

Chapter 9: Public Relations and Marketing

Vision: *The statewide system has a strategy for promoting home visiting programs in the state.*

I. Introduction

What is public relations?

Public relations (PR) is managing the message of a cause and the image of an organization in the public realm. The underlying mission of an organization or cause is to change public behavior – for example to decrease child abuse broadly or to increase public support for home visiting programs more narrowly. This can only be done if messages are consistent, appropriate and well-received. And, ensuring that an organization remains in good standing with the public is essential and has important implications in fundraising, policy and public awareness realms.

What is marketing?

Marketing is effectively reaching the appropriate audience for a product and convincing them to use it. Typically, a non-profit's product is a message or service. Marketing home visiting, then, means finding the audience for home visiting services and convincing them to agree to services. It also, however, means reaching a broader audience with the message of family support and convincing that audience to agree to the message and influence policy makers, funders and the general public of its merit.

II. Guidelines for public relations and marketing

1. Develop and implement a PR plan. Develop a variety of PR/marketing materials.

Much of this is done through the media, but other venues should not be ignored. Anything provided to any external audience – whether it be a printed piece, a representative from the organization, a website, an email – reveals something about the organization or program. Therefore all forms of communication should be consistent, strategic, clear and professional. Organizations should educate all staff about the key messages and images it wants to be communicating. While there are countless vehicles for these messages, outlined in this section are strategies for delivering them through the most common means.

A. How to Involve the Media

Working with the media can seem overwhelming in the beginning. Like any field, members of the press have their own language, procedures and culture and gaining entry in order to garner publicity for an issue can be an uncomfortable task. The bottom line, though, is that reporters need information and they often don't know where to find it. Organizations can develop relationships with reporters by offering to be a resource on a specific issue and providing them with easy to use materials.

1. **Identifying and communicating with reporters and editors**

Reporters and editors are busy. Finding the right contact people and knowing how to communicate with them is an important step in any media plan.

 - Maintaining an accurate media list. A designated staff person should be assigned to call media outlets to research the name and contact information of individuals who cover issues related to parenting, children and families or community news. Staff should find out how each prefers to receive information.
 - Whoever compiles the list should be sure to emphasize local media as well as other regional or national venues. The general public often focuses on local news.
 - Anyone pitching a story should follow a reporter's stories and then refer to previous stories when pitching.
 - Faxes, e-mails or mail press releases should be sent approximately one to two weeks prior to an event needing to be publicized (or earlier, depending on the lead-time requested by that media outlet).
 - Once a press release has been sent, follow-up calls are important. During the call, reporters should be asked if they are interested in airing or writing a story.

2. **Writing a Press Release – see sample at**

<http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

As always, writers should consider their audience. Editors and reporters receive many releases and give cursory attention to each. Writers should get to the point quickly and keep the following elements in mind:

- **Headline.** A strong, informative headline is important and should not be too cute or confusing, but original, jargon-free, attention grabbing and active.
- **First paragraph.** Next, a release should get quickly to the who, what, when, where and why and include imperative, compelling information.

Tip: Journalists often write in what is known as a pyramid style. This means that information is included in order of importance so that the story could stop at the end of any paragraph. For wire services, this means they can cut stories wherever they need to for space requirements. For release writers, this means realizing that a reporter in a hurry may stop reading at any time.
- **Quotations.** A quotation from the most senior appropriate person is usually good for a second paragraph. Journalists won't always call for an interview or even to follow-up on the press release, so the writer needs to give them what they need for their story right away, including the requisite quote. Writers should remember while writing quotes that people usually speak more casually than they write, so the quote should sound realistic.
- **Language.** Writers should never expect reporters to translate their writing into something they can use or understand. It is important to:

- Steer clear of jargon. While it is important to be accurate, writers should remember also that the audience here is not the child abuse prevention or home visiting field. Terms such as “intensive home visiting” and “parent-child interaction” do not read as well as “work voluntarily with families in their homes” and “strengthening the bond between parents and children.”
- Write at a 12th grade level.
Tip: In Microsoft Word, writers can measure this by going under “Tools/Options/Spelling and Grammar” and clicking “Show readability statistics” at the bottom of the window. Then, at the end of every spelling and grammar check, the program will indicate the reading level. An example – this chapter is written at a 10th grade reading level.
- Write in Associated Press (AP) style.
Tip: Buy an *AP Stylebook and Libel Manual* for guidelines.
- Use charts and graphs to illustrate statistics. Also, writers should break unwieldy stats down to per family or per child, when applicable. **See sample at** <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.
- **Boilerplate.** If an organization hasn’t already, it should develop a short paragraph describing what it does. Information might include when the organization was founded, its mission, who and how many it serves, where it serves them and any significant funders or partnerships. The boilerplate should be the last paragraph in the release. **See sample at** <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

