



## Youth Organizations in the Media

One of the goals of “Youth Driven” was to create awareness and appreciation of youth driven organizations within the youth and larger community. We thought that having better access to mainstream media would be a good first step. Some of our partners had expressed their frustration that any time they got media coverage their message was manipulated. Others couldn't seem to get any coverage at all.

The following information comes from a workshop that was given by Darlene Haber, an independent producer with MediaVision Inc. Her main focus was on personal contact between the youth organizations and the media. She stressed again and again the importance of establishing a personal relationship with reporters. If you want to get a certain media to cover your work you have to get to know them. Read the paper. Figure out who writes what. Find someone you think will be sympathetic to your cause and call them. Be persistent but not pushy. Recognize that they are stressed and have a lot of work to do. Try to make it easy for them to work with you by fitting into their schedule as best you can and giving them all the information they need. Always follow-up, and keep them informed about your new projects.

Another focus of “Youth Driven” that came out especially in this section is the idea of partnerships. Ideally these partnerships can be created not only between youth organizations, but also with the larger community. The media workshop brought together a group of young people representing five of our partner organizations. As follow-up to the workshop we managed to set up a meeting with the editor in chief and other senior editors of the Vancouver Sun. This partnership allowed us to access people who we would not have been able to meet with individually, and we are hopeful that an on-going relationship will make space for new opportunities for other organizations as well.

We recognize that priming a reporter in this way is a lengthy process, and that many of your organizations may not have the time to spend so much energy working on the

media. Maybe there will be some projects when you will have the time and others when you won't. (We certainly don't expect everyone to go out and hire a media relations person tomorrow.) It may be easiest to work on reporters as a coalition of groups as we did with the Vancouver Sun. Again, this information is meant as a resource, and everything is relative to your needs and situation. Just do what you can.

## The Benefits of Speaking to the Media

The media in all its various forms can help you communicate with the public and with decision makers on an ongoing basis. What we are advocating here is a calculated proactive approach to the media. This kind of strategy can help you accomplish the following goals:

1. Inform the community about the problems that are facing the communities.
2. Provide expert information issues so the public can make informed choices.
3. Help focus public attention on your problems or concerns.
4. Gain public support for your ideas, issues.
5. Use public support for your future plans to influence government policy makers.
6. Use public support to gain funding for implementation.

### IDENTIFYING YOUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

For a media campaign to be successful, it is important to first clearly identify your goals and objectives.

1. You must have a clear idea of what your message is. Only then can you determine the best way to go about getting that message into the public eye. Without a clear focus, any media attention will not be directed, and will likely not satisfy your objectives.
2. Once you have determined what message (messages) you want to capture the media's attention, you can begin looking at the types of activities or issues that would help advance your goals.
3. If there are several issues or messages you would like to gain attention, keep a list of them, and if media attention is focused on that issue because of another event in the news, try to turn that media attention into something you can "*hook*" your issue onto.

4. Identify spokespeople who are articulate, knowledgeable, and are interested in dealing with the media. Don't try to force someone into assuming that role if they are not comfortable. Their discomfort will show, and reflect poorly on the GVRD as a whole. Some people are media "*naturals*." Search for these people.

#### HINTS ON MAKING STORIES MORE NEWSWORTHY

There are no hard and fast rules for what stories or clips appeal to one reporter while making another yawn. There are, however, a few keys that can help you. The most significant is in understanding that in order to get them interested in you and your agenda, you have to focus on their agenda. Learn who they are and how they work, and then FIT YOUR NEEDS TO THEIRS.

#### Common Characteristics of Reporters:

1. They are people with stacks of pieces of paper on their desks and little or no time to go through them
2. The media outlets they work for have a voracious appetite for stories.
3. They are curious individuals.
4. They are sponges for new information.
5. They are overworked and underpaid.

Don't expect the reporter to do all the work to sort through your mountain of material and then write just the story you wanted. Or to sort through 20 minutes of an interview and pick just the 2 sentences you wanted used. It won't happen...or worse, they will get the story all wrong and it will be worse than not having done anything in the first place. To get the story you want, to get the statement made that is the most crucial, YOU have to do the work. YOU have to do the preliminary work to assure (as much as possible) that your agenda is the one that is used. You can only control the interview through what you say.

## Media Outlets

There are several different types of media outlets. Each operates with a different set of rules and has different goals. Knowing something about each will help you determine which type of media outlet best serves YOUR objectives. First, there are some similarities worth noting.

