

## WORK WITH THE MEDIA

Conducting media outreach and securing media placements are valuable ways to spread awareness about **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** and build interest in your event. Any form of media coverage for your event will highlight your efforts within the community and draw attention to the participants, volunteers, and sponsors of your event. Through media support, the local community is exposed to the **Recovery Month** message that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

Every year, **Recovery Month** is sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, part of the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**. This year's **Recovery Month** theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"** emphasizes that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable to individuals, families, and communities. It also emphasizes that people in recovery achieve healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their communities.

Use this document to understand the basics of media outreach, including speaking with the media and creating long-term relationships. Throughout this document, "the media" refers to the means of communication that reach people widely, including broadcast, print, and non-traditional means such as blogs and social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter.

### *Draw Attention...*

Members of the media receive a multitude of requests to attend and cover events, so it is important to distinguish your **Recovery Month** event from other unrelated events taking place in your community. The key to drawing media attention is to stress why your event is relevant to the community. The following items can help you entice the media to cover your event:

- **A relevant news hook:** Reporters like to cover topics that are likely to spark interest or debate, and that connect to issues that are already being discussed in the community. Personal stories are extremely powerful, so try highlighting a local person's story of recovery to showcase how recovery is happening right here, right now.
- **A strong, measurable impact:** Make a case for the physical, mental, economical, and societal benefits of recovery on individuals and your community. Emphasize that mental and/or substance use disorders affect millions of people nationwide and that in your community in particular, there is a serious need for treatment and recovery services.
- **Your local angle:** Emphasize the direct connection of your event to the local community. Note specific community residents and organizations, including businesses that will be participating in your event, to showcase the local reach.
- **The right time:** When contacting reporters, take into account how frequently their publications are distributed. Many reporters may request an advance lead time to write about your event before their publications go to print. Other reporters, such as those for broadcast outlets, may only cover "breaking news" live at the event site.



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## Research...

After you establish the key aspects of your event that you want to highlight to the media, you can identify the appropriate people to contact.

Research the outlets that will be most interested in your event. For example, if you partner with a youth-based organization for your event, you may want to contact the community or school news reporter at your local newspaper. In addition to traditional print and broadcast outlets, publicize your event in community calendars, daybooks, and “week-ahead” columns. For these outlets, it is important to look for online versions as well as print editions. Additionally, while a large national media outlet may not be likely to cover a local community event, local newspapers, magazines, broadcast stations, and community blogs may be interested in receiving news about your local event.

It is worthwhile to look beyond traditional media to online sources for other types of event coverage (e.g., on blogs and social media sites). Identify key online contacts by conducting a **Google Blog Search**. It’s important to identify each blogger’s general attitudes, preferred topics of conversation, and particular areas of interest to engage them.

You can also engage the media by establishing a presence on social media sites such as:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube

Once you have identified the media and online outlets you would like to target, the next step is to identify the most relevant person to contact at each outlet. Research the reporters or bloggers who have covered similar events before or who have discussed topics such as mental health, substance use, community health, or local events. To find out who has covered these issues in your community, set up **Google Alerts** online. This free Web-based tool notifies you when news on certain topics is covered in your area.

Use this information to help you to compile a list of journalists and bloggers to cover your event. In some cases, the phone numbers of respective outlets are located on their websites. For traditional outlets, such as a newspaper or magazine, you can simply call to inquire who the most appropriate contact to cover a **Recovery Month** event would be. If you have access to paid services, such as **Cision** or **BurrellesLuce**, these databases offer a list of reporters and their contact information.

## Organize...

As you research and develop your media list, keep your contacts’ information organized to make the outreach process easier. Media lists are best created in a spreadsheet program, such as Microsoft Excel. Once you have identified a potential contact, include the following in your spreadsheet:

- Contact name;
- Contact’s outlet and title;

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- Email;
- Phone number; and
- Pertinent notes (e.g., preferred time and method of contact, previous articles on recovery topics, and remarks from your interactions with this person).

## Connect...

Reach out to your media contacts via phone or email, depending on each contact's individual preferences. Keep your message clear and concise when contacting reporters, or "pitching" your event. Please refer to the end of this document for sample pitch emails and phone scripts to tailor for your use.

