

**A Media Guidebook for Women
Finding Your Public Voice
United States Information Agency**

Contents

Introduction
Media Strategy
Basics of a Media Plan
Press Releases
Tips on Paste-up of Published Articles
Interviews
Print Tools
Electronic Media
Press Conferences
Press Kits
Speeches and Presentations
Next Steps

Introduction

This guidebook, although intended primarily for women who have not had experience in working with the media, is designed for anyone who wants to become more familiar and skilled in dealing with the media. It can be used by women living in rural communities as well as by those in larger metropolitan areas. Because we hope it will be used in many different cultures, we encourage you to adapt the contents to the needs of the people with whom you are working. By adding your own specific experiences as examples, you can greatly enhance the usefulness of this handbook.

There is nothing mysterious about working with the media. In fact, you probably already know everything you need to know to educate the media about your issue or organization. This book is primarily about helping you develop the skills you already possess.

Developing these skills takes time and effort. It takes courage to stand in front of a large group of people or before a television camera. One objective of this handbook is to enable you to give a meaningful interview or deliver an inspiring speech; in short, to get media recognition for your cause. We cannot let either nervousness or inexperience prevent us from speaking. Women's voices should be heard.

One of the most precious, hard-won freedoms is the freedom to speak and publicly express our opinions. Among the voices now being heard around the world are the those of women who were previously silent. It is a time for women who are knowledgeable about the media to share their experiences with women who are just beginning to find their public voices.

We hope this handbook will help you to find your public voice. There is much to learn from each other.

Media Strategy

How you will go about developing a media strategy depends upon the answers to several key questions:

- * What is your goal?
- * What is your organizations function? How well established is it?
- * What do you want the media to tell the public about you and your organization?
- * Are you working with others or alone?
- * What resources are available to you?
- * Do you or people you know have media contacts?

Define Your Message

- * Get others involved. Form a committee of people to work with you to develop your media campaign. Be as inclusive as you can be, allowing people to contribute to the work.
- * Determine your goals and objectives. Define your organization and its goals. Have a clear understanding of what you want to accomplish before you start.
- * Create the message. Draft talking points that will answer basic questions about your issue. Make sure that everyone from your organization is using these succinct and quotable talking points. You want one clear, direct, and simple message.
- * Identify your target audience. Who is the audience you want to reach through the media? Abla Al-Nowais, chief editor of Zahrat Al-Khaleej, a weekly women's magazine in the United Arab Emirates, says: 'It is very important to know the intellectual level, social background and nature of the audience you are addressing.'

Try to think like the audience you want to reach. The media is just the vehicle. If possible, ask a member of your target audience or group to listen to you so you can test the message of your campaign.

- * Analyze and assess your media outlets and opportunities. Which type of media will help you to reach your target audience?
- * List your resources. These might include, but not be limited to the following: money, inkind donations of material, the time and talents of involved individuals, outside or related events that you can use to highlight your efforts.
- * Remain flexible. Revise your plans if circumstances or resources change, or if parts of your plan are not working. Stick with what works!

Basics of a Media Plan

Some basic points to address before you develop your media plan are:

- * Learn about the media available in your city, state and country. Read the paper, watch TV and listen to the radio.

- * Determine what will fall into hard news, or feature stories.
- * Discover reporters who are covering issues similar to yours and whether they are reporting on them positively or negatively.

From Rina Jimenez David of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, we got the following advice: women's groups should look towards establishing long-term relationships with friendly people in the media, rather than one-shot transactions aimed at gaining short-term publicity. Establishing a relationship--through regular contacts, subscriptions to newsletters and other published materials, and invitations to training and educational opportunities--means you gain not just a friend, but even a partner and champion in the media.

Why do we need a media campaign?

- * To influence public opinion.
- * To persuade opinion leaders.
- * To generate debate.

Press Releases

What is a press release? A press release provides information about your organization that is prepared and presented in a standardized format. It is usually one page in length, but no more than two pages. The purpose is to announce an issue of importance for which you want media attention, whether print, electronic or both. A press release should be brief and to the point.

What information should be included in a press release? A good press release, in the United States, answers the "5 W's" in the first paragraph: Who? What? Where? When? and Why?

- * **Who:** Who is the subject of the story? They should be identified and described. The 'who' might be a person, group, event or activity.
- * **What:** What is happening that the media should know about? The goal is to get the reader's attention, so that your release will be read and your issue reported.
- * **Where:** If it is an event or a press conference, where is it going to take place? Be specific about the address to the location --and include a map with directions. Include information about where to park a car or if there is public transportation. Make it as easy as possible for the reporters covering your event.
- * **When:** When will it take place? The date, day of the week, and specific time must be very clear. No approximations; only specific information.
- * **Why:** Why is this so important? The reason for your press release should be compelling. Be specific. Remember, the lead or headline should be written to hook the person into reading the rest of your release.

What is the best writing style for press releases? Use quotes. Sentences and paragraphs should be short. You want the reader's eye to move quickly and easily down the page.

Start with the lead (the main point,) expand upon your opening with more information and detail in decreasing order of importance. In other words, write the press release in the same classic 'pyramid' style as a straight news story.

How will I know if the lead or headline is a good one? Often you will not know until you see your story in print. If you put the most important information in the headline, follow the 5 W's, explain the specifics, and elaborate on the points that are most compelling, you have a good chance of success. Remember, a story is often printed right from your press release, with the newspaper editing the release from the top and working down.

After you have written the entire press release, go back and revise and revise until you have what you think is the most compelling lead. Do not be afraid to change the lead. Always check to make sure you have the 5 W's answered. It is possible to get so involved with trying to make the press release exciting and dramatic that important facts slip out of the final copy.

How do I get the press release to the right person?

Have the names of the person or persons who should receive it printed clearly on the release. If you are sending it to a newspaper, get the name of the editor, the correct spelling and title. This approach is personal and appealing.

