

Public Relations Tips and Tools

First Step: A Media Audit

If you are not already familiar with the reporters in your area who cover community issues, children and families, education, etc., your first step will be to conduct a media audit.

- **Determine Target Outlets.** Consider what local newspapers, Web sites, newsletters, radio stations, and television stations are reaching your potential members and supporters. Make a list of these top outlets and record their address, phone number, Web site, and email addresses.
- **Find the Right Reporter.** Call the front desk or editorial desk of each media outlet on your target list and ask which reporters and/or editors cover the subjects in which you are interested. Be sure to include columnists who report on community news and editors of community calendars and sections such as “People in the News.”
- **Relationship Building.** Once you determine the individuals you want to target with your news item, give them a call. Be respectful of the reporters’ time and first ask them if they are on deadline and would prefer if you called back at another time. If they are able to talk, introduce yourself and give a brief background on why you are calling. Ask reporters:
 - What subjects they cover regularly.
 - How they would like to receive information from you—phone, email, mail, fax?
 - What their interests are right now and the trends they are following.
 - What information you can provide them from your club that would be of interest.

Keep in mind that this first phone call will not likely result in the reporter covering your Kiwanis club. Instead, it will be the beginning a mutually beneficial relationship between you and the reporter and will help you understand what stories might be of interest to them in the future.

News Release Success

A news release is often the preferred method for media outlets to receive news. However, not all news releases are successful. Consider these tips when customizing your release and distributing it to media:

- **Consider Your Audience.** When customizing the release with information about the news from your Kiwanis club, ask yourself, “Why should the reader care?” The media will be interested in your release more if they feel it will have an impact on their readers. So, by asking this question and including the answer to it in your news release, you increase the likelihood of getting media attention.
- **Get the Word Out.** When it comes time to distribute your news release, send the release to each media contact through their preferred delivery method. Include a note with the news release letting the reporter that you have

spokespersons available and to contact you to schedule an interview. (Make sure your spokespersons are aware of their role, potential questions they could be asked, and that they are prepared for a possible call)

- **Be Persistent.** Within a day or two of distributing your news release, place a phone call or e-mail to each media contact to ask them of their interest in your release and see if they have any additional questions or would like an interview. Often times, reporters receive so much information that a quick reminder will be appreciated and will bring their attention back to your story.

Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor

Op-Ed columns and letters to the editor give you the opportunity to communicate directly to the public—including influential decision-makers—and shape or frame a debate in your own words, instead of asking a reporter to frame the story for you. There may be opportunities for you to utilize an Op-Ed or a letter to the editor in your efforts to raise awareness of the good work Kiwanis is doing in your community and around the world.

What Makes a Good Op-Ed?

An Op-Ed is a column or guest essay published in the opinion section of a newspaper (**O**pposite the **E**ditorial page). Most are between 500-750 words, and most outlets will take submissions by fax, e-mail or mail.

- **Finding the Right Timing.** Op-Eds should present an argument that is relevant and timely. For example, there might be a recent news item involving children in your community or a particular community issue that your Kiwanis club could urge support for. Op-Ed page editors are not looking for event announcements, promotional materials, or generic ideas.
- **Who is Delivering Your Message?** Find a well-known person—perhaps your president or a well-known community figure—who can sign the Op-Ed column's byline. Be sure to include that person's title, home address, phone number and email address when you submit the Op-Ed in case the publication would like to verify any information with them.
- **Short and Sweet.** Aim to keep your Op-Ed to fewer than 650 words. After writing a first draft, eliminate all unnecessary words or repetitive sentences. Again, remember to avoid technical jargon and acronyms.
- **Deliver then Follow Up.** Most newspapers will prefer that you send your Op-Ed to a specific e-mail address. If they don't make it clear on their Web site, call the main number and ask. Once it's been sent, don't call the newspaper or magazine repeatedly. If they're going to publish your piece, they'll call you. Don't be discouraged if your piece is not published; consider submitting it to another publication.

Submitting a Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor is an opportunity to offer a short rebuttal or differing perspective to an article recently published in the media outlet. Similar to an Op-Ed, a letter should present a distinct perspective—the difference being that the letter generally must directly refer to an article that appeared within the past week or so.

- **Make it Timely.** One of the most important elements of submitting a letter to the editor is ensuring that you respond quickly. Remember: News is timely. You should aim to send your letter no more than four days after the original article was printed.
- **Remain Clear and Concise.** Though letters to the editor should typically be fewer than 250 words, most newspapers will edit them down to fewer than 100 if they decide to print it. Therefore, it's important to make your case clear and concise. The more impact each sentence in your letter has, the less editing the paper will do if they publish it.
- **Pick a Messenger.** Just as with an Op-Ed, determine a well-known individual from your Kiwanis club as the source of the letter. In the letter, make clear why this person is a credible source of information on the topic. For example: "As president of the local Kiwanis club..." or "In my 20 years of community service..."
- **Getting it Submitted and Published.** Many larger newspapers will have a general e-mail box for letters to the editor. Check the publication's Web site or call the main number to get this address. Include full contact information of the person writing the letter, including a local address within the newspaper's readership area. It is not encouraged to aggressively follow-up on a letter to the editor, as publications may receive hundreds of letters every day. If the paper is going to print your letter, they will likely do so within a week of the original article.