## Similarities

1. Deadlines are absolute.
2. Need to have details is immediate.
3. Goals are the same: to provide audience with new information and/or good stories.
4. Severe time and space limitations. (editing)
5. Distinction between news and features.
6. Structure: reporters, editors, managing editors, producers.
7. All can distort reality-they just do it differently!
8. Analysis may not be what you had in mind.

## Differences

### Broadcast TV

1. Broadest audience
2. Visual exposure, better product recognition
3. Quoted directly, less chance of error
4. Need either great pictures or emotional story
5. Have to make time for TV
6. Demands a more practiced response

### Broadcast Radio

1. Provides more detail
2. Exerts more control over topic and content
3. More interactive with audience
4. Immediate response

### Print - Daily Newspaper

1. Don't have to be there - can be done by phone
2. More tangible - you can clip and save
3. Can provide more extensive coverage
4. No requirement for visuals
5. Facts and figures can be easily reproduced
6. Frequent "*misquotes*"
7. Editors alter stories

### Print - Community Newspapers

1. Less rigorous about "*news*"
2. Linked directly to community issues

3. More “*people*” oriented
4. Less staff - more responsive to handouts, prepared copy
5. Geographically limited

### Magazines

1. Long deadlines - story must be time “*insensitive*”
2. Longer story possibilities
3. Specialized, usually aimed at very specific market

### Trade Publications

1. Line between editorial and advertising is less clear
2. Very targeted to niche market
3. Opportunity for more detail and complexity

## Hints on Dealing With the Media

- Be prepared and be available because every media opportunity is a chance for you to convey your issues and your message to the public.
- Always decide what you want to say, and how you want to say it before talking to any reporter.
- Listen carefully to the question. Don't jump in to answer before you are sure what is being asked and have time to think about your response.
- Find any relevant facts that are requested quickly.
- Remember “*No comment*” is a comment, and the message it conveys is GUILT. It's like waving a red flag in front of a bull. If you can't answer a question, say so...if you don't know, admit it.
- Never alter the truth...if half-truths are discovered they will ruin your credibility.
- View every opportunity for media coverage as an offer of free advertising...and use it that way-with your own agenda.
- There is no such thing as “*off the record*”. When communicating to a reporter, assume everything you say can be used.
- Don't ask if you can review the story in advance-you can't.

- Do ask reporters for details about the story they are doing. Often your interview is a small part of a larger story and you need to know that before the interview.
- Discover what the deadlines are and help reporters meet them.
- Decide before the interview what you will/will not say. The ONLY control you have is in the answers you give.
- Never argue with a reporter or lose your temper regardless of the questions being asked.
- Keep answers short and to the point - they will be edited anyway.
- Don't speculate, ramble on, or let your thoughts wander.
- Try to get to know key reporters and or columnists and try to create ongoing relationships. Some have "soft spots," issues, or causes they are particularly interested in...and if you discover what they are you can often hook your stories into their areas of interest.

## Preparing for an Interview

1. Know in advance what your position is and be able to explain it clearly and concisely. Try explaining it in 30 seconds.
2. Before any interviews organize 2 or 3 points you want to make:
  - write them out
  - simplify and shorten the points
  - practice
3. Place your most important points at the beginning of each response where they will be clear and isolated.
4. Be sure of the facts and understand your overall objectives and strategies. Don't work at cross purposes to other agencies.
5. Have a positive attitude about the opportunity to be interviewed.

6. Its not only words that communicate. An energetic direct response portrays candor and confidence.
7. Don't feel pressured to respond instantaneously to a difficult question or a complex subject. Take the time you need to organize your thoughts.
8. Think fast, but talk slow.
9. Never forget who your audience is - you may be talking to a reporter, but your audience is the people who hear or read what you are saying.
10. Humanize your responses by allowing some of your personality to come through.
11. Reporters questions rarely ever appear, only your answers, so begin every answer in a positive way referring back to the question.
12. Avoid responding to hypothetical questions-don't speculate.
13. Avoid jargon.
14. Speak in the first person. We will be doing, not the GVRD is...
15. Never lie, but you don't have to tell all either!

## Keeping the Reporter on your Agenda

There are several techniques for helping you deflect difficult questions and keep the reporter focused on what you want discussed. Mastering these techniques will help you succeed in getting media attention for your agenda - not theirs.

1. "Hooking" as in putting out bait and allowing you to respond on your agenda. For instance:
  - "That's just one of the ways we...."
  - "We have a number of exciting new...."
  - "We're looking forward to...."
  - "We've set some high expectations...."
2. "Bridging" will move the focus of the question back onto your agenda with surprisingly few words. For instance:
  - "Yes, but..."
  - "No, but..."

