

SECTION 1

media

This section provides some tips on using the media effectively to communicate your message.

A-1 Media Communications Toolkit

Communications toolkit from the Institute for Media Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS)

ADS — NEWSPAPER, RADIO & TV

What is it? Ads refer to paid advertising in places where the population gets their news. Ads are, generally, quite expensive in media outlets that reach a broad base of the population. See **Public Service Announcements** on this list for notes about free advertising opportunities.

What does it do? It provides your organization or issue with a public profile in the mainstream press. In some cases, a provocative ad by a group campaigning on a specific issue, can actually be the motivator to get the news media to pick up your issue as a story. Environmentalists and health advocacy organizations have successfully raised the news coverage of issues by running well-placed ads in newspapers and on radio.

When do I use it? When earned media can't or isn't delivering your message in your words, purchasing advocacy ads may be a good option to help you reach target audiences. In general, because of the associated cost of running ads, the number of times an individual must see, read or hear a message to actually register it, and the difficulty in evaluating success, paid advertising is best used when you need to lobby a large group of people around a specific action, such as sending a letter to a politician.

How do I use it? Most importantly, plan paid advertising into your campaign at the start. If you have a large enough budget to run ads, the ads should be developed as part of your overall media or communications strategy. Too often, groups resort to ads when their other outreach approaches have failed. In these cases, messages are rarely well-developed, there is often not enough time to fully penetrate the target audience (for example, in radio, it is standard to run 40 ads in a one week period to ensure each listener hears your ad/message more than once).

COLUMNISTS

Who are they? Staff writers of newspapers who supplement editorial pages with their opinion pieces about timely issues.

What do they do? It provides an additional space for you to have your issue expressed.

When do I use them? Follow the columnists in your paper. If you notice one shares your values, or position on other issues, they may also be allies to your issue. If you don't have hard news, if the editorial staff don't share your point of view, approach a columnist with your story idea.

How do I use them? Call the columnist and tell them who you are, what your story idea is, why the issue is important and why it would make a good column for him or her to write.

GIMMICKS & NON-NEWS ITEMS

What is it? A creative hook by providing a visual, funny and/or provocative element. (This might include outlandish costumes or props, a stunt of some kind, or a “teaser” campaign that arouses curiosity.)

What does it do? It can sometimes draw attention to a story that you’ve had difficulty getting media interested in, or it might make up for a lack of hard news content, generating coverage by virtue of its quirkiness. Television news producers, in particular, often like to “balance” hard, serious, stories with softer, more colorful ones. If your timing is right, and your hook original enough, you could benefit.

When to use it? When you can come up with an idea that is both relevant to your issue and innovative or crazy enough to attract media attention. When you’ll be happy with superficial or spot coverage, as opposed to an in-depth discussion of complex issues.

How to use it? It depends on the gimmick. If it’s humorous and *not* visual, but lends itself to disc jockey patter, you might make the rounds of the morning or afternoon drive shows on local radio stations. If it’s a once-only stunt that you want the TV cameras to come out for, pick a time when they’re least likely to be occupied and send a teaser or two in advance that gives enough away to persuade them it will be worthwhile.

Don’t send gimmicks to news reporters! The best target for gimmicks are the soft news sections of the paper (food, fashion, and new homes), and the morning and drive shows on radio.

EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING

What is it? This is an opportunity for you to present a newspaper with a particular viewpoint or to raise general awareness and understanding about your issues among the paper’s decision-makers.

What does it do? It provides you with a number of very important opportunities: it allows you to meet, in person, the editors of your paper, which helps you develop personal relationships with these people; it allows you to speak, one-on-one to important decision-makers about the issue that is important to you; it allows you to build personal and organizational credibility as a valuable source of information on your subject.

When do I use it? Try to plan editorial board meetings at the beginning of your media campaign. By meeting with these key newsmakers early in your campaign you increase your odds of achieving your media goals. You will likely pick up

tips about how the paper would be most interested in covering your issue. For instance, if you work with drug addicts, you may find out that the paper is *not* interested in running stories about the impact on family members, but would like to know how business in your community suffers as a result of addiction issues. If you work on an issue that has social baggage, such as sexual abuse, a meeting with the editorial board early in your campaign will allow you to educate the press about the potential societal harm of using terms such as “fondled” to mean “molested” or “sex without consent” to mean “rape”.

In general, it is best to approach an editorial board meeting when you are not in a defensive position. Your tone will be friendlier, and the media will be more willing to invite you to speak if they know you wish to provide information, not berate them for your perception of their poor coverage of the issue.

How do I use it? Contact your media’s editorial page editor and request a meeting. Establish how long you will have to make your presentation, how many reporters and editors will be present. Do not approach the meeting with any anger toward the media. This will not work to your benefit. Do not condescend to the media. Simply explain your perspective in a professional and informative manner. You are trying to establish yourself or your group as a credible and informed source of information, not marginalize yourself as a crank. They will ask you difficult questions, perhaps even play devil’s advocate — it’s their job to test the validity of your position.

Know how the paper has been covering the issue — and know whether or not they ran an article on the day you meet with them!

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

What is it? A letter you write to the newspaper commenting on a current news story being addressed by the paper. The letter may criticize some aspect of the paper’s coverage or bring additional context to a particular story. It may also respond to a previously published letter. Letters to the editor appear on the Op/ed pages and are one of the most highly read segments of the paper.

What does it do? Like the Op/Ed piece, a letter to the editor can allow your comments to be presented with minimal mediation or interpretation by the paper itself. (Although in practice, this requires you to keep the letter as concise as possible, since all papers reserve the right to edit letters for brevity.)

When to use it? When you want to comment on a current story and/or its coverage without mediation and an op-ed piece isn’t warranted (because you don’t have enough to say on the matter; because you don’t think they’ll print an op/ed piece from you; or because you don’t have enough time to research and write one).

Don't overdo it. People who write more than one a month are dismissed as crackpots.

