

**WIC OUTREACH:
GUIDELINES FOR BUILDING
MEDIA RELATIONS**

WIC Outreach: Guidelines for Building Media Relations

One way to gain public awareness and support for the WIC Program is through your local media – newspapers, radio and television. Working with the media can also help reach potential clients who may not be aware of the important services provided by WIC. Having good relationships with the media can markedly improve the effectiveness of using them for outreach purposes.

Local WIC agencies can facilitate establishing and maintaining positive relations with media personnel by remembering certain guidelines. This publication has been designed to outline several of these guidelines to assist agencies with media interactions. Although the topics in this publication were not written in the format of sequential steps, it might be helpful to consider them roughly in the order as they appear. **Also, please note that as you read these guidelines, it is important to take into account any media rules and regulations specific to your local WIC agency.**

As an overview, the guidelines briefly describe the following eight topics.

- Preparing a list of key media personnel
- Characteristics of a newsworthy story
- How and why to prepare a media kit
- How to build media relationships
- How to prepare a fact sheet
- How to write a news release
- Guidance for holding a news conference
- Tips for hosting media visits or interviews

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1. Preparing a Media List

Compile a list of the following local media. Organize each list by market served. Some publications or stations are appropriate for some types of news, but not all.

- Print Media – newspapers, magazines, “shoppers” and other give-aways, and entertainment magazines
- Broadcast Media – radio and television stations

News staff decide what is newsworthy based on what they believe interests or affects their audiences. So, in your list, include the names, titles, addresses, and telephone numbers of the following key players. Update your media list every four to six months.

- Editors for city desk, city/county government, health, lifestyle decide what goes into newspapers and edit the news.
- Reporters on relevant beats for city/county government, health, lifestyle (at small papers, these might be the same person) write the stories.
- T.V. and Radio producers decide who goes on shows/programs.
- News directors decide what goes on the air.
- Assignment editors decide what goes in the story. They are supervised by news directors.
- Public service directors review and decide which community groups, programs, or projects to promote. Serve as publication or station’s liaison to community.

2. What News is Newsworthy?

Before you contact the press to cover a story, you must have something newsworthy to say. Remember your main objective for media coverage related to outreach is to raise public awareness of WIC and to increase WIC enrollment.

What is newsworthy? Something.....

- New that no one has ever said or heard before.
- Timely—yesterday’s news is old news.
- That involves a public figure, celebrity, or well-known organization.
- That affects a large number of people.
- With a human-interest angle. (Success stories with women and children always score high). Include pictures with personal stories.
- Visual (for television and news photography).
- That centers around an event or happening.
- That is “good news” such as lower, statewide anemia rates that can be directly tied to WIC.
- That is a variation of a theme already receiving media attention.
- Accessible to the media—give location, time, and other important information.
- Interesting on what would otherwise be a slow news day.
- Unusual or ironic.

3. Preparing a Media Kit

Media kits are the primary tools used to attract the media. They provide media personnel with newsworthy and background information in a clear and concise fashion. Their specific purposes are:

- To start conversation with reporters, editors, or radio/T.V. staff when making initial contact or requesting time on a talk show, airing of a PSA, or story coverage.
- To distribute at a media event, such as a press conference or charity drive.

Media kits usually consist of a 9” by 12” two-pocket folder and contain any or all of the following:

- News/press release (see p.9 – Writing a News Release)
- Biographical sketch of the WIC director and/or other key personnel
- Fact sheet (see p. 8 – Preparing a Fact Sheet)
- Photographs
- Graphs and charts
- Collateral and miscellaneous items
- Contact information

The outreach folder titled, WIC Makes a Difference (DHHS #1037F), may provide a starting point for the media kit. Add the pertinent elements from the list above that support your story. Remove any inserts from the folder that may distract from the focus of your story.