What if there is no specific reporter?

You can send the release to the attention of the editor. At the same time, you should be collecting information about media outlets. The following questions help you to gather the information:

- * Who decides what news will be covered? Name, title.
- * Who decides in that person's absence? Name, title.
- * Is there a reporter who specializes in your issue? Name.
- * What time of day/week/month/are story decisions made?
- * How far in advance of an event does this outlet like to be notified?
- * What type of material does this outlet like to receive with a release? Do they want background information, photographs, color slides, audio tapes, video tapes? What else would be helpful?

Don't forget to gather all the necessary telephone and fax numbers. Also, learn the names of secretaries and get to know them.

In the United States, the standard form for a press release is as follows:

- * Press releases are written on plain white paper, usually the standard size business paper where you live. If you have printed letterhead stationery, use it. This will help identify your organization as the source of the press release.
- * The margins around the edges of the text of the press release should be about 38 to 40 millimeters wide. This gives the editor or reporter room to make notes in the margins of the press release.
- * If your address is not on the paper you are using, then type your complete address in the upper left-hand corner of the page.
- * THE RELEASE DATE: This information is typed in BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS in the top upper right-hand corner of the page just slightly lower than the address on the top left-hand side of the page.
- * The name of the contact person is typed just under the release date, and the telephone contact number, if available, beneath it. In most businesses and nongovernment organizations in North America, an after-hours contact number is also given for the contact person.
- * THE COPY: the actual text of the press release begins about one-third of the way down the page.

- * Start with a headline. It is typed flush to the left-hand margin below the address information and before the copy of the release. The title is written IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.
- * The copy of the release is almost always double-spaced.
- * Paragraphs may be indented at the first line. Standard spacing is used between paragraphs.
- * If the release is longer than one page, the word '- more -' should be typed on the bottom of the first page.
- * It is always best to keep the press release to one or two pages at the most. Type the symbols ### or the number -30- at the center bottom of the last page.

Press Releases: Questions and Answers

Is there anything else I can do after issuing a press release?

Follow up with telephone calls. The first time you call, introduce yourself by name and organization. If you want to have a conversation, ask if the person is 'on deadline.' If a reporter is on a deadline and trying to complete a story, determine the best time to call back and hang up as quickly as possible without being rude.

If the person is not working against a deadline, ask if he/she received your press release. Ask if you can provide any more information; or if they would like to talk to someone. Try to have a short conversation to gauge his/her reaction to the material you sent. If the answers are not encouraging, thank the person for talking with you. Remember, you will be speaking with that person again, and there will be a time when the answer is, 'Yes, we are excited about covering your event and looking forward to meeting with you.'

What is meant by the 'release date?'

The 'release date' is the date you will allow the information in the press release to be published. Most journalists will not publish the information before the date you specify. This is often referred to as a 'press embargo.' For example, when an international nonprofit organization holds a press conference to publicize a new special report, it often releases the document with the restriction that it is embargoed until a specific date. This gives the journalists plenty of time to read the document and write their stories. It also allows the nonprofit organization to make 'news' on the day of their press conference.

Can I include additional material with a press release?

Yes, you may want to add background material about the issue, such as a brochure or examples of previous press releases. There are a myriad of ways you might want to 'personalize' or be creative with the release. If you are announcing the start-up of a company, for example, you could send a small product with your release. We heard of one woman who sent chocolate chip cookies! Just be careful that any additional material does not distract from the news you want to have published.

Tips on Paste-Up of Published Articles

What should I do with the original article?

Once a positive article is published, you should reproduce the original. Copies of the article can then be used in any future promotional materials. After making copies, put the original article in a file folder or notebook to keep it neat and safe. You may need to use it again.

How do I prepare the article for future use?

Use conventional business-size paper. This may be 8 1/2 x 11 inches, or A4, or whatever the standard size is where you live. It should be plain, white, unlined paper.

Cut the article from the paper or magazine, leaving as much margin as possible around the article. Do not cut too close to actual lettering, as this will make it more difficult to photocopy.

Cut out the name of the newspaper or magazine from the front of the paper. Use the 'logo' or recognizable typeface paper of that publication. This will be in larger print than the rest of the paper. If it is too large to fit on your paper and you have the photocopying facility to shrink the lettering, do so. If you cannot shrink the lettering, you may type the name of the paper at the top of each sheet of your paper.

Cut the date of the article from the paper. If the article appears in a section with a heading -- Letters to the Editor, Opinion Page, International News, National News --cut out that heading too.

How do I assemble all the pieces?

Generally, you will want to place the name of the paper from the front page at the top center of the page. The date of the paper will be centered underneath the name. The section of the paper, if available, will then be centered under the date.

If the article doesn't fit on the page, you may need to cut it and arrange it until it does fit.

Remember to keep it as close to the original format as possible, making sure that each paragraph follows the one directly preceding it. Be careful about this as it is easy to get confused if you are placing a very long article.

If the article has to be continued on a second sheet of paper make sure you include the following information on each sheet of paper: Name of the newspaper, date of publication, section of the paper in which it was published.

When you are sure that you like the way the article looks, you will be ready to paste up. Do not try to rush this first stage; how the article looks when you photocopy it will be very important. This will be the way most people will read the article, probably many more than saw it in the original publication.

Now stop and take the time to wash your hands. This is very important because if you have been handling any kind of newsprint, your hands will be covered with newsprint! If you begin to paste up with sticky tape or glue, you will almost certainly leave dark fingerprints and smudges on the paper. These smudges will be included in every photocopy that you make of the article!

Using double sided tape (sticky on both sides), or a very small amount of glue, paste up the article as you have arranged it. The sticky double-sided tape will be between the article and the paper, and it will not show up when the paper is photocopied. If you are using glue, remember to use the smallest amount possible so that the article sticks to the paper; too much glue will leave you with an unreadable original, impossible to copy. If you only have colophane tape, double it into a loop and use it in the same manner. (If you simply tape the clippings down, the edges will show in the photocopies.)

