

April 27, 2011 - How to Work with the Media Webinar (text version)

Below is the text version of the Webinar titled "How to Work with the Media," originally presented on April 27, 2011. (Please note: portions of the transcript below may be incomplete where indicated with an underlined placeholder space. Please refer to the webinar presentation recording and slides for additional information.)

Operator:

The broadcast is now starting. All attendees are in listen only mode.

Charlie Goff:

Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Charlie Goff and I am with ERG, a contractor supporting the U.S. Department of Energy Better Buildings Program. Thank you for participating in today's webinar on How to Work with the Media. The presenters today are Julie Colehour with Colehour+Cohen, Shannon Johnson at ERG, and Cassie Goldstein from Energetics, all of whom are contractors, as well.

Before we get started, I'd like to go over a few logistical items. First, all participant phone lines have been put on universal mute to prevent background noise. If you haven't done so already, please enter your two-digit audio pin. You can find your audio pin in the control panel box on the right-hand side of your screen under audio and to enter it, you just need to hit #, the two-digit number, and # again. And we'll need that so we can unmute your line during the discussion period.

The questions will be taken at the end of today's presentation. During the Q&A session, we'll be opening up the lines for a discussion and to answer any questions you might have. You can also ask a question at any time by typing it into the questions box on the right-hand side of your screen and we can go over those during the question period at the end, as well.

So finally, the presentations from today's webinar, along with the recording and transcript, will be posted to the Google site soon, so you can find it there. With that, I'll hand it over to Julie.

Julie Colehour:

Great. Hi, everybody. This is Julie Colehour and I'm with Colehour+Cohen and what we are going to talk about today, if we can go to the agenda slide –

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– is really how you can use media relations or earned media, as it's also called, to help promote your better building programs in your market. So we're gonna go through the ten rules with how to work with the media and I'll give you some good tips and guidance that will hopefully help you along the way. Then we're going to talk a little bit about specifically what media tools are available for Better Buildings Program partners and how you can work with DOE on your earned media and media relations efforts.

Then we're going to open up the phone lines for a Q&A, and on that you can start thinking about now if you've got any challenges with media relations or media outreach that you want to pose to us or any questions or want to share things that have worked really well or haven't worked so well. We'd love to have. We have a

small enough group today that I think we can have a nice discussion around those things at the end when we get to that point.

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So let's start with what is earned media? So earned media is also called media outreach. It's also called media relations. But the basic essence of this is getting reporters to tell your story for you, whether that's in print, TV, radio, online, whatever tool it is that's getting them to tell the story for you.

Why is it useful? Several reasons why it's a good tool to think about for your program. No. 1, it really builds program credibility. There's research out there that shows that people actually trust a media story three times more than they trust what's in an ad, which only makes sense. Advertising is clearly something that's trying to sell somebody something. Something a reporter has written has credibility behind it from that reporter.

It also can be a very cost effective way to get your message out as compared to what it costs to actually run and place an ad, and this is especially true when your program is news, so you really have something that's newsworthy or at certain milestones for your project, where you've hit something or have something that's newsworthy to share with the media.

With that said, if you're going to do media relations, you obviously are going to invest any money into it, you want to make sure that you get coverage, and in order to get coverage, you really need "news." So you've got to have a hook. You have to have something that's interesting and new. The media's not gonna run a story for you about something that's soft news or something that's not compelling to their readers/listeners/viewers.

A cautionary note behind media is that you really can't control the message 100 percent like you can on an ad or a brochure, a piece of collateral or a website. But you can, if done right, and we'll talk about how to do that today, you can guide the messages that are out there, that come out through media by how you put your media collections efforts together.

And then lastly, for Better Buildings, media relations or earned media is really the opportunity to sell your program benefits because media want to give useful information to their viewers, their listeners, or their readers, and obviously Better Buildings has things that are going to help people out there in the marketplace. And if you position it that way, they will see that as useful information to share with their audiences, media will.

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Okay, so the way we're going to structure today's overview are the ten rules of media outreach and they're listed here and I've got a couple of slides on each of these that hopefully give you some good – you can almost treat this as a good checklist if you're planning a media outreach event to look at and say have I done these things and does this make sense on how to structure things.

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So starting with Rule No. 1 to have a strategic plan. So there's a quote actually from *Alice in Wonderland* that says, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there." And that is so true with media relations and any communications

outreach you're doing for your program. And actually the picture here, this is a picture from New Zealand and this is Erin, who's worked in support of DOE there, and there's a sign pointing her in a million different directions. And the idea here is if you have a clear sense of where you're going, then you can plan all of your outreach efforts to make sure that you get there.

So some things to think about: Who is your audience? Who are you trying to communicate with? Is it homeowners? Is it businesses? Because that will guide the type of media you want to go into depending on what those decisions are.

What do you want that audience to do and what kind of media do they use? This may sound obvious, but if you don't know who your audience is, you're not going to pick the right media that communicates with that particular audience. So what are the media they use and then make sure that you're designing your media outreach strategy to hit those media. And then media outreach is just one tool in your communications bucket. How does it fit in with everything else you're doing to make sure that you're getting good communications out there to everybody?

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So Rule 2 is pick tactics that are aligned with your goals. So there's a number of different tactics that you can use for media relations efforts, so the first one is media events and we're actually going to talk about those a bunch today. You can also do press releases. You can do pitching. You can do op eds. You can do online viral, newsletters, trade and business media. So this is just a full on tool kit of different tools that you can use and we'll talk a little bit about each of these.

So a media event is a great thing to do if you have a strong visual that you can show and I'm gonna say that over and over today. You must have a visual. Do not do a media event with politicians standing there at a podium. It's really hard to get the media to come and even if you can get them to come, they may not air your story or show it because it's just not newsworthy.