4. Meeting the Local Media

It is a good idea to get to know the local reporters and editors. You learn what they consider newsworthy, who to call when you have a story idea, timing of deadlines, and other useful information. In return, they learn who you are and that you are a source of good story ideas and information about the WIC Program.

Try to establish yourself as friendly to the media, but remember, a reporter's job is to seek news. Answer their questions accurately and quickly and offer your services as a "background source" to provide information about public health programs, including WIC. Also, offer to direct questions about other public health issues to the appropriate health department personnel. The key to developing good media relationships is *availability* and *credibility*.

Consider the following tips when developing your relationships with reporters.

- A reporter is never completely off duty. If you say something newsworthy, it could show up in the news.
- Offer to review any technical material for accuracy prior to publication or airing.
- Don't try to buy reporter's attention with gifts or flattery. Good reporters can't be bought.
- Don't tell reporters how to do their jobs or ask to see a story before it is printed.
- Don't expect reporters to think something is newsworthy just because you do.
- Don't play favorites among reporters by giving one reporter a story before the others. You may alienate too many people and get less coverage overall.

The next page discusses tips on making **initial contact** and establishing an **ongoing relationship** with media personnel.

When making **initial contact** with media personnel, consider the following:

- Make an appointment to introduce yourself to the appropriate reporter, editor, or the public service director, although this may be more difficult in a larger town. Mid to late morning is the best time to visit reporters and editors. They are *very* busy in the afternoons.
- Tell the reporter or editor about the WIC program and provide a media kit. Hand-deliver your media kit to the editor/s of the section's in which you wish to publicize your information.
- Depending on time available, offer one or two story ideas for consideration.
- Leave your name and phone number on a Rolodex card.

Once you have made initial contact with local reporters and editors, it is important to establish an **ongoing relationship**. The best way to do this is through sending out periodic press releases and holding press conferences when you have important news. Be open to visits from the media.

When you have a story you would like covered, consider the following steps:

- Identify the media personnel who handle your issue and send them a media kit.
- Call media personnel in advance of sending your information or place a follow-up call to make sure they received it. Fax the information immediately if they have not received it.
- After they have had time to review the information, re-contact the reporter or editor to determine their interest in placing a story.
- Do not hesitate to re-send the information if they have not received it or say they have not seen it.

5. Preparing a Fact Sheet

Fact sheets should be included in media kits. They contain information about the WIC Program in general and about your project or clinic. The details on a fact sheet may depend on the focus of your press release or PSA. See the WIC outreach folder, WIC Makes a Difference, for information on the program. All fact sheets should contain the following:

- Name, location, hours, and services provided at your WIC clinic, including any recent changes.
- Key dates for special events, such as walk-in blitz clinics.
- A brief summary of the WIC Program as well as its mission and successes. (Include Medicaid savings associated with the WIC Program.)
- Information about WIC services (i.e. nutrition education, WIC foods, referral to other health and community resources, and breastfeeding support), the importance of these services for good health, and the means by which participants obtain them.
- Statistics (e.g., number of participants served last month and any recent changes, amount of food dollars spent in the community last year, number of people potentially eligible for the WIC Program, etc.).
- Eligibility requirements for the WIC Program.
- The civil rights statement. (See the WIC Program Manual, Chapter 4.)
- Contact information including names, addresses, and phone numbers as appropriate.

6. Writing a News Release

News releases must be.....