How to use it? Notice how long the published letters to the editor usually are and try and stay within those boundaries to avoid having someone cut your comments. If you must criticize the paper itself, do so in a calm and objective manner, backing up any claims you make with facts and concrete examples; expressing yourself angrily can sometimes undermine your credibility and position you as a crank. Make sure you sign the letter and provide the paper with your name and address, otherwise they will generally not even consider publishing the letter.

MEDIA BRIEFING

What is it? A media briefing is just that: a meeting in which you brief reporters about your issue area. Media briefings are different from editorial board meetings in a few ways:

- they are designed to provide relevant information to reporters, not editors
- they are usually held in your office, not at the media's
- they will often bring together reporters from a variety of media, including TV and radio

What does it do? Like the editorial board meeting, a media briefing provides you with the opportunity to inform media about your issue. It also gives you a chance to build your credibility with reporters, give them a face, and build relationships with the folks you will be counting on to get your name in the news. Like in fundraising, it's easier to say 'no' to someone you've never met. You don't want to become friends with reporters (necessarily), but you should develop a friendly, professional relationship with as many reporters as possible.

When do I use it? It is useful to hold media briefings at the head of a campaign, at regular intervals during a long campaign, and when you perceive that the media may not fully understand the complexities of your issue.

How do I use it? Call on the reporter you know best first. Get that person to agree to attend a briefing, then call others. Try to get a group of six to ten together. Provide food and drink, but don't go overboard! Have a Media Kit for each reporter. Bring in experts if you believe they could add to your presentation. Keep your presentation concise and leave ample opportunity for the reporters to do their job: ask *you* questions.

A tip: if you don't have a great deal of experience with the media, it would be advisable to do some media training before putting yourself into a situation like a media briefing. You can expect to get difficult questions. And, you should be prepared with your key messages so that everything you say follows a thread.

MEDIA CALL

What is it? A phone call to a reporter, editor or producer to pitch a story idea or to follow-up a news release.

What does it do? Press calls let the media know that you have a story they may want to cover. They also help you develop important relationships with reporters, help you establish a presence in their minds and in their files.

When do I use it? There are a number of different strategies you could use with respect to making press calls. Some organizations call reporters, columnists, editors every month or so, to update them on relevant changes in the issues the organization addresses. Some organizations only call the press when they are actively promoting a story. Some organizations never call the press — they should!

Even if you don't have a story to pitch, reporters who are interested in your issue will appreciate being kept up-to-date on changes to the issue. This contact will help you build your credibility as an information source, not just an organization looking for free media coverage.

At the very least, every time you send a press release to your local press, you should follow up with a quick call to the editor to see if he or she is interested in the story, if you can add any more details, or arrange an interview for a reporter. It is amazing how often this call will turn an 'story idea' into a story.

How do I use it? The very first rule is to ask, "have I got you on deadline?" Never launch into your pitch before determining whether your contact has time to talk (or listen) to you. If the contact doesn't have time, arrange a time to call back — and stick to it. Remember that every contact you have with the media is building your reputation as either a reliable, professional and credible source, or not!

When you make the phone call to follow up the press release and the editor says they aren't interested in doing a story, find out why not. Be polite, not indignant. Say that you'd like to know why so that you can pitch them better stories in the future and avoid pitching them ones they don't care about. Sometimes it's just timing, a busy news day, or a perception that your news isn't new. This feedback in and of itself is not only invaluable as a learning experience and as an insight into the way the particular editor thinks, it will also help enhance your relationship with the media outlet.

Be careful, however, with follow-up phone-calls to big media outlets, which get literally dozens of releases a day. "It's My Name from This Agency calling. Did you get the news release I sent you?" is a bad way to ask the question. Try "It's My Name from This Agency. We sent you a news release about whatever the topic is and the reason why the editor should find it newsworthy. Are you interested in doing a story?"

If you have a news idea that doesn't warrant a full-fledged press conference, a reporter might be persuaded to cover it if you call him/her and say that you

haven't told anyone else about it—basically, you're offering a scoop or exclusive, but don't call it that, they're overused terms.

MEDIA KIT

What is it? A package of information designed specifically for media. It could include:

- press release
- fact sheet on the issue
- history of the issue
- quotes or comments by experts and contact details
- selected press clippings
- charts, visuals or photographs
- background biography on your organization's spokesperson
- one-page description about your organization

What does it do? It provides detailed issue information to the editors, producers and reporters of the media. It gives you an opportunity to educate the media about your issue in a non-confrontational manner.

When do I use it? Hand out press kits to all the media who attend your press conference; provide kits to the individuals who attend your editorial board meetings; send kits to reporters who express interest when you make your press release follow-up press calls.

How do I use it? Be selective about the messages you want the media to take from your kit. Keep to two or three. Include only the information that is relevant to those messages: avoid the temptation to include every piece of printed material that exists about your organization or issue area.

MEDIA LIST

What is it? Probably, the most valuable tool in your media communications toolbox, your media list contains the contact names and numbers of all the media you would wish to tell about your news.

What does it do? It allows you to react quickly to news opportunities.

How do I use it? If you have the ability, develop your list in a database that allows you to keep notes on contact you, or others in your organization, have with the media. Keep track of stories that reporters cover which are related to your issue area. If you do not use your list regularly, have a volunteer update it every six months or so, so that when you need to react to news, you will have a reasonably accurate list.

NEWS CONFERENCE

What is it? A news conference is an event that, with any luck, brings all the media that you would like to know about your news, together in one room.

What does it do? The benefit of a news conference is that media and your spokesperson are together at one time—if there is controversy of any kind in your news, a dialogue between the two is simple. A news conference is good when you have several people who need to speak, but it is also a gamble; you can't ensure the press will attend. Call reporters and invite them.

When do I use it? News conferences take a great deal of time and energy to pull off. In some cases, they are also very expensive; however, they don't have to be. You don't have to rent a conference room at a hotel; you can conduct it at your office. Better still, conduct it "on location" where your agency does its work or at a site that relates to the issue you're dealing with. TV will be more likely to give more time to what you say if you say it in front of a visually interesting and relevant backdrop.

A news conference should only be called if you have an announcement which you are certain has important hard *news* value.

