

A series of technical assistance
manuals for community coalitions

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STRATEGIZER[®]

Building Public Support
through Media Relations



Building Public Support through Media Relations

Developed by Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America®

STRATEGIZER 42

INTRODUCTION

As community coalitions go about the difficult business of making their communities safer, healthier and drug-free, it is essential that they make use of every available strategy and tool. Positive media exposure is arguably the most powerful tool at a coalition's disposal.

It's no secret that the media represents a crucial vehicle for conveying information and affecting attitudes—whether for good or bad, the media has incredible power and influence. Without learning to make full use of the media, coalitions cannot achieve optimal effectiveness in approaching their mission. It's not about being pushy or blowing your own horn: It's about advancing the cause and generating crucial support.

The media's powerful influence and great "reach" are indispensable for raising awareness, altering beliefs and behavior, changing community "norms" and affecting policy decisions. Just as alcohol and tobacco advertising often glamorizes and normalizes consumption of these drugs, so can the media be used to present healthy, drug-free messages.

A comprehensive media strategy is essential to coalition success. Get started by first reviewing *Strategizer 4: Developing a Public Relations Plan* (available online at www.cadca.org for coalitions with paid memberships; nonmembers can order a copy online).

Briefly, you will need to:

- Develop a media strategy—know your coalition, your audience and what you want to achieve.
- Develop program elements—conduct research, develop a press plan, develop coalition media tools (including a press kit), and develop an ongoing relationship with your local media.
- Conduct program evaluation—review annually what worked and what did not.

"Each year in America, millions of children are faced with a decision – a decision about using drugs. Our job is to help kids make the right choice."

—Partnership for a Drug Free America® (PDFA)

This *Strategizer* will focus on tips and techniques to enable you to implement this plan by familiarizing you with these areas:

- Media literacy—understanding how the media works.
- Media relations—how you can help the media to help you.
- Media advocacy— how to *really* use the media to your coalition's advantage.

SECTION 1 MEDIA LITERACY: THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF THE MASS MEDIA

To get started, you need to educate yourself about how the media works. Familiarize yourself with the types of media available: Analyze and evaluate as you watch, listen, and read news and feature stories in the media around you. Understanding what makes it to air or into print will enable you to express yourself appropriately, get your “pitch” accepted and reported, and, above all, get your message across.

Put yourself in the position of the reporter, editor, or producer and ask yourself: Why is a story newsworthy? How is a story put together? Whose point of view is represented? Tracking the news gives you a feel for the interests and priorities of reporters and editors and also enables you to react quickly to a breaking news story by writing an op-ed piece, a letter to the editor, or offering your coalition’s perspective on an issue.

1. Research media players. Determine which media outlets in your state or community are most appropriate: newspapers (suburban & weekly, supplements); magazines; radio and TV stations (broadcast and cable, consider specific programs);

and trade, civic, other non-profit and company publications.

2. Compile a media list. Include the names and contact information of anyone who might do a story on your coalition or editorialize about the effectiveness of your approach: reporters, columnists, editors and editorial boards. Determine to whom (names, contact information) you should send your news releases—generally (for print media, broadcast TV or radio) this will be the News Assignment Editor.

3. Identify specific reporters to approach. Make a note of bylines on articles covering your issue.

4. Document efforts and coverage. Record details of what was sent, when and whether it was used, and record information about the coverage the coalition receives. Clip published stories. Remember to report all successes to the CADCA Communications Department!

SECTION 2 GETTING INTO THE NEWS—FIRST MEDIA STEPS

Everywhere you look or listen, ordinary people with some kind of professional knowledge, just like those in your coalition, are providing information to reporters who are asking them questions and putting their messages before the public. Have you ever wondered “why them and not us?” Many news stories that get to air use “sources” who were already familiar to the reporter—through good media relations practices.

MEDIA RELATIONS: HOW TO GET YOUR STORY AIRED

Cultivating good, ongoing relationships with specific media representatives is vitally important. Reporters will remember you for your polite, courteous and informative phone calls, and, if you have been in regular contact (without pestering), you’ll increase your chances of having your story ideas accepted or being called for an opinion. Remember: reporters need you as much as you need them. Treat media representa-

tives as human beings! Try to socialize with the media but never talk “off the record” because it may be used anyway. Finally, never become argumentative or abusive if your stories are not used.

Five steps to good media relations:

1. Cultivate Relationships

If you have developed relationships through regular contact with local reporters, so much the better when you’re ready to go to the press with a news release. Ask for an appointment to offer background information on your issue, to hand over a press kit, and offer yourself or a member of your coalition as a resource (but don’t be deterred—or pushy—if the reporter is too busy.)