- Timely – News is now. Something that happened yesterday, last week, or last month is old news. If a story isn't timely, hold off. You don't want to get a reputation for wasting reporters' time.
- Urgent – Use interesting information and attention-getting facts to put the story in perspective.
- Brief and focused – Length should be 1 ½ to 2 ½ pages maximum. Hook the assignment editor or reporter quickly, or you may lose him or her – and your chances of coverage. Isolate the message you want to share and make it clear.
- Important to people – Tell the practical importance of your announcement. What impact will your news have on people's lives? Include a description of the WIC Program, eligibility criteria, location of the local agency (including addresses and telephone numbers), civil rights statement, and a contact person to handle future questions.
- Authoritative – Quote appropriate experts.
- Easy to understand – Use lay terms. Scrap bureaucratic, scientific, and medical terminology when possible. If you must use any term, define it simply and concisely. Don't assume that non-health professionals understand terms that are commonplace to you.
- Complete – Begin by answering the six basic questions of journalism – Who? What? Where? When? How? And Why? End with contact information.
- Formatted properly – Put the subject of the press release and the contact person's name and telephone number at the top of the first page. If the press release takes more than one page, write "more" on the bottom of each sheet but the last one. For subsequent pages, repeat the contact person's last name, the topic and page number in the upper left corner. Avoid splitting sentences or paragraphs between pages, even if it means leaving excessive empty space. Type ### centered at the end on the last page. Remember to double-space the text (see sample in Appendix A).
- Photo friendly – Suggest photographic possibilities. Remember to obtain consent form/s when you arrange a photo session. The media representative (newspaper, magazine, or TV station) will obtain his or her own consent forms for photos he or she takes.

NOTE: Remember to include a non-discrimination statement at the end of all press releases.

7. Holding a News Conference

News conferences follow a certain style. Remember to.....

- Open with a short statement, lasting no more than 30 to 60 seconds. State the reason for the news conference and give the basic story. Say who you are and why you are there.
- Introduce key speakers. Never have more than three speakers at a press conference.
- Don't be surprised by questions. Reporters are there to ask questions. It's their job. Be sure to allow plenty of time for questions and answers. Always answer honestly and directly. If the reply requires some thought, stop and take the time to think it through. Do not brush aside a reporter's question.
- Listen closely and respond to each question. If you don't know the answer, don't speculate. Write down the question and the reporter's phone number and respond as soon as possible on that and other related information.
- Share media kits. Include vital facts or statistics, staff biographies, the text of the opening remarks.

Carefully select the location and time of the press conference. Consider:

- Location: Are the building and room easy to find?
- Timing: Is the time convenient for reporters? Mid to late morning is usually best to give reporters enough time to write their stories by deadline. Try to avoid a schedule conflict with other events.
- Parking: Is there enough?
- Space: Is the room large enough for all the reporters and their equipment?
- Electricity: Is there sufficient power for reporters' tape recorders, lighting, and sound equipment?

8. Hosting a Media Visit/Providing Interviews

When a news reporter asks to visit the WIC clinic and/or to interview you....

- Be prepared! Provide supplemental information such as media kits, fact sheets and research reports. Reporters may need the information to more fully understand your program. Prior to any interview, make a list of all possible questions (including negative) the reporter may ask and develop answers carefully. This will result in conveying the information correctly and concisely, helping you avoid damaging misstatements and making you a more effective spokesperson.
- Be accessible and accommodating. Have professional experts and program recipients available for interviews and photos. Meet reporters at the door and show them where to go. Offer information as requested.
- Know media deadlines. News crews have rigid daily deadlines. If they need something, they generally need it quickly. Mid to late morning is usually convenient for a media visit or interview.
- Be concise. When you are interviewed, speak in brief, focused sentences. Use layman's terms. Stick to the subject – you need not tell everything you know, particularly if it involves proprietary or confidential information.
- Admit to bad news, if you must, but emphasize any positive aspects. Point out what has been done to rectify the negative. Use it as an opportunity.
- Never speak “off the record.” Don't say anything you don't want to see in the news.
- Don't say “no comment.” It is perceived as an indication of guilt and/or dishonesty. Tell them you will get the information and get back to them. Ask for their deadline.
- Don't take reporter's insulting questions personally. It could be a tactic to get you to react angrily. Stay calm and continue to make points rationally.
- Don't argue with reporters or lose your temper. They're only doing their jobs.
- Make sure you understand the exact question being asked. Reporters don't always ask the right questions. Ask them to repeat the question if you're not sure.
- Be honest even it hurts. It is much better than lying to a reporter. They may find out. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Defer to another source or offer to find out and call with an answer as quickly as possible. Don't let reporters press you into answers you don't know.