Think about can I move my media event and put it in someone's house who participated in the program with a homeowner that can talk credibly to the media? Can I do my media event somewhere where I can do a great visual that shows how much this is benefitting the community or how much energy this is saving? Where can I do this on something that gives a visual component because that more than anything will get your media to cover your event.

Press releases. Writing a press release does not mean you're gonna get any media and that's more and more true today. Even five or seven years ago, we did a lot of press releases. We do very few press releases today just because the media doesn't have time to look at them and it doesn't necessarily lead to coverage.

So instead of press releases, what we tend to do is a lot more pitching. So you pick up the phone. You talk to reporters. You find out what they're interested in and you give them a customized story where they can feel like they're getting something exclusive that no one else is gonna cover. If you issue a press release, the media knows everybody got the same thing. So if they run that story, there's a chance that everyone else is running that story, too, and that doesn't give them any differentiation or anything special to put out there to their readers. If you pick up the phone and say, "Hey, I have an angle and I'm only pitching this to you," you are much more likely to get a story in the media and actually to get a story with more

depth, a bigger package of information put together because you've given that reporter the exclusive opportunity to cover what you're talking about. That will lead you to more coverage.

The other thing to think about with pitching is the media these days have fewer and fewer people in terms of reporters on staff and it's harder and harder for them to write things. So for certain stories, especially if your audience is commercial, so if you're going after businesses, looking into trade pubs and actually offering to author the article for them. So if you've got a credible program person that would be willing to be an author, you can write the story, which is great 'cause you can control the message, and it helps the media out in their days of ever shrinking staff. So author _____ can be a great tool if the audience is right for that.

Op eds or opinion editorials. It can be very powerful to get key influential people that are involved with your program to write an op ed and get that placed in your local paper. Now the key here is, just as I said before, you have to have news, for an opinion editorial, you have to have an opinion. You have to be commenting on something that's current and relevant and interesting. So figure out is there something in a current trend or something that's relevant to your program that you can put in there and have a true opinion and get that placed.

Another tactic that is often used for media outreach these days and more and more and more and more media are moving online, as you probably know. So look for ways to get your message and pitch into online media, whether it's pitching it to bloggers, posting things on blogs, doing viral campaigns to get things out there through the media is really good. And I've got down an idea here about doing a blogathon. If you're launching a program, open up a conference room. Invite everybody you know to come in and blog and tweet and post on Facebook and get things out on social media during your launch day and have – just get everybody pushing things out. It'll get passed around and that will give you some great online momentum for your program.

Trade and business media. So if your audience is reading trade media, don't forget them. It's an important place to be and a good place to pitch in, as well.

And then lastly, I think a lot of people often forget newsletters and e-newsletters because the circulation can be so small and they're thinking of big media instead of small media. However, if there's a newsletter that gets to exactly that audience that you're trying to influence for your program, go for it. It's much better to get 100 of the right people than to get something out to 100,000 people where you're not getting to the right people. So if the newsletter is targeted, use it as a tool.

And then there's a little follow up here in terms of your picking your tactics. There's a couple of pitfalls that you should be careful of in terms of your program so and I talked about these a little bit.

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Beware of the press release. It doesn't mean it will lead to coverage and only use a press release if you really have hard news, a big program milestone like a launch of your program.

Always provide follow-up pitching. So if you do send a press release, you've got to get on the phone and you've got to follow up or else it's going to sit in that stack of the other 50 press releases that that media outlet got that day.

Secondly, holding a media event does not mean the media will come and there's nothing worse than you spending the time to arrange a media event, you've got your politicians there, you've got your bosses there, everyone's all excited and you have no media show up. That's about as deadly as you can get. You can do everything you can possibly do to avoid that happening and the way to avoid that is, as I mentioned earlier, figure out what that visual is that's interesting. You've got to have that strong visual. You've got to have new news, so something worth telling, and then you have to be aware that in some cases, if breaking news happens in your market that day, that can pull the media away from your event and you may need to restage your event or do something else to get coverage. So there is some risk involved with media events.

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Let's go to Rule 3. As you probably all know, the world of how we receive information is changing dramatically and these days, now people actually engage online more through social media channels like Facebook than they do with email. So the pendulum has really shifted in terms of how people are getting information. And so because of that, you have to figure out how do you get yourself into that conversation that's happening on social media or get your program in there in a way that's meaningful and makes sense. So how can you use it to benefit your program?

There's some stats on here that are a little staggering about the use of Twitter and Facebook and YouTube. It is being used and it needs to be _____ if you figure out how to use it.

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The next slide shows, gives you some rules about, okay, how do you decide if social media is the right tool for your campaign? And it's really important to realize that social media is in its essence an engagement tool, which means you have to be prepared for two-way communication. So if you engage with social media, people are going to engage back with you and you have to put the resources and the time into engaging with those audiences. So to make social media work well, you've got to have good content. So that means that you have to be an expert. You want to share your opinions, that you're gonna have quality content that is useful. Because bottom line, if you don't have good content, it's a nonstarter.

But content isn't enough. So you can push content out through a website but if you're pushing content out through social media, you also have to be prepared to engage because that is the fundamental foundation of social media is an engagement. So you have to listen to what people say. You have to be willing to respond. You have to be willing to help people out and you have to be willing to deal with maybe the negative comments that get posted up there on your social media vehicle. So you have to be ready for that and have a policy and a procedure on how to deal with that and to do that takes commitment.

So if you're going to do social media, don't throw a Facebook page up there if you're never going to post anything to it. That can also cause you brand damage. It's sort of deadly to see that up there with no activity. The same goes for blogs or anything else. Make sure you've got the staff committed that you need to have to actually

maintain your social media presence and put those resources into doing that. And if you can do these three pillars of things around social media, you'll have a really good foundation to have success with what you do.

