



EC/UNFPA INITIATIVE FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN ASIA

Advanced

Dealing With Media

A Practical Guide



ComNet co-ordinated by the German Foundation
for World Population (DSW)

DSW

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RHI Advanced Dealing with Media
– A Practical Guide

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1. Introduction

Media attention is an important means of reaching the general public, generating public debate and obtaining support for ideas and actions. Media attention, however, is the result of hard and committed work. There are a number of reasons as to why an NGO should seek to obtain media coverage, ranging from enhancing the visibility of the organisation, to facilitating fundraising and increasing membership.

For a general introduction into the first steps necessary for carrying out media work, please refer to “Dealing with Media – A Practical Guide” (to order a copy, please contact rhi_info@asia-initiative.org), which includes information on how to develop a media plan, how to build up effective media contacts and what tools you can use.

The following guide gives a more detailed overview on how to organise specific press activities, such as news releases, presentations and press tours.

2. News Releases and Feature Stories

A **news release** fits onto one page and is meant to inform the public about new developments within your organisation or your work. A lot more things can be regarded as news than people think, such as the opening of a new facility, your annual report with new data on reproductive health in the country, the start of a new project, the funding of a programme etc.

The news release can be designed as follows:

- a.** The title should contain the essence of the story.
- b.** The first paragraph should contain the facts that are the reason for the news story.
- c.** The second paragraph should contain the context of the news story: basic information on your organisation, other activities, former projects in this field etc.
- d.** The third paragraph should contain detailed contact information on whom to contact for interviews and a list of materials available for background information.

Be clear, short and concise. It makes sense to write a news release in a certain manner, that journalists can simply copy the first two paragraphs into their paper.

Make sure that there are enough people available to answer the phone and questions, the moment the journalists receive the news release.

A **feature story** is meant to inform the public on background information, to stimulate public debate and to present the issues in an accessible way.

A feature story can be designed as follows:

- a.** Formulate the central message of the story (for instance, “women in this country should have more choice with regards to having children”).
- b.** Identify people, who can put faces to the facts and interview them (for instance, a woman with nine children, who says that if she had had a choice, she would have had less children, and a woman, who decided to plan her family and to limit the family size).
- c.** Begin the story with these women and what they have to say on the issue. People like to read personal stories and in this way you take your readers from the personal stories to the facts.
- d.** In the following paragraphs, continue with related facts (how many children do women have on average, can everybody get contraceptives if wanted etc.).
- e.** Describe what the government and NGOs are doing with regards to the central message of the story or interview people, who can inform you on the policy in this field.
- f.** End the article by coming back to the women; what would they need to fulfil their aspirations?

A journalist, who is writing a feature story, needs sources that give information and facts on health and policy. He/she will also need people, who are willing to share concrete examples and the story of their life with them. It is always highly appreciated, if you help them find these people.

3. Interviews

Although there are several different forms of interviews, e.g. for the printed press, radio or television, some rules apply to all types of interviews:

a. Good preparation is essential.

b. Take an hour to answer the following questions:

- What is the story that you would like to tell the public? Make notes and write down the message you want to get through.
- What is the reason the journalist asked you for an interview? Think about the questions you can expect and how to go from those questions to the story you want to tell. (Example: the journalist wants to talk about the abortion law, but you want to tell the public that maternal mortality is too high in your country. Question: “do you think that the abortion law in our country needs to be revised?” Answer: “abortion is only one of the causes of maternal mortality in our country, other reasons are ... etc., and what we want to do about it is ...” etc.).
- Think about the worst questions you can expect and rehearse answers to them.

c. The interview:

- Meet the journalist in a neutral environment where you feel comfortable.
- Set a time schedule for the interview beforehand. One and half-hours is the time span, in which you can tell almost everything.
- You can ask to see the interview before it is published. However, the rule is that everything you have said can be printed or broadcast. Do not say anything, that you do not want to see in the papers.
- Try to use common language and to avoid expert or technical language (your organisation, for instance, is not dealing with reproductive health but with sex and having children).

- Be aware that you are talking to the general public, not to the journalist; he or she is only the mediator.
 - Try to put faces to the facts (Example: “one of our clients has the problem that ... etc., or as a father or mother, I think that young children need good sex education ...” etc.).
 - Mention the name of the organisation as much as possible. It is important that the public gets to know you.
- d. After the interview:**
- Listen carefully to the reaction of people in your neighbourhood.
 - Ask the journalist to inform you about response from the audience (letters or phone calls that the newspaper or radio/TV station might receive).
 - Act immediately if the reactions are negative, for instance by calling the radio station or sending a letter to the editor.

4. Presentations

Use selected occasions, for instance nearby conferences, to present your organisation.

A good presentation answers the following questions:

- a. What is the structure of the organisation?**
- b. What are the activities of the organisation?**
- c. What is the general attitude of the organisation towards the issues involved?**

A presentation can be designed as follows:

On the structure:

- a.** Give the name of the organisation and the mission statement or the central goals of the organisation. Try to avoid technical language and expert terms.

b. Inform on the founding date of the organisation, the founders, and the reason for setting up the organisation.

c. Present overall information on the number of employees, regional projects, number of clinics, other facilities or projects.

d. Give overall information on where your money comes from and name your international partners.

