



A GUIDE TO MEDIA RELATIONS

WHY DO MEDIA RELATIONS?

Many nonprofits are accidentally well-kept secrets in their communities. This lack of public awareness can impede an agency's mission to do good work. As a member of the **FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS** campaign, having proper media relations tools is important for your agency.

As you may already know, marketing and advertising can bring donors, clients, and added awareness about an agency's programs and services. Media relations, although part of marketing and advertising, is a more focused way of communicating ideas and messages through the media to the general public without paying for ads. As a member of the **FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS** campaign, you have the opportunity to attract attention to your agency and build support in your community by taking a proactive approach with media relations. The following toolkit will help you identify stories, organize messages and communicate effectively with appropriate media outlets.

WHAT IS NEWSWORTHY ABOUT YOUR AGENCY?

Although you may think your agency is doing new and exciting things in your community, it is important to make those activities and events newsworthy for the media. Remember, you are competing with a lot of other news stories and with communication professionals who are also trying to catch the attention of reporters, editors and other gatekeepers to promote their product or cause.

The first step in engaging the media is identifying what kind of news you are trying to pitch. Events, stories and announcements usually fall under **FIVE** categories of news.

HARD NEWS is new information that is just becoming public and has not previously been reported, or a new angle to an ongoing story. **Example:** *Illinois foster care agency joins statewide campaign to change negative stigma towards foster care.*

SOFT NEWS typically involves a personal point of view on a story, such as a profile, human interest, or feature story. **Example:** *Foster care campaign inspires local college students to join new mentoring program.*

OP-EDS are opinion pieces (published on the page opposite a newspaper's editorials) that convey the viewpoints of experts or the public on a particular subject. **Example:** *What the **FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS** campaign means to me, by an ex-foster child.*

EVENTS can be both soft and hard news, depending on the type of event and the participants. A hard news event will have a notable speaker or a special limited occurrence. A soft news event will have a human interest appeal that is more general and topic-based. **Hard News Event Example:** *Foster care agency holds campaign launch with local senator unveiling new downtown billboard.* **Soft News Event Example:** *Foster care agency holds "chili-cook off" fundraiser for anti-stigma campaign.*

CALENDAR ANNOUNCEMENTS promote upcoming events and appearances. Newspapers, especially local papers, have calendar sections that detail upcoming events. **Example:** **FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS** Rally, Johnson Memorial Gym, 7:30pm, Tuesday March 8, 2008.

WHAT IS YOUR ANGLE?

After you have identified what category your story falls under, you need to find solid supporting angles to present to the media. By identifying these angles and including them while you sell or *pitch* your story, you are more likely to get a placement or *hit*.

The following are angles that you should try to include when building your story idea:

BASIC APPEAL: Make sure your story is relevant to the audience of the targeted media outlet. **Example:** *Pitch a story about foster care mothers to a local parenting magazine.*

GOOD TIMING MAKES GOOD STORIES: Your story should be closely or directly related to a current event. **Example:** *Agency X, member of the **FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS** campaign, celebrates foster care month with fundraising gala.*

THE LOCAL ANGLE: Your story should have local statistics, celebrities, opinion leaders and spokespeople. **Example:** ***FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS** agency applauds Mayor's expanded commitment to foster care issues.*

THE HUMAN INTEREST FACTOR: Your story should be relevant to people's daily lives and appeal to the reader's emotions. **Example:** *Foster kids gain support through a new local campaign and form local club.*

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PEOPLE: Always be prepared to provide solid data and statistics to support your story idea. Also, provide experts and "real people" for interviews and supporting quotes. It's important to show that you can provide plenty of material and quotes for the reporter.

PRACTICE + RELATIONSHIPS = REPUTATION

PRACTICE

Media relations is a muscle your agency needs to use and build. Having a plan and developing practice will pay off in the long term for your agency. Do not be discouraged if you do not see results right away; often a single day's news story comes from months of outreach and a series of information exchanges. It's important to know that you and the media both want to achieve goals that depend on one another. More specifically, you want to reach the public while the media wants to capture the public's attention. You provide the stories and they provide the coverage. This trading of services is all based on your relationship with reporters, editors and other media professionals.