2. Develop a Contact File

This file should include knowledgeable, articulate spokespeople from your coalition so that when a



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reporter wants an expert in your city to talk about an issue you can direct them to someone. Distribute the list to relevant editors and reporters—and make sure you inform your contacts so they won't be surprised if they receive a call!

3. Develop Story Ideas

Formulating stories to present to the media for their use will increase your chances of getting into the news.

- Keep the story succinct, compelling and relevant—be confident of its value to the community.
- Try to make the story locally newsworthy—give it a “hook” with local flavor or relevance.
- Consider such topics as your opposition to/support of legislation or local government activities, providing a service in an emergency situation, current local vs. national use trends, case studies/true life stories, studies or surveys (the media love statistics).
- *Don't* push a story that's not a story: You'll lose credibility in the eyes of the reporter/editor and possibly lessen your chances next time. Ensure that you're offering something fresh and interesting.

4. Compile a Press Kit

A press kit is a folder of information about your coalition designed for distribution to the media. It can help “open the door” and build positive, long-lasting relationships with media representatives. Ensure your press kit is well designed and visually appealing with your coalition name and logo on the front and a contact name and phone number on all materials. Send it to all your media contacts and keep a supply on hand.

A good press kit includes:

- A concise (one page) **fact sheet** about your coalition (mission, founding date, member

organizations, number of volunteers, board of directors, community activities and programs, a short “biography” of the coalition, affiliation with state coalition and CADCA);

- A **background sheet** expanding on the subjects in the fact sheet;
- **Story ideas**—it is *vital* to include some story possibilities to generate interest;
- A list of knowledgeable and articulate **spokespersons** who can supply additional information;
- News clippings—include favorable published stories, these can add both information and credibility.

5. Be persistent!

Maintaining a presence is key. Developing good media relations is an ongoing process, not necessarily something that will happen overnight, or when you want it to. Clip press articles in which the coalition is featured and record the details of radio and TV appearances. Remember to report all results to CADCA's Communications Department.

MEDIA CHANNELS FOR YOUR MESSAGE

To get “into the news” you will need to consider such vehicles as:

- News/press releases—these are your “pipeline to the public” since reporters rely heavily on them for story ideas and often run them verbatim.
- Presentation to a newspaper editorial board—editorial boards are made up of representatives from the paper, the community and local business, and are “sounding boards” for the various readerships served by a newspaper. A well-prepared presentation by your coalition can help determine how a paper will editorialize on an issue and whether a reporter will be assigned to cover it.
- Letters to the editor—a powerful way of influencing public debate on issues.

- **Opposing Editorials (Op-Eds)**—appear opposite the editor’s column, though usually are not published unless requested by the paper, so discuss the possibility with your press contacts.
- **News conference/briefing**— an excellent means of releasing important information (new coalition partner, new local study, announcing major decision etc) to a large audience though you’ll need to prepare well and anticipate lines of questioning.
- **Testimony**—public hearings where a coalition member is testifying are important for establishing your coalition as a credible, expert source. Testimony is persuasive writing and can be used widely to spread your message so make sure you distribute press releases.
- **Public forums**— an open debate at a meeting or conference may interest the media, especially if it’s on a “hot” issue.
- **Radio and TV interviews**—see below.

WORKING WITH THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

For radio or TV talk shows, local public affairs programs, or local cable TV access channel (not hard to get on):

- ◆ **Know the players**—listen and watch local programs. Once you have a list of stations to contact, think about your ‘pitch’: a response to a specific editorial or news report; a legislative or regulatory issue; new research; an upcoming event or program. Make it interesting, even provocative. Having some representatives from your coalition field calls from consumers for an hour on air is a great idea.
- ◆ **Make the call**—If you already have a contact at the station talk with him/her; otherwise ask for the producer of the show you want to be on. Be persistent—you’ll have to ‘sell’ the producer on the idea—but don’t be a pest. Try to plan in advance, since many shows are booked weeks ahead—perhaps your ‘pitch’ is an upcoming anniversary or milestone.
- ◆ **Cross sell**—A producer may not be interested in your topic, but may suggest another. Discuss this with them immediately—don’t pass up a chance! After you hang up, prepare a proposal on the new topic and line up a suitable guest.
- ◆ **After the call**—Producers rarely agree to book a guest over the phone. Be prepared to fax information on your topic and guest right away: a short cover letter (on coalition letterhead) summarizing your topic idea and why the spokesperson is the right person to talk about it, include a bio of the spokesperson. Also include 10 – 12 suggested questions on the topic—these can be very useful to hosts.
- ◆ **When you get a “yes”**—Find out the date, time, location and duration of the interview; whether it’s a live or taped, studio or over-the-phone interview; if there will be other guests; and if there will be call-ins. Establish exactly the topic to be discussed and if sample questions are available—find out if you have any say in the questions. Rehearse the spokesperson with emphasis on delivery of two or three key points.
- ◆ **Media training**—This can help you get across your points no matter what questions you are asked, or how hostile the interviewer is. Communicating well in an interview situation requires training: CADCA’s public relations staff can help you with this. Read the ‘Interview Tips’ section in the CADCA PR Guide.
- ◆ **Get the word out**—Make sure members know someone from your coalition will be on the radio or TV. Mail a special postcard if it’s too late for the regular newsletter or monthly meeting.
- ◆ **After the interview**—Regardless of how it goes, drop a line to the producer and host thanking them for inviting you to appear on the program. Include suggestions for future program topics and follow up on this. Report the event for the coalition newsletter or meeting.
- ◆ **Last-minute requests**—You may be contacted by a producer at the last minute if a guest cancels. Establish what (the topic) and when the interview will take place and then do your best to find someone suitable. But never deliver an inferior guest—if you can’t find someone call the producer back and ask for a rain check.
- ◆ **Success breeds success**—Build on the momentum of this first successful interview and start booking more!