Finally, keep several originals if you have them. Newspaper print often turns yellow, darkens with age and becomes more difficult to photocopy. Safely store the originals.

Interviews

No matter what the media (radio, television, or newspaper), and no matter who the interviewer, the key principle is that you must always remain in control of the interview situation.

Gather all the information you developed when planning your media strategy and review the important elements before putting yourself into an interview situation. Decide what you want to achieve through the interview. Decide who is the audience. Understand the kind of interviewing that is done by each media outlet. Remember that although you will prepare differently for a television interview than for a radio interview, the key is simply to be prepared.

The experience common to everyone preparing for an interview is nervousness. There are many techniques that you can use to make yourself more comfortable and less anxious, but do not expect the anxiety to go away. The best way to overcome nervousness is to be thoroughly prepared. Also, practice restating your goals in colorful ways, or using interesting analogies, vivid language, unusual examples and illustrations, or uncomplicated data. You should consider a variety of ways to stress the most important points you want to make, eliminate any misperceptions about what you are trying to achieve, and clarify your vision for the future of the issue or the organization. One thing you should not do is let nervousness prevent you from participating in an interview.

Mrs. Abla Al-Nowais, chief editor, Zahrat Al-Khaleej, wrote an article called 'Ground Rules for Dealing with the Media.' Among her helpful points:

- * One has to be confident in dealing with the media...Do not be shy or hesitant.
- * Beware not to fall in traps laid by journalists. Some of them will try and make you lose your temper and lead you to contradict yourself. Do not be easily affected and stay calm.
- * The golden rule when being interviewed is 'say the truth.' From my experience in this field, I can assure you that saying 'no' is much better than saying one small lie.

To prepare further, the following are several good points to note when the interview is scheduled.

- * What is the date and time of the interview?
- * Where will the interview be held? Make sure you have exact directions if you are not familiar with the location. Find out if you will need a pass or security clearance.
- * What is the full name of the interviewer? If you do not know the interviewer, make sure to listen to a program or read articles by that reporter. It is important to get familiar with the format of the program and style of the reporter interviewing you.
- * What is expected of you? Why have you been chosen for the interview?
- * Will the interview be live or taped? When will the program be on the air?
- * Will you be interviewed alone or as part of a panel? How many will there be? If there will be a panel, who else will be speaking? What will the format be? How long will each person get to speak?
- * How long will the interview be?
- * Give the exact spelling of your name and how you want your organization listed for identification on radio or if TV, in 'CHYRON' (names on screen for identification.)
- * What are the ground rules? Most of your interviews will be on the record. You are giving the interview because you want the media to be a conduit to the public. You want the media to

quote you or your colleagues and use the information you have given to them. But there are other kinds of interviews and different ground rules for these.

--On the Record. Whatever is said to the journalist may be published and directly attributed by name to the interviewee. It is by far the best way to get your message across.

--On Background. Whatever is said to the journalist may be published, but with attribution to a previously agreed upon identification: for example, 'an official spokesman of _____,' 'a well informed source,' 'an expert on _____,' etc. It is generally used when the institutional interests represented by the interviewee may be damaged by direct attribution.

--On Deep Background. Whatever is said to the journalist may be published, but without attribution of any kind. The information should appear as a conclusion drawn by the journalist as a result of his or her inquiries. It should only be used when 'On Background' would lead to quick identification of the interviewee and serious institutional damage, since it presents a severe difficulty for the journalist.

--Off the Record. Often misused, this ground rule, as the words imply, means that the journalist will receive information that is not to be published under any circumstances. Use is generally restricted to emergency situations involving the physical well-being of the participants in the interview, or others who may be the subject of the interview. It should not be used in other circumstances since, taken literally, it places a considerable burden on both the journalist and the interviewee.

'On the record' is by far the best way to work. The other guidelines are nothing more than a convenient shorthand for journalists and officials dealing with sensitive political, economic and law-enforcement concerns.

The best advice is to avoid relying on these shorthand terms. Understanding may vary from culture and journalist to journalist. If you cannot go on the record, talk to the journalist and reach a specific understanding regarding attribution before the interview begins.

Remember you may both work together again and that you both have a professional interest in good, expressive journalism.

How do I prepare for an interview?

Write an ideal interview. The interview may be scheduled for literally a few seconds, or you may have five minutes, or you may have longer. Limit yourself to the Three most important points that you want to make. These will become your 'islands of safety,' which you will return to again and again during the interview. Regardless of the length of time, do not try to get more than three main points across in any interview. Practice, Practice, Practice .

Again, write the three positive points that you want to make in the interview. Prepare a brief example or story to illustrate each point. Use as few numbers as possible. People are easily bored with hearing statistics; however, it is extremely important to state the facts about your issue.

The late Barbara d'Achille, a journalist and crusader for environmental protection who lived in Peru for many years once said: Public opinion cannot be manipulated with impunity; therefore, it is important to provide accurate information that is scientifically correct and without

exaggeration. When shoemakers, gardeners, butchers, bakers, and housewives understand ... then we will have public opinion obliging governments to have an environmental policy.

No matter what your issue is, you must learn to talk about it effectively. Learn the points. Learn each example or story. No notes. You should practice with a colleague who will act as the interviewer. If you know the reporter's format, duplicate it during practice. Practice all the possible questions. NO NOTES. However, be as natural as possible!

What do I need to know to know about television interviews?

Always look directly at the interviewer. Never look at the camera or television monitor. Do not worry about the camera. A professional is responsible for the camera --you do not have to be concerned about it! Try not to look away when you are thinking of an answer. Maintain eye contact with the person asking the questions.

Where do I look if I am in a studio being interviewed by a satellite connection?