RELATIONSHIPS

One way of keeping that relationship healthy and alive is sending the right message to the right people at the right time. Remember the following points when working with the media:

- 1. Identify the right people.** Make sure you are writing or talking to the right reporter or editor. Just because a person works at a paper or works in a certain section of that paper doesn't mean they are interested in foster care. Do research on past stories written about foster care and try to find reporters and editors who have an interest in this topic.
- 2. Build rapport.** Keep the channels of communication open with your local reporters, producers and editors. Let them know about what's going on at your agency without expecting a story. If they do write a story, always follow up with a note about how great the story was for the agency.
- 3. Reporters need help.** Reporters are always looking for experts to check facts, provide quotes and find data. As foster care and child welfare experts, you hold a lot of the information reporters need to write good stories. Make sure you let them know that you can help them not just with *your* story, but with *any* story dealing with foster care.

REPUTATION

Once you have practiced media relations and built good relationships, you will find that you have formed a reputation that has made your agency the "go-to" organization when issues about foster care and child welfare arise in the news. This reputation comes with time and needs to be nurtured by continuing to work on your relationship and communication with local media outlets.

PICKING MEDIA FOR YOUR STORY

There are three major forms of media with which you want to communicate. **Television, radio and print** each offer different advantages and require different methods of engagement.

TELEVISION

Many non-profits are intimidated by television and do not contact networks when they have a story. Although you may not make it on CNN, you may be surprised by how much local coverage you can achieve by contacting local stations. Because television news depends on strong visuals, it's important to know and identify when you should go after this type of media. Good opportunities include a live event or interview, footage of volunteers and mentors, or even an unveiling of a new campaign billboard.

There are different types of stories that will appeal to different television outlets. For example:

Local network affiliates or regional cable news networks	Local stories and events
Local bureaus of national networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, etc.)	Stories with national appeal and scope
University and public broadcasting stations	Community and human interest stories
Local television programs (talk, morning, etc.)	Interviews, local events and stories

WORKING WITH TELEVISION

Coordinating and pitching a story with a television station, like most of media relations, is based on talking to the right people at the right time. Below you will find a table that outlines who, when and how to talk to professionals in television.

WHO	WHAT THEY DO	WHEN TO CONTACT THEM	HOW TO CONTACT THEM* (See templates)	THINGS TO REMEMBER
News Assignment Editors	News assignment editors choose the stories the station will cover and assign specific reporters to cover them.	When you have breaking news, hard news or general news that doesn't fit with any particular reporter's beat.	- Pitch Letter - Media Advisory - Press Release	There are different editors for different segments throughout the day (i.e. morning, afternoon, evening and weekend).
News Planning Editors	News planning editors assign reporters to long-lead stories. They also list events on the station's planning calendar.	When you want to publicize an upcoming event.	- Pitch Letter - Media Advisory	Stations in small markets may not have a planning editor; contact the news assignment editor instead.
Beat/Feature Reporters	Beat reporters cover a specific issue for the television station such as health care or business. Feature reporters cover soft news and human interest stories.	When your story fits with their issue area or special interest.	- Pitch Letter - Press Release	Beat reporters know their stuff. If you are talking to a healthcare or family service reporter, make sure you have facts ready.
Program Producers/Bookers	Program producers select guests for shows and segments.	When you want to promote a spokesperson with an interview.	- Pitch Letter - Media Advisory	Larger markets may have to deal with a booker. His/her job is solely to book guest and interviews.

* Remember to always follow up any e-mail, fax or mail communication with a phone call.

RADIO

Radio works well for promoting social issues because there are usually an array of local programs that are dedicated to current events and human interest topics. Because radio stations know that many of their audience members are parents, foster care and child welfare are always great topics to pitch to them.

Like television, radio also has different kinds of programs that you want to consider when pitching a story.

TYPE OF PROGRAM	TYPE OF STORY
News segments	Breaking news, timely update to the day's news as it happens.
Listener call-in programs	Good for debating hot issues. Be sure to have your facts in order. Spokespeople may be asked to co-host.
Morning and afternoon "drive-time" programs	A mix of news, interviews and music. A great way to promote events and repetitive messages.
Talk shows	Great topic arenas for expert interviews and event promotion.
Public affairs programming	A good way to promote your organization by having a staff member act as an expert on a panel of speakers.

WORKING WITH RADIO

Relationships with radio outlets are often more permanent than those with TV outlets, and the potential for recurring airtime is greater. It's important to keep those relationships fresh, stopping by the station, emailing updates and keeping them in mind throughout the year. Just as television needs visuals, radio requires interviews. When contacting a radio station for press coverage, make sure you can always provide someone to speak. Below is the contact breakdown for radio media.

