you have a cordial relationship with the interviewer even when questions are asked that you would prefer not to answer. Be friendly throughout the interview, even if the interviewer is hostile.
11. Talk to the audience, not the interviewer: Do not take it personally when the interviewer asks hard questions; remember that you are trying to get your message to the audience that can use your services, donate money to your organization or partner with your nonprofit on new initiatives.
12. You might not know it all: Do not be afraid to say "I don't know" if you do not. Offer to get back to the reporter with the information.
13. Anticipate hostile questions: Be prepared with succinct answers to all the questions you would prefer not to answer — in case they come up.
14. Practice using bridge phrases to move through the information you want to deliver during the interview. Some examples include:
 - "It's also important that you understand...."
 - "And in addition...."
 - "What's important is...."
 - "What I do know is that...."
15. For emphasis, you can use phrases like:
 - "That's a really interesting point.... At Good Works we feel...."
 - "That's a key point because...."
 - "That touches on an important point I want to make...."
 - "Let me make sure your audience understands that...."

MORE INTERVIEW DOS & DON'TS

Do:

- Look in the mirror before you go on camera.
- Sit down in a comfortable chair.
- Smile comfortably.
- Take your hat off.
- Take off dangling or noisy jewelry.
- Take reading glasses off.
- Get your message across first.
- Talk in 15-second soundbites.
- Think about how you want the story written.
- Ask if they need a sound check.
- Ask someone to hold the microphone.
- Think about the one thing you want people to think about when the interview ends.
- Dress and act accordingly.

Don't:

- Look straight into the camera.
- Worry about the background.
- Worry about the condition of your desk in front of the reporter.
- Show your concern over a distasteful question.
- Stop the tape.
- Fidget in your chair.
- Sit in front of a window.
- Stand with the sun behind you.
- Let the reporter set up in a noisy place.
- Be afraid to NOT answer a question.
- Ask for a copy of the tape.

SPECIAL TIPS FOR RADIO INTERVIEWS

- Speak very clearly and slowly.
- Practice for radio interviews by taping yourself and playing it back. How you sound on your voice mail or answering machine is a pretty good indication of how you will sound on radio.
- Talk like you would to your mother. Avoid five-syllable words that take up too much time. Use conversational, everyday language and terms.
- Use very short sentences because radio interviews are for the ear.
- Use numbers sparingly. Provide numbers in terms that paint a picture to a *listener*. For example, don't say "55,000 square feet"; say "the size of about five football fields." Don't say "84 units of housing"; say "homes for seven dozen families."
- Tell a radio reporter the *most important* part of your story. Never is it more important to get to the heart of the matter than when you are doing radio interviews.
- Do not expect a radio reporter to use portions of a speech at a press conference. The reporter will not waste that much tape. He will take notes and then ask you to repeat what he wants on tape. Because of this, always set aside time at the end of your press conference for radio reporters.
- Do not hold the microphone. Do not pull the microphone closer to your face or mouth. The reporter will know how far to hold it to optimize the sound.
- Do not swing your arms, wave your hands or rattle your jewelry. All of these create sounds, believe it or not, that a sensitive radio mike will pick up.
- Never underestimate the "power of pith." Try to think of something clever to say a day in advance of your event or announcement. Practice it several times so you will not be tongue-tied. A clever phrase dramatically increases the chance it will be broadcast.

- Keep your answers brief. A radio reporter will have only about 45 to 60 seconds to tell a story and include a soundbite from you. The less you say, the less editing the reporter will have to do, and the less likely your comments will be misinterpreted because they had to be edited down.
- Offer a photo suggestion to illustrate the story. Stories with some type of artwork (photos, charts, graphs) receive three times as many readers as stories that do not carry artwork.

