

# Transportation Outreach Planner

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## Public Outreach Strategies

### Media Relations and Press Coverage

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#### Recommended Target Groups

##### Education

College Education  
High School Diploma  
No High School Diploma

##### Language

Creole  
Other  
Spanish

##### Disability

Hearing Impaired  
Other  
Physically Challenged  
Sight Impaired

##### Income

Low Income  
Middle to Affluent

##### Vehicle Ownership

Non-vehicle Owner  
Vehicle Owner

##### Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity

## Age

Seniors

Working Age Adults

Youth

## Strategy Class

- General

## Strategy Types

- Civic Engagement
- Educational
- Promotional

## Description

Media relations is the practice of building relationships with the press in order to attract free media coverage and publicity. The goal of media relations is to obtain as much press coverage as possible and to ensure that a consistent message is conveyed to the public. Media relations strategies are generally part of a broader public relations plan.<sup>1</sup>

## Special Uses

Media relations strategies can be used to: <sup>2</sup>

- Raise media and public awareness
- Obtain free press coverage and publicity
- Educate or inform the public
- Address public concerns or mitigate controversies

## When to Use

Media relations strategies are often used to promote a specific message or to address controversial issues. Agencies are also able to use media relations strategies to respond to media inquiries and provide expert interviews and appearances. By being proactive with the press, agencies are more likely to get press coverage and have their message conveyed consistently. Media relations strategies are undertaken in an ongoing basis in order to build strong relationships with the media so that when a story or message needs to be conveyed the mechanisms are in place to facilitate coverage.

## Cost

### **\* \* Moderate (\$1000 to \$9999)**

The cost of implementing a media relations program can be moderate. Expenses include staff time to oversee the activities and the cost of creating and disseminating the press kits or press releases. Additional costs can be incurred if agencies hold press conferences or press tours.

Low (up to \$999)	*
Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)	**
High (\$10,000 to \$50,000)	***
Very High (Above \$50,000)	****

*Disclaimer:* The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.

## Time

### **\* 1 to 3 months**

Most media relations efforts can be carried out in a short amount of time, depending on the complexity of the message. The time needed to create an effective media relations strategy includes the development of the message, the production and dissemination of the media kit. The most time consuming aspect is the production of the media kit and the follow up with the press to encourage media coverage.

1 to 3 months	*	<i>Disclaimer:</i> The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.
6 months to a year	**	
Multiyear	***	

## Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

Media relations strategies can be used to target any demographic group. Agencies can be most effective in reaching their target market by focusing on media sources that serve their target. For example, newspapers tend to attract a higher percentage of men, older adults, and more educated and higher income persons. Radio and television news reach a wider demographic, but can also be targeted depending on the geographic market that they reach. Websites, social media sources, and trade journals can be used to reach specific groups. In addition, it is possible to obtain coverage from community newspapers and media outlets that serve non-English speaking populations. Since media coverage cannot be guaranteed, however, agencies should not rely on free press to disseminate their message to their target audience.

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for creating a media relations strategy:

- **Establish a committee to guide the agency's public relations and media activities.** Agencies should form a public relations committee to help guide the organization's communication and media strategies. Members of the committee should include community representatives, media leaders, and communications experts. In addition to establishing a committee, agencies should also appoint at least one staff person to coordinate the agency's public relations program and serve as the agency's official spokesperson with the media. The primary responsibilities of the committee and the designated public relations staff should be to:<sup>3</sup>
  - Develop an internal and external public communications plan
  - Promote the agency's mission and goals
  - Form a strong working relationship with the media
  - Establish and maintain relationships and communication with community organizations, leaders, and stakeholders
  - Ensure that the agency's message and brand is consistent in all forms of communication (newsletters, website, etc.)
  - Manage speaking engagements and information requests
  - Develop collateral material (brochures, flyers, posters, etc.)
- **Determine the communication goals and conduct research to determine how best to achieve those goals.** Whether creating a comprehensive media relations program or seeking press coverage for a specific project, it is important to understand the message that is being communicated, the purpose for communicating that message, and how that message relates to what the agency is trying to achieve. Below are key questions that should be considered at this stage:<sup>4</sup>
  - What is the purpose for the communication, i.e. announcement, obtain feedback, change attitudes, educate, etc.?
  - What is being communicated?
  - Who is the target audience?
  - What is the best way to reach the target audience?
  - What is the public's existing perception(s)?
  - How will it be determined if the message was communicated effectively?
  - Is the message consistent with the agency's overall mission?
- **Develop a communications plan.** The plan should include goals, objectives, and policies for communicating with the general public and the media. The communications plan should follow the SMART principles: "Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, and Timed." Specifically, the plan should contain the following components:<sup>5</sup>
  - Communication goals and objectives
  - Target message
  - Target audience (external and internal)
  - Budget
  - Timeline and calendar of events
- **Create a media list and establish contacts with media outlets.** In order to encourage publicity and free media coverage agencies need to establish a working relationship with key members of the news media. To do this effectively, it is important to maintain a current list of media contacts including editors, reporters, and producers,

and to be familiar with the types of stories that they cover. The list should include representatives from the following media outlets:<sup>7</sup>

