

How To Generate Coverage Or Draw Media Attention To A Story

To get media coverage on a story or an issue, you must “pitch” the idea to the media. Outlined below are a few ways to present information to pitch your story.

Proclamations

It is sometimes possible to encourage your Mayor to proclaim October Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) and encourage residents to take action against domestic violence. Although generating a proclamation usually requires several months lead time, if you have a good relationship with the Mayor’s office, you may be able to do it in a matter of weeks.

- 1** Write a letter to the Mayor’s office requesting a meeting to discuss the possibility that the Mayor will officially proclaim October DVAM. In your letter, discuss the prevalence of domestic violence in your community and offer local statistics. Indicate that you will follow up in a few days with a telephone call.
- 2** If you are able to get a meeting with the Mayor’s office, bring a sample **proclamation**, using language you would like the Mayor to use in issuing a proclamation in your city. If you are going to hold a news conference around the proclamation, you will need to coordinate the date, time and place with the Mayor’s press secretary.
- 3** Work with the press secretary to select a suitable date, time and place for a news conference, if you are going to hold one to announce the proclamation. You will want to work with the press secretary to coordinate media work, including drafting an advisory and contacting area journalists. If you hold a news conference, you also will need media statements by the Mayor and your program director, as well as copies of the proclamation to distribute to the media.
- 4** A “paper release,” through which you distribute a news release about the Mayor’s proclamation (and a copy of the proclamation) is a much less labor-intensive route. On the day the Mayor proclaims that October is DVAM, you can fax your news release and a copy of the proclamation to the press. You also will need to coordinate a “paper release” with the Mayor’s press office, as they may have their own plans for publicizing the proclamation. Using the Internet and your social media sites is also an efficient way to quickly disseminate this information throughout your community

Op-Eds

Op-Eds are brief opinion pieces focusing on a particular issue from a particular point of view. They run opposite the editorial pages of newspapers. (Op-Ed stands for Opposite Editorial page, which is where submissions are commonly published.)

- 1** An op-ed should be no longer than 500 to 700 words and signed by the author. You can usually find op-ed guidance and word limitations on the publication's website. In it you should emphasize the signatory's experience and opinion. Approach your topic so that it will be of interest to the general public or the newspaper's readership, if you are submitting an op-ed to a community, alternative or ethnic newspaper. For instance, an op-ed on DVAM could focus on the pervasiveness of domestic violence and how important it is for everyone in the community to take action to help end abuse.
- 2** You can submit an op-ed to more than one newspaper, but once you know that a paper is going to use it, you must contact the others to withdraw the op-ed from them. Op-Ed page editors can get very angry if an op-ed they are considering runs in another newspaper in the community.
- 3** Send the op-ed with a brief one to two paragraph cover letter to the op-ed page editor (you can call the newspaper to get the editor's name and phone and fax numbers). Frequently, the op-ed page editor and the editorial page editor are the same person. As with a letter-to-the-editor, send the op-ed via both email and fax to the editor. In both the op-ed and its cover letter, include the name, title, organization and telephone number of the author. In the letter, explain the author's expertise on the topic that the op-ed addresses.
- 4** A few days after you submit the op-ed, follow up with a telephone call to make sure it was received. If it was not, you can resend it.

Columnists

Newspaper columnists are often widely read and they are interested in writing about timely issues of importance to the community. Many respond well to letters, telephone calls or emails suggesting topics. Before you pitch a columnist on an idea, read his or her column a few times so that you get an idea of the kinds of issues she or he tackles.

- 1** Address your pitch letter to the columnist directly. Explain why your topic is timely (October is DVAM) and why readers should know more about it (domestic violence affects x out of every x women in your community). Indicate that you are writing to ask the columnist to address domestic violence in her or his column.
- 2** With your pitch letter, you may also want to include information on your program and your DVAM activities. Keep in mind that the columnist may want to focus on a personal story, and want to interview a survivor, so you may need to identify and prepare someone.
- 3** Mention that you will follow up by telephone in a few days. Also, be sure to include your name, title, organization and telephone number at the end of your letter.

