



Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

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Strategic Media Planning for Battered Women's Programs

Why we need to work with the media:

The media is a method to reach hundreds, thousands or even millions of people with a specific message. You can mobilize your community to take a specific action. For example, if your program has received funding cuts, you can utilize the media to get members of your community to contact their legislators about restoring the funding. You can engage your community to care about your program and what you do to better the community and end domestic violence.

- You can be targeted about *who* you reach with your messages.
- You can frame the messages that go out to your community about domestic violence and violence against women.
- A lot of social and attitude change has occurred after extensive, long-term media coverage. For example, the number of women getting mammograms and doing breast cancer self-exams has increased after heavy media coverage.

How to get started:

You need to think about working with your local media as a long-term project and relationship. You shouldn't try to get media coverage simply for the sake of coverage. It should be about getting a specific message out to your community or getting your community to *do* something specific. *One* media event or one press release isn't going to change hearts and minds in your community.

There needs to be an ongoing relationship between your program, your local media, and your community. There has to be program commitment to do this work.

- Media advocacy should be an *institutionalized* part of your organization.
- If you aren't the director or team leader of your program, it's a good idea to get buy-in from her that this will be a priority for your program.
- In fact, there should be buy-in from the entire staff that media work is an important facet of ending domestic violence in your community.

Strategic communications planning:

It's important to analyze and monitor the media. What are your major local media outlets? Consider newspaper, radio and television. Don't forget culturally and community specific media outlets in your area, such as Latino radio, the newspaper of the reservation closest to your program, the local college's television station, or a call-in radio show geared towards seniors.

How do your local media outlets cover domestic violence? Do they understand or try to understand the issues?

Which reporters are assigned to cover domestic violence issues? In larger media outlets such as WCCO-TV, one reporter may be assigned to cover domestic violence femicides, another to legislative issues like funding and public policy, and another to community events such as a fundraiser for your program. In smaller communities, it may be one or two reporters who cover *everything*, domestic violence-related or not.

Long-term media planning:

Try to get your whole staff together, at a staff meeting for example, to discuss long-term media preparation and messaging.

- What would you like to see change in how your local media covers domestic violence and your program?
- What *general* attitudes or beliefs about domestic violence or battered women would you like to see change in your community?
- Who would you like to reach in your community?
- Who is underserved? Who needs to hear your messages the most?
- What would you like members of your community to *do* when they hear about you in the media? Utilize your services? Refer friends/family/co-workers to you? Donate? Volunteer?
- Are your local media outlets coming to your program when they have a question or need a comment on domestic violence? Are you seen as a resource? Why or why not?
- What's a long-term message or two you would like the public to walk away with every time domestic violence is covered in the media? It can be as simple as, "The Women's Crisis Center is here to help all women in Smith County who are experiencing domestic violence. The 24-hour crisis line is (218) 123-4567."

Media planning for your program's special events:

After you have discussed long-term messages and strategies, sit down and sketch out a plan for the next year (or even the next six months). What events are coming up in the next 6 months to a year where you could utilize the media to get out your long-term messages? Examples can include Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Violence Against Women Action Day, the anniversary of the founding of your program (especially if it's a milestone like 10th or 25th), a fundraiser, a candidate forum, etc. Add these events to the calendar.

Realize that there may be times when you do a media event that isn't planned far in advance, but that is in response to something specific, such as responding to the domestic violence murder of a woman in your community. The planning for such an event would remain the same as planning for a regular event—you may just have to work more quickly.

One month to two weeks before your planned event, think through the following issues. If you can get other staff members to plan with you on messaging, that's GREAT and very effective.

- Who is your target audience for the event? For example, the audience for coverage of a Choose Respect teen dating violence event will be very different from the audience for a candidate forum. Shape your media messages around your target audience.
- Always think in terms of action—what do you want people to *do* after they read or see something in the media about your event? Donate to your program? Volunteer? Utilize your services? Contact legislators? Shape your media messages around concrete and simple action your audience can take.
- How do you want to garner media coverage for your event? Will it be a press conference, by going on a radio talk show, by sending out a media advisory to inform the press that you're having an event that you'd like to be covered, or by personally pitching a story to a reporter? Think about what would be the most effective vehicle for each event. It can be any or *all* of these things.
- Who would be the best person, or people, to carry your message to the media at the event? The Executive Director? A survivor? A legislator? The Chief of Police?
- How can you frame your pitch to reporters so that your event will be covered? How can you ensure that your event seems newsworthy? Are there any visuals that will be eye-catching for photographs or on-camera coverage?