On the activities:

a. Try to describe your activities from the perspective of a client (Example: “a woman, who goes to our facility can do so from 8 until 10 in the morning. We offer the following services ...” etc.).

b. Inform on the client profile: who are they, what are their most important problems, what does the project offer to help them and how do they get to know your organisation.

c. Give names of other groups and organisations that your group co-operates with.

d. Inform on the main problems you face in your day-to-day operation.

On concepts and attitude:

a. Provide general information on your country, on issues you work with (for instance health, sex education, status of women, vulnerable groups).

b. Explain, what your organisation considers the most important problems in this field and what you think should be done about it.

c. Describe your plans for the near future.

d. Elucidate, what help you need most (money, technical assistance, public relations, political support etc.).

e. Explain, what you consider the biggest success in the work of your organisation.

Last but not least, remember that good presentations keep an eye on the formal aspects:

- a.** Visualise things: use charts, illustrations, diagrams, pictures, and/or overhead foils to capture the attention of all listeners.
- b.** Vary the intonation of your voice: modulate, emphasise, stress and accentuate.
- c.** Hand out the basic information on your organisation in form of brochures, folders, etc to the participants.
- d.** Keep your presentation short.
- e.** Practice your presentation, especially if you feel insecure about speaking in front of many people.

The impression you leave on the listeners, is the impression they get from your organisation.

5. Press Conferences

A press conference is an effective tool, if you have news that you want to tell the public.

The actual press conference takes no more than an hour, there should, however, be room for interviews with spokespeople of your organisation afterwards.

Preparation:

- a.** Find a room in a central location, that does not look embarrassingly empty when only a few people show up.
- b.** Find out, which is the best date and time for the journalists, with regards to their deadlines.
- c.** Send an invitation to all relevant media, try to identify the names of the journalists, who deal with these issues and invite them personally.
- d.** Compile a background information kit (including statistics, facts, contact details etc).
- e.** Make phone calls the day before the press conference to ask whether the journalists intend to come.

f. Prepare, what you want to say and discuss with your colleagues, who will say what.

The press conference:

a. Register the participants, collect their business cards and make sure you have all the necessary data to contact them again.

b. A rather effective form is to have one spokesperson, who welcomes the participants, introduces the organisation and briefly mentions the reason for being there. The second speaker can go into the real news item, while the third person gives background information.

c. After the three speakers, there should be time for questions. Radio journalists might want to talk to one of the spokespeople afterwards, the printed press might ask for background information.

Keep in mind:

- a.** Do not expect journalists to know what you are talking about. It might be the first time that they hear about your issues, explain everything in common language.
- b.** There are no stupid questions; there are only stupid answers.
- c.** Do not speculate about things you do not know.
- d.** Never ever lie.

Afterwards:

a. Evaluate the media attention you have been able to gain.

b. Add the journalists, that attended the press conference to your mailing list.

c. Make phone calls a few months later, to see if you can get some follow up attention. For instance, if you have opened a new facility, inform them about the number of clients or how the project is getting on.

6. Press Tours for Journalists

A press tour for journalists from the national media and abroad can be a very powerful tool to gain support and visibility for projects and programmes. A successful press tour will provide your organisation with friends for life. However, press tours also tend to reveal the weaknesses and problems of projects and programmes.

Most journalists have a positive attitude towards development aid and towards projects and programmes in this field.

They are also very keen on aspects that are important in the public debate such as:

- a.** Does the money go where it should, in other words: how bureaucratic or corrupt is the receiving government or organisation?
- b.** Is the money spent wisely and effectively?
- c.** Does the programme serve the needs of poor people?
- d.** Are clients treated with respect?
- e.** Does the project improve the clients' quality of life?

Preparations:

a. The responsibilities, needs and interests of journalists are different from those of politicians, policy makers or parliamentarians. It is therefore not a good idea to combine visits of these groups.

b. Similarly, radio, television and print media journalists have different requirements and should also constitute separate groups.

c. Keep the group small.

d. Make sure, that you have at least one interpreter for every three foreign journalists.

e. Do not splash out on luxurious hotels for the journalists. Especially western journalists will find it hard to deal with projects for poor people, in relation to the luxury of the hotel, in which they are staying and might feel bribed.

f. Prepare an information kit with background information, names of locations, statistics etc. for the journalists to take home with them.

During the press tour:

a. Journalists want to go to the field, while host organisations sometimes want them to visit important people in the capital. To avoid irritation, it is wise to limit visits to ministries, political leaders etc. to a third of the visits at the most.

b. Journalists are aware that the work involved is difficult and that there are obstacles and problems. They will highly appreciate it, if you share your problems with them, which contributes to your accountability. Hiding problems and weaknesses will make them suspicious and less enthusiastic about what you are doing. They will judge you by the way you are dealing with problems and mistakes, not by the fact that they exist.

c. The best spokespeople for your work are the beneficiaries of your projects. The story of their life, their problems, their concerns and their appreciation of your work will make it into the feature stories. Give your guests the opportunity and plenty of time to talk to them.

The RHI Practical Media Guide is part of the ComNet's capacity building measures. The "Information and Communication Network" (ComNet) is a Regional Dimension Project funded by the European Commission (EC) and UNFPA under the EC/UNFPA Initiative for Reproductive Health in Asia (RHI) and co-ordinated by the German Foundation for World Population (DSW). It aims at helping the partners of the RHI to increase their capacity in the field of Information and Communication and informing the international community about the activities of the RHI.

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