WHO	WHAT THEY DO	WHEN TO CONTACT THEM	HOW TO CONTACT THEM* (See templates)	THINGS TO REMEMBER
News Assignment Editors/ News Directors	Known as the "gatekeepers", they decide what stories will be aired.	Contact news directors with breaking/hard news. Contact news assignment editors with interviews and softer human interest stories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pitch letter - Phone Call - Press Release 	In small markets, a radio station may only have one person who is both a news director and an assignment editor.
Reporters	Reporters cover the stories, many times on location.	Contact reporters when they have been assigned a specific beat that is relevant to your story.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phone Call - Media Advisory 	Radio stations have limited resources. Reporters may depend more on directors to determine what they cover.
Program Producers	Develop ideas, manage guests and brief hosts.	Contact program producers When you want to promote a staff member who can act as an expert or talk about a new program or campaign.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pitch Letter - Phone Call - Media Advisory - Press Release 	In a small market, a host may also be the producer. Make sure your news is relevant to the show's audience.

* Calling radio contacts and following up with email is the best way to get heard. Remember: these are busy people who often wear many hats at the station; being persistent is key.

PRINT

Print publications are an excellent way to target your audience by interest and population. It is important to research the publications you are using and to know the size of their circulation, who they target and what kind of stories are featured. Publications are usually categorized as either newspapers or magazines. Although both are print forms of communication, newspapers and magazines can serve a different purpose in your media relations efforts.

NEWSPAPERS

Good for small, local regions. Great way to reach local communities about events and local announcements.

MAGAZINES

Good for larger markets. Longer lead times needed. Great way to promote agency staff with interviews and new topics in foster care. Targeting is also more focused and story ideas need to be more tailored.

WORKING WITH NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES:

Like radio, your relationship with reporters and editors is vital in getting your story in a publication. Communicating through writing is the best way to reach key gatekeepers and reporters who work in print media. It's important to write strong and clear messages to the person you are dealing with at the publication. Always be willing to provide additional information on the topic you are pitching. The more substance, the better chance you have that they will write a story about your agency. Below is the contact breakdown for print media.

WHO	WHAT THEY DO	WHEN TO CONTACT THEM	HOW TO CONTACT THEM* (See templates)	THINGS TO REMEMBER
Section Editors	They are the "gatekeepers" for specific sections of the publication.	When you have a specific story that may be of interest to a certain section editor. Best to try to contact only in small markets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pitch Letter - Press Release - Media Advisory 	Although editors assign the articles, they are busy. It's much better to talk to a beat reporter who can pitch for you to his or her editor.
Beat Reporters	Reporters who specialize in a certain topic like health, local interest or politics.	Contact reporters when they have been assigned a specific beat that is relevant to your story.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pitch Letter - Phone Call - Press Release - Media Advisory 	Beat reporters usually know a lot about their specialized topic. Make sure you can answer questions.
Calendar and Daybook Editors	They manage the listing of regional events.	When you want to let them know when an event is coming up that is open to the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Media Advisory 	It's very important to let them know far in advance of your event. This will give them more time to publicize it.

* Again, remember to always follow up any e-mail, fax or mail communication with a phone call.

COMMUNICATING TO THE MEDIA THROUGH A PITCH LETTER

WHEN TO USE A PITCH LETTER

A pitch letter followed by a phone call is an effective way to communicate a story idea to the media. Pitch letters are the best way to start a dialogue between your agency and a reporter. Research the reporter first and find out if he or she is the best person for the pitch. Then find out how he/she prefers to receive pitch letters. Most reporters now prefer email, but some television and radio reporters like to receive pitch letters by fax.

TIPS FOR WRITING A PITCH LETTER

A good pitch letter will immediately grab a reporter's attention and cause him or her to give consideration to your story idea. To achieve this, your letter must:

- Start with a good hook! The first sentence should spark the reporter's interest with an interesting fact, a creative message, a question, or breaking news.
- Get to the point quickly within the first paragraph.
- Be no longer than one page.
- Show the reporter that the story matters to his or her readers.
- Work with a local angle.
- Always be followed-up with a phone call.
- Be sure to thank the reporter for considering your story idea and to provide your contact information for follow-up purposes.

PITCH LETTER TEMPLATE

Date
Name
Title
Address

Dear Name:

There are over 17,000 children in Foster Care in Illinois. These children have to face many difficulties that others don't. One challenge that often gets overlooked is the negative attitudes and stigma that foster kids face.