3. Using Media Alerts – see sample at
<http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

For events and press conferences, a simple alert is usually the most effective tool. This is a one page document that literally spells out “Who, What, When and Where.” The alert should indicate any interview or photo opportunities that might interest the press. As with anything going to the press, contact information should be featured prominently. If there is room, a short version of the boilerplate should be inserted.

4. Using Statements – see sample at
<http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

Issuing a statement is an effective way to respond to breaking news if an organization either anticipates a barrage of media inquiries or want to have a voice in the debate. A statement should be written as though the spokesperson were standing at a podium addressing the press. This should all be in quotes; written it in a professional, yet conversational tone; and every sentence considered on its own, since reporters will use only a sound byte.

This proactive approach is a good way to get an issue wedged into breaking news in cases where it would otherwise be ignored. Tying the benefit of home visiting and child abuse prevention to stories about CPS, foster care and child abuse can help to ensure that reporters at least consider the angle, and possibly pass it on to the public.

5. Securing Television and Radio Coverage

Radio and television programs should be approached in the same way as newspapers, remembering to provide visual and audio opportunities. Prior to sending materials, staff assigned to working with the media should listen to the shows and familiarize themselves with formats. When sending information to radio stations, whoever is listed as the contact person, should be prepared to handle last-minute live interview requests. If an organization only wants the spokesperson to handle interviews, it should know where they are at all times. **See sample at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.**

6. Writing a Letter to the Editor or Securing an Op-ed

A letter to the editor is one of the simplest ways to communicate an opinion to the general public. Depending on the size of the local newspaper, the chances of having a letter printed may vary. On average, many local papers publish up to 80 percent of the letters submitted.^v

The op-ed page usually appears opposite the editorial page in the newspaper. Op-eds are usually longer than letters to the editor, offering an opportunity to present an extended argument. Members of the community write Op-eds, whereas journalists usually write editorials. Op-eds are similar to editorials in that an op-ed typically carries more weight than a letter to the editor – it presents a point of view with much greater detail and persuasion than a short letter will allow.^{vi}

Letters to the Editor: See sample at

<http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

- Letters should be brief, focused on just one idea or concept and limited to 250-300 words. If the article is too long, the newspaper may edit out some important facts.
- It is helpful if the letter refers to a recent event, or other articles, editorials or letters the newspaper has recently published. This will increase its chances of being printed.
- The letter should include contact information. As with anything going to the media, include you're a contact name, address, and phone number so the paper can contact the appropriate person with any questions and verify authorship.

Op-ed Letters^{vii} - See sample at

<http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

- The writer should get guidelines by calling the editorial page editor or op-ed editor for the newspaper's op-ed policies. Writers should inquire about the submission guidelines, accepted length, and the approval process.
- Writers should consider the content. An Op-Ed should have a clear point as well as an "ask" of its readers. It is a call to action, at the very

least asking for a change in attitude or opinion. More likely, the writer will want readers to contact decision-makers to urge specific action.

7. Clipping and using your good press

A good article can have a long life. Organizations should archive press clippings and send them to legislators, the governor, coalition partners, and other decision-makers. It can be helpful for State Leaders to alert sites in about relevant press coverage utilizing existing resources such as websites, listservs, or newsletters for this purpose.

B. Brand Identity – see Healthy Families America Graphic Standards Manual

It is important to present a consistent image to the public by developing and protecting a brand identity. State systems have the right to be licensed to use the Healthy Families America brand identity if they agree to follow the graphic standards guidelines outlined by PCA America. If state systems have their own identity, they should develop guidelines for usage to protect it and ensure it is always presented consistently. A brand identity means more than the just a logo, however. It refers also to the name of the organization and any other graphics, colors or fonts it regularly uses to represent itself.