How do I use it? Send media an Advisory up to a week before your press conference. Follow-up with a press release that details highlights of the news you will release, a strong quote from your spokesperson and conference details. Two days before the conference, call the media you've sent printed material to. Be prepared to resend the press release—many will not have seen it.

If your news is big enough, consider a strategic leak to one newspaper the day before so that the story will appear as an "exclusive" on the morning of your news conference, or tell a radio station a few hours before the news conference. If done properly, this will ensure more widespread coverage.

Don't give away every element of the story (e.g. if you're releasing a report, don't give them the full report but just key findings, just enough for them to write a 300-word story or do a 30-second news item and make sure there's something left for them to report the next day). Make sure the reporter knows that you are giving them an exclusive. The major risk of using this approach is alienating the other media outlets, so don't always favour the same one.

Try to find an "ordinary" person who is affected by or whose situation illustrates the news you're releasing and who is willing to talk to the media.

Other Tips:

- The best time to hold a media conference is mid-morning or early afternoon—and no later than 2 pm if you can help it. If you hope it will create follow-up stories, never release late in the day or late in the week.
- Give advance notice and then again the morning of the conference.

- Give away enough information in the advance notice to show you have a credible story, but not so much that there's no need to attend.
- Have more than one speaker, each one fulfilling a different role (spokesperson, person suffering effects of story, etc). However, don't have too many speakers, and ensure each one is a genuine expert on the subject being addressed.
- Keep each presentation short (1-2 minutes).
- Keep the conference to 45 minutes or less, including reporters' questions.
- Allow plenty of time for questions.
- Be prepared to arrange individual interviews following the conference.
- Provide a decent sound system or a place to set microphones, and have all speakers' trade places to be in front of the microphones.
- Avoid placing your presentation area against a window (for photo and video)
- Provide handouts (press kits) with key details, contact names, bios and photos of spokespeople
- Have the media sign in. Follow-up with reporters who did not attend.
- Monitor coverage and evaluate success of the press conference in relation to the time, energy and money it took to hold.

NEWS RELEASE

What is it? Also referred to as a *Press Release* or a *Media Release*, the press release is a written document that outlines, generally in one page, the news you would like the media to cover.

What does it do? It lets the media know that you have information that they may/should be interested in.

When do I use it? Send a press release out when you have something newsworthy to tell people; when something status quo has changed that people will be interested to know.

How do I use it? Write in active voice, emphasizing anything new, active, focused on people, having broad impact. Make sure your story is in the first sentence. Write a headline that can help grab attention. Keep the release to one page and make sure your *accurate* contact details are on the page.

To distribute, faxing is easiest. You can choose to either "broadcast fax" your release to every reporter or media outlet in town, and hope that one will pick up your piece. Or, you can target the release to specific reporters, from one (an exclusive) to any who you've noticed have an interest in your issue area. How you approach distributing your news release will depend on the nature of your news, your media strategy, and the relationships you have developed with the media, and target audiences.

OP/ED PIECE

What is it? Some say that op/ed is short for ‘opposite the editorial’ pages, others are adamant that op/ed is short-hand for opinion editorial. Both are accurate. An op/ed refers to commentary material that appears on the pages in the newspaper that also contain the article by the editor (usually near the back of the first section). This material is distinguished from news articles in that it is not required to be “objective” or neutral, but is allowed — indeed expected — to embody the author’s personal (albeit informed) opinions.

What does it do? It allows you to present your perspective on an issue unmediated by a reporter who is interpreting your views in the context of a news story, which usually includes other sources and uses your comments only selectively, often editing or juxtaposing them in ways that don’t serve your interests. There is also a certain degree of prestige and legitimacy conferred by having your views published on the Op/ed pages, which are usually read by those people in a community who wield influence.

When to use it? When you have an informed perspective on an issue that is currently in the news, or about to be in the news. When you want to present an in-depth or complex analysis of a situation without being mediated by the reporter. When you want to build profile of your issue and raise awareness of aspects of the issue that are not being discussed fully elsewhere. When you think it’s important to go on record providing an alternative perspective to the ones currently dominating the press coverage.

How to use it? If you have a relationship with the newspaper and/or the person who edits the Op/ed pages already, you might want to call first and indicate that you have an informed perspective that you’d like to submit in the form of an opinion piece. This gives you the opportunity to find out if they’re likely to run it, and/or to convince them to retain space for it, and find out what length they’d prefer and when they need it by. If you don’t have an established reputation and/or relationship and don’t want to call first, you can write the piece and submit it with a brief cover note, and keep your fingers crossed that they’ll use it.

PHOTO RELEASE

What is it? A hopefully arresting photograph that tells a story and features a person and/or event that wouldn’t otherwise be available to the newspaper but that might be of relevance and interest to its readers.

What does it do? Capitalizes on the inherent interest value of a visual image to generate attention to your event or issue. Can compensate for the fact that the newspaper may not have deemed your event worthy enough of attention to have

sent a photographer in the first place. If supplied photo is engaging enough, can sometimes transform a C12 story into a section cover.

When do I use it? When your news event or issue lends itself to a visually arresting image (something that embodies drama, surprise or human interest, for instance), or incorporates the image of a famous person. When newspapers fail to send photographers (or reporters, for that matter) to your event and you can come up with an image that's interesting enough to incite them to use it despite not having been there themselves.

How do I use it? Attach a professional quality photograph to a piece of paper on which you have written a lively caption or cutline, explaining the significance or relevance of the photograph, and clearly identifying who's in it and when and where it was taken.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT — PSA

What is it? PSAs are free advertising. The only hitch is that since they are free, you have little or no control over how often they are printed or broadcast, or at what times.

What does it do? PSAs help groups publicize their events and services.

When do I use it? Whenever you have an event you want the public to know about; when you have extra time and money to dedicate to crafting public outreach materials. (!) In many cases, a clever TV PSA, which simply introduces a group without referencing a specific date, can run dozens of times over months or even years. OXFAM-Canada produced a series of three 15 & 30 second PSAs featuring two famous Canadian comediennes (Mary Walsh and Cathy Jones) which have been run on CBC TV for a number of years.