Interviews by satellite television will be different than interviews with a reporter in person. If you are in a studio, being interviewed by a reporter in another studio, you should look **DIRECTLY AT THE CAMERA**. In this case, the camera IS the person you are talking to. Even if that person is in another country, you should imagine that they are the camera in front of you. This is often a bit more uncomfortable for a first-time interview--but don't let it stop you! Everything else will be the same--it is just that the person won't be sitting across from you. Imagine the camera in front of you is a friendly, smiling face!

How do I start?

Start with your three points. In most cases, you will have a few minutes before the interview to talk with the reporter. As background, you should send some information ahead of the interview. Most important, make sure your first answer includes one of the three points that you want to make in the interview.

What if the interviewer keeps moving away from the points I want to make?

Be polite, but firmly bring the interview back to the points you want to make by using 'bridges,' beginning your answers by saying, 'well, it seems the real issue is...' and then state one of the points you want to make. Some of the following comments are useful 'bridges' to give you the opportunity to make the points you want to make:

- * Let me add...
- * I'm often asked...
- * That's not my area of expertise but I do know that...
- It seems the most important issue is...

What if the reporter asks a question I don't want to answer? Swim back to an 'island of safety.' Use a story to illustrate one of the three points you prepared in advance. People remember stories. Think of interviews you have listened to and you will probably remember a story that illustrated a point.

What if the reporter asks negative questions? Do not repeat the negative! Your job is to make your three positive points. Do not get upset or defensive. Correct any misinformation quickly and then go on to state one of your positive points. **STAY POSITIVE**. If it is a harsh criticism, you can say, 'I'm glad you asked me that, many people might have that misconception but the truth is'...and then get back to your 'islands of safety.'

This is where your prior practice will really be valuable. Remember, you will have practiced several 'negative' and difficult questions, and you will have these answers ready. Again, STAY POSITIVE.

What if the reporter keeps interrupting me with questions?

Let the reporter interrupt. You may say, 'you've asked me several questions' and then answer the question you want to answer with one of your three points. If the interruptions are far from the points you were making and you want to get back, you may say 'as I was saying' and then continue your answer with one of your three points.

What if there is a long silence?

Stay silent. Do not volunteer unnecessary information. Do not be afraid of the silence. The interviewer is responsible for that time. In a slightly confrontational interview, silence is often a method that an interviewer may use to get a person to volunteer revealing information.

What if I'm asked to add more or say more than I want to say? Go back to your 'islands of safety.' They are important enough to elaborate on and repeat, possibly with different stories or examples to illustrate the points.

What if I don't know the answer to a question?

Be honest. If you do not know the answer, say so: 'I'm sorry, I don't have that information, but I'll be happy to get back to you with it.' When you say that, make sure you do get the information to the reporter.

How long should my answers be?

Your answers should be brief, approximately 20 seconds. However, they should be shorter for radio and longer for print.

What about how I look and sound (for TV and radio)?

More than 90 percent of communication is nonverbal, so how you look and sound will be very important. Be enthusiastic and energetic. Both radio and TV tend to 'flatten' people, make a person less exciting and more 'bland' --so be excited about what you are saying. It will be very helpful to videotape and review your practice sessions. You will probably find that you have to go past your 'comfort' point to show emotion when being interviewed for a television broadcast. If your interview is for television, you should follow some simple guidelines.

- * Wear solid colors, light but not white.
- * Do not wear flashy, or shiny fabric.
- * Do not over accessorize.
- * Apply normal makeup and check in the mirror before you go on.

What will the first few minutes in the studio be like?

A sound engineer will usually ask you for a voice level, to make sure the microphone is set correctly. In answer to a request for a voice level, state your name, spell your last name, the name of your organization, your title if you have one, and the subject of the interview. This gives vital information, as well as the correct pronunciation of your name and organization.

Can I say something to a reporter and expect it not to be used?

Never. Always assume the microphone or recorder is on. Always. Many well-known people have been embarrassed by comments made when they thought the microphone was turned off. Assume that anything you say to a reporter at any time will be used. And never say 'no comment,' since that will usually give the impression that you have something to hide. A reporter

is always working and there is no 'off the record'--unless you have reached explicit agreement on this point. Never say anything you do not want to read in print or hear on radio or television.

Radio News and Interviews

In many countries, radio is the best method to reach a mass audience. In societies where at least 50 percent of the population (of which 60 percent are women) are illiterate, a campaign using print media is ineffective. Also, television is only available in the capital city; thus a television campaign does not make sense either.

Public speeches are effective, but only if the speaker understands the level of education, economic and cultural outlooks, and differences in local customs.

An estimated 15 percent of Americans get their news from listening to the radio. Radio 'talk shows' are becoming an increasingly popular tool for individuals to express their political and social opinions. Most radio stations have news segments throughout the day. Many radio stations get their information from news syndicates, and larger stations that have their own operations.

How you approach the radio will depend on the structure of the station's operation.

You may be able to call in your news directly. You may also have the opportunity to telephone a radio 'talk show' and offer your views. Some smaller stations also do interviews in their own radio studios. Research the radio in your area to determine the best way to approach the station.

Will the same tools apply for radio interviews as for TV interviews?

Yes. But, expression and content are even more important when there is no visual image.

What if I get an impromptu call from a reporter

who wants to do an interview on the telephone immediately? Find out the reporter's name, telephone number and deadline, and ask if you may call him/her back in a few minutes. Compose yourself. Think about your three positive points. Practice the 'interview' out loud. Do any quick research you can on the reporter, the news organization and the audience you will be addressing. Then, relax, and call the reporter right back.

What if I have to use technical terms and statistics in my answers?

Use as few numbers and statistics as possible. Instead, create word pictures. If you hear someone say 'about the size of a football or soccer field' it makes more of an impression than if someone said '4,300 square meters.'