Make sure you give your local media outlets enough time to prepare to cover your event. In communities where there's a weekly paper, give them more than one week's notice. In larger communities, such as the Twin Cities, 2 days notice is plenty. Just make sure you call the day before or the morning of your event to follow-up with reporters.

Developing a plan for short-term media response:

It is important for battered women's program to develop a plan for short-term media response. For example, there is a domestic violence murder in your community and a reporter would like a quote from your program.

- Is there one person who is assigned to speak to reporters? What if she's out of the office or on vacation? Is there a way for someone from your program to be reached after hours? Staff should develop a media protocol of who speaks to the media in such situations.
- Never answer the reporter's questions immediately. Get a general feel for what she wants to talk to you about and what her angle is going to be. Ask her if she's on deadline and when the deadline is. Ask the reporter if you can call her right back.
- If you don't think you are the best person qualified to answer the reporter's question, you can refer her to someone else in your program or to someone outside of your

program, such as another program, MCBW, the police department. *Always* give the person to whom you referred the reporter a heads-up that you are sending the media their way.

- If you refer a reporter to a survivor, please see the section on safety planning.
- **Media caucus!** What this means is that you do some strategic thinking with others in your office about what message you want to send to the audience about the issue you are being asked about by the reporter.
- Gather a few of the fine minds in your office (including the executive director, if possible, if you aren't the director) and spend 10 minutes talking about what your messages should be to the reporter. Write down your main talking points. Think in terms of action—what do you want your audience to *do* after reading a quote from your program or seeing an interview?
- Distill your talking points into a few quick, simple sound bites for the interview.
- If you work alone, you can call another program to media caucus. You can also call MCBW.
- Do any research you need for the reporter. For example, if she asks, “How many women have been murdered in Minnesota in the last 5 years?” try to find the answer for her. Provide her with any fact sheets or other resources such as the Femicide Report.
- During a media caucus spend some time troubleshooting any possible difficult questions you may be asked. How will you handle hot-button issues that reporters may bring up, such as “What about battered men?” or “She had left him several times and went back. Why do women always do that?”
- Call the reporter back as promptly as possible. Respect her deadline.
- Stick to your talking points as much as you can without sounding robotic.
- If you don't an answer, admit that you don't know it. Tell the reporter you will get back to her and after the interview, try to find the answer.
- Understand that everything you say to the reporter is **ON THE RECORD**. Even if you ask to go off the record and the reporter says yes, they could still use what you said. Be aware of this at every moment and be very careful in what you say.
- Be sure when talking to a reporter that you are observing your program's confidentiality policy at **ALL TIMES**.

Building relationships with reporters:

If you have been monitoring the media for a while, you should have a pretty good idea who is covering various domestic violence issues in your community's media outlets.

Don't be intimidated to talk to reporters. The vast majority are nice people who want to do a good story. Journalists aren't the enemy. In fact, they can be some of your strongest allies if you're able to build a relationship.

A great way to begin a relationship with a local reporter is to call her up, introduce yourself, and let her know about your program—what you do and who you serve..

Offer yourself and your program as a resource *every* time you talk to a reporter. Reporters love knowing that they have someone to call first if they have a question or need a comment. Let the reporter know that if you don't have an answer for her, that you'll find someone who does.

Be a good source/resource for reporters:

- Be timely—respect deadlines, return phone calls promptly, do what you say you will do when you say you'll do it.
- Be honest—if you don't know something, say so.
- Be credible—know your facts, give the real deal.
- Be human!

Invite local reporters to visit your program to find out more about what you do and who you serve. This method is probably better suited to small communities than in the Twin Cities where reporters have a lot of stories to cover.

If a reporter covers your issues or event, THANK HER! If the reporter has done an especially good job, it's a nice idea to e-mail a thank you note to the reporter and CC her supervisor, too. Make reporters feel appreciated!

If the reporter makes a major error or covers domestic violence in a problematic manner, don't just call her up and yell at her. Think of this as an opportunity to gently educate the reporter and continue building a relationship. Be constructive and courteous at all times.

If you have a good relationship with a reporter, it will be much easier to pitch a story to him and to have him act in a time-sensitive manner.

If there's news breaking in your community and you feel your program should offer official comment on it, don't be afraid to call up a reporter to offer insight or a quote. You don't have to wait for them to call you!