

Media Outreach: What Makes News

Your Public Relations Team:

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An Overview of Public Relations:

What is Public Relations?

In short, public relations is about telling the story that you want to tell – to the audiences you want to hear it.

A basic definition of public relations is to shape and maintain the image of a company, organization or individual in the eyes of the client's various audiences. In PR terms, audiences are anyone who ever has or ever will form an opinion about you and/or your company. For the Caring for Colorado Foundation and its grantees, these audiences can include potential and current grantees, elected officials, Foundation board members, staff, members of the local community, members of the media, online communities and more.

Media Outreach 101:

The media consists of different vehicles used to disseminate newsworthy information, including:

- Daily newspapers
- Weekly, community newspapers
- Radio
- Television
- Professional/specialized trade publications
- Online/Internet outlets including websites, blogs, etc.

Earned vs. Paid Media

Many marketing communication plans include paid advertising. However, at the heart of public relations is “earned media.”

In contrast to paid advertising, with “earned media” you don't take out ads in the newspaper, on the radio or on television. Instead, you earn stories and coverage by developing ideas to “pitch” to the media, garnering their interest on featuring your idea as part of their coverage.

A benefit to “earned” media is third-party credibility. With earned media, you are not telling your story through an ad that is identified with you and your services, but through a credible news source that is choosing to feature you or your organization, and share your story with their audience.

What Makes News?

The news media is constantly looking for new and interesting things to cover. The perception of what is and what is not news varies between reporters, editors and news outlets.

In order to successfully pitch a story to the media, it is important to look at story possibilities through the eyes of the reporter and their readers / viewers. What is likely to interest them and why? In general, you are more likely to be successful with a story idea when it:

- Provides a local angle to a regional or national story
- Tells a compelling personal story
- Highlights a developing trend or new initiative
- Piggybacks on a local, regional or national news event
- Highlights unique or new programs, features, plans
- Connects a unique and significant historical angle to a current, timely story
- Demonstrates the broad impact of your organization in the community

The local news media can be an effective tool to utilize for community outreach. As a matter of fact, 61 percent of all news stories have a local angle and 41 percent are about everyday events.*

**Study produced by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, an affiliate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 12/99.*

Pitching to Different Outlets

While there are no concrete rules to what a specific outlet will run, there are some key factors to keep in mind that may play into an outlet's decision to cover a specific story, for example:

- Daily publications are often concerned with "tomorrow's news...today," they often desire breaking stories and the latest news.
 - Community newspapers are largely ultra-local. They usually target a specific community, whether defined by location or by ethnicity, race or interest. Often the decision on whether or not a community publication will run a story is whether or not it has an explicit tie to the community it represents.
 - Magazines, whether weekly, bi-weekly or monthly are often concerned with aspects of a news story that have not yet been reported. Because they don't run a daily publication, their reporting often comes out after the initial news breaks, thus they are looking to populate their magazine with new ways to look at what might be an "old" story. They are also more likely to report more in-depth coverage, because they often have more time to complete it before their deadline.
 - Television coverage is most notably concerned with capturing a visual. Pitching a television station requires you to paint a picture of what the viewer will see if the camera crew decides to capture coverage.
 - Radio is often about providing perspective and expert resources. Radio talk shows often look for local opinion leaders and experts to weigh in on topics that will spark an interesting discussion for listeners, and prompt numerous call ins.
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How News Is Released to Media

There are many ways that news is disseminated to the media. Many times, we make a call or send an email to the appropriate reporter. We will often provide the reporter with a news release, calendar announcement, news brief or news advisory.

- News release – This is a one to two page document that explains a story idea in detail, including quotes, statistics, etc. Many times weekly, community and rural publications will publish the release as is. The larger publications and broadcast mediums will use it as a springboard to develop a more in-depth story.
- News brief – This is a one to two paragraph announcement. News briefs are distributed to the media to announce grants, awards, new staff, etc.
- Calendar announcement – This is distributed to publicize community events. Calendar announcements must be released three to four weeks before an event so that the media can publicize the event and the public has time to register.
- News advisory – This is sent out to the media to inform them about an event and encourage them to cover the event.
- Letter to the editor – A letter to the editor is released to the editorial pages of a publication as a way to share one’s opinion on a topic of public interest.
- Social media- Reporters increasingly monitor twitter, facebook and blogs for story ideas.

Suggesting Story Ideas:

Caring for Colorado Foundation’s grantees are making news everyday. It is a team effort to identify and promote opportunities.

By working together, we have the opportunity to position the Foundation and its grantees as THE source of information for the media and community on issues such as:

- Oral health
 - Mental health
 - Preventive health
 - Patient navigation
 - Workforce-nursing
 - Safety net (capacity and access) for the underserved
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The “over the fence” test

Often the best opportunities will come from personal interests, successes and community involvement. We often tell people that if something happens that is so unique or exciting that you can't wait to tell your colleagues, friends, family or neighbor “over the fence,” chances are it is newsworthy.

- Are you excited about a new program, industry trend or community event your organization is participating in or supporting?
- Are you moved by a client's/patient's experience.
- Is there something unique about your program/project and its benefits to your community.
- Did your organization, program or staff member receive a recent award or honor?
- Is someone from your organization speaking or presenting at an industry or community event.

I Have An Idea. Now What?

You know your community and your organization best. We need your assistance to make working with your local media successful. Please be on the lookout for interesting, out-of-the-ordinary stories. And remember no idea is a bad one. Call or email Jennifer Nuhfer at jennifer@morethanpr.com or 303-320-7790 with story ideas anytime.

All we need to know is who, what, where, when and why it's interesting. We'll then contact you for more information and to talk about how we might be able to use your idea in our outreach. NOTE: The more lead-time you can provide on a story idea, the more likely we are to be able to secure interest from a targeted media outlet.