Which image has more impact: '35,000 children die needlessly every day,' a statistic that many international development organizations use, or: '100 jumbo jets crash with 350 children aboard every day,' which UNICEF uses to describe this 'silent emergency?' The latter imagery is more vivid.

If you have to use technical terms, make sure you define them as simply as possible. Use words that are common to the audience you are addressing. Define any terms that are not in common usage. This will be especially important if you are speaking to people of different nationalities.

May I make an audiotape of the interview?

Discuss this with the reporter interviewing you. Most likely, you will be able to make an audiotape, and it is not unusual for a person being interviewed to make this request. This way, you will have an accurate record of the interview. You can play back the recording later and coach yourself to improve for your next interview. This will also give those people working with you who didn't hear the broadcast an opportunity to review the interview later. If at all possible, practice before a camera or a tape recorder.

Print Tools

There are many different methods and outlets for implementing your media strategy. The following are descriptions of outlets available to you in newspapers, newsletters and magazines.

Newspapers

Depending upon the size of the community in which you live and the proximity to a large city, you may have access to a nationally or internationally circulated daily newspaper, a local daily, or possibly a weekly local paper. Become familiar with the newspaper by following how it covers the issues that concern you. If you know a reporter is interested in the issue, contact him/her directly. On a smaller paper, you may contact the news editor for your news story. At different times, you will be sending all of these people press releases and press kits.

News Stories

Send a press release, with the specific information that you think is newsworthy, to a person by name, if possible. Remember that many people are competing to get the editor's attention, so help the reporter you are contacting 'pitch' your story to the paper's editor. You should include background briefing material, giving the reporter names of people and contacts who can provide further information. Make it as easy as possible for the reporter to write a story about your issue.

Feature Stories

This is an opportunity to be more personal in approach and explain how an issue affects a particular individual. You can delve into more conceptual information in a feature story, and not be limited to the facts in the news. If the newspaper you are contacting is not large enough to have a features editor, you may write a story yourself and submit it for publication. Include good photographs with your copy.

The Op-Ed Piece

Many major newspapers have a page opposite the editorial page where they print opinion pieces (Op-Eds), which offer subjective comments on the news. An 'Op-Ed' article is usually about 750 words in length. Anyone may submit an Op-Ed piece to the editor of a paper. If you can, call the Editor to ask for specific requirements for Op-Ed's for that paper. Generally, the editor will ask for an 'exclusive,' which means that you agree not to send the article anywhere else if their paper agrees to print the Op-Ed. The policy for opinion pieces differs with each newspaper. On the Op-Ed page of The New York Times, is the following: Note to Readers --The Op-Ed page welcomes unsolicited manuscripts. Because of the volume of submissions, however, we regret that we cannot acknowledge an article or return it unless it is accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If manuscripts are accepted for publication, authors will be notified within two weeks.

Letters to the Editor

This is one of the most widely read sections of a newspaper. It is a wonderful opportunity for you to express yourself about an issue of great concern to you. Most important, even if your letter is not printed, it is great practice for you to compose your thoughts in a clear and concise manner. You will have the best chance of getting your letter printed if you comment directly on an article.

Letters to the Editor need to be written immediately after the article on which you are commenting appears. Do not wait! Write immediately! Be as brief as possible. Refer to the article by title, date of publication, and reporter. If you have information to add to what was printed, be sure to include it. Sign your letter with your complete name and the name of your organization if it associates you with the issue. Ideally a letter to the editor is about 200 words in length. If you need to write a longer article, consider preparing an Op-Ed piece.

Newsletters

Many non-government organizations (NGOs) publish newsletters and magazines. If your issue relates to the work of an NGO, they may be interested in publishing something about you or your organization in their newsletter. The local library, U.S. Information Service or NGO representative can give you details on how to contact the NGO newsletter or magazine editor. Many NGOs have a large international membership and their newsletters are widely circulated. Here is an example of how the newsletter of an international organization could be part of your overall media strategy. A woman living in a developing country is working to improve educational opportunities for young girls. She meets with a local representative of an NGO. Her article is published in the newsletter and read by thousands of people who are members or supporters of the NGO. Major newspapers pick up the story, supported by the public relations and media department of the NGO. A member of a European parliament quotes the article. The writer has become one of the 'experts' on the issue of improving educational opportunities for young girls in her community. A television producer selects the writer to be interviewed for a segment on educational opportunities for girls.

Magazines

There are thousands of magazines published throughout the world today. The best way to start your research is at your local newsstand. Find out what magazines are available in your country. The local library or U.S. Information Service will also have a reference section providing you with information about magazines.

Each magazine will have a page with a masthead --the listing of names and titles of those working for that magazine. It will also provide the frequency of publication--weekly, biweekly, monthly or bimonthly--and list the magazine's departments. If your issue is covered by a particular department, write directly to the department's editor listed on the masthead. If your issue does not appear to fit a listed department, send the material, addressed by name, to the Managing Editor. If enough interest exists, the story will be assigned to a staff member. It may take several attempts before you receive a response. Use every communication as an opportunity to develop a relationship with the editors and staff, including such 'gatekeepers' as secretaries or assistants. Magazines usually maintain files of information for future reference to generate story ideas. Since they usually cannot publish 'breaking news,' magazines are able to develop stories with longer time lines.

The 'lead time' (the time between when the article must be received and when the magazine is print) varies with every magazine. Learn the 'lead time' for each publication in which you are interested.

Electronic Media

Television and Radio

Today, most major cities in the world have access, by satellite communication, to international television news networks such as CNN. Large parts of the world, especially rural areas, however, still rely heavily on radio for world news. For some, the choice of channels number in the hundreds; for others, there is one state-controlled radio/television link. In short, the access to information varies tremendously. On the other hand, communications technology is growing exponentially, and it is vital that you are aware of trends in electronic communications as well as present-day media opportunities.

How do I start?

