



Youth

in action
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Working With the Media

Which Organizations Make Up the Media?

The term “media” refers to all means of mass communication in your community—news and nonnews, local and national. It is largely through these publications, broadcasts, visual displays, and advertisements that you and everyone in your community learn what’s going on.

Media vary widely in how many people they reach. Your school newspaper, for example, reaches far fewer readers than a national newspaper or magazine. Different media organizations also have different goals. Your school newspaper reports on items of interest to you and your classmates, such as student elections, dances, and athletic events, while a major newspaper concentrates on stories of regional, national, and international importance.

News media include daily and weekly newspapers, television, radio, and news magazines. Other communications fall within the term “media,” such as billboards; neighborhood and community newsletters; cable television (TV) providers; and posters, magazines, and newsletters.

Whatever their audience size, purpose, or affiliation, the media in your community reach and inform almost everyone. Partnerships with the media, therefore, will allow you to get your crime prevention message to individuals and organizations that help decide exactly what your community sees, hears, and reads.

There are so many messages to send, so many stories to tell, so many people to reach. The media offer direct and often immediate access to people in their schools, homes, and workplaces. They may even reach people driving in their cars as they listen to the radio or read billboard messages. Given the media’s far-reaching effects, establishing lasting partnerships with newspapers, magazines, TV and

from the administrator

In a world where so many stories and viewpoints are competing with each other for the public’s attention, it would be foolish to neglect the potential of your local media in publicizing your message. This Bulletin provides specific steps that you can take to get started in working with the media to prevent crime in your community and to develop a productive partnership that will help your ideas to get the consideration they merit.

radio stations, advertising companies, and other communications organizations is important in your effort to publicize your program and prevent crime.

How Does Working With the Media Prevent or Reduce Crime?

By working with the media in your community, you help educate everyone—children, youth, and adults. You also build support for youth crime prevention. Using your connections in the media will allow you to get your message out in a very powerful way. Broadcasting a message on a local radio station, for example, may be much more effective than simply posting fliers in your neighborhood. While hundreds of people listening to radios at home, at work, in their cars—or even while jogging down the street—will hear the radio message, only those who happen to walk or drive through the particular streets in your neighborhood where fliers are posted—and who actually read the fliers—will receive the message.

You can use the media to inform the public about your efforts and your successes. The media can

help you attract new volunteers and supporters and allow you to build partnerships with other community groups that can help. You never know where these relationships may lead. You may even receive some free publicity or sponsorship!

What Does It Take To Start Working With the Media?

First of all, you'll need to know exactly where to send information that you want printed, broadcast, or displayed. Call your local television station or community newspaper, and ask for the public affairs or marketing department. Find out if a specific reporter is assigned to cover your school or youth programs for the community newspaper. Your school's journalism teacher, athletic director, or principal can provide information on helpful media contacts. Parent-teacher association (PTA) officers are also good sources of information. Make sure to introduce yourself to the person in charge of collecting information for the PTA newsletter and find out how and when to submit an item to be printed in the newsletter. Ask the faculty sponsor or student editor of your school paper to include an article on your program in the next issue.

After getting to know media contacts and learning where to send information that you want to publicize, your group should work on clarifying the message that it wants to communicate. Think about the main points of your message. Are you promoting one program or addressing many activities? Are you calling for a specific action? Do you simply want the media to publicize your program or do you want to get the media involved directly as a program participant or an official sponsor?

As your group plans its work with the media, it should follow five critical planning steps:

- ◆ Develop a process.
- ◆ Reach out to a variety of media organizations.

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:

- ◆ *Assessing Your Community's Needs.*
- ◆ *Planning a Successful Project.*
- ◆ *Lining Up Resources.*
- ◆ *Acting on Your Plans.*
- ◆ *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the "Resources" section. Good luck!

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- ◆ Start getting the word out.
 - ◆ Keep media contacts lined up.
 - ◆ Develop allies.

Step 1: Develop a Process

Spreading information about your program also requires developing a process for preparing and sending out media communications such as media advisories, press releases, and pitch letters. Follow these steps:

- ◆ Design a letterhead that highlights your organization's name, address, and telephone number; copy or print advisories and front pages of press releases onto this letterhead.
- ◆ Decide who will be your group's "point of contact" (the person whom reporters or other media representatives should contact) for a particular issue or story. Always provide the name and telephone number of the point of contact so that the media representatives can get answers quickly.
- ◆ Write media releases in the "inverted pyramid" style. This means the most important facts (who-what-when-where-how-why) come first. The less important facts come later; and the least important facts come last. Importance is defined by what the media and the public will find important, not by what your group wants highlighted. Study news articles to see what type of information is usually emphasized. By following the "inverted pyramid" style of writing, you'll make sure that your audience or readers get the most important information first. You'll also make sure that readers who stop reading or listeners who tune out early receive the most crucial information. Don't bury the most important information at the end of a story or broadcast!
- ◆ Limit press releases to no more than two or three pages.