- Above all, RELAX. Advise your staff in advance when the media is coming. Ask them to act naturally and to cooperate.

Television Interviews

If your local health department receives coverage by a television station and they request an interview, remember to...

- Prepare by selecting your “must air” points and stressing them in the interview. Write them out and be sure to watch the time so they all get said. Script the interviewer. Although they may not use all of it, it may help get some of your questions asked.
- First impressions are critical – establish your likableness. Smile and thank the interviewer; call the interviewer by name.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer – the “crossover” moment between question and answer is critical to credibility on tough questions. To lose contact could indicate evasion, dishonesty, or anxiety.
- Speak up clearly and distinctly. Maintain an even pace to word delivery. Words should not slur together, nor go too fast or too slowly.
- Color important words – Go up the scale to a higher note. This is a good way to underscore major points. Then, take a slight pause to reinforce the importance of what you’ve said.
- Do not swivel or lean to one side in the chair. Sit fairly erect with a slightly forward tilt. This will help your energy level and make you look more attentive.
- Keep your answers short, simple, and free of unfamiliar jargon. Get to the conclusion first, and then explain. (e.g., Good nutrition results in having healthier babies with fewer developmental problems. WIC contributes to good nutrition by providing...)
- Work the name of your organization into your answers, but make the interjections logical and unobtrusive (e.g., “We at the Monroe County Health Department believe...”).
- Offer to bring appropriate visual materials that could illustrate your points. Film or videotape clips are especially desirable

Radio and Telephone Interviews

Frequently radio interviews are conducted by telephone. When providing radio interviews, remember to.....

- Ask whether the interview is to be aired live, live-taped, or taped. Turn off any “noise” makers in your office. Cut other telephone calls. Close office door.
- To sound alert, sit up straight in the chair or stand up.
- Don’t shout or whisper. Speak in normal tones over the telephone mouthpiece.
- Tilt mouthpiece slightly away from your mouth to avoid “popping” or “hissing.”
- Make sure you have a clear telephone line.
- Watch pauses. “Uh” sounds worse on radio than anywhere else. Silence is better.
- Avoid using numbers unless absolutely necessary. If numbers are needed, round them off.

Appendix A: Sample Press Release

Use agency letterhead

RELEASE: IMMEDIATE (*or date, month, year, and time*) DATE: (*date distributed*)

Contact: (*Name and telephone number of contact person for more information*)

WIC PROGRAM PROVIDES ASSISTANCE FOR ELIGIBLE WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN

(*CITY*) – WIC or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program provides supplemental nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health care and community resources to participants. The WIC Program is available at (*insert name and location of local WIC agency*). You may apply for the WIC Program on (*insert days of the week*) from (*insert times of day*).

To be eligible a person must:

- ◆ Be a pregnant woman; a breastfeeding woman who has had a baby in the last 12 months; a woman who has had a baby in the last six months; an infant; or a child up to the fifth birthday;
- ◆ Reside in North Carolina and in the health delivery area of the WIC agency;
- ◆ Meet the income eligibility scale - The gross annual household income cannot exceed 185% of the Federal poverty income guidelines - All **Medicaid, Food Stamp and Work First recipients meet the WIC income eligibility criteria;** and
- ◆ Have an identified nutritional risk as determined by a health professional. Nutritional problems include anemia, poor growth, previous poor pregnancy outcome, inadequate dietary intake and other nutrition related health problems.

-MORE-

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WIC Program Provides Assistance

Contact: *(Name and telephone number of contact person for more information)*

For more information about WIC or to make an appointment please visit *(insert local agency*

name and location) or call *(insert local agency phone number)*. Or, you may call 1-800-

FOR-BABY (1-800-367-2229) from 9:00am to 5:00pm Monday through Friday.

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