

INTRODUCTION TO WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Knowing how to work with the media will give you an excellent tool to generate public interest in National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. Television coverage of an event or a personal interview in a newspaper, to mention just two options, can help you call attention to available services, flag volunteer opportunities, and raise awareness about the impact of crime, particularly on victims and their families.

There are two kinds of media coverage: paid and unpaid. Paid media coverage is usually known as advertising. Unpaid media coverage can take a variety of forms, such as community service announcements, letters to the editor (for newspapers, magazines or online publications), and photos, articles or features generated either by you or by a reporter.

The first step in getting either sort of media exposure is having a clear idea of your **target audience** so you can select the most appropriate medium. Who is your message aimed at, and which media will be most effective in reaching that audience? For example, an older audience is more likely to use traditional media (television, radio, newspapers etc.), whereas a younger audience might be reached best through the Web. A community newspaper will appeal to a different audience than a local business newspaper.

Another important consideration is **hook**. What will catch the attention of your audience and make them interested in your event or story? The fact that you are running your event during National Victims of Crime Awareness Week will help “sell” the story to the media. You can also make use of information from this Resource Guide’s fact sheets. Tying your event to local accounts or statistics is likely the most important incentive for media, so you should give some thought to possible local connections. You might want to ask a local radio or television host or newspaper columnist to participate in your event as a special guest, host or moderator. You can also ask local media to sponsor your event. See the Event Planning section for more details.



Advertising

If you have a budget, advertising can be an effective way to reach your audience. Traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines can help you produce an advertisement for broadcast or print. The cost will vary depending on such factors as the size of the media readership, what other media is available (competition), the number of times your ad appears, its size or length, and where it is placed (e.g. front page or back cover) or when it is run (during a top-rated evening show or in the middle of the afternoon). Contact the advertising department of your target media for more details.

Media Relations/Publicity

It is possible to get significant media coverage of your event without paying for advertising.

Public Service Announcements

Most broadcast and print media will announce upcoming community events in community calendars or bulletins free of charge. Send the details of your event to the attention of the community events calendar at local papers and radio and television stations. In addition, radio stations, local cable channels and some television stations will run public service announcements (PSAs).

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor in newspapers and magazines can be powerful tools to raise awareness about victim issues and to promote your event at the same time.

Preparing Your Message

Getting the media to cover your event can be a bit more involved. You will need to think of a hook and prepare a few written materials in advance, such as a news release and background information about the event or victim issues that you want to highlight. The fact sheets, histories, success stories, testimonials and sample news release included in the Resource Guide may be helpful.

You will need to identify someone in your organization as the media contact or spokesperson – someone who can promote your event and respond to inquiries from journalists and the public. This person should have a good understanding of the nature and purpose of the event and the important issues involved. Prepare some key messages in advance so the spokesperson will be sure to deliver the right message.

The spokesperson should also be prepared to answer the hard questions. A list of Questions and Answers (Q&As) can be helpful. Spend some time thinking of questions that an investigative reporter might ask and prepare answers that will help your spokesperson stay on message.

Basic Dos and Don'ts for Media Spokespersons

- Prepare the key messages beforehand.
- Listen carefully to questions before answering.
- Emphasize key messages.
- Stick to the facts, stay on topic.
- Be driven by the message, not the questions.
- Do not speculate.
- Do not answer hypothetical questions.
- Do not feel obliged to fill “dead air” or “talk needlessly.”

Getting the Message Out

Local media Web sites generally provide up to date contact information which you can use to build a good media directory that can be helpful both during the Week and throughout the year.

You should contact the assignment or news editor at community newspapers, television and radio stations at least two weeks before your event. Community television and newspapers, in particular, require plenty of prior notice to accommodate their recording and print schedules (though magazine timelines are longer). Describe your plans and explain why the event will be of interest to the media's target audience; provide the date, time, and location of the event, and say who will be participating, including special guests. Follow up your first contact by sending a small package of background information with your news release.

If media outlets do not have staff to cover your activity, offer to write an article on the event for them. Many community newspapers will accept stories or photographs of community events they cannot attend.

Remember that television tells a story through pictures. Make sure your event has plenty of photo opportunities. The more engaging the pictures, the more likely you will get coverage.

Always remind the media about your activities the day before – a media advisory sent by e-mail or fax is a good way to update them on any last-minute changes and encourage them to come out.

Additional Media Activities

Radio and television talk shows can provide an opportunity for listeners to learn about and discuss the importance of victim issues in their community. Encourage radio hosts and producers of TV news and public affairs programs to plan a special program for their audiences during National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. You should provide them with a local hook and a list of possible interviewees/panelists for the program.

Using the Web

The Internet is an important emerging tool in media relations. For some target audiences, the Internet may be their main source of news. Many mainstream media outlets now offer content that is available only on their Web sites, and there are numerous Web news sites, blogs and community group event listings that you may wish to take advantage of.