- “I don’t know the answer to that, but what I do know is...”
  - “That’s the way you interpret it, but we...”
3. “Flagging” a way to deflect questions by offering new information, or at least, a new direction. For instance:
    - “The most important thing to remember is...”
    - “The information we’ve seen indicates...”
    - “There are two things I think are relevant...”

## Managing the Interview

1. Find a comfortable position and stay there.
2. Guard against fidgeting, wringing your hands or tapping a pencil.
3. Look the interviewer in the eye and maintain eye contact.
4. Listen attentively.
5. Use natural, low key body or hand movements.
6. Don’t wear sunglasses, chew gum, or swivel or rock in a chair.
7. Look at the interviewer or glance down, don’t gaze around or lift your eyes or head upward...as if looking for divine inspiration.
8. Avoid jangling jewelry, large bracelets and shiny earrings.

## Dealing with the tough Questions

There are several interview pitfalls. An awareness of them helps keep you from falling in.

### NEEDLING

“Do you really expect us to buy that idea?”

### Response

“Yes, absolutely!” and go on to describe why.

### FALSE FACTS

“So there is really no difference between the municipalities and the GVRD?”

### Response

Try to use some part of the question to correct the reporter graciously...such as, There are some differences but the most important thing to remember is....

### REINTERPRETATION OF YOUR RESPONSE

“So what we have here is an accounting system that allows governments to hoodwink the public.”

**Response**

Avoid using reporter's loaded words. "What we are concerned about is..."

**PUTTING WORDS IN YOUR MOUTH**

"So you don't think the government has created an accurate system of accounting for public funds."

**Response**

The reporter is trying to get you to say things you don't want to say. Don't argue with the question, but firmly state your position. We believe.....

## Evaluating Coverage You Received

Each time you follow these suggestions, the results can be different. The causes for the differences are as varied as the stories and the people you talk to about them.

In each of the communities, or at each of the news outlets, there will be certain individuals who you will begin to get to know. As you learn about them and the items they cover, you will gain insights into how they treat certain issues, and how to best communicate with them.

After every attempt at getting news coverage, whether successful or unsuccessful, analyze your performance. Ask the following questions:

1. What would have helped the story be told more effectively. Could you have found a person to better illustrate the point you were trying to make?
2. Is there a more articulate spokesperson?
3. Is there a better way to contact the media outlet?
4. Ask if they prefer calls or releases. Could you have written your own story?
5. If the story didn't get covered, is there someone in the media you can ask about why. What didn't work?
6. What could have been done to make the story more attractive or more interesting to the media?
  
7. If something went wrong, analyze that too. Could the message have been clearer? What went wrong with the written material? The interview? Did the reporter get the facts muddled? How can that be avoided next time? If there was a mistake, how can it be corrected?

8. By continually trying to get media coverage, you will quickly learn what works and what doesn't...and hopefully why. By beginning to build contacts in each of the communities, you will start discovering allies - people who are sympathetic to your cause and who can help you.
9. Always remember the media needs good stories on a daily or a weekly basis. Their best source of stories comes from you...the people who are out there in the community working your hearts out and finding out what is really going on. Once you learn how to translate what you have learned into news stories, you will be able to place them successfully, and frequently.

## 10 Keys To Dealing With The Media

1. Prepare in advance
  - Anticipate issues and questions
  - Determine how to answer the tough months
2. Have a simple CORE message that permeates all communications
  - This message should not change with the specific issues
3. Have three key messages
  - These are messages that can change from day to day and week to week
4. Lead the person/reporter to YOUR story
  - Don't get hooked into following the reporter's story-try to get them to follow yours
5. Do a pre-interview with the reporters
  - Ask them what is their story
  - What is their deadline
  - Who else are you talking to
  - When will the story run
  - How long will the interview take
6. Delay to prepare and do a pre-interview before meeting the public, or reporters
  - Ask yourself what is the story you want to tell
  - Determine how to best get the reporter on your agenda
  - Determine how you will answer all the hardest questions you can think of-just in case the reporter asks them
  - Remember your core and key messages

7. Keep answers brief and simple
  - Avoid all technical jargon
  
8. Work with the reporter to clarify issues
  - If you get the feeling the reporter is unclear about the issues make every effort to clarify your position
  - Politely clarify any misinformation the reporter might have
  - If asked an unfair question, say so
  - Remember to remain calm and never be argumentative no matter what the reporter asks or says
  - Never criticize the reporter, or loose your temper
  - Never use the words "no comment" they imply guilt
  
9. Don't feel obligated to answer every question
  - You can get back to the reporter with additional information
  - You can defer question to another person, or you can defer the question but you should give a reason that is credible
  
10. Evaluate every experience - because experience is the best teacher

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