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Okay, so Rule 4 is to work with others. In the ever-shrinking days of budgets and needing to be more and more creative about how to communicate about programs, it's really important to figure out who else is out there in the market who might be able to help tell your story. Where are there good potential collaborations? One way to do this is to find third party credible spokespeople who are willing to talk to the media on your behalf. Is there someone at the local university who's an expert on the energy efficiency that you could put forth as an expert to give some credibility to the media about your issue and help carry that story for you? Find those people because they could really help give some depth to your media relations effort.

In addition, look for partners that can help carry the message for you through their media relations efforts and you can do the same for them on their behalf. If you find a nice partnership for bringing various people together, you can really leverage your resources on both sides of the point. If you're going to do that, though, if you're going to combine promotional or media relations efforts, it's important that the organization that you choose to partner with is a really good fit with your program. So you've got to have complimentary visions and goals. You've got to have the same audience, so audience overlap is really important.

And then is that partner you're choosing, do they know how to use it? Do they have a history of collaborating with other groups? Is this going to be more benefit for everyone involved and not too much of a hassle to really get it done? So but if you can find those things and find good partners, you can really help extend your media budget by doing that.

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And then Rule 5 is do your homework. So build a really good media list. Look at who's covering what in your market, which reporters are on the beat for energy or things that are related to your subject matter. Research their editorial calendars. All the media publish editorial calendars and if they're doing a special environmental section or a special energy section, that will be in there and plan your outreach to pitch around when they're doing stuff. Know what those reporters have covered before you pitch them. And I can't emphasize this enough. There's nothing worse than calling a reporter, pitching them a story, and them saying, "Oh, I actually did something very similar last week." Non-starter. It makes you look like you haven't done your homework and you don't know what you're doing.

If that reporter had covered something similar, then the following week instead, you should know that. You should call them up and say, "Hey, I see you covered XYZ last week. I'm glad you're interested in that. I've got a little bit different angle to put on top of the story and it might be a great follow up." That way, you look smart and you're giving the reporter information that they can actually act on and use.

Look for ways to tie your story into current activities and trends. If something comes out in the media that's relevant and has a connection, do a quick set of pitching to certain reporters and say, "Hey, this is hot right now and here's how my program is addressing this," or "Here's the solution." However you can tie it in will help increase your level of coverage.

And then the last thing on doing your homework, there's so many people out there in the marketplace now doing energy efficiency, you should know about other programs in the market that might be pitching the same reporters with similar stories at the same time. So figure out what's going on so you can make sure you thought in – nothing would be worse than holding a media event and finding out someone else is holding a media event on a very similar energy efficiency subject matter on the same day. You want to avoid that at all costs and the only way to really do that is really doing your research about what's happening in your market with other energy efficiency programs.

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Okay, Rule 6. Yep, another important one. So you need to find the "Ah Hah!" for the media. What is going to catch their attention? What is that sound bite going to be in the interview? So if you've ever done a media interview for TV, they might spend five or ten minutes keeping you on a camera and then they're going to pick 15 seconds, 20 seconds to pull out and that's what's gonna end up on air. And 90 percent of the time, what that little snippet is is some sort of "Ah Hah!" or factoid that makes the case for what you're trying to say.

So for instance, I've got an example here that was used early on in the Energy Star program days where the factoid that got picked up on the media all over the country was, "Did you know that the average home pollutes more than the average car?" So an "Ah Hah!" for the audience, the media loved it. They picked it up, they used it.

For Better Buildings, we've got some factoids that the program has been developing and one of them that we've got is, "Many American homes are so leaky that they waste 200.00 to 400.00 each year in energy costs." So again, something that you can deliver that sound bite to the media and they're gonna pick it up. They're gonna make it a headline or a call out box in a print article and that gives your story – that's something that the media can really grab on to.

Also, it's really important when you're pitching the media, that you pitch it from the perspective of the media's audience, so their reader, their listener, their viewer. You don't call them up and say, "Hi, Mr. Reporter. I've got a great story. We're doing this great program and we're helping homeowners become energy efficient and we're doing this, that, and the other." Instead what you want to call up and say is, "Hey, Mr. Reporter. I want to tell you about Jane Smith, who she just upgraded her home through our program and she is receiving these XYZ benefits as a result. She really loves it and would love to tell you about this so we can share this exciting, important thing that other people could do with your viewers to give you an idea."

Make it personal. Make it something where you really sell it from the perspective of the viewers and listeners because the media care much more about that than just hearing about the details of your program.

And then lastly, as I said this a couple of times, but local angles. Look how you can tie it in to what else is going on in the market to make it more of a trend story and something that the reporter can sort of package in and put together.

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Okay, Rule 7. You want to groom your spokespeople. So who is the best person to deliver your message. In the picture here on the screen is actually a guest, a

spokesperson who's putting a pumpkin on top of his head, and we're gonna see this particular spokesperson later in the presentation when we watch our videos. But his name is Tom Watson and he's the King County eco consumer and on this particular story, he is talking about composting your pumpkins after Halloween, so putting them in the yard waste cart for composting. So he was a good person and was actually willing, in this case, to put a pumpkin on his head, which was great.

But it's really important to figure out who is the best person to deliver your message? Do they have a good, credible on camera presence? Are they gonna come across right? And then make sure that you train them on your messages and your factoids. Never wing an interview. It's not a good idea. Things will go wrong and it won't turn out to your benefit, so don't wing an interview.

Learn how to bridge to your key messages. We see politicians do this a lot, so think of the politicians you see on the air. They get asked a question. They don't answer the question. They instead tell the reporter what they want them to know. So there's two ways to do this. I don't recommend to people that they completely skirt the question like many politicians do, but instead, you can start by answering a little bit and then say something like, "What we're really here to talk about today is the fact that most homeowners can save \$200.00 to \$400.00 on their energy bills by doing a home energy upgrade," or different things that you can do to turn and make sure that you're getting your key message across in your interview. It's a technique and it takes practice to get to do this well, but if you can get to do this well, your spokespeople can really lead reporters in the interview so that you make sure that the messages you care about are getting out there. So practice, practice, practice.