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SECTION 3 MEDIA ADVOCACY: HOW TO FURTHER YOUR GRASSROOTS POLICY GOALS

Media advocacy is the art of “working” the media to persuade people: altering people’s beliefs and behavior, encouraging volunteers, raising your coalition’s profile and funding. We call this public relations. Through good PR, you can actively influence the beliefs and behavior of people whose support you need for your success: your members, the public, lawmakers and journalists who can write positive editorials and balanced stories that strengthen your public support.

To raise awareness and motivate people you have to convince them that there *is* a problem, that it *is* on their doorstep, and that they *can* do something about it. In short, you’ll have to be able to argue for your work, use information strategically to lobby for what you want, and position your coalition’s message and efforts so that people hear about you. You need to work the media—both the press and self-generated media like advertising—so that people in your community can hear your voice clearly among all the points of view the media presents on substance abuse.

DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE

There is fierce competition for both the attention of the media and the American public—you need a distinct, simple message that will be heard clearly above all the others out there. Your clear and concise message should define who you are and where you are “coming from.” It should convey the urgency of your mission as well as the emotion driving it.

Bring coalition members together to brainstorm about your message—why is substance abuse really a problem, why should anyone care, and why is your approach compelling, empowering and destined for success? Review your coalition’s goals and mission statement. Then isolate one or two short key phrases that represent the essence of your message—e.g. ‘Talk to your kids about drugs, now’—and repeat these key phrases often in interviews, news releases and other communications.

TAKING YOUR MEDIA PROGRAM FURTHER

Press coverage helps increase awareness of the substance abuse issue, and the activities or role of the coalition. However, in order to inform, persuade and motivate the target audience, and increase the coalition profile and credibility, the coalition needs to consider more proactive methods of getting into the media: advertising (paid media ads, public service announcements, billboards etc), brochures and coalition-sponsored events. Increased coalition visibility in the community means increased assistance for substance abuse issues.

PR Tools and Opportunities

Every member and volunteer is a potential “mouth-piece” to sing the coalition’s praises so don’t neglect internal PR. Keep everyone up-to-date and motivated about coalition activities and progress through a newsletter and PR report at the monthly board meeting. The creation of a coalition logo is a great idea: displayed at events and on all coalition publications, it will make your coalition easily recognizable. Get involved with nationally declared observances such as Family Day, National Recovery Month—the national scale of these events increases media interest which you can take advantage of. Also, don’t forget the CADCA awards—being recognized by a national organization for a job well done is a great media opportunity.

Other PR opportunities include:

- ◆ Signature event—an annual event that is synonymous with the coalition
- ◆ Speaker’s bureau—an excellent means of maintaining a public presence in your community
- ◆ Advertising—with “paid media” you control the message.
- ◆ Public Service Announcements (PSAs)—similar to advertising but free, and a proven way of communicating a message. Many national campaigns can be customized with a local “tag.”
- ◆ ONDCP’s National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign supplement for newspapers—can be customized with local information.



COALITION STRATEGIES AND IDEAS

Fighting Back Partnership of Vallejo, CA—*Tim Tyler, Public Relations Director*

Fighting Back of Vallejo has two key strategies for getting their message across when dealing with the media: (1) involving partner organizations when conducting a media event; and (2) framing the event/program with a strong anti-substance abuse message. When a multitude of agencies and individuals speak about an initiative at a media conference, the community understands that the program is worthwhile, has widespread support and is an effective method of shaping community norms.

“The key to ‘framing,’ ” says Tyler, “is to get all the participants to rehearse the message you want to convey and not to engage in debates that might detract from your advocacy.” Earlier this year, when coalition representatives were due to speak at a press conference about the coalition’s impending loss of funding, representatives were urged to keep reporters on the topic of “What Fighting Back has done for me, and how it has had a positive impact on the community.” Funding-related questions were referred to the executive director. Focusing on the *benefits* of Fighting Back paid off. The human-interest stories became the story in almost every newspaper the next day—prompting many offers of help, an effect that a simple story on a coalition losing dollars would not have had.

