

# Media Relations Tools & Techniques

Below are descriptions and tips for using the most common media relations tools. A combination of these tools, spread over time, is the basis of a good media relations campaign. Use every available channel of communication to get your message out to the community. Always look for fresh “hooks” to increase your media exposure. Be sure to include a contact name, phone number (alternate phone number if available) and email address on all media documents so interested reporters can get in contact with you.

**Media Advisories / Media Alerts** are brief, one-page, written notices designed to alert the media of an upcoming news event, such as a news conference. Advisories include the who, what, where, when and why of your activity. Examples of what visuals will be available for photographs and video is also a good idea to include. In providing the media with complete information, an advisory should include background information on the existing severity of a traffic safety threat, and introduce the traffic safety program that addresses this problem. The actual name of the program and the dollar amount of the OTS grant should be disclosed as well.

Reporters may want to conduct their own research prior to your event. You can help to point media in the right direction by providing the OTS Marketing and Public Affairs telephone number (916-262-2975) and the OTS Web site address ([www.ots.ca.gov](http://www.ots.ca.gov)). Be sure to also include parking information and directions. Language should be enticing and in the future tense.

Advisories should be sent via fax or email two or three days before an event and followed by a phone call. Remember, weekly newspapers need more lead time than dailies. Radio and TV generally need two days notice. Call your local television stations and ask for the name of the News Assignment Editor, who should always receive the media advisory. Some stations may choose not to give you a name and instruct you to send information directly to the News Desk. Always call the media the morning of an event to remind them of the time and location and notify them of any changes due to weather, etc.

**Press Releases / News Releases** offer more information than media advisories and reach more contacts in less time than phone calls. A news release may precede a news event you want covered, be used to make an announcement or provide a response to a current issue or recent story. If possible, limit your news release to one page (no longer than two).

Monitor local daily, weekly and monthly publications to determine which reporters cover your issue. At larger publications, it is important to target specific reporters and section editors. At smaller publications, all media materials may pass directly through the Editor. Be sure to organize the information in your news release in order of importance — with the most pertinent information for the public to know positioned at the top and supporting information toward the bottom. This “pyramid” format ensures that as your news release is edited for available space, key information is more likely to remain part of the story. All key information should be in the first two paragraphs. Include quotes from local authorities or well-known community leaders to support your story. When possible, use digital pictures to complement a news release and provoke interest in the subject. In order to increase your organization’s credibility and the likelihood that your release will be read, only send out a release when

you have some real news. News releases can be a valuable communication tool, but only if they are really news. News releases can be used for “hard” and “soft” news.

**Fact Sheets** are similar to a media advisory in that they include the same basic who, what, when, where and why of your campaign or event. Fact sheets contain key facts, statistics, dates and milestones and an overall snapshot for readers.

**News Conferences** should be used when you have a visual story or need to get information out to all media sources at once.

- News conferences should be held in a location that is easily accessible to the media and is relevant to the message you are presenting. For example, consider planning your media event at a local elementary school when promoting bicycle safety or at a high school when promoting teen seat belt use.
- Make sure the site offers adequate electrical, audio and visual access for reporters.
- Choose a time and date that are convenient for reporters. Usually mornings (not before 9:30 a.m.) or early afternoons on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday generally work well for reporters. Avoid scheduled broadcasts like noon and 5 p.m. Be sure your news conference is not at the same time as another newsworthy event, as you don't want to compete for media attention. Take the time to investigate other events that might overlap with yours so you can avoid any conflicts well ahead of time.
- Alert the media of a news conference by sending out a media advisory two to three days prior to the event. Follow-up with a phone call to confirm that your information was received by the correct person and take advantage of the opportunity to sell your story.
- Choose spokespeople carefully. If possible, prepare remarks for speakers to keep them on track and avoid duplication of remarks. Make sure all spokespeople (five at the most) speak for a short time (2-5 minutes) and are available after the news conference to answer one-on-one questions.
- Have media kits on hand which include: event agenda, news release, fact sheet, contact sheet with speakers' names, titles and organizations and a brief background on your program. Media kits can also be sent to those reporters who were unable to attend your event.

**Radio and TV Talk Shows** provide a format for guests to present issues and concerns of interest to the community. Identify the most appropriate programs for reaching your intended audience, including local cable or community-access channels. To place a spokesperson on a talk show, send a pitch letter to the talk show producer indicating why the issue is important to listeners and viewers. Follow-up with a phone call to make your pitch. Plan on submitting your request a few months in advance as talk shows often require significant lead time. Be sure to review Section VI of this resource guide, *Interview Techniques*, prior to the interview.

**Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** are another good way to reach the public. PSAs are used by print and broadcast media as a means of providing community service messages. TV and radio PSAs are generally 15, 20, 30 or 60 seconds in length and are run on radio and television free of charge by the station. To inquire about placing a PSA, call the station's public affairs director and ask what their PSA policy is. Tell them you are interested in producing a PSA and find out how best to proceed. Stations will have different requirements, so it's important to place that call. Competition is fierce for

PSA placement, so be sure your topic is timely. The same holds true for print PSAs. These can be in the format of camera-ready ad slicks with a simple message, *Report Drunk Drivers. Call 911* or even a logo, such as *Click It or Ticket* (if it conveys a message). Inquire about a magazine or newspaper's PSA or filler guidelines. Size specifications greatly vary. Also be sure to plan far in advance as PSA calendars book quickly.

**Calendar Releases** are modified news releases designed to give community calendar editors the basic information about your event. Whenever possible, send calendar releases four to six weeks in advance to ensure inclusion in the media's community calendar. However, check with your local publications to get a more accurate deadline.

**Print and Broadcast Editorials** are used to react to a recent editorial, event or news story, to make a point, state a fact or offer an opinion or also to correct misinformation. These editorials can be submitted to a newspaper, TV or radio station.

- **Letters to the Editor** should be submitted within a few days of the event or activity to which you are responding. Timeliness is key in whether or not your letter will be printed. Letters should be well-written, succinct and to the point. Generally, 75-100 words is the maximum length recommended. Find out what is the preferred format (fax, email, etc.) for submitting letters to the editor for each publication to ensure that your letter will receive the best chance of running. Daily newspapers operate on such a quick time frame that email is often the preferred method for submission. By the time traditional mail arrives, the moment may be lost. Letters should be typed, signed and include a contact name and phone number.
- **Op-Eds** should be written in a news article format, but in an opinionated fashion, outlining your organization's persuasive points and solutions to issues, and citing necessary statistics and facts as back up to your opinions and/or arguments. Op-Eds should be submitted to the Editorial Page Editor of a newspaper. Similar to a letter to the editor, an op-ed piece provides you with a format to react to an issue, state a fact or express an opinion. Op-eds should also be typed and signed. Maximum length is generally 450 to 600 words (check with each publication to confirm length and submission requirements). *This information can also often be found on the Editorial page of the publication.*
- **Broadcast Editorials** serve the same purpose as a letter to the editor or op-ed piece — to react to an issue, state a fact or offer an opinion. Broadcast Editorials should be directed to the station manager of a TV or radio station. It's always a good idea to call in advance and ask about the specific requirements for submission, including length and format.
- **Editorial Board Briefings** are another route to consider. In an editorial briefing, key members from your agency or organization sit down with the editorial board of your local paper and discuss the matter at hand — seat belt use, pedestrian safety, impaired driving, child restraint, etc. — at length. To arrange for an editorial board briefing, submit a letter of request to the editorial page editor. Follow up with a phone call to make your pitch. See what time and date are convenient for them and be prepared to send background information (Suggestion: This is a good way to get your local paper involved with traffic safety issues affecting your community).

**Media Contacts** are a crucial component of a successful media relations plan. It doesn't matter how newsworthy the story or how great the news release or op-ed piece is if the information is not received by the correct media contact. Contact information is readily available online and can also be obtained by calling the newspaper, television or radio station directly to find out who the news director (radio) or assignment editor (television) is. Additionally, media databases are available in both hardcopy and electronic format from a variety of sources, including Bacon's Media Directory and Metro California Media, to name a few. These directories are somewhat costly to obtain. Remember, staff turnover in the media industry is relatively high, so be sure to update your contact list on a regular basis.