Also, if you don't know the answer, tell the reporter you don't know the answer. Don't ever guess. That seems obvious but a lot of people think they have to say something so they'll guess and then we have inaccurate information out there. Don't do that. Just say you'll get back to them and then get back to them within 24 hours.

Nothing is ever off the record. Don't do it, no matter how friendly the reporter is being, etc. Don't say something you don't want to see in print.

And then also, be ready for that personal question. And this is very applicable to these programs out there right now. The reporter will probably ask you, "Have you upgraded your home? Have you done an energy assessment on your home?" You need to have an answer for that and if the answer is no, it would be great that the answer is, "I've got it scheduled," or "I'll be doing that next month." Obviously you want to be walking your talk. But any of your spokespeople out there need to know how to answer that personal question in a way that makes them credible on their subject matter.

Practice, again, before every interview, and then after the interview, don't shy away from it. Watch it. Critique yourself and use that experience to improve on your next interview.

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Okay, going to Rule 8. Ensure flawless implementation. So you've done all this work to get your spokespeople ready, your messages right, your media event logistics are perfect. Everything is set up and you're ready, ready to go, and you need to make sure your day of and your pitching logistics are flawless so that you really follow through with a home run. So do a dry run of your visuals. Make sure

you've got those strong written materials ready there for the media. Make sure you follow up.

The morning of the media event, your media people should be standing there calling the reporters from the event, making sure they're coming, calling the assignment editors, making sure they're coming. Reminding, reminding, reminding is really important for the media because they're pulled in so many different directions. Of course, you want to do that in a nice, helpful way, but don't be afraid to follow up.

And then make sure there's someone at your media event assigned to help each reporter that gets there. So if three TV stations show up, you should have a media person on each one of those three stations that's saying to the reporter, "Okay, what's your angle that you want? Who do you want to talk to?" And make sure that media goes around and gets all the pieces that they need to make a good story. Because it can happen that sometimes media show up at an event and it's too noisy, it's too crowded, they don't know what's going on. They may not run a story after you've done all that work to get them there. So once they're there, you need to make sure that they do what they need to do to actually get a story to run.

Be responsive. So they're there. Tell the reporter if there's any other information, you'll get back to them, and get back to them within 24 hours or less, based on what their deadline is.

And then lastly, so your story ran, don't let it end there. This is a really common mistake that we see. Use those links. Send around copies of those stories. Merchandise that coverage. 'Cause a lot of people aren't naturally just gonna see it when it appears that first time in the media. You want to make sure that as many of your target audiences as possible see that coverage, so use it and merchandise it out through all of your communications channels however you can.

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All right, Step 9. Be ready for the unexpected. So because you don't get 100 percent control of media relations efforts, you need to be ready for things to go sideways. Now hopefully this won't happen but if you're prepared and they do, you're gonna be much better off in the long run. So do the exercise – and this can be kind of fun sometimes – of asking all the hard questions and how you can answer them. So what is the hardest question someone can ask, and even if no one ever asks these questions, it's really good for you to have this in your head and have this in line and everyone on your team understands how you answer hard program questions.

And then in addition, make sure you prepare a crisis plan. So what if something goes wrong? What if a contractor injures a child in a home when they're doing a job? What's the protocol for a negative media story or negative media call that comes in? Who's in charge? Who needs to be notified on your team? Who handles the media inquiries, how information is gonna be sent out or given to the media by whom?

So we have all seen big media crises like the BP recent oil spill and how badly that was handled by BP from a crisis standpoint and then you see good ones where people do a good job of handling crisis. So it's just really important to be ready for that.

And then if you're actually in an interview situation and the interview goes south, here's some things that you can do. If they're asking questions that seem like maybe they're leading towards something that's negative, ask the reporter, say, "What's the angle you're working on for this story?" You absolutely have the right to ask that question. Ask who else they're interviewing and talking to for this story. If the reporter has the facts wrong, correct them with the correct facts. You can also offer up additional spokespeople, those third party credible spokespeople that I talked about earlier that can substantiate or reinforce your message.

And then also prepare a response strategy for when the story appears. So if the story comes out and it is negative, maybe you've been working on an op ed that you're gonna send in to the paper to post with your opinion or your position on what's going on, so you can be ready for it. You can't prevent negative media but you can definitely figure out how to respond to it and hopefully correct inaccuracies so you can mitigate it to a certain extent.

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Okay, and then Rule No. 10 is fostering relationships. So strong media relationships are really a program asset and it's something that you can use to the benefit of your program on an ongoing basis. However, they do need feed and caring over time, so you always want to be helpful and responsive to reporters. You want to keep your promises. If you're gonna get them something, you get it for them. You want to position your spokespeople as experts in the subject matter and provide those up. Those experts help that reporter do their job better and reporters are appreciative of that.

You want to stay in touch with them. So you want to be giving them information, useful background information, even when you're not pitching them a story. So you don't want a reporter to only hear from you when you've got a story to pitch. You want to develop that relationship and keep those touch points as your program goes on.

And then you want to say thank you. If they run a story, shoot them an email, "Thanks. Great story today. It was great to work with you on this. Please let me know if you need anything else." Just make sure you do that follow up at the end after the story runs.

So things not to do. These things will not help you develop a relationship with reporters. Don't be critical of a reporter. That seems obvious but if a story runs and there's something that's slightly wrong on it, don't – unless it's a fact that you just need to correct, you should not be critical of how a reporter writes a story because it's their job as a reporter and you don't want to be critical of their job.

You don't want to ask to see a story before it runs. That's really a no-no in the media world and not something that a reporter is going to appreciate you asking. I already mentioned about complaining if something is minor or not, right?