Blogger engagement is a longer process, as most bloggers respond better to people who they have engaged with previously. It may be beneficial to first send a personal email to each blogger to introduce yourself. In this email, don't address any business news, instead use it as an opportunity to identify your organization, state that you read their blog, and share the blogger's interest in the topic of discussion. Do this well before you plan to contact the blogger about your **Recovery Month** event. Connect with bloggers in the early stages of event planning, and once a relationship is established, keep them updated with event details.

Likewise, to begin your media outreach to reporters, introduce yourself to the media contacts. If you contact the media by phone, first ask the person you are calling if he or she has a moment to chat before discussing your event. Don't be taken aback if journalists seem rushed, as they are commonly on deadline. Instead, offer to call back at a different time or be directed to someone who would be interested in talking about your event.

After briefly sharing your event information, thank each media contact for his or her time, and share your contact information so the person can follow up with you later about the event. Also, offer to send event materials (such as a promotional flyer) for further details.

If you speak to media contacts who are eager to hear more about your event, follow up after a few days to answer any outstanding questions. Confirm whether they will cover your event with a brief email or a quick call. Again, brevity and clarity is imperative when engaging the media.

Keep in mind that reporters, editors, producers, and bloggers can often only devote a few minutes to learning about your event or story. Following are a few key points to highlight to keep your pitch brief:

- Date and time of your event
- Location
- Affiliated organizations and noteworthy speakers or attendees
- Significant statistics or local impact of recovery
- Your contact information
- Resource for more information (e.g., <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> and your event website)

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## Interview...

If you are presented with the opportunity to be interviewed by a member of the media, it's helpful to adequately prepare for the discussion.

- **Research the interested media contact and his or her outlet:** Reporters and bloggers expect that you will have some knowledge about the beats they cover and the types of stories included in their outlet. This will also help you understand the outlet's target audience and anticipate questions that you may be asked. Much of this information may be uncovered when you develop your media lists before you begin your outreach, but it's also helpful to do a quick scan to review any recent stories that have appeared.
- **Have a strong understanding of your event and materials:** You will need to be able to speak in detail about your event. Prior to your interview, review and become familiar with any supplementary materials that are being passed out at your event, in case you are asked to explain them in further detail.
- **Practice with friends or colleagues:** Prepare your talking points and rehearse what you intend to say with a friend or member of your event committee. To most effectively convey your points, speak in short sentences that can be easily understood.

The day before your interview, confirm the date, time, place, and anticipated length of the interview. Whether you will be speaking with the media on the phone or in person, always be professional and polite. Keep in mind that the goal of your interview is to communicate **Recovery Month** key messages, the details about your event, and the importance of treatment and recovery in your local area. The following techniques may also be useful in an interview:

- **Bridging:** If you are asked a question that steers you away from your key messages or anticipated topics, you can "bridge" your response to a connecting subject. Instead of answering directly, find a component of the question that you can tie back to your main points. One example of bridging is to say, "That's a great perspective, and it relates to the larger issue of recovery....," and then you can get back on track with your key points.
- **Bundling:** To get the point across quickly, state your key point and then explain your justification. For example, you can say "SAMHSA has a series of initiatives that improve prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. **Recovery Month** supports these initiatives by..."
- **Blocking:** If a reporter asks you a question that you don't feel comfortable answering, try to avoid saying "no comment," as it may appear that you are hiding something. Instead, offer to put the reporter into contact with someone who can accurately answer the question. To transition the conversation, link to another topic that you do feel comfortable discussing.

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For a successful in-person interview, keep in mind the following tips:

- **Eye contact:** Maintain a connection with the person interviewing you. If you are on camera, stay focused on the reporter, rather than the cameraperson. Try to avoid being distracted by any activity that surrounds you.
- **Posture:** Sit up straight, avoid fidgeting, and find a natural place to rest your hands. Use gestures sparingly so as not to distract the interviewer, and remember to act confident – you know your stuff!
- **Voice:** Show enthusiasm for the topic by inflecting your voice to emphasize key points. Try to avoid using verbal fillers, such as “um,” “like,” and “you know.”
- **Dress:** Remember to dress neatly and professionally. Unless your event is a walk/run or similar outdoor activity, dressing up is always an appropriate style.

If you are asked to conduct a phone interview, keep in mind the following checklist when preparing for and conducting the interview:

- **Organize:** Just as you would prepare for an in-person interview, do the same for a phone interview. It’s okay to have notes as an aid since no one can see you, but still rehearse beforehand so you aren’t reading directly from a script.
- **Plan your location:** Call from a quiet place where you will not be distracted by background noise. Try to call from a landline for a more stable connection – then turn off your cell phone.
- **Stay upbeat:** Although you are not face-to-face with the reporter, keep a smile on your face to help you convey a friendly tone in your voice.
- **Inquire to clarify:** Ask the interviewer questions to confirm that you understand the questions and he or she understands your messages. This is very important in the absence of visual cues.