First, become familiar with the radio and television programs in your area. The local library or U.S. Information Service should have media guides. Are there international networks with bureaus covering the region in which you live? 'Stringers' --freelance reporters who work for different media outlets --are often another important source of news coverage. Make a list of all television programs that broadcast news and feature stories. Note the type of program for each station: news, documentaries, interviews, panel discussions (talk shows) --and the appropriate contact person and telephone number listed for each.

What if I have a news item I want reported on television?

Contact the assignment editor or news editor. Remember, it is your job to 'sell' the story to the reporter. If the story has a local or national connection, or you have an exciting visual, your chances of coverage by television will be greatly enhanced. When you think about television, think about what the cameras will 'see' when they cover your story.

Over and over again, news editors and assignment editors will tell you that, although they read press releases and reports, they really want you to tell them a story --as visually as possible. The elements they look for in a story are: human interest, a local angle, national importance, or a connection to an earlier news story.

How do I get a feature story printed, if I do not have breaking news?

The approach resembles the one used for a news story, but not as dependent on timing. In this case, more opportunity exists to identify those reporters interested in your issue. You should begin by sending them written material. Include any articles you have already had published. If there is not a particular reporter, you should send the information to the assignment editor.

Explain why viewers would be interested in this issue.

Here is a story about a unique way to introduce yourself and your organization to the media: In the Philippines, media practitioners, news sources, public relations professionals, political gossips and influence peddlers gather to trade information, views, insider scoops and jokes at the kapihan (breakfast forum.) The kapihan can take many different forms. It can be structured or freewheeling, it can have resource persons or questioners. Whatever the form, the information exchanged usually appears in the newspapers.

One women's group, PILIPANA, has had great success with their kapihan. The format they use is to have one or two resource persons (one from PILIPANA) make a brief presentation, after which a candid open forum follows. During the first year, the issues discussed included violence against women (and its implications on development,) sexual harassment and the image of women in the Bible. They found that the kapihan became not just a forum for sharing views and ideas, but also an excellent way of projecting issues into the media.

Among some of the additional benefits of the kapihan, the PILIPANA reports, are such things as new 'walk-in' participants, greater media interest and the formation of new advocacy groups such as the academe, a University of the Philippines group whose first activity was a public campaign, 'Speak Out Against Sexual Harassment on Campus.'

The PILIPANA found that by using a format long familiar to the local media and to the public, they reached a wide audience not normally receptive to a feminist analysis of social issues.

What about radio possibilities?

'Talk' radio programs are growing in popularity in the United States. Hosts of these programs now command attention and influence large numbers of people to take political action. If you know the host of the radio interview program, contact him/her directly. Also, contact the producer of the program to find out what information might help them prepare for the interview.

What about electronic data transmission of my organization's information?

The opportunities for distributing your material as electronic data are growing at an extraordinary rate, and you shouldn't pass up opportunities join what has been called the Information Superhighway. Remember, however, that many people still have little or no access to computers and telecommunications; electronic data is a supplement, not a substitute, for more traditional methods of communicating through the media.

What kind of opportunities for electronic data communication are you talking about?

Electronic mail, or e-mail, is one. If you or your organization has access to e-mail, you can distribute messages, announcements, press releases and other information to individuals and groups around the world. The catch is that you need to know their e-mail addresses.

In some cases, it may be possible to establish a group e-mail address, so that with one keyboard command, you can send information to a number of sources at the same time.

Another possibility might be to join, or even establish your own local electronic bulletin board, known as a BBS (Bulletin Board System). First you would compile an electronic database of your material. Then you would provide a telephone number so that anyone with a computer and modem could gain access to your information. Obviously, the technical details and costs of creating or joining a BBS will vary widely with location and circumstances. Moreover, the quality of the telecommunications system will always be a limiting factor. If you're operating in a city with poor telephone lines, it might not be worth the trouble to establish a BBS.

Keep in mind that a BBS requires time and maintenance. If your information is not changed and updated regularly, even users deeply interested in your topic will quickly drop away.

Is a BBS the same as the Internet?

No. Although both require a computer and modem, a BBS is essentially an independent, local database. The Internet is a vast, loose worldwide electronic network with many different levels of usage, activities and functions. Depending on your situation, it might be possible to post information with an organization, newsgroup or database service already on the Internet.

Many universities and organizations, for example, use a system known as a 'Gopher' to search out, locate, exchange and retrieve massive amounts of information. Another Internet system, the World Wide Web, permits the display and exchange of visual or graphics files.

Remember, however, that although the time may come when the Internet is as easy to use as a telephone, that day has not yet arrived. You will need someone familiar and experienced with the Internet to establish your Gopher or other type of database.

As with a BBS, it is vital that the data be as current as possible. In the hyperspeed world of the Internet, information becomes stale very quickly. This means that, even if you have the opportunity for posting information on a BBS or Internet location, you need to determine if the amount of time required makes the Internet a worthwhile investment.

What are the similarities in dealing with the various media outlets, print and electronic?

Press Conferences

It takes a great deal of time, money and energy to organize a press conference, so be sure you have something important to announce. In addition, journalists do not have the time to go to press conferences that are not going to produce news.

If you do hold a press conference, thorough planning and preparation are essential.

* Decide on the location for the press conference. It should be easily accessible, convenient and visually attractive. If electronic media are invited, make sure that the power and electrical facilities are adequate.

* Decide on the time of the press conference. This will depend upon the media you are trying to reach. Because of deadlines, mornings are usually best.

* Check with similar organizations to make sure the date you select does not conflict with any other important events. A huge national celebration in your country would not be the best time to schedule a news conference. If you know another organization traditionally plans an event on a specific date, schedule your event for another day. Getting a story into the news means competing with other people who are also trying to get their story into the news! You have now selected a location, a date and a time.

* Determine who will be invited from the list of media that you have compiled. Supporters of your organization should also be present, as well as people --such as celebrities --who can help attract media to an event.

* Outline the content of the press conference in a press release.