And then also, don't double pitch, and this is a big issue. So if you call a reporter and offer them a story and they say, "Oh, I'm not sure. Let me think about it. Call me back tomorrow." Don't pick up the phone and call another reporter at the same publication who's two desks down. Because if they're in a small newsroom and they talk to each other, they're gonna know that and that's just going to irritate your

contact that you did the first pitch at. So be careful not to double pitch into reporters.

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So that wraps our ten steps or ten rules for media relations, and what we're going to do know is I'm gonna talk briefly about two little snapshots of media relations campaigns that have been successful and then we're gonna pause and have you guys watch two videos that were sent out with video links here before – I think earlier today and yesterday, actually. And then we're gonna come back and discuss some key themes that we see in those videos because it really shows you how everything comes together for a media relations effort.

So the first clip you're going to see is for King County, Washington and it's a campaign called Recycle More. King County is a very green county and they do a lot of recycling, yet more than half of what goes in the garbage still is recyclable, so there's a lot more recycling that can happen out there and the challenge was how to make the old news of recycling sort of newsworthy because this is obviously for most media is not new news. And what we ended up doing was basically having some neighbors compete to see which family can decrease its garbage waste the most. And in this clip you're gonna see, what you're gonna see is basically an expert helping show people what's recyclable and what's not. So that will be Clip 1 you're going to watch.

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Clip 2 is going to be a campaign from Puget Sound Energy called "Rock the Bulb." And for this one, they were doing light bulb exchange events where customers could bring in ten incandescent bulbs and get ten free CFL bulbs in exchange for them and then they could continue to engage in the campaign through a contest that they put together. So things to look at here on this media event, this was the launch of this campaign and we were looking to get the media to cover what was going on and really what you'll see here is a nice package where they talk about the event and they pull all the pieces together in terms of promoting this and getting people to come down and exchange their bulbs at the event.

So we're gonna have you now watch these two videos and I want you to, as you're watching them, to look for three things. The first thing I want you to look for – so maybe write these down and as you're watching the clips, try to write these three things down for each of the two stories. The first one is what's the compelling visual that was offered up to the media, so identify what that was for each of the two stories. The second one is who's the credible spokesperson that is delivering the message. And then the third one, what's the "Ah Hah!" or the factoid that's coming through that's helping tell the message and closing the deal for the viewers of these TV stories. So those three things, compelling story, credible spokesperson, and what's the "Ah Hah!" or the factoid that's pulling through.

So what we're going to do here is we're actually going to pause it for a second. It's gonna take different amounts of time for people to load these in depending on what kind of computer you're on and what you're running. So we'll pause I think for probably about five minutes to allow time to watch those and we'll give it a little extra time on the end, so just bear with us, for the people who have slower computers. And then we'll come back together and discuss. I'm going to unmute all the lines and we'll discuss what you saw on those three items that you're looking for.

[Pause]

Okay. I think that should have given everyone enough time to watch the two clips. So can we unmute folks on the phone, please? *[Music plays]* All right, well we might need to remute folks if we have that going on. All right, so maybe unmuting isn't going to work. I'll go through a summary here of what I thought you saw when you watched those two clips.

So first off, let's do the King County recycling one. So what's the compelling visual? So in this case, again, as I mentioned before, recycling has been covered in the news a ton so what can we do to make it interesting and sorting people's trash on blue tarps in front of their house made that interesting for the media. Actually getting out there and dumping out the garbage cans and looking at what's in there and doing that made that a more compelling story than just the general education about recycling story.

In addition, by putting Tom Watson there – that's the same guy who had the pumpkin on his head at the picture earlier – into a white lab coat, we suddenly took a King County employee and made him a garbologist and made him a credible spokesperson. I mean he's credible because he knows the subject but we made him into something that was interesting for the media. So a simple thing of a white lab coat, a green hard hat, different ideas to take your person and make them a little fun yet more official in the eyes of the media can really help on a story.

And then for that one, what was the "Ah Hah!" or the factoid?

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Clearly in this case, it was at the end where 3 billion pounds of waste goes in the landfill each year but 1.5 billion of those pounds, or 50 percent, could have been recycled. So that factoid or that "Ah Hah!" really got picked up and used over and over for the campaign.

In terms of Puget Sound Energy and the "Rock the Bulb" campaign, I put that one in here because it's a great example of a package story. We worked with them on that story a lot before the actual event so they could get all of the pieces that they wanted. And they specifically wanted, in terms of the visual, to shoot at the event and you saw some clips of the event in there, but they wanted to shoot in a retailer, which they did, and then they wanted to go out with the volunteers who were delivering bulbs and actually shoot them, as well. So we customized that package with that station so that they'd get all the pieces they wanted and to create a really nice comprehensive story.

Our spokesperson there, obviously we had utility spokespeople but talking to the homeowner. That's what the media wants. They want to talk to the people that are participating in the program, so figure out how you can provide those participants to the media.

And then lastly, what was the "Ah Hah!" or the factoid in this one? In this case, it was if you change your most used ten bulbs, you can save \$400.00 on your utility bill, so another nice cost saving message for consumers.

So I hope what those two examples gave you is kind of a visual in your mind of how a media story can really come together by offering these various elements that are important to the media for them to do a good story.

So now I am going to turn it over to Shannon from ERG who's going to talk a little bit about media tools that are available to you as a Better Buildings program partner.

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Shannon Johnson:

Great. Thank you, Julie. As Julie mentioned, I'm Shannon Johnson with Eastern Research Group and we've been providing support to the Better Buildings program and one of the things that we've been creating are media tools for you all to use in your outreach programs and I just wanted to introduce you to some of those tools today. We'll be talking about some of the pieces that we've created so that everyone – all of the Better Buildings programs – can have a unified message and be consistent and accurate in how they're talking about the broader Better Buildings program and their individual program, as well.