- 4 After you have sent your pitch letter or email, follow up with a telephone call to ensure that the columnist has received it, to determine the level of interest and to see if you can offer any additional information.

Calendar Announcements

The event listings, which appear in most daily and many weekly, community and college/university newspapers, are a great way to publicize events you are holding in conjunction with DVAM.

- 1 Contact the calendar editor at your local newspapers (check local community, ethnic and alternative newspapers to see if they also have events calendars) and find out what kinds of events they include, when the calendar runs and how far in advance you need to submit an announcement.
- 2 Send the calendar editor a one-paragraph calendar announcement of your event or activity. Briefly describe the event in one or two sentences and include the sponsors. List the date, time and place for the event or activity. Mention whether or not there is a charge to the public and how much is being charged. Include the name and telephone number of the person whom the public should contact about attending the event or participating in the activity.
- 3 If you are in a rural community, be sure that you maintain contact with the editors of weekly and/or monthly community newspapers or newsletters. As you plan your activities for DVAM, be sure to alert them with advance telephone calls, as well as media advisories and news releases. Newspapers and newsletters that come out weekly or monthly require more lead time than dailies, so ask the editor about how much time she or he will need to ensure that your event is mentioned in the calendar or in an article.
- 4 You will want your event or activity to be included in the community calendar, and you might consider submitting an article about the event afterwards, accompanied by a photograph (both in color and black & white) of the event or activity. Ask the editors of community papers and newsletters if they would be willing to let you place advertising for your DVAM event at a reduced rate or if they will donate space for an ad.
- 5 Local radio and cable access television stations also often have community calendar listings. Ask the public information or community affairs director at the stations about their community calendars. In most cases, you should be able to get information about your event or activity included in the calendar, if you submit the information to the station before the deadline.
- 6 In addition to using media calendars, you can get the word out about an event or activity by posting the information on a community bulletin board. Ask area churches, synagogues, mosques, YWCAs or YMCAs, grocery stores and community centers about access to their bulletin boards. In rural areas, community bulletin boards are usually more accessible and efficient public outreach tools than media calendars.

How To Place A Public Service Announcement

Television and radio stations, newspapers and magazines can run Public Service Announcements (PSAs) if time and space allow. The following tips will help you place PSAs.

Submitting PSAs To Television Or Radio Stations

- 1** Using your media list [link to the PDF: How to prepare a media list], compile a list of all the radio and TV outlets in your area (include cable TV stations in addition to regular broadcast TV) and call each to find out if they run PSAs. If they do, get the name of the community affairs director.
- 2** Write a letter or email to the community affairs director in which you ask her or him to run your PSAs. Be sure to mention the length of the spot. You might want to include some local statistics on domestic violence to better make the case that they should run the PSA. Include a copy of the script (radio) or storyboard (TV) with your letter or email, as well as your name, title, affiliation, email address and telephone number.
- 3** Follow up your letter or email with a telephone call to the community affairs director. Ask if she or he received your correspondence and if the station is willing to consider airing the spot. If it was not received, explain why you are calling and offer to resend the material.

Submitting PSAs To Newspapers Or Local Magazines

- 1** Compile a list of all the newspapers, including weekly, community, college/universities, alternative and ethnic newspapers, newsletters and local magazines. Call the display-advertising department or the advertising department (if there is no display advertising department) at each outlet to find out if they accept PSAs. In some cases, you may get referred to someone else at the outlet. Keep trying until you find the right person to talk to.
- 2** Send the appropriate person at each outlet a letter or email in which you ask her or him to run the PSA. Enclose a camera-ready copy of the PSA. If sending via traditional mail, use a large enough envelope and poster board so that the PSA does not get bent or folded. Include local statistics on domestic violence, along with your name, title, affiliation, and email address and telephone number. Also mention that you have enclosed a copy of the camera-ready PSA.
- 3** Follow up your letter or email with a phone call. Ask if your correspondence has been received and if the outlet is willing to run the spot. If it was not received, explain why you are calling and offer to resend the material.