Voices for Illinois Children and 64 other agencies across the state are launching the "Don't Write Me Off: Foster Kids Are Our Kids" campaign to change negative perceptions and to encourage the public to do something about foster care. The campaign launch will be held April 5, 2006 at the Ada S. McKinley Community Center and will feature a new television spot and speeches by local child welfare experts, ex-foster care youth and local television personalities. Over two hundred members of the Illinois foster care and child welfare community are expected to attend this event.

The kick off will start at 9am, speakers include:

- Nancy Ronquillo, Campaign chairwoman
- Merri Dee, WGN Director of Community Affairs
- Charmaine Gray, Former foster child

After viewing the television spot and listening to the scheduled speakers, agencies will receive campaign materials and instructions on how to implement the campaign in their own communities. Future media strategies will also be discussed.

XXXX agency can offer you:

- An interview with Jerry Stermer, President and CEO of Voices for Illinois Children, who helped spearhead the campaign.
- An interview with Les Pappas, Creative Director of Better World Advertising, the social marketing agency that produced the campaign
- An interview with Charmaine Gray, former foster child
- A advance viewing of the television commercial
- A copy of the spot after the launch

I have attached some photos of the speakers, campaign materials and stills from the television commercial. You can learn more about the campaign at www.fosterkidsareourkids.org.

Thank you for your time. For more information or available times for media interviews, please contact me at 555-555-5555

Sincerely,

Jane Doe
XXXX Agency

COMMUNICATING TO THE MEDIA WITH A PRESS RELEASE

WHEN TO USE THE PRESS RELEASE

Journalists receive thousands of press releases every day. Your release needs to stand out and needs to make sense to the journalist. Examples of what makes a press release newsworthy include:

- Hard or breaking news*
- Statement outlining your organization's position on new child welfare policies
- Announcement of new partnership, program, or campaign for your organization

* Soft news, human interest, or feature stories rarely merit a press release. These are better conveyed through a phone call and/or pitch letter.

TIPS FOR WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

- Make sure to have a bold and impressive headline in boldface type.
- Make your lead paragraph concise and include your key messages.
- Emphasize the local angle when applicable.
- Always try to include quotes; reporters use these quotes to write their stories.
- Always go from most important to least important.
- Answer the basic "who, what, when, where, why and how".
- Keep it to one page if you can, no more than two pages.
- Include all contact information: phone, website and email addresses.
- Include the date.

PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

For Immediate Release:

Enables reporters to publish the release immediately.

Organization's Logo:

Identifies and brands your organization.

Headline:

Grab reporters' attention. Subheading can be added to provide additional detail.

(Agency Logo)

Dateline:

The location where the release originated and the date the news is being released.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact
Jane Doe, 555-555-5555
JaneD@foster.org

Ads Push Communities to Do Something About Foster Care Foster Care Agencies Across Illinois Launch New Foster Care Campaign

Lead:

The first paragraph summarizes the news; a reporter should understand the purpose of the release after reading this paragraph.

CHICAGO, IL (Dec. 12, 2006) — "Don't Write Me Off: Foster Kids Are Our Kids," a partnership of child welfare agencies from every region of the state spearheaded by Voices for Illinois Children, took a major leap forward with the staged introduction of billboards, Spanish language radio spots, subway and bus ads, and print advertisements this month.

The campaign, anchored by a WGN television ad and website (www.fosterkidsareourkids.org) is a unique and powerful advertising campaign that reaches out to the public with realism and a challenge, reminding us that foster kids are everybody's kids. The campaign unites sixty-four child welfare agencies throughout Illinois to combat negative perceptions and revitalize community support for foster children.

Supporting information:

Provides additional details that a reporter can use to write a story.

"Foster parents throughout Illinois are a generous, loving group. But communities must also find ways to support their efforts to bring normalcy and healing to children in their care," said Nancy Ronquillo, CEO, Children's Home and Aid Society of Illinois and Chair of the statewide steering committee for the "Don't Write Me Off" campaign. "Educators, neighbors, health-care professionals — everyone can contribute to the well-being of Illinois' foster children," added Rick Velasquez, President, Youth Outreach Services in Chicago, and Vice-chair of the steering committee.

Jerry Stermer, President, Voices for Illinois Children stated, "This first-of-its-kind, coordinated effort aims to fundamentally change the way we think about foster care — instead of being seen as only a state responsibility, it will be seen as part of a community's job to help every child, including foster children, achieve his or her full potential."

-more-

Quote:

Always include a quote from your organization's spokesperson.