So some of the tools that we'll go through briefly today are a press release template, some tips for working with the media, which right now includes how to write a press release document for those of you who may not be familiar with it. We have a Better Buildings media backgrounder, a question and answer document, and a few other pieces coming soon which include facts and tips for the media, as well as tips for working with DOE. So the tools that are available right now are available on the Google site, so you can access them right now, they're up there live, in the Marketing and Driving Demand section, there's a subsection called "How to Work with the Media" and these pieces are there unless they're noted with "coming soon." And in that case, definitely check the "Insider Blast" because we'll always be announcing these new tools when they're made available.

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So the first tool I wanted to discuss was the press release template. And I just want to reiterate Julie's warning about issuing a press release for any type of news and assuming that that's going to get you press. We definitely don't want to encourage you to put a press release out without any news. So we've written a sample press release that includes promotion of Energy Awareness Month. This is just a suggestion. I know a lot of programs have launched already so there may be a lull in the news that you can get out to the media but you still want to be outreaching your program. So you can connect your program with some sort of event, such as Energy Awareness Month, which is, like I said, what this press release is connecting to, and Energy Awareness Month is in October, in case anyone's not aware.

If you have upcoming events or anything like that, you can use this press release, tailor it to your needs. It includes a quote from Department of Energy Secretary Chu, which you can take and use in a press release or other promotional materials as you see fit. So that's a good resource to have.

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And then one of the tips for working with the media is just an instructional document with how to actually write the press release. Some of you may be familiar with press release writing and can do it in your sleep. Others might not have done that yet. So these little bubbles, as we've been calling them, on the sides of this document, provide instructions for how to write the release, how to word your paragraphs and

when to include background information and things like that. So it's an instructional tool for you.

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And then the next tool is a backgrounder for the media. This is a good piece to share with the media in a press kit if you're having an event and expect media there or if you're getting media inquiries. It provides a lot of good background information on the Better Buildings program and its benefits to energy efficiency and job growth. So that's a good document to provide so that information is consistent.

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And then we've also developed a media question and answer document. This is a good tool to us when working with the media but also a good tool to review now even if you don't have planned media outreach because it asks and answers a lot of questions that you might be faced with either by a reporter or maybe even someone in your community. It includes broad questions like, "What is the Better Buildings program?" but also some questions that skeptics might ask, like, "How will you ensure that jobs are sustained in the long term?" or "Why should businesses become more energy efficient?" So it's definitely a good tool to have in your back pocket when talking about your program.

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And then we're also working on a "Facts and Tips for the Media" document that will include factoids or the "Ah Hah!" messages, as Julie has mentioned, that will resonate with audiences and will likely get picked up by the media and will get used over and over again to associate with your program and energy efficiency. So because we want to make sure that these factoids are true and vetted to the highest degree, we're still working through several of them, but we've included two in this presentation that are also featured in the tools that I've mentioned already that you could start using to talk about your programs and encourage people to get involved.

So the first is "The average American household spends nearly 2,000.00 per year on energy use in the home but 200.00 to \$400.00 of that could be going to waste due to drafts, air leaks around openings, and outdated heating and cooling systems." The second is "By making upgrades that improve a home's heating, cooling, and air quality, families can reduce their annual energy use by 15 to 30 percent and make their homes more comfortable."

So you can use these pieces in your outreach and try and communicate them to people in your communities because when you put things in terms of cost and how they affect people, it kind of resonates a little bit more. So like I said, we have a document that we're working on that will include several more of these factoids that you can use for your "Ah Hah!" message.

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And as I said, these tools, the ones that are complete, are available on the Google site on the Marketing and Driving Demand section and as more are completed, they'll be announced in the "Insider Blast" and also available on the Google site.

So now I'm going to turn things over to Cassie Goldstein to talk about how to work with DOE to get press.

Cassie Goldstein:

Thanks, Shannon. So we talked a little bit previously about in the “Building your Better Buildings Brand” webinar the options that you have to promote your program through DOE. So today I’m going to quickly review those promotional tactics but focus more on how Julie’s ten steps apply to working with DOE. I’ll also give you some questions that can help you think about content development for working with DOE.

So the two ways you can work with DOE are through formal announcements and various online resources. Formal announcements include press releases, progress alerts, and press statements. The key to that is that these all reach different audiences and serve different purposes for DOE. If you’re interested in hearing more about those, please refer back to the “Building your Better Buildings Brand” webinar which is already on the Google site or “Working with DOE on Better Buildings Press,” a document that we’ve created that will be on the Google site soon, so you can look out for that in the Insider Blast. If you want to submit material for any of these items, you can send those to BetterBuildings@ee.doe.gov.

Then you also have the option of using DOE online resources, which include the Better Buildings website, the DOE website, DOE’s energy blog, DOE Twitter accounts, and energy bloggers. So those are also described in that same branding webinar and will also be described in detail in the Better Buildings press document.

So with those options in mind, we want to think about how they fit into the ten steps Julie described, so let’s just start with the first step.

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When coming up with your strategic plan, have working with DOE and the national perspective of Better Buildings in mind and you can work that influence into your communications goals in assessing your audiences. Then for Rule 2, the various pathways DOE can help you with our tactics, so a progress learn or press statement would be a tactic. And before pursuing any of the working with DOE options, make sure they align with your goals. Please ask yourself, “What will a DOE press statement help me achieve?”

Then some of the ten rules of media outreach end up sort of being taken care of by DOE when you’re working with us just by the nature of our relationship, so embracing social media is one of them because you can work with us to use DOE energy blogs, Twitters, and so forth. No. 4, working with others, that’s the basis of what I’m talking about. DOE is an entity that can help you tell your story and we encourage you to work with us, so that can basically check that rule off the list, in this case.