## Practice Your Messages...

When speaking with the media, it may be helpful to use the following talking points about **Recovery Month** and tailor them to your event.

- **For a Specific Event:** On **[date]** at **[time]**, **[Organization]** is hosting **[Event or activity]** at **[Location]** to celebrate recovery and encourage individuals with a mental and/or substance use disorder to embark on a path of recovery and live happier, healthier lives. Mental and/or substance use disorders can affect anyone, including people in **[City]**, where **[number]** people are affected. Our community must remain dedicated to the recovery process by advocating for resources that help people address these treatable conditions and support individuals in recovery, as well as their affected family members.
- **To Promote Recovery Month:** **[Organization]**'s activities are part of the **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** initiative that has been celebrated for 23 years. Sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**, this month-long observance celebrates individuals in recovery and families who have supported these individuals, as well as those who

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work in the prevention, treatment, and recovery field. It emphasizes that the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable for all individuals, as well as their family, friends, and greater community. This year, **[Organization]** will be observing **Recovery Month** by **[include the name and brief description of your Recovery Month activities]**.

- **To Provide Information and Resources:** Visit the **Recovery Month** website at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> and **[insert your organization's website]** for detailed information on prevention, treatment, and recovery. For specific information on local treatment options, visit SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" website, <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, or call SAMHSA's 24-hour National Helpline, **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**, or **1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**, for free and confidential information in English and Spanish.

## Consult Resources...

For more information on **Recovery Month** and services available to those in need, please refer to the following resources:

- **SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**, provides 24-hour, free and confidential information about mental and/or substance use disorders and prevention, treatment, and recovery referrals in English or Spanish.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- **SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" website**, <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.
- The **Recovery Month** website, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, contains all the materials from this toolkit and a wide variety of relevant resources.
- **SAMHSA ADS Center's "Working with the Media to Support the Campaign for Mental Health Recovery" Webcast**, <http://www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov/teleconferences/archive/training/teleconference062408.aspx>, provides helpful tips for contacting the media and useful strategies for organizing outreach efforts.

**Inclusion of websites and event examples in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.**

## SAMPLE PITCH EMAIL

Hello **[name]**,

After reading your recent article on **[topic]**, I thought you may be interested in an upcoming event celebrating people in recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders. As you may know, this is a significant problem in our area, but recovery is possible. **[Name of host organization and any noteworthy attendees]** will be hosting **[type of event]** on **[event date]** in the **[City/town name]** area as part of **National Recovery Month**, a large national movement in celebration of recovery. Locally, **[insert local statistics on the prevalence of mental and/or substance use disorders]**.

**Recovery Month** is sponsored each September by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Below is a media advisory that provides details on this event. Please feel free to contact me if you need further information, or would like to schedule an interview with **[name and title of person being offered for interviews]**. I will follow up prior to the **[event]** to see if you or someone from your organization will attend the event.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

**[Your name and contact information]**



## SAMPLE PITCH CALL SCRIPT

Hi **[name]**,

My name is **[your name]** and I am calling on behalf of **[name of organization]**. I would like to tell you about an event related to mental and/or substance use disorders in our community. Do you still cover **[reporter's beat – health care, community events, etc.]** and have a moment to chat?

As you may know, mental and/or substance use disorders are all too common, and not everyone receives the help and support they need. **[Insert local prevalence statistics to support the local community impact]**. I'm calling because despite the prevalence of these conditions, especially in our local community, recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders is possible.

We are hosting an event on **[date]** in **[city]** as part of **National Recovery Month**, which is sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Our goal for this event is to increase awareness of mental and/or substance use disorders and emphasize that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming these conditions are significant and valuable to everyone in our community.

If you are interested in learning more about the event, please contact **[spokesperson name]** at **[spokesperson's contact information]**. I also have additional information I can send you. Is your email address **[email address]**?

I'll send you the information shortly, and please let me know if you have any additional questions. My contact information will be included in the email. I will follow up prior to the **[event]** to see if you or someone from your organization will attend the event.

Thank you for your time, and I hope to speak with you again soon.