- Newspapers
  - Television
  - Wire services
  - Publications and newsletters of local organizations
  - Trade publications
  - Public access cable shows
  - Radio public affairs shows and talk radio
  - Internet and online publications, including blogs and social media sites
- **Develop a media strategy to attract publicity and press coverage.** Once an agency has a clear message, a communications plan, and a list of media contacts, they need to develop a clear strategy for approaching the media. The media strategy should take into account the following factors:<sup>8</sup>
    - **Newsworthiness:** Prior to contacting the media, it is important to ensure that the information that is being communicated is newsworthy. Stories that are likely to get press coverage include events that are interesting or unique, policies, projects or programs that can affect a large group of people, controversial issues, and inspirational people stories.
    - **Deadlines:** Determine the local press deadlines and contact the media in advance of these deadlines.
    - **Timing:** If possible, determine the slow news days and make plans to release the story during that time frame. Avoid releasing a story when there are other major events or news stories.
    - **Target the Story:** Contact the media outlets that are most likely to be interested in the story. Agencies should aim to obtain coverage from the media sources that have the greatest reach with the target audience.
    - **Expert Testimony and Media Guide:** Agencies should develop a list of contacts that can provide journalists with interviews or answer technical questions. A media guide with information on upcoming meetings, media policies, and guidelines for covering and photographing events should also be provided.
  - **Prepare a media kit and collateral materials.** In order to attract media coverage of events, projects, or policies, agencies should develop a media kit to disseminate among news outlets and interested stakeholders. Since many news outlets may not have sufficient staff to cover a story, the media kit should provide sufficient information for a journalist to write a story. The media kit should include the following material:<sup>9</sup>
    - **Press release:** The press release should include a catchy headline and a brief summary of the story, highlighting the "who, what, where, when, and how" of the story. It should also include quotes that can be used by journalists, and contact information for follow up questions.
    - **Fact sheet:** A fact sheet is a one-page document that provides a quick overview of the key facts at-a-glance.
    - **Collateral pieces:** This includes brochures, pamphlets, posters, and other useful public information material.
    - **B-roll or Photography:** B-roll is video footage, without a voice-over, that is used in news broadcasts to represent elements of a story. Television news shows can use b-roll to put together a story. Photographs should also be provided for print and online media.
    - **Other relevant material:** This may include maps, graphics, reports, etc.
  - **Make press releases and the media kit available in hardcopy, as well as in electronic format.** In order to facilitate access to the media kit, an electronic version should be available electronically and on the agency's website. This will make it possible for agencies to email the information to a large number of media outlets and interested stakeholders.
  - **Follow up with the media outlets and monitor coverage.** After disseminating the media kit, agencies should make follow-up telephone calls. Since news outlets receive many news releases on a daily basis, a follow-up call will allow the agency to sell the story and provide additional backup information. However, care should be taken to avoid making such calls during critical deadline hours. If the journalist plans to run the story, agencies should request information on when it will be printed or broadcast. The agency should also monitor local media sources to determine how much coverage was obtained and how the story was conveyed. This information will help agencies to assess whether the communications objectives were achieved.
  - **Maintain on-going communication with media agencies.** Agencies should consider holding an annual press meeting to review upcoming projects and plans. This will help journalists to identify future stories and provide a mechanism to establish relationships. Press tours can also be used to attract journalists to learn more about specific project. However, caution should be used when organizing press conferences. Agencies should only hold press conferences for high profile stories or to address issues of public concerns. If press conferences are held too often, news agencies may lose interest in attending. The goal is to ensure that the media view the agency as a reliable source for newsworthy information.

## Recommended Target Demographics

Media relations strategies can be used to target any demographic group. Agencies can be most effective in reaching their target market by focusing on media sources that serve their target. For example, newspapers tend to attract a higher percentage of men, older adults, and more educated and higher income persons. Radio and television news reach a wider demographic, but can also be targeted depending on the geographic market that they reach. Websites, social media sources, and trade journals can be used to reach specific groups. In addition, it is possible to obtain coverage from community newspapers and media outlets that serve non-English speaking populations. Since media coverage cannot be guaranteed, however, agencies should not rely on free press to disseminate their message to their target audience.

## Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when coordinating a media relations strategy: <sup>10</sup>

- **Invite the media to all events, but recognize that they are not going cover all of the functions.** Likewise, the media will not provide coverage for all the news releases that are submitted.
- **Involve the media early in the process.**
- **Keep track of the journalists that cover transportation related issues and establish contact with them.**
- **Establish credibility and trust.** The media is more likely to provide coverage to a story if they deem it is coming from a reliable source. Avoid exaggerating information or using sensational headlines.
- **Ensure press releases are readable.** Avoid technical jargon or hard to read information.
- **Double check the facts.** Make sure all names and figures are correct, as well as any factual information that is disseminated to the media. Once a story goes out, it is difficult to correct mistakes.
- **Use active verbs to start headlines and present or future tense in the text as much as possible to keep the writing energized and current.**
- **Be ready to answer difficult questions from the press.** Avoid saying "no comment." Prior to speaking to the media, agencies should consider the various questions that may arise and should be prepared to provide responses.

## Case Studies

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority provides an excellent example of how to use the internet to maintain good media relations. The agency's website includes an official page for that reporters and members of the news media can use to obtain the latest news from the agency, information on public meetings, public testimony, contact information for interviews, a photo gallery, a glossary of terms and acronyms, regulations for non-commercial filming and photography, and links to other useful sites. In addition, they have produced a Media Guide with information on how best to cover the agency ([http://www.wmata.com/about\\_metro/news/newsroom.cfm](http://www.wmata.com/about_metro/news/newsroom.cfm)). <sup>11</sup>

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC), in collaboration with the Safe Routes to School program, developed an on-site guide for transportation planners and volunteers that provides the basics for dealing with the media, including how to interview and how to manage a crisis. This guide is an example of a resource tool that is used to train transportation planners and activists to communicate with the media and maintain a consistent message (<http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/media/index.cfm>). <sup>12</sup>

## For Further Information

The following links provide useful guides and information on how develop and implement a media relations strategy:

- Let the World Know, Publicity and Promotions Handbook: Provides a detailed guide on how to deal with the media and attract media coverage. It includes samples of press releases, fact sheets, and other sample templates ([http://www.toastmasters.org/let\\_world\\_know.aspx](http://www.toastmasters.org/let_world_know.aspx)). <sup>13</sup>
- The Community Tool Box: The site offers a guide on how to create press releases and how to organize press conferences, as well as other useful information ([http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter\\_1005.aspx](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter_1005.aspx)). <sup>14</sup>
- Institute for Public Relations: Provides research-based articles on public relations (<http://www.instituteforpr.org/>). <sup>15</sup>

## Sources

1 "Let the World Know: Publicity and Promotions Handbook," Toastmasters International, 20 January 2012, ([http://www.toastmasters.org/let\\_world\\_know.aspx](http://www.toastmasters.org/let_world_know.aspx)).

- 2 "Let the World Know: Publicity and Promotions Handbook," Toastmasters.
- 3 "Let the World Know: Publicity and Promotions Handbook," Toastmasters.
- 4 UC Berkeley, "Planning for Effective Communication," 20 January 2012, (<http://administration.berkeley.edu/commguide/planning.htm>).
- 5 National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), "Tips from the School PR Strategic Plan," 2007, NSPRA, 20 January 2012, ([http://www.nspr.org/research\\_in\\_progress](http://www.nspr.org/research_in_progress)).
- 6 National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), "Tips from the School PR Strategic Plan."
- 7 "Let the World Know: Publicity and Promotions Handbook," Toastmasters.
- 8 "Let the World Know: Publicity and Promotions Handbook," Toastmasters.
- 9 "Let the World Know: Publicity and Promotions Handbook," Toastmasters.
- 10 "Let the World Know: Publicity and Promotions Handbook," Toastmasters.
- 11 Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, "Media Relations," 20 January 2012, ([http://www.wmata.com/about\\_metro/news/newsroom.cfm](http://www.wmata.com/about_metro/news/newsroom.cfm)).
- 12 The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC), "Safe Routes to School Program: Media and Visibility," 20 January 2012, (<http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/media/index.cfm>).
- 13 "Let the World Know: Publicity and Promotions Handbook," Toastmasters.
- 14 University of Kansas, "The Community Tool Box: Chapter 6. Promoting Interest in Community Issues," 20 January 2012, ([http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter\\_1005.aspx](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter_1005.aspx)).
- 15 Institute for Public Relations, 20 January 2012, (<http://www.instituteforpr.org/>).