1. **Name.** The Healthy Families America program and network has long used the acronym HFA. However, in order to build recognition within a community, it is a good idea to use the full name for all public communications. Social service agencies are rife with acronyms and reporters, policy makers and the public quickly learns to tune them out. “Healthy Families” invokes a positive, caring, community-friendly image. “HFA” doesn’t invoke much of anything. Whatever name an organization uses, however, it should avoid acronyms and jargon when possible – even when answering the phone, an often-overlooked public communication.
2. **Logo.** The logo should not be altered from one use to another and should never be distorted. It is a good idea to educate all staff on the proper use and, if necessary and in the absence of a graphic designer, authorize one or two people to be in charge of incorporating graphics into all materials. For information on the Healthy Families America brand identity or an example of how to develop graphic standards, refer to the *Healthy Families America graphic standards manual*.
3. **Colors.** Identify the colors of the brand identity in a fail-safe manner. A common way to do this is to identify the Pantone Matching System (PMS) colors used in the logo. If a graphic designer created the logo, he or she probably provided this information. If not, examples of these numbers can be found at a print shop.
4. **Layout.** It is important to use a common layout, font, font size, etc. for all letters, press releases, fact sheets, talking points and other public communications. This is often left to the personal preference of individual writers and departments, which can result in messy, inconsistent-looking final products or a great deal of re-layout to ensure consistency.

C. Marketing Materials

Any materials produced should be strategic and focused. A common mistake in creating marketing materials is trying to produce a ‘catch all’ piece to use with various audiences. This approach usually only dilutes the efficacy of the piece. Writers should identify a target audience and find out what they want and need to know and how they best learn that information. Organizations should also determine where print money is best spent versus something that could go on a website.

1. **Brochures.** Before spending the money to print a costly brochure, organizations should determine exactly whom they are trying to reach and whether there aren’t other vehicles that might reach them more effectively. One-page fact sheets, laid out attractively, can often take the place of brochures and can be altered easily to incorporate different information for different audiences. If the organization does decide to print a brochure, it is usually a good idea to make sure it will remain relevant as long as possible. Because larger printer runs are more cost effective than small runs, the organization will probably want to be able to use the brochure for a while and thus shouldn’t include numbers that change often, or too many year-specific statistics. **See samples “Fact Sheet” and “Backgrounder” at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.**

2. **Newsletters** –These are a good way to stay in touch with key constituents, networks, policy-makers and so on. Again, it is important that writers know their audience. If only reaching an internal network, writers can consider an e-newsletter to save print budgets. For external audiences, the publication should contain information that will interest and educate, not lose, them.

- It is always important to steer clear of jargon and unexplained acronyms.
- Newsletters should come out in a timely manner – often, small organizations find themselves putting off this task and the “quarterly” newsletter is seen only twice a year.
- If at all possible, it is useful to hire a graphic designer or find a design student willing to lay out the newsletter. Layout matters a lot in terms of readability.

(See PCA America newsletters online at www.preventchildabuse.org and Healthy Families America newsletter, SCOOP, at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/publications/scoop.shtml>)

3. **Website.** Organizations should not underestimate the power of the Internet. It is important to designate funds for one. Legislative aides, reporters and funders all use the Internet to research organizations. When designing a site, organizations should:

- Keep in mind the audience and, if applicable, design separate sections for networks and for others. Make sure it can remain updated. If this will be difficult due to staff and budget considerations, organizations can include general information with instructions on how to get more information. An updating plan should always be part of overall website planning. If statistics are included that change, website creators should make note

of on which pages they appear so that someone remembers to change them when necessary. Out-of-date or inconsistent sites are maddening for viewers seeking information.

See some state examples at <http://pca-ny.org/hfny/index.shtml> or www.healthyfamiliesfla.org.

4. **Messages.** Talking about child abuse prevention and home visiting to the public can be tricky. It is important to pay careful attention to the language used. Prevention advocates have learned that it is often difficult for audiences to get beyond the words “child abuse,” so these words should be incorporated carefully. Focusing on the positive aspects of home visiting, such as strengthening family bonds, providing resources to parents and emphasizing that programs are voluntary is often a useful strategy.

2. Establish a coordinated effort between sites and the state system to identify and meet PR needs. Establish a process to inform and engage all sites about PR efforts.

Organizations should find ways to fit public relations and media into current vehicles used to share information with networks. Public relations and media efforts should be included as an important element along with the other news. While legislative and funding issues are quickly spread among networks, remembering to encourage good public relations is often overlooked.