How do I use it? Find out various media outlet policies, lengths, and timing by calling their advertising department. For broadcast, a general rule is to write 15 and 30-second pieces. Contact your local community television station to see if they could assist in producing a TV PSA. Many radio stations will produce PSAs free of charge since they are obliged by their CRTC license to broadcast a minimum number of PSAs each month.

RESEARCH

What is it? Original research conducted by or on behalf of your organization can be a very effective means of generating attention to your issues. Research on a matter of public interest that is methodologically sound (and seen to be presenting valid,

unbiased information) is usually considered newsworthy, especially if it uncovers data that challenges previously held perceptions. If you don't have the resources to conduct your own research, sometimes it's possible to make use of recent research undertaken by another organization that pertains to your issues and has not already been covered.

What does it do? The release of a current study constitutes news in and of itself; it avoids you having to piggyback on an existing news story or event. It can also help to position your organization as a credible source of information on a particular issue. (Because of the expense and expertise usually involved, research is generally not undertaken by fly-by-night operations, and conducting a study demonstrates that you have access to funds and alliances with experts.)

When to use it? When important, unanswered questions exist about some aspect of your issue, and you can afford to conduct research that will answer those questions. When you have reason to believe that although your opponents and/or the news media do not believe your cause or issue is important, the general public is very supportive of the position you and your organization are taking.

How to use it? Ideally, it's useful to think carefully about the research's potential to generate publicity in advance of conducting it. Some strategic planning can increase the likelihood that the research will address issues or uncover information that will be seen to be newsworthy. If your group is characterized pejoratively as a "special interest group," (implying that the study results are suspect) look for a way to ensure that the validity of the research can be defended (by having a credible, independent body conduct it for you, for instance). If the results of the research are groundbreaking enough, you may be able to justify releasing them at a press conference, especially if you're able to involve independent experts.

STAGED EVENTS —RALLY, PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION, FUNDRAISER

What is it? A staged event can take many forms: one type (the rally, public demonstration) endeavours to bring a large portion of the public out to state their position on a certain issue. Another type of staged event can draw on fewer people, and is meant to draw attention to an issue that is otherwise being ignored.

What does it do? If it works, the staged event draws attention to your issue. You could be looking for media attention, to translate to a story, which you hope will draw more supporters. You could be hoping to capture the attention of your elected official, to show her that her constituency supports a particular position that you (and her constituency) would like her to act upon.

When do I use it? Staged events, like news conferences, can be very risky. If you organize a rally with the goal of showing the mayor that the community is opposed to putting a highway through the middle of town, and only thirty people

show up, the mayor will legitimately be able to say that the public is, in fact, not opposed to his plan. Road blockades, a BC favourite for staged events, can also backfire if they aren't properly managed.

Rallies, or any staged event, in and of itself, is usually not 'news' and should always be pegged or hooked to something that is, such as a new report about the issue in question.

How do I use it? Plan well in advance. Try to work in coalition with other groups that support your position. Rallies and demonstrations, sit-ins and vigils, roadblocks and celebrity appearances must be well managed. One aggressive volunteer or protester could alienate the media, send the wrong message to opinion leaders and policy-makers about the goals of your group, and negatively impact your reputation.

Hold your event on a day when you can expect the largest number of people and the most media coverage. Sunday is usually the best bet.

VIDEO NEWS RELEASE — VNR

What is it? A VNR is a tape of broadcast-quality images that you send to television stations to use in their news broadcast. It can be as simple as four minutes of unedited raw footage, or it can be up to three minutes of edited material. Most TV stations prefer to receive ¾ inch tape of raw footage which they can edit themselves.

What does it do? It provides the media with the images you would like them to use to represent your story. It provides media in locations such as Vancouver with images of "remote" areas that they otherwise would not have the budget or time to shoot themselves. A VNR can move an otherwise non-visual story, like the release of a report, into a TV news piece. If, for instance you release a report on the state of grizzly habitat in Northern BC, images of bears in the habitat would improve your chance of making BCTV News.

When do I use it? When media can't (or won't) send cameras to cover your story.

How do I use it? Go to your local Shaw Cable or Rogers Cable station and ask if one of their crews or independent producers would be able to shoot the footage you need. In general, TV news will not broadcast video shot on home cameras. The quality simply isn't good enough. This is not a cheap way to get TV news coverage, but if you have a great visual it may be worth the investment.

A-2 Developing Effective Communications Skills

Communications toolkit from the Institute for Media Policy and Civil Society
(IMPACS)

How Editors Choose the News

IS IT NEW?

News, as the word implies, must be new and this is the most important criterion. News is about change, trends, and new developments, events that are different from the norm, information that people previously didn't know.

Ask yourself:

- What has changed in recent days/weeks/months related to the issues on which my agency works?
- What have I heard about changes coming in the future?
- What trends are affecting the people/issues we work with?
- What have I heard from my staff that made me say, "That's interesting, I didn't know that."?
- What's going on in the community?
- What is my agency doing now that's a shift from the past?
- What research have we conducted recently? (Any research can be turned into news: if the topic was compelling enough for you to study it, the public would be interested in it to, and by definition you should have found out something new in your research.)

News stories don't have to be one-off events. In the minds of editors, different stories deserve different amounts of coverage, both in terms of the space/time allotted to them in an edition/program, and in terms of the frequency that the story will be covered. An ongoing issue can have "legs"—in other words, it is sufficiently interesting and complicated that it will be covered several times a month while it continues to develop or until there is a "resolution". Some stories are so hot that they are deemed to deserve daily coverage. Ask editors how much coverage your issue merits and try to make your releases and phone calls fit this time frame.

Don't issue a news release with every twist and turn of a story: editors get antagonistic towards people who try to get far more coverage of an issue than (they think) it deserves.

