

Bringing ★ ★ Honor to Victims ★★

BUILDING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

National Crime Victims’ Rights Week is a unique opportunity to work with your local newspapers, and radio and television stations to build public awareness about issues related to crime victims’ rights, and to build relationships with the media that can last throughout the year.

As with any effective relationship, it’s important to establish trust and a good rapport when you interact with the media...something that happens when you become a valued and credible source of information, analysis, and referrals to other sources.

Get to know the media representatives who cover issues of importance to you. When you read the daily newspaper or watch the evening news, make a mental note of the reporters who regularly cover criminal justice, legal, social, public policy, and health stories.

If there is a local story for which you feel you or your organization can be helpful, telephone the reporter and offer yourself or a colleague as an expert. If you receive media coverage, you can develop your relationship further by writing thank-you notes to the reporter and editor. Always be receptive and attentive to media inquiries by promptly returning phone calls.

WHAT’S NEWS?

The media categorize news into two categories: hard “breaking” news (e.g., new victims’ rights legislation is passed, a local crime leaves many in the community victimized) versus softer “feature” pieces (e.g., a crime victim rebuilds her life through advocacy, local victim advocates reach out to domestic violence victims in unique way). The media will typically view National Crime Victims’ Rights Week as a feature piece, unless something particularly newsworthy is occurring.

Whether hard news or soft, the media love facts. Use the enclosed *Statistical Overview* for useable, newsworthy data. The Internet also can serve as a valuable resource when searching for current data.

Before approaching the media, you must carefully define your message, then tailor your news releases and events to convey that message. Present your information in terms of how it will directly affect the news organization’s readers, viewers, listeners.

Most reporters, and readers, want to know the human interest angle to any story, announcement, or event. For instance, does it introduce a new or alternative perspective or does it educate, affect, or influence a large number of people? You are in a unique position to put a human face on crime victimization, either through the services you provide or the individuals you serve.

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MEDIA LISTS

Your publicity efforts will bear little fruit if you're not targeting the right media contacts. To develop your media list, a variety of sources are available:

- ★ the yellow pages for the call letters and addresses of your city's radio and television stations;
- ★ the phone book for the addresses of your local newspaper(s); and
- ★ your local library for media directories, which, in addition to providing addresses, will list the names of reporters, editors, reader demographics, and the paper's circulation.

You may be able to use media lists developed by your local Chamber of Commerce or mayor's and district attorney's offices. Many reporters now prefer to receive news releases electronically, so don't forget to get e-mail addresses. This will save on postage, too!

TOOLS THAT GRAB MEDIA ATTENTION

Below we describe a number of tools commonly used to communicate with the media. While you can be creative

in how you go about explaining your issue and activities, you must be able to articulate—as briefly and succinctly as possible—the newsworthiness of your information and its relevance to the community.

Media Advisory - A media advisory, sometimes called a *media alert*, is a one-page notification to the media that briefly explains an event (e.g., news conference, candlelight vigil, rally, open house). Include the "who, what, when, where, and why" of your event. A media advisory should be sent out one to two weeks prior to your event (four weeks in advance for a calendar listing), and be followed by targeted telephone calls to the appropriate reporters. If one of the major news wire services (i.e., Associated Press, Reuters) has a bureau office in your city or town, call their "day book," which lists each day's newsworthy events in your community, to make sure your event is included. *The sample media advisory in the Sample Section can help you as you develop your own.*

News Release - News releases continue to be the most effective way for an organization to disseminate important

information to as wide an audience as possible, and, if well written and newsworthy, will be noticed by the media. News releases can be used to announce the results of a new study, an award, a special event, an outreach campaign, or a new service to be offered by your organization.

Write your news releases in the "inverted pyramid" style with the most critical information, "the news," first, followed by supporting details. Your release should tell the reader how and why your news affects a large number of people. Try to use local statistics to call attention to real problems—for instance, your community's number of drunk-driving crashes, number of reported rapes, or the need for services for crime victims. At the end of the release, include a brief paragraph about your organization, its mission, and its relationship to the event—what is typically called "a boilerplate."

The news release should be one to two pages in length, and can include quotes from prominent people in your organization. *The sample news release in the Resource Guide can help you with localizing your*

own release, and don't forget to use the enclosed NCVRW letterhead found in the Camera-Ready Section.

