

# HOW TO GET YOUR STORY TOLD

## A JOINT PROJECT OF THE

Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA)  
California Chicano News Media Association (CCNMA)  
National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA)  
San Diego Association of Black Journalists (SDABJ)



SATURDAY, JULY 9, 2005 | MEDIA ACCESS WORKSHOP

# ■ WRITING AN EFFECTIVE NEWS RELEASE OR MEDIA ADVISORY

Press releases are the quickest, cheapest and most widely used technique to initiate media coverage. You can send them to several news outlets at once, increasing your chances of coverage.

Editors can tell quickly from reading a news release whether an event is newsworthy. By writing them effectively, you are more likely to persuade an editor to cover your story.

Update your mailing list. Many organizations, including non-profit groups, continue to send releases to reporters who no longer cover the beat.

An effective release is clear, concise, accurate, complete and to the point.

- Type on standard 8½-by-11-inch paper, one side only, double-spaced. Use your organization's letterhead.
- Date the release, on top of the page. Then include, "For immediate release."
- Include the 5 Ws (who, what, when, where, why) and H (how).
- Include at least two contact people, including their name and phone numbers, preferably both day and evening numbers.
- If your lead is not news to you, it won't be news to a reporter or editor.
- Have someone copy edit your news release.
- A News Advisory is better for TV and radio.
- Be available at all times.
- If you promise something, deliver.
- If the event is visually interesting, say so!
- Include pictures only if they help tell your story.
- Keep it simple. At the end of the news release, type -30- or -end-.
- Don't assume others know anything about your topic. Use names of people; identify them by occupation or title. Say who you are and what you do.
- Be accurate and double-check facts. An editor is more likely to discard your release — and your group's credibility — if there are misspellings or other errors.

*Information courtesy of the San Diego Association of Black Journalists and the Asian American Journalists Association (Los Angeles and New York chapters).*

## ■ GETTING ON THE AIR

TV journalists are looking for short sound bites (10 to 20 seconds). TV stories cannot be as detailed as newspaper stories. TV stories are usually 90 seconds or less. Try not to repeat information already written in your press release (i.e. time, place, date of event). The facts about the event can better be told by the writer.

- Good sound bites are often those said with opinion, emotion, enthusiasm, simplicity.
- Save the details for before the camera is rolling. That is when broadcast journalists are looking for background information.
- Remember, TV is visual. Be animated. Use gestures, facial expressions and body language to help bring life to your words. But don't overdo it.
- Start your event on time. Typically, broadcast reporters are on a tight schedule, running from one event to another and capture whatever they can on tape.
- Identify spokespeople who have a story to tell. If your organization helps the elderly, select an elderly person to speak for the group. If you represent children, make children available to speak to the reporter or video photographer.
- The more visual your event, the better chance you'll get covered.
- Make your event unique.
- Dinners and meetings are hard sells. They do not make good "video."
- Be persistent. Follow up and follow through.
- Even if you say something off camera, it's still "on the record."
- Do not use organization jargon and acronyms.

## ■ GETTING IN THE PAPER

- Start your event on time.
- Provide detail, clarification, colorful quotes, real stories and first-hand accounts and anecdotes.
- You must never assume journalists — no matter how well you know or have worked with them in the past — are not on the record.
- Although print reporters may appear to be more knowledgeable about a subject because they have more time to dig for details, never assume they have all the background necessary to accurately explain your story.
- Be persistent. If one reporter is not interested, another might be.
- An event might have a better chance at getting photo placement than getting a story.
- Develop relationship with members of the media.

## ■ DEALING WITH THE MEDIA WHEN SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS

- Be honest. If something bad happens, say so. If you don't know all the details, admit it. If you're working to find a solution, say that, too.
- Offer to make more facts available as they surface. Make it a point to honor the promises you make to reporters for additional or future information.
- Identify a spokesperson and make sure that spokesperson is available and on call 24 hours a day. Communicate with that person whenever there is a new development.
- Do not go into hiding.
- When things improve, tell the media.

## ■ DEVELOP AN EYE-CATCHING HEADLINE SOMETIMES THAT'S ALL THE EDITOR WILL READ

- A basic news release is designed to capture the attention of the media in hopes that they will present your information to the public. There are some very specific guidelines to follow in the writing and presentation of your news release. Be sure that your topic is newsworthy, not an advertisement cleverly disguised as news. Include as much pertinent information in the first paragraph as possible.
- News releases should be submitted on 8½-by-11-inch paper, typed, double-spaced in a basic font (no italic) and preferably limited to one page. The release should include the who, what, when, where and why of the story. Make your release interesting enough to entice the reader, but be sure to avoid "fluffy" wording and excessive adjectives. Often, if an editor deems your story of interest, she will run it exactly as it is written.
- Use a few paragraphs to briefly describe your business, product, service or event. Quote from experts, community representative, witnesses or other reliable sources add credibility to your story. Always list a contact name and telephone number for more information.

# ■ GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

The following recommendations are general tips that will help you succeed in media interviews.

- Prepare two to three ideas you want to convey. These are your communication points, the three most important issues or points you hope to discuss and get across during the interview.
- Prepare a list of questions you anticipate being asked. Anticipate issues and questions that may arise during the interview.
- Know your subject matter well.
- Make short, simple and specific statements.
- Explain your most important points first.
- Don't stray from the topic.
- Summarize and then elaborate. Example: "We have the best organization in that area because our volunteers really care about the children. Let me explain. Our volunteers spend 5 more hours with the children, whereas other volunteers in other organizations only spend one hour."

## ■ PANELISTS

- Nelly Cervantes, Reporter, Diario Latino
- Lorie Hearn, Metro Editor, The San Diego Union-Tribune
- Janye McClinton, Producer, NBC 7/39
- David Poller, Photo Editor, The San Diego Union-Tribune
- Rachel Ralston, Assistant Editor, Gay & Lesbian Times
- Ozzie Roberts, Columnist, The San Diego Union-Tribune

## ■ MODERATOR

- Robert Santos, weatherman and reporter, KSWB Channel 5/69

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- California Chicano News Media Association, [www.ccnma.org](http://www.ccnma.org)  
President-San Diego chapter: Janine Zuniga, Reporter, The San Diego Union-Tribune
- National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association, [www.nlgja.org](http://www.nlgja.org)  
President-San Diego chapter: David Poller, Photo Editor, The San Diego Union-Tribune
- San Diego Association of Black Journalists, [www.sdabj.org](http://www.sdabj.org)  
President-San Diego chapter: Tim Carr, Freelance Journalist

## ■ EVENT CO-CHAIRS

- Dana Littlefield, Reporter, The San Diego Union-Tribune
- Michael James Rocha, Features Design Editor, The San Diego Union-Tribune