Some ways to give a story legs:

- **Offer fresh angles.** For instance, if it's an environmental campaign, suggest stories that look beyond strict environmental issues: how are First Nations affected? What about tourism? Educational opportunities?
- **Offer little "nuggets" of news** that can generate a little coverage. Did you find an interesting document in a freedom of information request? Has a politician shifted ground slightly on your issue? Try issuing a news release on Sunday, always a slower news day.

- **Suggest different approaches to the story:** Make a campaign leader available for a profile story. Publicize the results of a poll you conducted. Get a high-profile person to visit. Organize a public debate, and invite the media. Offer an exclusive in-depth interview with a researcher. Think laterally.

IS IT RELEVANT TO OUR AUDIENCE?

Issues and events that are relevant to people's lives qualify as news.

Ask yourself:

- How does your agency's work affect people's lives?
- How will people in your community be affected by the event?
- What tangible impact does this issue have on people?

Editors are always demanding that reporters do stories about events/issues that have an impact the lives of ordinary people. They want real people as "characters" in stories, not just officials and spokespersons. Find people from among your clients or your supporters who are willing to tell their story to the media.

Much of this is about how you portray your work or issue, what the media call *framing*. Think about framing your agency's work in terms of the benefit it has on the community. Frame your issue in a way that shows how and why it matters.

Proximity is one of the elements of relevance: editors search for news that is close to home. If you are a local agency, this will be to your advantage with the local media.

IS IT INTERESTING?

The above criteria are the most important, but they don't explain the preponderance of stories in our media about the Royal Family, American multiple murders and animals who perform bizarre stunts. Yet people read, watch and listen to them. Rather than despairing at this, think of how you can use this tendency to your advantage.

Ask yourself:

- Is there a personality who can help us attract media attention?
- Is there a way to humanize our story?

Don't bang your head against a wall with this: if your issue meets the first two criteria, it ought to be covered.

Preparing a Spokesperson

The Communicator's Commandment:

Identify your message. Know your message. Believe your message. Present your message directly. Summarize your message clearly

1. Be Available!
 - ALWAYS make sure your key spokesperson is available to comment whenever you send out a communication to the press.
2. Be Prepared!
 - ALWAYS be fully prepared to comment when you send out a communication to the press.
3. Know, and fully understand, why you want to talk to a reporter
 - Is it to inform, motivate, persuade, and entertain?
4. Know, and fully understand, why the reporter wants to talk to you
 - Preview the show or read the reporter's writing before you talk to her. If the interview is for media outside of your market, call an ally to get this information.
 - Do some background research on the interviewer. To the best of your ability, try to determine whether s/he has an 'agenda'.
5. Know what you want to say in one minute or less
 - If you can't summarize your news in one minute, it's too complicated or it lacks focus.
6. Be truly interested in your subject
 - If the subject does not intrigue you, you won't get the reporter interested either.
7. Believe in what you are addressing
 - If you are not entirely convinced about the statements you are communicating, you will not persuade the reporter, or readers, to support your position.
8. Know your subject intimately—forward, backwards, upside down
 - Gather timely and extensive data related to your issue.
 - Cite evidence during the interview to back up your key points—sometimes data/research/statistics, sometimes anecdotal evidence, but always something tangible.
 - Offer to fax a background release or fact sheet containing this information, it makes it more likely the reporter will cite your data (and cite it accurately!)
 - Know what those who will argue your position will say, and address their points—be proactive, not reactive.
9. If you don't know an answer, never lie or make it up
 - Tell the reporter you'll get right back to them with the information they want, and do!
 - Or, give the reporter a contact who does know the answer. S/he will remember you as a cooperative and reliable source.

10. Prepare to answer two or three really tough questions
 - Think of questions you hope you won't be asked and prepare answers for them.
11. Know your top 1-3 clear, concise messages
 - Make positive statements.
 - Avoid defensive comments.
 - Talk in soundbites, keep answers short, do not over-answer.
 - Avoid acronyms, jargon and technical terms—remember who your audience is.
 - Use your organization's name, never "we" or "I".
12. Rehearse your delivery
 - Words written on paper often do not translate well when spoken—deliver your interview out loud to the mirror, to colleagues or people in the grocery store.
 - Practice 'bridging': answering a question about the past with an answer about the present, a question which would require you to make assumptions with an answer that addresses the facts, a question which is irrelevant with a message that addresses the reason you want media coverage.
 - For broadcast interviews, practice keeping your answers to about 20 seconds. Time yourself with a stopwatch, but don't look at it while you speak. You'll be surprised how quickly 20 seconds goes by, yet it's a long time on television.
13. In broadcast interviews:
 - Smile, sit erect and maintain open body language;
 - Use simple hand gestures;
 - Project energy;
 - Maintain eye contact — not 'camera contact';
 - Use the interviewer's name once near the beginning of the interview;
 - Keep your answers shorter than you think they should be. Sound bites rarely run beyond 20 seconds, 15 is average;
 - For television, dress conservatively. Don't wear stripes or small patterns, they go fuzzy on screen. Subdued "cool" colours lend a sense of authority; bright colours can make you seem less serious. Don't distract the viewer from your message by outlandish dress, unless of course that's part of your message;
 - If it's a studio interview, arrive early so you can get make-up;
 - If it's a field interview, ask the cameraperson if you can conduct it somewhere that fits with your message: with children playing behind you if it's about daycare cuts, under a tree if it's about logging, on the street if it's about the homeless. Try to avoid "behind-the-desk" interviews unless you want to look like a bureaucrat;
14. In print interviews:
 - Pay attention to how the interviewer paraphrases you. Correct her if necessary.
 - Take time to clarify or elaborate.
 - Offer to follow-up with additional information.
 - Supply photos if possible.

INTERVIEW CHECKLISTS

PRE-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Before sitting down to do an interview, try to answer all of the following questions:

1. Who am I speaking to?
 - What is her name?
 - What is his bias?
2. What is his area of interest?
3. What has she written/produced on this or similar topics before?
4. What is the reporter's objective?
 - Is there a particular issue she'd like to cover?
 - Is he looking for 'dirt'?
 - Is this piece part of a larger series? What is the series about?
 - Who else is she interviewing for the piece?
5. Who is the Audience?
 - Local?
 - National?
 - Industry?
6. How much time/space will I have to get my point across?
 - One quote?
 - seconds?
 - minutes?
7. What are my 2 or 3 key messages?
8. What are the 3 worst questions I may be asked?
 - How can I best respond to these questions?