For No. 5, doing your homework, once again, because DOE works through the Office of Public Affairs for any of our tactics, we cover the responsibility for this role, as well as No. 7, and groom your spokespeople, and 8, ensure flawless implementation, and 9, be ready for the unexpected. And then I think that 5, 7, 8, and 9 end up being sort of supported by fostering our relationships and making sure that we’re communicating as we’re working together.

So to go back to No. 5, finding the “Ah Hah!”, Julie proposed a bunch of different questions to ask yourself to put forth the best message. So these two new tools that

we've created that I mentioned a little bit give you some more direction in finding the "Ah Hah!" when you're working with DOE.

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So for DOS press statements, one of our formal announcements, we're gonna go to an old school method of considering the five W's, which are who, what, where, when, why, and how. So you can think about any of these questions here when you're filling out the DOE press statement template and that will really make sure that you're grabbing the reader's attention and providing the information that's most interesting.

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You can think about these questions when you are thinking about what might be a good idea for a strong pitch for the DOE energy blog. So these are all questions that are incorporated into "Working with the U.S. Department of Energy on Better Buildings Press" and "Working with the U.S. Department of Energy on the DOE Energy Blog," which will all be on the Google site, too.

And then to close up with the final rule, it's important to foster relationships and we always want to be working together with you as much as possible so that will give us the most success. And then as always, if you have any questions, you can email them directly to me at Cassie.Goldstein@ee.doe.gov or BetterBuildings@ee.doe.gov for any questions, comments about working with DOE on media relations.

Okay, and I think with that, we'd like to open it up with questions.

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So some of you have had some great comments on the chat feature and we encourage you to I think raise your hand, considering our unmuting option, raise your hand in the webinar box and then we'll unmute you and get your question.

Charlie Goff:

Yep, and just one comment. Your control panel box may have closed during the webinar class. There should be a red box or orange box with an arrow and you should be able to expand it and then you'll be able to see the raising your hand feature. But I think we can go ahead and call on a couple of people. Ian Hoffman had some comments that he'd like to make, so we'll go ahead and unmute your line, Ian, and so you're unmuted, so feel free to follow up on the comments that you made or that you wanted to make earlier.

Ian Hoffman:

Yeah, I guess just a few things. I used to be a reporter and I just wanted to emphasize a couple of things that I think were covered and maybe diverge a little bit from a couple of the messages. I think one of the things was in handling pitches that you actually ought to give the reporter some time. Make sure you give three to seven days of notice. A reporter's got to arrange for a photographer, got to arrange some space with an editor or some time during a broadcast. I mean there are some things that they've got to do. It's not an instantaneous response. If your event is not kind of a very critical kind of emergency news event, then you've got to give them that planning time.

The other thing was if you have a public audience, if your targeted participants, you might keep a focus on those consumers. I mean the message I think from the webinar was make sure you identify your audience and really cue your message to that audience. I just can't overemphasize that enough, just not too much emphasis on the program or the structure of the program, the politicians and everything else. Mention those things but keep the emphasis on people that look like your audience, who live in the same kind of housing, who probably have the same kinds of energy usage. Form those connections.

And the other thing was you can't overstate the value of first-hand stories from participants, especially if those reach the reporter through a third party, through a trusted party, like an NGO, a local government source. You can plant things and sometimes those will be regarded with greater credibility than if you pitch them.

And just a couple of other things. I do think things can be off the record. You just have to be savvy about it. You have to be able to negotiate it. By offering things off the record, you can engender some trust. You can engender that relationship with a reporter that was discussed later in the call. So where it's appropriate, where you see value in it, and that's a key. You have to see some value in it and so does a reporter. You have to keep in mind that what you offer off the record has to actually be something that's worth going off the record for, then go ahead and negotiate it. Some things can be on background and some things can be truly off the record.

And also, I want to say look at your program through outside eyes. Make sure you don't have vulnerabilities. Do you have equity issues? Is your program just serving a very specific socioeconomic group? And anticipate your questions, anticipate those issues. Do you have some waste or some incompetence or things that may look messy to an outside eye and either fix them or anticipate questions about them.

And lastly, don't sound too anxious. When you're handling reporters, project confidence and the expectation, at least, of positive coverage. Reporters will keep that in mind when they're writing.

Oh, just one last thing. I do think you can double pitch. If you hear a reporter being noncommittal over the phone, that's probably a no and so you should tell him, "Look, if I don't hear from you in a couple of hours or tomorrow, I'm going to pitch this to your competitor." Know who that is and go ahead, follow up and go to him. You've got to keep in mind, reporters are competitive animals. Draw upon those competitive instincts to get your coverage.

Female:

Great, thank you. There are a few other questions that were coming in in the chat feature. I don't know, Julie, if you can see those or I can read them to you.

Julie Colehour:

Sure. No, I can see them.

Charlie Goff:

Actually, first we have Gillian Ream has a few questions that I can unmute your line, Gillian.

Gillian:

Great. Hi. I wanted to first thank all of the presenters and the last caller. That was really helpful, actually. One of the issues that we've been having in our program is that we are focused on one small neighborhood at a time and so really having trouble getting even citywide and especially regional media. We keep getting, "Well, what do you have for the people who aren't in your neighborhood?" And their answer, "Oh, you can apply," or "There's this _____ thing." They don't want to sell them our special Better Buildings program if it doesn't apply to their whole viewing area. And so I was just wondering if anyone else had that issue and how you've dealt with it.

Julie Colehour:

Yeah, I mean I think that goes directly towards sort of knowing your audience. It may just be that regional or market-wide media doesn't make sense to you for a couple of reasons. No. 1, the media's not interested in covering it because it's not applicable to a large percentage of their viewers or listeners, but the other side of it is you could create a lot of program demand in unhappy homeowners if they hear about it and then are told no, they're not allowed to participate. If you have a small geographic program, then your market-wide media relations may not be your best communications tactic. You might instead be looking at neighborhood blogs, outreach through local community groups, door-to-door type activities, small community events, things that reach a smaller geography targeted around where you're doing your outreach.