More: If more than one page, insert "-more-"

PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE CONTINUED

Because of the campaign, people are learning that there are many ways they can help foster youth. From changing attitudes to mentoring to volunteering to donating time, money or school supplies -- there is a role for everyone to play in making foster care better for children and families.

The campaign also speaks to youth who are or have been in the foster care. Commenting about the importance of community support, Charmaine Gray, a former foster youth, said, "As a young person who grew up in foster care, having people there when I needed them was so important. I was lucky enough to have a mentor to encourage me and help me over some of the rough spots. Now I'm in college studying social work and planning for a career working with foster kids."

To arrange an interview with Jerry Stremer, Nancy Ronquillo or Rick Velasquez please contact Jane Doe 555-555-5555.

Voices for Illinois Children is a statewide, non-profit, public awareness and advocacy organization whose goal is to make Illinois a much better place for our children. Voices works with parents, communities and lawmakers to ensure that public policies meet children's needs so they grow up healthy, loved, safe and well-educated.

###

Supporting information: Provides additional details that a reporter can use to write a story.

Pound sign: Try to keep your release to one page, never more than two. Use ### to signify the end of the release.

Boilerplate: Brief paragraph that describes your organization.

COMMUNICATING TO THE MEDIA THROUGH A MEDIA ADVISORY

WHEN TO USE THE MEDIA ADVISORY

A media advisory or media alert is used to let the media know about an upcoming event. The advisory should be sent to the media about two weeks before the actual event.

TIPS FOR WRITING A MEDIA ADVISORY

- Include all the details of the event. Always include when and where the function will be taking place, who will be speaking and what the major topics are that will be discussed.
- Include a contact person who will manage and schedule any interviews with the speakers.
- Know how your media wants to receive the advisory. It's always best to call your media contact and ask how they prefer to receive alerts. They will indicate email or fax. If you can't get a hold of anyone, do both.
- Follow up! This is very important. Call the reporter the day you send the advisory to see if they got it and to see if they are interested in attending. If a reporter is not interested in the event, ask if someone else at their organization or publication might be interested.
- Send out a reminder advisory one week to several days prior to the event.
- Send out a reminder the morning of the event and follow up with phone calls.
- Send a press release to all the reporters on your advisory media list, even if they didn't make it to the event.

MEDIA ADVISORY TEMPLATE

Contact Information: Name, phone number and email address of contact person.	(Agency Logo)	
What: Summarizes purpose of event.	Media Contact Jane Doe, 555-555-5555 JaneD@foster.org Media Advisory Foster Care Agencies Launch Statewide "Don't Write Me Off" Campaign Foster care advocates, opinion leaders, and social marketing experts unveil campaign	
	What: Campaign Launch and Press Conference	Where: Specific location of the event.
Supporting information: Provides supporting details and information a reporter can use to write a story.	When: April 5, 2006 Where: Ada S. McKinley Community Services 2907 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, enter through side entrance.	
	Who: Jerry Stermer, President of Voices for Illinois Children Mr Stermer will speak about the planning and development process for the campaign. Nancy Ronquillo, President of Children's Home + Aid/ Campaign Chairwoman Ms. Ronquillo will talk about the statewide participation of the 64 agencies in the development and implementation of the campaign. Les Pappas, President and Creative Director of Better World Advertising Mr. Pappas will speak about the creative development and media strategy of the campaign. Merri Dee, WGN Personality and Community Affairs Director Ms. Dee will close with WGN's commitment and partnership with foster care agencies and the campaign.	
	Why: A creative campaign was produced by a collaboration of non-profit agencies spearheaded by Voices for Illinois Children and Family Support America. WGN-TV in Chicago is sponsoring the television ads and will air them for a year. Private foster care agencies in communities across the state are participating. To arrange an interview with Jerry Stermer, Nancy Ronquillo, Les Pappas or Merri Dee, please contact Jane Doe at 555-555-5555	
Why: Provides additional information about the issue.	###	Who: Identifies event participants.

Now that you have these templates and useful tips on how to communicate to the media, remember that everyone has their own style of working with the press. Feel free to explore and adapt these methods to suit your own personality and the culture of your agency. It is your individual style and your agency's identity that are going to help reporters and other media experts remember you.

Keep track of the work you've done with a clippings book and a folder of online coverage. Regularly update your call lists with the right contact information, including phone numbers and email addresses.

Your efforts with the press may produce immediate results or may take some time. Don't be discouraged – your persistence will pay off. Investing the time and energy certainly will lead to valuable media exposure – coverage that will further your agency's mission and the child welfare movement.