POST-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Following your interview, take a couple of minutes to evaluate your message delivery.

Ask yourself, and ask others who were present, if you were able to:

1. Communicate your key messages
2. Avoid responding emotionally
3. Maintain control of the interview
4. Avoid repeating negative language, by turning answers to positives
5. Speak concisely and avoid using jargon
6. Use anecdotes
7. Avoid giving personal opinion
8. Use the interviewer's first name
9. Maintain eye contact and smile appropriately
10. Demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to your issue
11. Use effective, natural and appropriate body language

What to do when a reporter calls and catches you unprepared

A WORD OF CAUTION

If an agency has only one person who is "authorized" to talk to the media, and that person is away when a reporter calls, it gives a bad impression. Agencies should try to encourage any staff who are comfortable and familiar with the issues to talk to the media. This will require good planning and preparation of spokespeople. Any and all people speaking on behalf of your organization must be totally informed and practiced in the key messages you are trying to communicate.

Failing that ability, agencies should always designate an alternate spokesperson. Designated spokespersons should consider giving out their home or mobile phone numbers: you never know when a reporter might have a question that gives you an opportunity for free publicity, and the more accessible you are, the more likely a reporter is to call you. A pager is a good option – it is cheap and gives a bit of extra privacy.

IN ALL CASES

1. Find out what the story is about.
 - Is it a general issue the reporter feels you are competent to comment on? (If you are— it's free advertising. If you're not, politely turn them down and use the opportunity to educate them about what your organization does.)
 - Is it a story that is directly related to your organization? (Is there a potential for this story to damage you? Will it raise your profile? Consider before talking. If the reporter won't tell you, you don't have to deal with him.)
2. Ask for time.
 - Don't be hesitant to say you'll need time to get a handle on the issue, consult with others in your organization, your board, experts, and so on.
 - Determine the reporter's deadline and get back to them by that time. Even if you decide not to do an interview, it is critical that you let the reporter know so that he can find an alternative interviewee.
3. Prepare your answer.
 - Consider what you want to get out of the coverage.
 - Strengthen your story elements to make sure you achieve the profile you want from this free advertising
4. Call the reporter back.
 - Be aware that he probably already has a story focus and your involvement may be heavily edited and / or peripheral. Regardless, if you said you'd call back, do. It cannot be emphasized enough that you are building relationships and every call, or broken promise, will impact on your future credibility and reputation with the media.
5. Be appreciative and helpful when reporters call.

- Again, you're developing relationships. Can you refer to them to somewhere else for a quote? Comment on just one portion of the story?

If you're misrepresented

- Consider how serious it is. If it's really bad, ask for a correction. If it's not, use it as an opportunity to educate and build relationships. Can you get a story out of this?
- Call and discuss at a time of day when reporters are less likely to be busy.
- If it's serious, ask for the editor or producer
- Call right away if it's radio; the story will likely run more than once and you want to stop it.

If reporters are calling to cover bad news about your organization

Defuse the situation by:

- Deciding what you can and can't discuss (there must be ***something*** you can discuss—and being available to provide some details will go a long way to reducing the appearance of being under siege).
- Making the parts you ***can*** discuss available as soon as possible.
- Having a rationale for the parts you ***can't*** discuss (it's under investigation; I don't have the facts right now, etc.).
- Calmly reiterating this rationale if you are pressed.
- Avoiding engaging in speculation.
- Keeping your cool.
- Looking for ways to turn bad news into good coverage. Is there something you wanted to publicize anyway? Can you develop relationships with reporters?

If there's bad news about your organization and reporters are NOT calling

- Decide if you want to try to alter the perception that has been created.
- If so, act quickly. Get a media release or some sort of response out ASAP—the same day the story first appears.
- Make it clear that you are at the centre of the story (implying that balanced news coverage requires that you are heard).
- Answer what you can and hold off on the rest. Mitigate any damage, and open the door to further communication.
- Use this as an opportunity to educate about your organization—make sure your media material has basic background information about you.
- Call the reporters who have covered the story and ask them why they have not called you. Tell them you feel this was a misrepresentation of the story and educate them about your organization or issue. If they are unresponsive, call their editor and ask why you were not called. Stand your ground but take the line of questioning rather than criticizing (“I'd like to understand why you didn't call; I believe you should balance this story with a follow up story that includes our point of view...” rather than, “Your journalism sucks.”) Again, you are building relationships.

PRINT INTERVIEWS**Media Outlet****Reporter Doing Interview****Background****Phone****Fax****Email****Interview Date****Time****In Person? Location****By Phone? Who will call whom?****Subject****Has the Reporter been briefed?****By Whom?****Materials sent in Advance****Expected Publication Date****Photo to be taken? Photo required?**

MEDIA CALLS**Media Outlet****Contact Person, Title****Phone****Fax****Email****Contact Details****Date****Time****Action (called... sent release... sent media kit... etc...)**

B. Here is a sample Press Release for you to adapt as required:

Local women's centre challenges government on access to justice for poor women

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 8, 2007

A coalition of provincial women's organizations is challenging the provincial government's assertion that there is enough legal help for poor people in this province.

At a rally in St. John's to celebrate International Women's Day, Rosita Wu, the co-ordinator of the local women's centre, criticized the government's announcement that poverty law services were available via the Internet and call centres, and therefore local advocates were not necessary to provide services.

"How can women who do not have enough money for food afford a computer and an internet connection?" Ms. Wu said. She went on to point out that many women who come into the centre do not have telephones, and cannot wait on hold at pay phones to get assistance.

Poverty law services enable poor people and marginalized communities to protect their fundamental needs such as housing, food and income security. Access to justice requires access to poverty law services for all people, not just people who can afford a lawyer.