SPECIAL TIPS FOR NEWSPAPER INTERVIEWS

- Newspaper interviews and stories generally are longer than broadcast stories. Prepare additional background information that can be handed to a print reporter.
- You will have to do a lot more preparation for print interviews. Make sure you have your facts and figures ready. Bring copies of budgets, and do not be embarrassed to refer to the printed materials you brought when answering questions.
- If you do not understand the question, ask for clarification. Do not assume the reporter fully understands what he or she is asking. The topic or announcement you are making may be terribly confusing.
- Use simple, everyday terms. Avoid jargon, acronyms and bureaucratic terms.
- Refer to the press release. If the reporter has not read it, he or she will be forced to use the information.
- Answer honestly. Never lie to a reporter. Reporters have trained a sixth sense to look for inaccuracies or contradictions in your remarks.
- Make sure you have identified and coached others who can speak to the press about your event or story. Have a list of people with phone numbers ready to provide to the reporter. If the reporter asks for suggestions of people to call for comment, you want to make sure they are people who support your programs and who think that your nonprofit is the greatest thing in town.
- Ask for the reporter's deadline.
- Ask when the story will appear.
- Ask for any additional information the reporter might need.
- Ask for the reporter's business card. Give the reporter your card.
- Thank the reporter for attending and for giving you the opportunity to explain your program or tell your story.

Crisis Communications

Nobody likes bad news. And nobody ever wants to see their dirty laundry aired in public or appear in print. But bad news does happen, and when it does, your priority is to limit the damage and stop further negative reporting. It's a tall order and a difficult one, but it is not impossible. Here are some suggestions to help you work with an aggressive reporter who already has enough information to publish a negative story.

Always return the call. This tip is so critically important that it bears repeating — always return the call. You do not want to pick up the paper and read, “Sarah Jones was not available for comment,” because people will interpret it as “Sarah Jones is guilty and would not come to the phone.”

Ask, specifically, what the reporter needs. Ask your own questions. Do not provide the reporter with more information than he or she already knows. Do not offer material the reporter has not specifically asked for. Find out the reporter's deadline and promise to call back with the information before that time.

Research the information. Do not get on the phone without knowing exactly what has transpired (a housing development built by your nonprofit is found to have serious code violations). You do not have to share everything you learned with the reporter, but research what is going on thoroughly. Knowledge is power.

Find documentation to support your position. Know what money was spent, for example, and have copies of receipts. Look for letters or correspondence — anything that was put on paper.

Back everything up with facts. Do not work from memory or institutional history. Double-check the facts before passing any information on to the reporter.

Tell the truth. There is no exception to this rule. Nothing is more important than being on the record with what you know to be true. If you are being sued, you still can say, “We have been advised by legal counsel not to discuss pending litigation. I'm sorry that I cannot provide you with additional information.” End it at that. It's truthful. It's quotable. It's an answer. Refer the reporter to your attorney, if necessary.

If you have done something wrong, admit it. Then immediately list what has been done to correct or address the problem. You cannot take back or change what has happened in the past, but you can take measures to ensure it does not happen again.

Write down what you are going to say and the points you need to make before you call the reporter back. This will help you stay focused when the reporter starts asking the same question five or six different ways.

Do not go off the record. Do not say “no comment.” These are red flags for reporters that send the message that this story is a lot worse than the reporter thinks.

Do not “spin.” Do try to be as positive as you can be about a bad situation, but do not say something so outrageous or unbelievable that you damage your credibility and the credibility of your organization.

When in doubt, keep it out. If you are not sure that a piece of information should be released, do not release it. Trust your instincts. Ask your attorney, your executive director or someone on your board first. Once you put something on the record, it stays there. You cannot take it back. So think carefully about what you are going to say.

Determine who will speak to the reporter. The person you choose to answer a reporter's questions also sends a message. Who is the person with the most knowledge about the subject? Who can address it most rationally? Keep the response to one person. This will cut down on confusion and make sure that one message, and one message only, is given.

RESPONDING TO NEGATIVE STORIES

The times when you do not have a crisis are the best times to plan for negative stories. Do you know how to respond quickly when you hear that a negative story will be published about your organization?

- Include potential negative stories in all your media planning efforts. Prepare for them.
- What are all the negative questions that could possibly be asked? What is your answer to each one of these questions?
- Who will respond to negative stories (executive director, chair of the board)? Establish this beforehand. Name a backup. Do you have their home, evening or cell phone numbers so they can be reached anytime, day or night?
- What is the bottom line of the message you want to get across in this story?
- Do not answer questions that are not asked unless it advances your nonprofit's agenda.
- Do not use nonprofit jargon like "capacity-building" or "TA" in mainstream media. No one outside the community development industry knows what these terms mean.
- Focus on the positives, not the negatives.
- Acknowledge mistakes and explain the steps that are underway to correct them.
- Do not become defensive.
- If the story has potential criminal or legal concerns, call your attorney first.
- Think about your message in terms of a headline. How would you sum it up in one sentence?
- If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. Then find out the answer.