* Decide who is going to speak. Is there going to be one special person hosting the conference? Do you have a panel of speakers who are going to brief the press? Make sure that you leave plenty of time for the press to ask questions. You may want to have the questions answered by a specific person.

* You will have to organize the site of the conference so there is room for broadcast equipment, cameras, microphones, lighting equipment and chairs. Arrange for interpreters if necessary. Also, try to serve some refreshment. In many countries, journalists are poorly paid and often forego meals to cover news stories. Nothing elaborate, just tea, coffee and cookies, for example. There should be a table near the entrance on which you will have the following:

* Press kits and other information to hand out;

* Sign-in sheets for the press;

* Sign-in for visitors and guests from other organizations;

* Any additional information you have, such as posters or giveaways.

* Ideally, you should have a person assigned to assist the press attending the conference.

This person will make sure each member of the press has all the information she needs. If there is a reporter with whom you have spoken in the past, or to whom you have sent material, make sure you introduce yourself and your colleagues. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet people and develop ongoing relationships.

* Follow up the press release with telephone calls. Try to remember that, even though the work you are doing is vital to you, you are competing with others in equally important organizations who are also trying to get the attention of the media.

* If you have a facsimile machine, fax a reminder two or three days before the press conference. You should also telephone two or three days before the conference to ask again if the journalist will be attending, and to ask if there is any additional information the person might need.

* Check the list of press in attendance. If someone important is not at the conference, send him/her a press kit.

* On the day of the conference, arrive very early in order to resolve any last minute problems that might develop. Check the microphones and make sure everything is in good

working order. Try to begin the news conference at the designated starting time, but no later than ten minutes after the scheduled starting time.

Press Kits

A press kit is a folder of materials that provides all information relevant to your issue. Make a list of the things that should go into a press kit. Generally, a press kit includes, but is not limited to the following:

- * A list of the contents of the kit.
- * A press release.
- * A short welcoming letter, which gives basic information: name, address and telephone number of the contact person for journalists with any questions.
- * A 'backgrounder' or 'fact sheet.' A short narrative paper that gives in-depth information about the issue. The purpose is to anticipate and answer any questions the journalist may have. Following is a general format for a backgrounder:

Start with a concise statement about the issue or subject of the press release. Provide, in a few paragraphs, an overview or history of the issue. What important events led up to today's situation? Remember, you are providing information so that a journalist can write about the issue with greater depth and perspective.

Explain, in detail, the current situation. It should be factual, add substance to the press release, and deal with the key issues. You might include comments from others who support your actions.

Limit your backgrounder to four or five pages in length. It can be double- or single-spaced. Subheads on each paragraph enable the reader to follow the information. Define any technical terms.

- * Press clippings about your organization, issue or individuals who work with the group.
- * Visuals: pictures, graphs, maps, charts --whatever helps convey the importance of the issue.
- * Speeches, reports, outlines and summaries of reports. Be careful not to overwhelm the reader. The idea is to give enough information to interest the journalist and allow him/her to write or produce a piece advancing the goal of your organization.
- * A brochure about the organization. If you do not have this kind of a document, a short summary of your work is a good substitute. It should include what you have done and what your goals and vision are for the future.
- * A brief biography of each person involved in the press conference. Include copies of the texts of their presentations or speeches.
- * An agenda for the press conference, if applicable.

Make a list of the names of the people to whom you have sent press kits. Call to confirm that the press kit was received, and find out if any journalist wrote an article. Write thank-you notes when appropriate.

Speeches and Presentations

It usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech. Mark Twain The work of preparing a speech or presentation can be divided into 10 steps. 1. Define the purpose of the speech or presentation.

Do you want to persuade the audience to do something, or do you want to educate them about an issue? Do you want them to take a specific action? Do you want to inspire them, or convince them about something?

2. Define your audience.

Do they know anything about your subject? Are they interested in your subject? Are they friendly toward your subject?

3. Become familiar and comfortable with the subject about which you are speaking.

4. Determine what you want your audience to know, to remember, to learn.

Write out in approximately 25 words or less the objective of your speech. Zita C. Montes de Oca--Fundacion Mujeres en Igualdad--of Argentina makes a good point when she says: It is vital that women remember that dialogue (discourse) is also an important tool for gaining power. Yet, when we prepare our verbal and written opinions, we do not always dedicate enough time to finding a style that fits our specific objectives. Equally as important as writing a speech are the strategies that enable the thought to reach the public, through the mass media and or through our public appearances.

5. List the three main points you want to make in your speech. Illustrate each point with at least one example--a story, or anecdote--that will create a picture in the minds of the listeners in your audience.

6. Outline the substance of the presentation using quotes, statistics, examples and other interesting information.

7. Write the opening or 'attention getting' statement of your speech.

8. Write the closing part of your speech. You should aim for a strong finish. It should be a stirring statement in which you issue your call to action, predict the future, make a declaration, refer to your opening comments, summarize your main goal.

9. Know the program where you will speak. Are you the only speaker? What is the order of appearance? Will you be the first, or last speaker if there are several speakers? Will there be a panel of speakers?

10. Be aware of the time for questions and answers. How much of the time, allotted to you, will be reserved for questions and answers?

There are a few other items you should remember in planning a public speaking engagement:

* Your introduction to the audience. Your introduction to the audience by the sponsor is very important. Write it yourself and send it ahead of time, but take an extra copy with you too. Decide how you want to be introduced and what you want them to know about you. Keep it warm and personal--and short.

* Check the room and equipment. Make sure that the audio-visual equipment you will need is available and in good working order at the site. Arrange to bring your own equipment if necessary. Try to visit the site of your speech before the event. If not possible, arrive early enough to confirm that the setting is satisfactory. Make the equipment request (microphone, projector, podium, etc.) when you accept the invitation to give the speech. (You may also want to

bring a tape recorder to record yourself.) Be prepared for something not to work properly --and to give a brilliant speech anyway.

