

# What's Your Hook?

## Using the Media to Educate Your Community on After School Programs

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# **Using the Media to Educate Influencers**

## **MEDIA RELATIONS AND MEDIA ADVOCACY HANDBOOK**

### **INFORMATION, THE MEDIA AND THE AUDIENCE**

The news media have grown into one of the most powerful forces in the world. Every day, billions of people rely on the media to provide information on local, national, and international news and stories. While new technologies allow the broadcast media to receive reports from halfway around the world, local media outlets can cover stories happening in the community as news unfolds.

#### **So what does this mean to you and other community-based organizations?**

With the public relying more heavily on the media, the media's appetite for news has grown as well. This appetite for information adds up to one extremely important point for you: there has never been a better time to promote your program and the issues of teen pregnancy prevention and male responsibility on-air or in print.

Never before has news and information been so readily available. As a result, the public has developed a greater reliance on the media and looks to newspapers, television, radio and the Internet to fulfill its information needs.

To promote teen pregnancy prevention through the media, it is important to identify all audiences, as well as media contacts who may be interested in your program and teen issues that affect the community.

This handbook will not only help you identify audiences, but will also teach you the tactics that media advocates employ when working with the media to promote social change.

## WHAT IS MEDIA ADVOCACY

To understand media advocacy, it is necessary to first define the term 'advocacy.' According to Lawrence Wallack and the other writers of *Media Advocacy and Public Health*, advocacy is a "catch-all word for the set of skills used to create a shift in public opinion and mobilize the necessary resources and forces to support an issue, policy or constituency." Coalition building, leadership development and extensive public participation are its base (27, Wallack, et al).

Media advocacy is a tactic that allows community groups to strategically express their story/side of an issue in a manner that applies pressure for and promotes social change. It puts public health problems in their *political* context and addresses "external health determinants," such as employment and education and marketing variables, including advertising, promotion, pricing, product availability, etc. (77).

<b>Differences Between Traditional Approaches and Media Advocacy</b>	
<b>Media Advocacy</b>	<b>Traditional Approaches</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowers community groups to communicate their stories in their own words; relies on coalition building and community organization for support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distributes health messages from a centralized point</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses agenda setting and framing – theories rooted in the political and social sciences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relies on theories from the behavioral sciences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treats audience members as potential advocates for social change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addresses the audience in a one-way communication</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops healthy public policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops health messages</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shifts focus from changing the individual to changing the environment in which the individual acts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses on changing the individual</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents the issue as 'hard news' and the media advocate as a news-maker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Falls prey to the assignment desk and public service time</li> </ul>

(74-75)

Media relations is the mechanism through which community groups advocate. Its tools (press releases, pitch letters, media alerts, etc.) and methods (pitching, interviewing, etc.) provide the basis from which community groups promote social change through the media.

Media relations is about using the media to successfully communicate information to different groups of people. The objective is to get the word out clearly to the target audience.

## SETTING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Advocacy and media advocacy efforts alike need goals and objectives. While it can be difficult for organizations to agree on clear and specific goals, it is important to address the issue early on. As noted in *Media Advocacy and Public Health*, clear goals provide a “specific sense of direction, a unifying theme, and a specific end point for a particular effort” (38). For community groups that focus on teen pregnancy prevention, that “specific end point” might be a reduction in the teen birth rate, or perhaps a more short-term goal, such as an increase in funding for programs that promote positive youth development.

Objectives are steps that must be taken to reach the overall goal. Media objectives address steps that must be taken to: 1) gain access to the media, 2) frame the issue and 3) advance the policy (38). *Media objectives are part of media advocacy, which in turn, is part of a larger advocacy strategy.*

For instance, a community group might 1) *gain access to the media* by sending a pitch letter to or meeting with a reporter about the program’s unique efforts to reduce teen pregnancy. They would 2) *frame the issue* by including state or local statistics and a description of the need for more of these programs, as well as a demand for action from the group/opinion leader/decision maker, which proposes a solution. They would 3) *advance the policy* when the group/opinion leader/decision maker addresses the problem and makes funding available for additional programs (38).

Key to advocacy is ensuring goals for the organization coincide with goals for the issue (38).

## SETTING THE AGENDA

As noted in the beginning of this manual, the news media have grown into one of the most powerful forces in the world. This point is emphasized in *The Press and Foreign Policy*, in which B. Cohen argues that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful much of the time in telling people what to think *about*” (62).

The media advocate’s job is to ensure his/her issue receives the attention it deserves. Once the media focus is on the issue and held there it will be deemed important by the public and action will be taken (61). Criteria for creating compelling stories will be discussed in the following pages.

The agenda setting process is cumulative. It involves setting the:

- media agenda (what is covered)
- public agenda (what people think about)
- policy agenda (regulatory or decision maker action on issues) (61)

## **HOW THE MEDIA WORKS**

Media relations has three components that must fit together in order to work: 1) the media, 2) the audience, and 3) the advocate. The advocate originates the story; the audience is the group of people the advocate wants to reach with his/her information; and the media is the vehicle that conveys the advocate's ideas to the target audience.

## **THE MEDIA: THEIR NEEDS AND THE AUDIENCES THEY SERVE**

Generally speaking, the mass media are considered to be newspapers, magazines, radio, television, wire services and on-line networks. People regularly consult these sources to get their information.

Some people read the newspaper every morning over a cup of coffee, while others listen to news radio during the morning commute to work. College students may log on the Internet to see what's happening, while a retired person may view a television network morning news program to find out what is going on in the world.

As a newsmaker or media advocate, you need to understand the media's needs and their audiences; knowing the interests of who you're talking to could mean the difference between a successful or unsuccessful pitch.

With an approach that is informed and helpful, you will learn each media outlet's individual characteristics and different requirements. Following the recommended guidelines will help you develop solid relationships with each.

## **Understanding a Reporter's Needs**

When reporters, editors and producers evaluate story ideas, they generally look for certain elements that make a story newsworthy, as well as identify stories that will interest their audience. The more elements are involved, the more likely the reporter will use an idea you suggest. Following are some elements that make a story newsworthy.

## Elements of Newsworthy Stories

Anniversary peg	Can this story be associated with a local, national, or topical historical event?
Breakthrough	What is new or different about this story?
Celebrity	Is there a celebrity already involved with or willing to lend his or her name to the issue?
Controversy	Are there adversaries or other tensions in this story?
Injustice	Are there basic inequalities or unfair circumstances?
Irony	What is ironic, unusual, or inconsistent about this story?
Local peg	Why is this story important or meaningful to local residents?
Milestone	Why is this story an important historical marker?
Personal angle	Who is the face of the issue in this story? Who has the authentic voice on this issue?
Seasonal peg	Can this story be attached to a holiday or seasonal event?
Timeliness/Immediacy	Is this story relevant today?