Media Terms and Job Positions

The following terms explain some of the technical words and job positions the media uses.

B Roll: An opportunity for a television reporter to come out and take some pictures of an event that may not warrant a full-blown news story.

Embargo: This is a story or press release that is distributed in advance, but can only be published or aired after a specified date or time. Try to avoid this.

Hook, angle or news peg: The reason why a reporter would want to cover your story.

Jump: The part of a newspaper story that needs additional space to complete the printing of the story. For example, a story may begin on the front page of a newspaper, but it may be continued on an inside page of the newspaper.

Lead sentence or paragraph: The sentence or sentences that begin a reporter's story.

Live Shot: The news report is live at the location where an action or activity is happening. This Q & A usually lasts about 45 seconds to 1 minute.

Media avail: Making a prominent speaker, board member or executive director available for media interviews.

Package: Reporter tells story around two soundbites. Includes 15-second standup. Usually 1:15 to 1:30 minutes

Photo ops: An opportunity for the press to take pictures of an event that may not warrant a full-blown news story.

Soundbite: A 30-second audiotape that describes your program in a clever way. This is used most commonly by radio stations.

VO or voice over: Used exclusively in television, a news anchor reads a story while a piece of film is being shown. There is no reporter commenting on the story during a voice over. About 15 to 30 seconds in length.

VO-SOT or voice over and sound on tape: An anchor reads the first part of the story, pauses as a soundbite from a tape runs, then picks up reading the story following the soundbite. Usually 45 seconds long.

Wrap: Reporter tells story around two 15-second soundbites. No standup. Usually 1 minute to 1:15 minutes.

DESCRIPTION OF MEDIA JOB POSITIONS

Television

News Director: In small media markets, the news director is very involved in making decisions about what stories are put on the air. In larger markets, the news director may serve a more administrative function, which is more removed from the story assignment process.

Assistant News Director: This job, which usually occurs in larger media markets, involves managing the assignment of news stories, but not the coordination of the whole day's stories.

Executive Producer: This position plans the deployment of news resources each day, which includes assigning reporters, scheduling live camera shots and preparing for potentially breaking news.

Show Producer: This position produces one of the morning, noon or evening newscasts, which includes coordinating reporters, live shots and story placement during the news show. Show producers have tremendous influence over what gets on the news, although they may not assign stories. Their duties include:

- Writing and editing copy
- Editing videotape
- Monitoring status of live news (an interview with the mayor about her volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity) or breaking news (a 200-unit apartment building is burning down)
- Planning graphics for the news show

Assignment Editor: This position may determine what news gets covered and what does not. This is often the person to whom press releases are routed and the person who assigns reporters to cover press conferences.

Reporter: This is the position that most non-profits deal with. This person interviews staff, calls for comments, writes the story, etc.

Community Affairs Director: This public affairs position is responsible for programming local talk shows, PSAs or neighborhood meetings for a station.

Radio

News Director, Assignment Editor, News Anchor: In most markets, these positions may be rolled up into one or two people. Unless you contact an all-talk radio station or a major station in a major market (New York, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C.), probably anyone in the news department can help you.

Assignment Editor: This position may determine what gets covered and what does not. This is often the person to whom press releases are routed and the person who assigns reporters to cover press conferences.

News Director: In small media markets, the news director is very involved in making decisions about what stories are put on the air. In larger markets, the news director may serve a more administrative function, which is more removed from the story-assignment process.

News Anchor: This person reads the news once it is gathered by reporters, editors or the news director.

Newspaper

City or Metro Desk Editor: This position may determine what news gets covered and what does not. This person often receives press releases and assigns reporters to cover press conferences.

Assignment Editors: In very large media markets, this position may be separate from the city or metro desk editors. In this case, they would determine what news gets covered and what does not. They are often the person to whom press releases are routed and the person who assigns reporters to cover press conferences.

Reporters: This is the position that most non-profits will deal with. This person interviews staff, calls for comments, writes the story, etc.

Columnists: These writers are usually very experienced reporters who are paid to give their opinion on local, state or national affairs.

Editorial Page Writers: These writers express their media outlet's opinion about a particular issue currently in the local, state or national news.

Opinion-Editorial Editors: These editors receive and edit the letters of citizens who want to express an opinion on local, state or national issues currently in the news.