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For more information, contact:

Rosita Wu, St. John's Women's Centre: 250 555-5555

C. Here is a sample letter to the editor for you to adapt to whatever issue or particular event that you wish to address.

Dear Editor:

I am writing to express my concern about the assumptions in the article “Poverty law services have no place in the justice system” that appeared in your paper on March 9, 2007. In the article you stated that “using the courts and administrative tribunals to provide a vehicle for the poor to waste the justice system’s time is exacerbating the system’s already limited resources, resources that tax payers’ dollars are paying for.”

I am the co-ordinator of a women’s centre in Smalltown, British Columbia and I see daily the results of what happens when poor people do not have access to the justice system. Last month, several women came into the centre saying that they were being denied emergency assistance. These women were not told that they had the right to appeal these decisions. Because they did not receive the help they needed, these women and their children were going hungry.

A legal advocate from the centre told one of the women that she had the right to appeal and helped her fill out an appeal form. The advocate accompanied her to the Appeal Tribunal. The Tribunal ruled that the workers were misinterpreting government policy and that the woman should have received a cheque.

Poverty law services enable poor people and marginalized communities to protect their fundamental needs such as housing, food and income security. Access to justice requires access to poverty law services for all people in Canada; not just people who can afford a lawyer.

Yours truly,

Laurie Lee, Co-ordinator

Smalltown Women’s Centre,
Smalltown, BC
250 411 1111 (phone); laurie.lee@smalltown.ca

D. An example of an op ed piece by the CCPA

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives | Editorial
October 4, 2004

Women pay the price of legal aid cuts

By Alison Brewin

“After being denied Legal Aid in 2002, I represented myself twice in court. My ex-partner’s lawyer was brutal towards me. I had practiced going to court and representing myself, but this did not matter because I cannot argue with a lawyer. I am not a lawyer. I am just a mother.”

The idea that everyone is equal under the law is a fundamental principle that most Canadians take for granted. Our constitution guarantees equal access to justice for men and women. But when it comes to legal services in BC, it seems the constitution doesn’t hold much weight.

In 2002, as part of massive cuts to public services, the provincial government dramatically cut legal aid coverage. The budget for the Legal Services Society (LSS) — which provides legal aid services to British Columbians — was slashed by almost 40 per cent over three years. The vast majority of this came from funding for family and poverty law legal aid.

For women, the results have been devastating. Women’s need for legal services is overwhelmingly in the areas of family or civil law — precisely where most of the cuts were made.

Without adequate legal representation, women are losing custody of their children, giving up valid legal rights to support, and being victimized through litigation harassment. They are spending endless days navigating a complex legal system — researching and preparing legal documents, appearing without a lawyer for highly charged divorce and custody cases, and agreeing to settlements that are not in their own or their children’s interests.

“I feel as though this experience is ruining my daughter’s childhood. This has been ongoing for seven years... My daughter is now seeing a counselor to help her deal with the effects of the case... I always thought that this was supposed to be about her best interests. Yet it seems very clear that this is not at all about her interests.”

Family law includes divorce and custody disputes that the courts deal with when marriages break down. Poverty law involves things like appealing decisions about welfare and Employment Insurance benefits and disputes with landlords (such as evictions).

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Provincial funding for poverty law has been completely eliminated. Family law legal aid is now restricted to emergency situations — where someone is concerned for her safety or that of her children, or has reason to believe the spouse will leave the province with the children.

Using violence as a threshold for eligibility is wholly inappropriate given the complexities of domestic violence. Only access to adequate, quality legal representation based on need, not violence, will ensure that survivors of spousal abuse can free themselves from such situations.

“I was so scared at that time [in court] that I was physically sick, but I had to be strong because no one else would represent me. I have been through a lot but this was the most embarrassing experience.... When I came to Canada, I was told I could get help and this country supports the best interest of children — I just don’t agree or see this happening.”

Legal aid exists to ensure that people who cannot afford to pay for a lawyer aren’t left to fend for themselves. In criminal law cases where there is a threat of jail our justice system has always emphasized the importance of a fair trial and provides legal aid to ensure that those charged with a criminal offence have access to a lawyer to defend them. Family law, however, is viewed by the courts as a dispute between private individuals. This view of family law as “private” has been used by governments across the country to justify inadequate funding for legal aid.

BC’s Attorney General Geoff Plant makes no apologies for the cuts. Nor does he shy away from acknowledging his government’s view that the courts should not be involved in family law matters. But this view of the law completely ignores his government’s constitutional obligation to make sure policies do not undermine women’s equality, and the key role government plays in the complex web of law that governs marriage breakdown. It also ignores the reality that is going on in our courtrooms.

The sad irony is that the province collects considerably more than it spends on legal aid. A provincial tax of 7.5 per cent on legal services was created in 1992 specifically to fund legal aid. It currently provides approximately \$90 million to government coffers. This, in addition to \$9 million from the feds for criminal legal aid, far exceeds the current spending of \$55 million.

In the words of retired Madame Justice Claire L’Heureux-Dubé of the Supreme Court of Canada: “It is a matter of justice! Legal aid for women is not only a matter of equality as it is one of rights.”

– Alison Brewin is the Program Director at West Coast LEAF (Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund) and author of *Legal Aid Denied: Women and the Cuts to Legal Services in BC*, co-published with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

D. Another example of an op ed piece by the CCPA

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives | Editorial
April 18, 2006

McGuinty government fails vulnerable citizens

By Hugh Mackenzie

Look through the smokescreen created by Premier Dalton McGuinty's \$23 billion gap campaign and you see a provincial government that is in denial; one that has not been prepared to tackle the fundamental problems for which his government inherited responsibility when it took office.

If you only read the headlines, the record looks promising. The McGuinty government has increased funding significantly for health and education — two of its major priorities. But even that has not bought the real change that Ontario needs.

In health care, the government has not challenged the dysfunctional and inefficient patchwork of privatized public services in long-term care and home care created by the government's predecessor.

In elementary and secondary education, the government has invested in reducing class sizes across the system and improving funding for students at risk, but it continues to give boards less funding to pay teachers than they are actually paid and less funding for school operations than it actually costs to run schools.