**Wire Services**, such as Business Wire, PR NewsWire and Associated Press provide another mechanism for distributing your media materials to a large number of media outlets in a short amount of time. Depending on the wire service, you can select the specific geographic region (California, Northern California, Bay Area, Los Angeles, etc.) to receive your materials. You can also select applicable trade publications, such as transportation, government, health, etc. Costs associated with using wire services vary depending upon circulation and number of words. Blast fax services are also available to assist with distribution of your materials. Visit the following Web sites for more information on wire services:

- [www.businesswire.com](http://www.businesswire.com)
- [www.prnewswire.com](http://www.prnewswire.com)

**Long Lead Publications**, such as industry newsletters and regional magazines, are another good venue for promoting your program or campaign. Unlike the quick turnaround associated with daily news services, magazines and newsletters require much more lead-time, often several months in advance, to run a story. A bylined article, similar to an op-ed piece can be modified for a magazine or newsletter. Keep in mind that the focus of the article should connect with the intended readers (audience). If you're interested in having an article included in the July issue of a publication, chances are the article will need to be submitted by late April or early May. Careful planning will avoid missed deadlines.

**Follow-Up and Monitoring Efforts** are an important part of any media relations campaign. Distributing the materials is just the beginning. Keep the issue alive by writing letters to columnists and responding to articles and editorials. Make follow-up calls to ensure that your news release, calendar release or op-ed lands in the right hands. To track successful media placements, utilize online sources, such as Google, or one of the professional media tracking services in your region.

## Visual Ideas

As previously noted, the television media are more likely to cover your traffic safety story if you make it as visual as possible. The following are ideas to include in your news conference, photo-op or media interview.

### DUI:

- Provide tours of DUI command vehicles or other equipment used in sobriety checkpoints.
- Demonstrate fatal vision goggles. Have them on hand for members of the media to try.
- Display the remains of a vehicle involved in a crash with a drunk driver.
- Consider using the following to represent those who were killed by drunk drivers in your county or region:

- Sunglasses to represent teens
- Clear alcohol bottles filled with red liquid
- A row of gurneys
- Use stuffed animals, such as teddy bears, or dolls to represent children killed by drunk drivers.
- Decorate an empty playground in flowers and bows as a symbol of goodbye to children killed by drunk drivers.
- Conduct a sobriety field test demonstration with a media personality or traffic reporter.
- Coordinate Grim Reaper classroom visits to high school students.
- Hold a candlelight vigil.
- Release doves, as a symbolic gesture of hope.
- Place ribbons on patrol cars.
- Have media personality play a video game while consuming alcohol to illustrate impact on reaction time.
- Prepare non-alcoholic “mocktails” on cooking segments on TV or radio shows to promote responsible holiday celebrations.
- Hold event at the scene of a DUI crash.

#### Occupant Protection:

- Utilize *Click It or Ticket* creative materials to produce signs, banner or other visuals.
- Coordinate a rollover simulator demonstration to illustrate impact of a crash.
- Drop a watermelon off a three-story building onto the windshield of a junked car to represent impact of crash.
- Display a damaged child safety seat that saved a child’s life.
- Display a damaged child safety seat involved in a collision to illustrate non-use of damaged seats.
- Remove damaged or recalled safety seats by tossing into dump truck.
- Utilize Vince & Larry, the crash test dummies, to generate enthusiasm at community events.

#### Emergency Medical Equipment:

- Life Flight helicopters, ambulances and fire trucks all make great backgrounds for media events. Highlight new and enhanced equipment and technologies whenever possible.
- Uniformed EMS personnel (life flight crew, firefighters, paramedics).
- Conduct CPR, “jaws of life” or other extrication demonstrations.

#### Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety:

- Display a collection of damaged helmets worn by a cyclist who survived a crash.
- Display pairs of running shoes (or children’s shoes) to illustrate pedestrians killed.
- Utilizing groups such as Safe Moves to conduct bicycle safety demonstrations.
- Have police officers on bicycles conduct demonstrations about proper riding and safety techniques.
- Host a checking station for proper helmet fitting.
- Offer safety inspections of bicycles and bicycle equipment.
- Drop two melons, one unprotected and one that is safely nestled in a bicycle helmet, from

an elevated platform to simulate the impact of a crash with, and without, protective headgear.

Line up small bicycles or bicycle helmets in a row to illustrate the number of children killed or injured in cycling collisions.

- Use backdrop of traffic signs (stop, yield, railroad crossing, traffic light) for media events.

### Speed Control

- Position radar trailers near the event. The media and other attendees can monitor the speed of passing traffic.
- Create large signage, including illustrations and graphs that detail the technical advantages of the Stealth Stat devices.
- Demonstrate the nighttime data collection capabilities of the Stealth Stat device.
- Have children create and display poster size drawings that feature speed regulation devices and speed control messages.