However, public relations is a major component of fundraising and advocacy. State Leaders should encourage sites to identify success stories to pitch to the press, and to share the press they receive. It is helpful to identify a point person for sites to contact if they receive media inquiries. Templates for press releases can be made available to sites, perhaps through space on the state website devoted to the “pressroom”. Finally, State Leaders should keep the marketing and communications department of PCA America informed of press activities and inform staff of appropriate contact people should a national request for a local story emerge.

3. Identify and train site staff to work with the media. Identify and train key statewide collaborators to work with the media.

A. Identifying staff – see sample “Talking Points” “Fact Sheet” at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

Organizations should identify staff who are knowledgeable about home visiting and child abuse prevention, who are personable, articulate, and who do not fluster easily. The number of people authorized to talk with reporters should be limited and as a general rule, staff should talk only with print reporters instead of television, for which an executive director or appropriate spokesperson should appear.

B. Identifying key statewide collaborators – see sample “Talking Points” at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

Organizations should find the most senior, prominent – but not controversial – partner it has, using collaborators very close to the issue. It is precarious to have to worry that an interview may be hijacked for someone else’s cause. For instance, a

state legislator may have been a great supporter of a program, but wants to talk about another pet project at that particular moment. It is important to know for certain where a spokesperson's allegiance lies when it is important. Someone from your organization should always be available and trained as well.

C. Identifying participants – see “Spokesperson Questionnaire” at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

Program participants can be great spokespeople for media stories. Many features spotlight one successful participant to lead into stories about the program. It's helpful, therefore, to have on hand the names and stories of several participants to respond quickly to press inquiries. These participants should be comfortable talking to the media, sharing their stories and strong examples of success.

D. Other testimonials – see “Words of Support” “Fact Sheet” at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

It is helpful to keep on hand speeches supporting the organization, or short quotations by well-known figures promoting the program. These are great to use in marketing materials and grants to underscore the support a program receives from the community. The “Words of Support” document includes comments about the national program that may be helpful. **See sample “Backgrounder”** for an example of how to incorporate such quotations.

E. Handling Interviews – see sample “Talking Points” at <http://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/ssdq/> or Appendix B.

Reporters should always be encouraged to talk to the spokesperson of the organization. The media contact person should make sure the spokesperson is prepared for the interview with talking points containing core information about the program and relevant statistics. If there is one main point that needs to be made in the interview, the spokesperson should be advised to come back to that point as much as possible. Interviewees often complain of being misquoted; this can be avoided by only giving reporters the organization wants them to use. A spokesperson doesn't need to be uncooperative, just prepared, especially if he or she knows the topic of the interview could go in the wrong direction. After the interview, the media contact or spokesperson should follow up with the reporter to see if additional information is needed and ask when the story will run. It is important to thank the reporter for helping the organization increase awareness about a program or issue.

III. Public Relations and Marketing Resources

PCA Graphic Standards Manual

[APHA Media Advocacy Manual](http://www.apha.org/news/Media_Advocacy_Manual.pdf)

http://www.apha.org/news/Media_Advocacy_Manual.pdf

[Benton's Best Practices Toolkit](http://www.benton.org/publibrary/toolkits/stratcommtool.html)

Benton's Best Practices Toolkit provides "tools to help nonprofits make effective use of communications and information technologies." This site has a comprehensive list of links to online resources that includes items about technology funding and basic Web information. <http://www.benton.org/publibrary/toolkits/stratcommtool.html>

Dr. Charity on publicity and marketing <http://www.drcharity.com/hb/hb3.html>

Marketing and Communications Resources for Non Profits - These materials were presented by Nancy White and Pat Chappell at the "Media and Your Message" Workshop in June of 1999 Forum for Early Childhood Organization and Leadership Development. These materials may be useful for a broad range of non-profits and community groups. <http://www.fullcirc.com/rlc/rlcindex.htm>

Marketing Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations Volume I: Develop the Plan

A step-by-step guide to marketing for nonprofits. Includes action steps and practical worksheets that will help your organization thrive in today's environment. By Gary J. Stern: http://www.wilder.org/pubs/mktg_vol_1/index.html

Promoting Public Causes, Inc.

This social entrepreneurial consulting firm has a listing of free resources in the field of communication and marketing.

<http://www.publiccauses.com/resources/topresources.htm>

Public and Media Relations

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http://www.mapnp.org/library/pblc_rel/pblc_rel.htm

The Public Relations/Marketing Director's Bookshelf

This site contains a list of useful books on Public Relations and Marketing, along with a comprehensive review of each book.

http://www.genie.org/pubs_reviews_marketing.htm