Gillian:

Thanks.

Charlie Goff:

Okay. We have another question from Piper Foster. This is probably for you, Julie, but it's are there tips to pitch a story differently to print media or radio rather than TV?

Julie Colehour:

Yeah, absolutely. So I mean starting with TV, you've got to have something visual and we talked a lot about that today, but we didn't talk that much about print or radio. So for radio, you need to look at your media list and it will depend on how you want to pitch it. So if you're pitching a news station that has a reporter that's gonna create a story, package it and record it and run it, then what you want to do is offer up what are your compelling "Ah Hah!'s" and your facts and who are the spokespeople that that radio reporter can interview. The other option is going on radio morning shows where it's actually live talk type shows and placing a spokesperson on to those live talk shows.

For print, usually with a print interview or a print pitch, you've got more time to tell your story. So if you get a print reporter interested, you'll be able to hopefully get on the phone and tell your story and then also, they're gonna want interviews, so you're going to line them up with various spokespeople that can talk about your program and what's going on and they also might want photography. So offering them up, "Hey, you can send a photographer out to this homeowner's house, take pictures, talk about what they're doing," would make a lot of sense.

Does that answer that question?

Charlie Goff:

Okay, Julie. We have another question from Maya Silver. She asks is it okay to pitch the same story to two different publications risking a similar story?

Julie Colehour:

Absolutely. Maybe I didn't make this clear earlier. The media expects that you're pitching the story to multiple publications, so I mean that's sort of a given unless you tell them otherwise. So if you want to pitch them an exclusive and you tell them it's an exclusive, then no, you can't pitch at other publications. But if you don't tell them that, the media expects that you're pitching it to everybody, different publications.

The double pitching that I mentioned, that we had a conversation about, was pitching two of the same reporters in the same newsroom. And I agree 100 percent with the comment made earlier that if you're gonna do that, you just have to be honest about it and tell them you're gonna do it. What you don't want to do is make it look like you're calling down the row of desks to multiple reporters in the same newsroom and not giving that reporter a chance to say yes or no to your story.

Charlie Goff:

If anyone else has a question they would like to ask over the phone, they can raise their hand and we can call on you or feel free to type it in on the questions box.

Shannon Johnson:

We're trying to get one question from an attendee, so we'll get that and answer that as soon as possible, but maybe just some other questions just for some further discussion while we have a few more minutes. Can anyone share any "Ah Hah!" messages or facts that you have found to be the most compelling for media in your experiences so far? And if you want to answer this question, just raise your hand.

Okay, we've got another question from Gillian. Gillian, I don't know if you can –

Charlie Goff:

Gillian, you should be unmuted. You can ask your question over the phone.

Gillian:

Thanks, yeah. I just was curious when you mentioned talking to reporters and routine pitches and staying in touch and I was wondering, I don't want to bug people. What do you either, as reporters, what kinds of information do you think are really useful and really good things to be sharing.

Julie Colehour:

So it's definitely things that are related to your subject matter, which might be somewhat obvious. If DOE releases a new study about home energy use that would be useful background information for that reporter to have, send it over. If there's a new related program being launched or something, a new benchmark or milestone in your program where you might send it to the reporter and say, "I know this isn't really newsworthy but I wanted to share with you that our program has now reached 50 percent of its target three months early and next we're moving on to XYZ." So you're just kind of keeping your program kind of in their head and they're updated about it and then also providing useful information that they can put in a file and then pull out next time they're doing a story about energy or energy efficiency.

Charlie Goff:

We've got a question from Daniel Rodriguez about if he can get a copy of the PowerPoint presentation and the PowerPoint presentation will actually be posted to the Google site pretty soon.

Female:

Yeah, we'll definitely send a link and refer to it in next Tuesday's "Insider Blast."

Julie Colehour:

The one thing I'll say about the question that was raised by Shannon earlier about the "Ah Hah!" is I think we tend to make our "Ah Hah!'s" too – I should say sort of dry and factual. What I encourage you to do is think about a reporter saying an "Ah Hah!" out loud. "So did you know that the average home pollutes more than the average car?" Think about it in a verbal sense rather than a written sense, because that's what's gonna get picked up, and so word it in a way that would be spoken and it's really something that whoever your audience is would not have thought of before. Because this is what catches their attention and draws them into your subject matter.

Charlie Goff:

It doesn't look like we have any other questions coming in right now. Julie or Shannon, are there any last comments you'd like to make?

Julie Colehour:

I don't think so. I hope this was helpful to everybody and that you all are invigorated to go out and do some media outreach.

Shannon Johnson:

Yeah, and definitely let us know if there are tools that you think that you would find useful in your media outreach that we might not be planning. We'd certainly like to learn what would be helpful to you and do what we can do to provide those materials.

And just to kind of summarize, this recorded webinar will be on the Google site. The tools that we've introduced are either on the Google site or will be added to it very soon, so that's your sort of one-stop shop for all of this information.

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So we hope this was helpful today and if you have any questions following the webinar, you can feel free to email them to BetterBuildings @ee.doe.gov and we'll be sure to get back to you as soon as possible.

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Charlie Goff:

Great, and right before we sign off, I just want to make the announcement about two upcoming webinars we have. Next week, we have one on "Financing Energy Efficiency Retrofits in the Commercial Sector." It will be the first of a two-part series with the second one following four to six weeks later. And on May 11th, we have a webinar about "How to Engage Small Business Program Participants." And information for how to register for these including a more detailed description and the registration link are on the Google site calendar.

Female:

Great, thanks everybody.

Female:
Thank you.

[End of Audio]