- ◆ Check spelling and grammar. Better still, have someone else proofread for you.
- ◆ Double space the press release, and print it on only one side of the paper.
- ◆ Fax or mail the release promptly, and make sure you've sent it to the most current media contact. Old news is no news, and news on the wrong person's desk is dead news!

Step 2: Reach Out to a Variety of Media Organizations

Remember: don't limit your media contacts to your community's daily newspapers and major TV and radio stations. Include your school's newspaper and PTA newsletter, your school system's publications, bulletins of religious organizations in your community, weekly newspapers, "magazine" sections of the Sunday newspaper, local calendars of events (often found in newspapers but separate from the daily news), youth center leaflets and message boards, and any other communication outlets in your community. Local talk shows are usually produced separately from the TV or radio news departments, so add them to your list of media contacts. Don't forget about Web sites, cable TV organizations, and supermarket bulletin boards!

Step 3: Start Getting the Word Out

Getting the word out about your program requires concentration, a significant time commitment, persistence, and—most important—a clear and powerful message.

Concentration

To keep your media efforts focused, assign one person or a small group of people to be your group's media representative(s) or spokesperson(s). As they will have the important job of communicating with media representatives on behalf of your group, spokespersons or media representatives must be responsible, well spoken, and easy to get along with.

Time Commitment

Form a media committee for your group and assign activities to all committee members so that no single person has too much to do. Even with a committee, however, writing up the following types of media releases is time consuming:

- ◆ **Media advisories** (notices of upcoming events that highlight why media should be interested).
- ◆ **Press releases** (stories that tell the “who, what, when, where, how, and why” of an event or activity that has taken place and provide interesting quotes or illustrations).
- ◆ **Pitch letters** (brief letters to media contacts that propose ideas for a story, especially one that is more in depth than a regular news item).

Time is also needed to fax or mail these items to the media; to determine your message; to select spokespeople; to collect photos, summaries, and fact sheets; to make followup telephone calls; to discuss story ideas with reporters, editors, producers, administrators, or advertisers; and to record all media coverage your program receives. Make sure your volunteers understand how much time and hard work it takes to secure great media coverage!

Persistence

Getting the media to cover your program also requires persistence. Explain to your volunteers the importance of introducing themselves to media representatives, following up on all telephone calls or requests from the media, and keeping media representatives informed of your activities—even if they seem to have forgotten about you! Only through group members’ persistent efforts will your program receive the attention it deserves.

Powerful Message

Before dedicating a significant amount of your group’s time and effort, make sure that the

message you want to deliver is powerful and focused. The more detail that you can provide about your group’s activities and goals, the better. The media, for example, will be much more interested in broadcasting information on a peer mediation group’s efforts to reduce fighting in its high school if the group has a clear mission, specific activities, and success stories to report.

Step 4: Keep Media Contacts Lined Up

One of the most important elements of a strong working relationship with the media is an up-to-date media contact file. This can be a database on a computer, a paper list, or a set of index cards that allows your group to keep and update records. Whatever its form, the contact file should list media contacts for various subjects along with each contact’s organization name, street address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.

Also keep a record of each media report on your program made by TV and radio stations, newspapers, newsletters, magazines, cable TV providers, and advertising firms. Organize your files. Collect information on how many people heard and/or saw each report. For example, keep track of how many phone calls your organization receives in response to an article or published report. You could develop a log or tracking sheet to be completed by all persons taking calls and tally them up periodically. Also keep a list of all calls your program received as a result of each news article, broadcast, advertisement, or other media communication. Survey people who heard your broadcasts or read articles about your program to determine what they learned from those media reports.

Reviewing records on a regular basis will provide clues about how your group can work more effectively with the media. The best way to track your results is with a clipping book or scrapbook. Log every one of your group’s media

reports—printed stories, broadcasts, advertisements, and publications—in this book. You may want to develop an intake sheet for doing so. This sheet should have space for you to enter the report’s date, source (name of newspaper, newsletter, radio or TV station, or other media agency that ran the report), audience size, and response(s). If it was a printed communication, include a copy of the article or release as well. Remember to keep copies of all printed and media information—including negative articles—about your organization or event. This will help you focus on public perceptions, even if they are negative.

Professional “clipping services” can track and provide copies of all communications about your program that appear in the media. Youth can find out about clipping services available in their communities by checking with their schools, public libraries, or local newspapers. Although helpful, these services are expensive and probably will not be cost effective or necessary to keep track of the mostly local media coverage that your group will get. Instead, form a “media coverage” committee or subcommittee to be responsible for taping TV and radio segments, clipping articles about your program that appear in school, local, or national newspapers or in any other printed media (such as PTA or neighborhood newsletters), and describing any other media coverage that your program receives (on grocery store bulletin boards or local billboards, for example). A committee could also be formed to search national newspapers every so often for information about your group’s community, town, school, or State.