In post-secondary education, funding has been increased, but with the government's new tuition policy, students will be paying more in tuition by the end of its term in office in 2007 than they would have if the previous government's policy of tying tuition to inflation remained in effect.

Beyond the priorities, the record is much worse.

Social assistance rates have been increased twice. But even with the increases, social assistance beneficiaries will be worse off when the latest increase takes effect, once inflation is taken into account, than they were when the McGuinty government was elected.

Thanks to the Harris government's cuts, benefits are scandalously low. A single person is expected to get by on \$547 even after the increase in the March budget, a single disabled person on \$980 a month, and a single parent with two children on \$1,184 a month. There is no relationship between these benefit levels and what it actually costs to meet basic needs in Ontario.

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Even the Liberals' promise to end the Harris government's clawback of the national child benefit from social assistance beneficiaries has evaporated. The Ontario budget focused on the \$550 per year in benefit increases for a single parent with two children that has been passed through since 2004. It failed to mention that the more than \$2,700 in child benefits clawed back by the Harris government is still being clawed back from the most vulnerable citizens. For every dollar in child benefits that the McGuinty government has chosen to pass through, \$5 is still being clawed back.

Just as important is the government's retreat from its plans for early childhood education. In the face of the Harper government's announced cancellation of the national child-care funding agreements, Ontario has simply folded its tent. Funding for 2005-6 is to be spread out over three years and its plans have been scaled back to fit, leaving parents, child-care providers and municipalities scrambling to figure out what to do next.

The government's response to the federal child-care cuts is pathetic. Child care is Ontario's responsibility. The government's First Start early childhood education plan was in the Ontario Liberals' election platform in 2003 — before there was a federal program. And the crisis in child-care availability in Ontario has nothing to do with the federal government; it was created by cuts imposed by the previous Ontario government.

The McGuinty Liberals are governing in a state of perpetual denial — as if the legacy of public services gaps they inherited does not exist.

That state of denial extends to the revenue side of the budgetary equation as well. The government freely admits that Ontario does not have the fiscal capacity to meet its citizens' public services needs. But its response has been to attribute Ontario's lack of fiscal capacity to McGuinty's apocryphal \$23 billion fiscal gap with Ottawa.

The government is denying the obvious. The cost of the tax cuts brought in by the previous government — now running at \$15 billion a year in lost revenue — went far beyond what this province could afford. And the bills are still coming in.

There is an answer that involves confronting Ontario's lost fiscal capacity and filling the gaps in public services left behind by the previous government. That's what the Ontario Alternative Budget does. Released last week by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the alternative budget shows that by restoring about half of Ontario's lost fiscal capacity, these needs could be met.

Of course, for the McGuinty government the avoidance strategy is the more attractive option. But even within its avoidance strategy, the government has failed its most vulnerable citizens.

The big attention-grabber in the March 23 budget was a \$3 billion turnaround in Ontario's fiscal position in 2005-6.

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Less than one-tenth of that amount would have been enough to end the clawback of the national child benefit from Ontario's most vulnerable families with children. The government chose to ignore them.

Less than one-fifth of that amount would have been enough to press on with plans for child care, rather than cutting and running in the face of the federal government's cancellation. The government chose instead to abandon its own plans.

Less than one-third of that amount would have been enough to get social assistance benefits halfway from their current level to Social Development Canada's market basket requirement for a basic income. The government chose to ignore the problem.

Instead, the government chose to put its fiscal turnaround at the service of its re-election plans, manipulating the numbers to create the groundwork for a good-news budget next (election) year.

Putting its political game plan ahead of the needs of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens is shameful.

Hugh Mackenzie is a research associate of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

- E. The following are sample questions that could be difficult to answer when you are being interviewed by the media and strategies for dealing with these questions.
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Being interviewed by the media

1 Loaded questions based on inaccurate assumption:

Poor people do not need poverty law services. Legal services are for people who have money to pay for a lawyer.

Challenge the inaccuracy, then move on to your message:

Legal services are for everyone. Poor people tend to interact with government bureaucracies more often than other people because of their need to access benefit programs to meet their fundamental needs. Poverty law services ensure poor and marginalized people can exercise their right to fulfill their basic needs for shelter and income. Without poverty law services poor and marginalized people are effectively barred from accessing justice in Canada.

2 Multipart questions confuse you by bombarding you with questions:

Using the courts to get someone a welfare cheque is a waste of tax payers' money, isn't it? What about criminals getting off because of backlogs in the court system? How can you justify wasting the justice system's time for something as minor as a welfare cheque?

Choose the question you want to answer. Do not try to answer them all:

A welfare cheque is not minor to someone who does not have enough money to buy groceries for her family. For a family that needs assistance, the welfare cheque is critical to their survival; families have to pay the rent, everyone needs to be able to put food on the table. Being denied welfare is not minor issue in a poor person's life; it is the single most important factor in being able to survive; everything else depends on it.

3 Hypothetical question:

If we had poverty law services, wouldn't that just increase the costs of justice and then wouldn't everyone want subsidized legal services?

Label the question speculation. Refocus the question to reflect the real issue:

It is just speculation that providing poverty law services would increase other costs to the justice system. The real question is "how can we continue to afford the civil and social disorder that comes about when you put obstacles in the way of accessing justice."

4 Bait question contains a word or phrase that is meant to create an emotional response:

Why should a bunch of welfare bums have access to our justice system?

Do not repeat the offensive word. Refute the allegations:

If we want to live in a fair and just society, then poor and otherwise marginalized people need to have their most fundamental needs for food and shelter met. Sometimes this means going to court or to a tribunal.

5 Personal opinion:

What do you really think about the poor having access to free legal help?

Your personal opinion is not the issue.

This is not about my personal opinion; it is about acknowledging that we all have a right to house, feed and clothe ourselves and our families: and when necessary have access to the justice system in order to exercise those fundamental rights.

6 You do not know the answer:

Admit that you do not know. If possible, get back to the interviewer with the information.