

Developing a Media Relations Plan

The media can play an important role in helping to maximize the impact of your traffic safety outreach efforts. In order to make sure that your interaction with the media is done cohesively and succinctly, not randomly or without direct purpose, the development of a comprehensive media relations plan is essential.

The purpose of a media relations plan is to help you take a step back, look at the “big picture” of how to interact with the media and then proceed with clarity and purpose. There are several components to any successful media relations plan. Creating a plan will help you and your organization stay on track and be more direct in working with the media.

Media Relations Plan Components:

Situational Analysis — The first step in creating a media plan is to analyze your current “situation” or “environment.” Conducting a “situational analysis” will allow you to thoroughly examine the history, background and potential obstacles facing your issue or cause. This analysis also enables you to determine any positive or negative information about your external or internal environments. For example, if you are trying to promote seat belt compliance among teens, it will be important to ask the following questions:

- What is the current compliance rate? How does it compare to the seat belt use rate of adults in California?
- What are the common characteristics of those teens not wearing seat belts?
- Are there any existing programs in your area focusing on the issue? If not, when was the last program implemented? Was it successful?
- Will your audience be accepting of messages or not?

Goal — What is the “overarching” end result you wish to achieve? In keeping with the above example, your goal might be to increase awareness about the importance of seat belt usage by generating news stories or it might be even broader — increasing teen seat belt compliance in your county by three percentage points within a specific time frame. The goal will provide the direction that your media relations strategy will take.

Objectives — Media relations objectives relate directly back to your identified goal and should be measurable. They represent “how” you will meet your overarching goal. Objectives that would directly support the goal of increasing safety belt use could be:

- Generating positive awareness of the importance and life-saving benefits of seat belt compliance through broadcast, online and print media stories
- Increase visibility of your organization through media relations (i.e., increasing calls to your organization)

Target Audience — Identifying specifically “who” you are trying to reach will help in developing key strategies and what tactics (actual actions) will work best. Audiences can be the news media themselves, policy makers, community leaders or the general public. Often target audiences are broken down even further — children, parents, teens. If you are conducting an ongoing campaign about the dangers of impaired driving, your primary target audience would likely be comprised of the

following groups of people:

- Motorists
- Repeat offenders
- Men, 18-34 years of age

Secondary target audience members might include policy makers and community leaders — in an effort to engage them in the topic.

Strategy Development — Now that your goal has been identified, it's time to develop your strategy — your approach in meeting your goal and objectives. Strategies are not specific tactics, but rather they represent the “who” and “what” and the “how” of meeting your stated objectives. For example, if your objective is to generate more news coverage for your program, a strategy might be to foster relationships with appropriate reporters. The tactics within the strategy might be a news conference, letter to the editor or regular news releases.

Key Message and Story Angle Development — The first step in developing your story for media consumption is identifying the key messages you want to communicate to your target audience. What message do you want people to remember? Are you asking them to become aware of an issue, alter their opinion or change their behavior? By narrowing down your focus, and repeating your key messages often, you'll have better success in reaching your audience.

Once you have determined your key messages, it's important to develop your media angle or “hook.” What is it about your program or event that makes it newsworthy, links it to the community or affects the public? Is there a current trend affecting your issue? The more you can simplify the message, the more likely your chances for success.

Tactics — Tactics are specific tools used or actions taken to reach your target audience(s) and assist you in meeting your goal. Tactics always flow directly from your stated objectives and goal and they are never done simply for the sake of doing something. They are done with a specific intent and end-goal in mind.

Media relations is one tactic from a long list of communication disciplines. All of the sample media relations tools you will find in this media resource guide are different media relations tactics (news release, media advisory, news conference, etc). Which tactic(s) you use will, again, be based on your overarching goal and your identified target audience. For example, if you are trying to encourage the use of bicycle helmets among children of a specific ethnic population, the tactics used to communicate your message will be very different than if you were trying to reach adult men with anti-DUI messages. The channels through which these two groups receive information are likely to be very different.

Media List Development — Lastly, it will be important to create an updated, comprehensive media list to help in distribution of your media materials. Please see *Media Relations Tools & Techniques*, for more information.