Step 5: Develop Allies

In addition to relaying information about your program, the media may actively participate in or become strong advocates for your program. To gain the participation and support of media organizations in your community, your group

needs to convince senior media personnel that your program does the following:

- ◆ Deals with a problem of concern to a large segment of the community.
- ◆ Is effective.
- ◆ Could be even more effective with greater media exposure.
- ◆ Has an interesting story to tell.
- ◆ Offers visual or print images that will attract readers.
- ◆ Will create a favorable public image for the station, newspaper, or company, if it chooses to cover, support, or participate in the program.

Developing allies in the media is a long-term process that requires personal commitment and continuous action and contact.

What Does It Take To Keep Working Successfully With the Media?

Whether seeking publicity for your group’s activities or full partnerships with local media, you’ll need to perform several activities on a regular basis:

- ◆ Write to media contacts whenever an important issue arises. Describe the issue, explain your program’s impact on the issue, and outline how the media can help increase that impact.
- ◆ Set up appointments with public service managers, news directors, and editors of local media. Discuss your program and how it needs media support.
- ◆ Include media representatives on “very important person” (VIP) guest lists for any special events, workshops, or training seminars that your program hosts. Consider asking a radio or television broadcaster, newspaper columnist, or PTA president to

act as host or deliver a speech or presentation at one of these events.

- ◆ Have media representatives sit on your program's board of directors.
- ◆ Encourage local news media to report on positive community crime prevention efforts—starting with your program.
- ◆ Give media contacts positive information on youth. Although youth may be involved in a small percentage of crime, they make many positive contributions to the community (through programs like yours) and possess untapped energy, talent, and enthusiasm. Let the media know this!

What Are Some of the Challenges of Working With the Media?

Your single biggest challenge when working with the media will be showing that your message contains important and timely information for the entire community. You also need to make your group's story stand out from the dozens of others that come into newsrooms, TV and radio stations, advertising firms, and other media offices every day.

Another challenge is maintaining strong relationships with media contacts when

personnel in media organizations and membership in your own group are constantly changing. Having new contact persons call to introduce themselves and outgoing contacts call to notify you of their departure and identify their successors is very helpful. By making sure you have a strong ongoing relationship with media contacts, you'll never be an unknown caller when a big event is being planned and you need coverage!

What Are Some of the Rewards of Working With the Media?

By developing and maintaining a strong relationship with the media, your group will enjoy the following rewards:

- ◆ People in your community—youth, adults, and children—will learn about your program and receive helpful crime prevention information.
- ◆ Media partnerships and support from local celebrities and officials will generate new resources, greater media exposure for your program, and ideas for rejuvenating your program.
- ◆ More people will learn about—and perhaps decide to volunteer for—your program.

Getting Messages Across

In addition to calling attention to your own projects, in some cases you also can help government agencies develop positive youth messages for the media. For the past 4 years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have staged a youth media contest to get youth involved in delivering its antitobacco message: "Tobacco—The Truth Unfiltered." Last year's contest entries were reviewed by a panel of celebrity judges (including cover model Christy Turlington) and media professionals. First-place winners had their entries promoted online and included in a national media campaign resource center.

The contest also demonstrates that you can interest the media in publicizing your message by presenting it in unusual ways. For example, several students won first place for their claymation video illustrating CDC's antitobacco theme. Other contest winners designed Web sites and posters, drew cartoons, wrote stories and essays, and produced radio and TV public service announcements. Be creative—the media and your audience will pay more attention if you are.

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- ◆ Volunteers will appreciate positive public recognition of their efforts.

How Can Work With the Media Be Evaluated?

Evaluating your project can help you learn whether it has met its goals, but only if you decide up front what you want to evaluate and how you will go about doing so. The purpose of conducting an evaluation is “to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down.”¹ When evaluating your media project, you will want to be able to show that it does one or all of the following:

- ◆ Allows you to reach people in a variety of places—such as their schools, their homes, their workplaces, and even in their cars.
- ◆ Helps you build relationships with representatives of the media in your school or community.
- ◆ Educates members of your community about crime prevention and informs them of the many positive activities of youth through articles, broadcasts, performances, or artwork.

¹ National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

- ◆ Reaches your target audience—whether they’re children, adults, teenagers, or seniors—with an important crime prevention message.
- ◆ Builds partnerships with members of the media.

In evaluating your media project, also consider whether and how well it has met the following more general crime prevention goals:

- ◆ Reduces crime.
- ◆ Reduces fear of crime.
- ◆ Remains cost effective.
- ◆ Has a lasting impact.
- ◆ Attracts support and resources.
- ◆ Makes people feel safe and better about being in your school or community.

Be sure to include an evaluation step—such as keeping track of all phone calls or responses you receive on every article or broadcast—in your overall plan. Consider the positive and the negative feedback that you get, and ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your message to a wider audience. Then, adjust your activities to strengthen your project.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a good skill, one you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck with your project and—Have fun!



Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for youth, parents, and teachers.

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
800-638-8736
301-519-5212 (fax)
Internet: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

Washington, DC 20531

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National Crime Prevention Council

1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006-3817
202-466-6272
202-296-1356 (fax)
Internet: www.ncpc.org

Public Relations Society of America

33 Irving Place
New York, NY 10003-2376
212-995-2230
Internet: www.prsa.org

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The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

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