Fact Sheets - Reporters love data and anyone who is a reliable source of data. Fact sheets provide additional

information to help reporters put your story into a larger context and fill out their reports. You can prepare fact sheets on an array of issues:

- ★ national and/or local statistics on crime rates;

- ★ an overview of victims' rights legislation—present and pending—in your state;

- ★ an overview of the criminal justice system, highlighting the roles of law enforcement, the district attorney's

INSIDER STRATEGIES

- ★ At least two months before National Crime Victims' Rights Week or another noteworthy event, write to local print and broadcast managing editors and owners to ask them to support your public service campaign.

- ★ Ask media officials to produce a series of programs or articles that provide an overview of victims' experiences. Programs or articles could examine the issues surrounding victims of sexual assault, elder abuse, child abuse (using adult survivors or parents), hate crime, domestic violence, drunk driving, family members of homicide victims, and others. Avoid suggesting programs or articles that may be exploitative, and encourage the media to be sensitive to the victims they interview.

- ★ Consider approaching a local public relations or marketing firm for *pro bono* assistance in creating a public service campaign.

- ★ Don't forget to contact your local cable access talk shows, which are always looking for new ideas and frequently highlight the programs of community service agencies.

- ★ Encourage your mayor or city council chair to read

your National Crime Victims' Rights Week proclamation at a council meeting before National Crime Victims' Rights Week. Local media covers council meetings, and it will help alert them to the upcoming week, as well as provide an additional opportunity for coverage.

- ★ Coordinate with victim advocacy organizations in your community to produce a "calendar of events" for National Crime Victims' Rights Week that includes information about special events and activities and how to contact organizers. Provide this calendar to print and broadcast media in your city (especially editors and news directors). See the 2002 Events included on a bookmark in the Camera Ready Section.

- ★ After events, send professional quality, 5" x 7" black and white photographs to your local newspaper(s). Many newspapers will print community-event photos, but may not have their staff cover such occasions. Be certain to include a caption that identifies each person in the photo and provides a brief description of the event. Also, provide the name and phone number of a person for the paper to contact for more information.

office, victim advocates, judges, the prison system, community corrections, the parole board, and other key players; and

★ the need for “volunteers for victims,” providing details about various volunteer duties including court monitoring, one-on-one advocacy, assisting with support groups, developing new public awareness programs, writing, fundraising and clerical work.

Public Service Announcements - Public service announcements (PSAs) are free advertisements for issues and organizations that serve the public interest. At least two months before National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, contact the public service department of your local radio and television stations and newspapers to learn about their requirements and deadlines for receiving PSAs.

Radio stations usually will air PSAs in lengths of 15 seconds, 30 seconds, or 60 seconds, and frequently require PSA recordings on audiotape or compact disk (CD). Many also accept written text (the station will record the script that you provide). Some radio and television stations will produce a PSA for local nonprofit organizations

featuring the station’s on-air talent. This approach virtually guarantees good pick up by the station and saves you production and distribution costs.

Newspapers also provide limited public service space, but usually require the advertiser to produce and provide camera-ready art. When you mail either the finished PSAs or the scripts, include a cover letter that encourages the radio, television station, or newspaper to support your public awareness campaign. *Sample radio PSAs are included in the Sample Section.*

The editorial pages of your local newspaper provide yet another opportunity to advance your messages on a given issue. Op-eds and letters to the editor are used frequently by savvy communicators:

Op-Eds - Essays that run “opposite the editorial page” are frequently written by people not on a newspaper’s editorial staff. Op-eds usually run from 500 to 700 words, but contact the editorial page department to ask about exact requirements. The piece must be timely and provide a different and/or unique perspective on an issue currently important to

the public’s health and welfare. Consider “co-authoring” a column with other victims’ organizations or a recognized local expert in your community. A collaborative effort will increase the impact. *The sample op-ed in the Sample Section will help you craft your own piece.*

Letter to the Editor - Different from an “op-ed,” letters to the editor generally react to specific news stories or editorials that have previously appeared in a newspaper. For most newspapers, the letters-to-the-editor section is the first and most frequently read in the publication. Again, contact the newspaper for guidelines on length and submission requirements.

Also, many newspaper editors are receptive to authoring their own editorials commemorating National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, so don’t overlook this possibility.

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