The Miami Coalition for a Safe and Drug-Free Community—*Marilyn Culp, President*

The Miami Coalition involved the media right from the beginning by convening a media task force with representatives from public relations firms, TV executives and other media personnel. Directly involving the media in this way gave them some “ownership” of the coalition and spurred a commitment to help “draw the line” and change public perceptions. In 1988 the local media supported the introduction of a beer tax by developing their own ads and articles to sway public opinion, and, recently, Spanish radio stations have taken the lead in the club drugs awareness campaign, running public education spots on ecstasy and raves.

KIDco/TADco—*Nora Drexler, President*

At election time, youth leaders from KIDco/TADco host a legislative breakfast where candidates “face the press” over substance abuse issues. This is a huge media event because of the inevitable controversy surrounding the opinions of the candidates, and the coalition takes full advantage of this press. Questions on substance abuse issues are mailed to candidates prior to the breakfast

and their written responses posted on the coalition website. “Watch a change in the polls take place at election time, in favor of coalition positions for drug prevention!” says Nora Drexler.

Another terrific media strategy is to ask your police department to invite reporters to ride with police during operations such as underage drinking and tobacco vendor compliance checks. The press love getting the story, and it allows them to take a responsible, community-oriented position on the issue. The story can also help promote toll-free coalition numbers for reporting illegal activity.

The Oregon Partnership — *Judy Cushing, President*

Oregon Partnership leverages its media relations to supplement real-time campaigns. It is not enough to simply float an idea, concept, or message to communities. The real work is done on the ground by real people in real communities who are working diligently to make their cities and towns safer, healthier places to be.

Whether or not the media outreach specifically reduces drug use among young people, building a real campaign accomplishes some important goals. First, the media will pick up on it and will typically reach parents and have a measurable impact on their likelihood to discuss the topic of drugs with their kids. Second, campaigns are not solely limited to media (print, radio, television, or other). Although some dollars may go to getting a campaign on the airwaves and/or one may run an effective earned media effort – most of the organizing is reserved for communities themselves and getting the media to participate (even co-sponsor) to create new social and cultural norms.

The town of Newberg, OR, recently hosted one such community event and demonstrated the impact that media outreach coupled with community organizing is having on its residents. Young people spent a week-painting mural tiles with various drug-free themes and then showed up to compete at the skate-park the day of the unveiling. Hundreds of kids, parents, and community members turned out to celebrate New-berg’s “Anti-Drug” mural project and skate-park. The mural project won first place in their town parade the next day and is now available as a traveling exhibit.

The Oregon partnership also has had a strong presence in op-eds and features in Oregon’s largest newspapers and earned media pieces in newspapers across Oregon. Oregon Partnership staff regularly provide “expert” views for the major TV networks in the Portland media market.



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SUMMARY

To increase your support base and hopes of influencing public policy, you must build a public perception of credibility, action, and political power for your coalition—by implementing a media plan. Once you are “media savvy,” you’ll start to see the potential of the media for bringing recognition to your hard working staff and volunteers, increasing funding, and inspiring other groups to similar achievements. In short, a good working relationship with and knowledge of the media are indispensable to coalition success.

RESOURCES

CADCA Media How To Guide

CADCA Public Relations Guide

CADCA Strategizer 4: Developing a Public Relations Plan

www.cadca.org

Join Together Online

www.jointogether.org

National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign (ONDCP)

www.mediacampaign.org

Partnership for a Drug-Free America® (PDFA)

www.drugfreeamerica.org

You Can Increase Your Media Coverage (CSAP)

www.health.org

Media Guide (NIDA)

www.drugabuse.gov

Impaired Driving Fact Sheets and Facts (NHTSA)

www.nhtsa.dot.gov

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America® is a membership-driven organization put in place to give anti-drug and drug-related violence coalitions technical assistance and support. The purpose of the *Strategizer Technical Assistance Manuals* is to provide step-by-step guidance on various topics relevant to the work you do in your community each day. We know you are busy, so *Strategizers* are designed to be easy-to-use guides that help to streamline the planning process.

Strategizers cover such topics as long-range planning, board and staff development, development of media strategies, marketing

planning, fundraising for coalition operations and programs, methods for engaging hard-to-reach populations, and more. For a current list of *Strategizer Technical Assistance Manuals* or for additional technical assistance on the topic covered in this *Strategizer*, contact the CADCA staff by writing to: 901 North Pitt Street, Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314, or call toll-free: 1-800-54-CADCA

Please notify CADCA regarding the technical assistance needs you may have. Your coalition is on the front line against the ravages of drugs, alcohol and violence.



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