Notes

Notes

THE ENTERPRISE FOUNDATION

The Foundation's mission is to see that all low-income people in the United States have access to fit and affordable housing and an opportunity to move out of poverty and into the mainstream of American life. To achieve that mission, we strive to:

- Build a national community revitalization movement.
- Demonstrate what is possible in low-income communities.
- Communicate and advocate what works in community development.

As the nation's leader in community development, Enterprise cultivates, collects and disseminates expertise and resources to help communities across America successfully improve the quality of life for low-income people.

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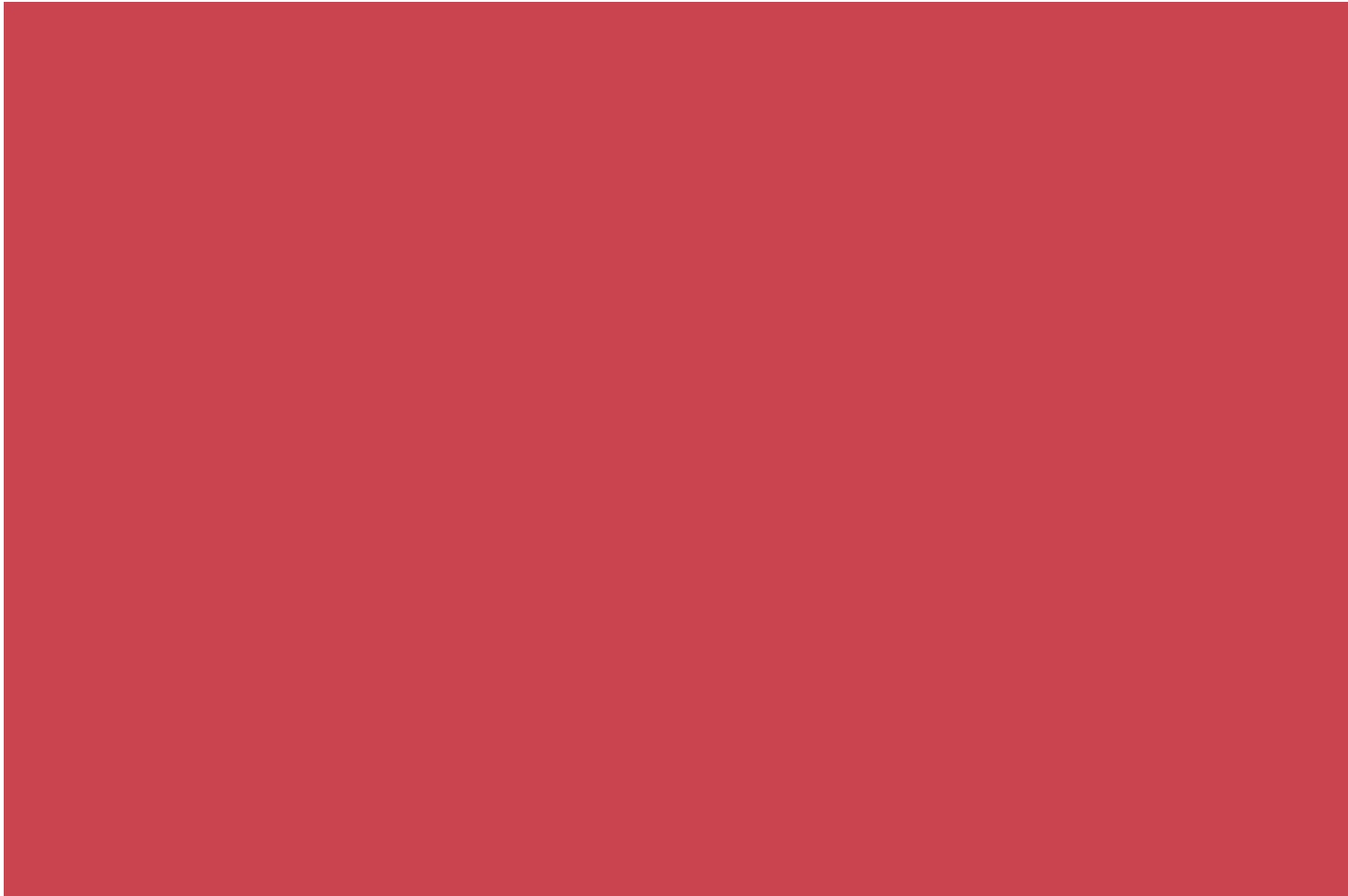
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