* Preparing the speech. As Aydan Kodaloglu, the General Director of the Turkish-American Association in Ankara, pointed out, she is always careful to observe the proper protocol in addressing audiences, recognizing senior personages at the beginning of her remarks. In addition, she tries to be precise, use short sentences and keep her speeches SHORT.

You should deliver no more than three major points in your speech. An average speech is approximately 20 minutes long. Your sentences should be brief. The shorter and simpler the better. In general, your speech will be about seven to 10 typed pages long. A general rule of thumb is that 12 typed lines equal about one minute of speaking. One double-spaced typed page is about two minutes; five pages double spaced will be about 10 minutes. There will be differences in some other languages, of course.

* Verify how long you will speak. Regardless of how much time you have use simple words and keep it brief. The American humorist Mark Twain probably said it best: By hard honest labor, I've dug all the large words out of my vocabulary. I never write metropolis for seven cents because I can get city for the same price.

* Minimize the use of numbers or statistics. Use word pictures to illustrate numbers whenever you can. If there are important statistics, hand them out at the end of your presentation.

* Practice your entire speech repeatedly before the presentation. Be thoroughly familiar with it, but do not memorize it. Practice with another person who can give you helpful comments. Also, practice in front of a mirror while timing the speech.

* Underline those parts of the speech you want to emphasize. Mark the places where you want to pause. Make sure you are comfortable with the phrasing and that you are not using too many 'ums' in your presentation.

* Do not read your speech. If you read your speech, you risk boredom. You want to be natural, enthusiastic and excited about the presentation. Talk to your audience, not at them. Write an outline with key words or phrases on index cards, then practice giving the speech. You will be more comfortable with the information without reading it. Maintain eye contact with the audience 90 percent of the time. Eye contact during the first and last few minutes will help to hold their attention and emphasize your main points.

* Use your nervousness to your advantage. Being nervous is normal. Try as much as possible to channel the nervous energy into enthusiasm and excitement. Just before the speech, you can practice taking some deep breaths to calm yourself. Focus your attention on your key phrases. Do not feel you must hold your hands in place. Gesture as you would in normal conversation.

The following are guidelines if there is a question-and-answer period.

* Take questions from the entire audience, not just people sitting in one section.

* Listen to each question carefully, without reaction.

* Treat each question equally.

* Repeat all positive questions so everyone in the audience can hear the question being asked. If the questioner asks a negative question, rephrase it as positively as possible.

- * Maintain eye contact with the whole audience when answering, not just with the questioner.
- * Do not become drawn into a 'one-on-one' with any questioner or allow one questioner to dominate the audience.
- * Respond as simply and directly as possible.
- * If you do not know the answer to a question, say 'I don't know' and either promise to get back to them with information, or invite them to contact you at a later date.
- * Do not ask if you have answered their question. When you feel you have completed the answer go on to the next questioner.
- * Do not announce that 'this is the last question.' You will keep control of the audience by deciding yourself which is the last question. Always leave yourself a minute to sum up what you have said. In your final words, you should emphasize the positive message you want your audience to have as they leave the room.
- * Distribute any handouts at the end of the speech, not at the beginning.
- * Try to remember to enjoy yourself. If you are smiling and friendly, enthusiastic and excited to be there, your audience will be too. If you are uncomfortable or bored, they will be as well.

Audiovisual Aids

Audiovisual aids can be very helpful in a speech. People remember about 40 percent of what they see and hear. Rehearse with these aids before giving your speech. Check the electric outlet availability if you are using a slide or overhead projector. Verify that the plugs and equipment are compatible.

If you are using slides, you should be able to use them with the lights on. Test this beforehand as you do not want to turn off the lights unless you absolutely must. If you are using video, again, verify that all of the equipment is compatible. The video should be no longer than five minutes. Overhead projectors take practice to use effectively. You cannot spend time aligning each transparency. If you are using an overhead, then put a ruler on the machine and PRACTICE alignment many times before the actual speech.

Try not to use chalkboards. They are messy and difficult to read from a distance. You also do not want to turn your back to the audience, which is unavoidable when you use chalkboards.

If you are using a flip chart, again practice many times before the event to memorize the order of the sheets. Turn the page with your face to the audience, and do not speak while you are flipping the pages.

Public Speaking Checklist

The following provides a checklist, or outline, for developing and delivering a public speech. You should also use this form in evaluation sessions after each individual speech performance.

Topic

Was the substance...

- * Adequately adapted to the audience?
- * Appropriate for the occasion?

Content

Did the substance of the speech include...

- * Interesting ideas?
- * Factual information?

Was the substance of the speech:

- * Adapted to the purpose of the speech?
- * Appropriate to the interest and level of the audience?
- * Adequate with regard to knowledge of the subject?

Organization

Did the speech include...

- * An attention-getting introduction?
- * Sentence transitions which were smooth and clear?
- * A strong and memorable conclusion?

Delivery

Did the speaker...

- * Project his/her voice?
- * Use clear phrases?
- * Use correct grammar?
- * Use gestures that were natural but not distracting?
- * Pace his/her presentation?
- * Articulate sounds with clarity?
- * Remain enthusiastic?
- * Use eye contact with the audience?
- * Have good posture?
- * Appear poised and confident?
- * Have any distracting habits?
- * Use vocal variety (as opposed to monotone?)

Next Steps

Your article, Op-Ed, letter to the editor or editorial has been published! You have given an interview, speech or presentation. You have a relationship with at least one reporter. Press or media attention has become an important part of your media strategy. Now what do you do? Review your campaign and decide where you need to put more effort. It is a wonderful time to meet with others whom you trust for a brainstorming session. Use this as an opportunity to ask questions and suggest ideas for the next steps.

If an organization is able to think of an unusual approach to demonstrate their issue, the likelihood of increasing public and media interest improves. Look at these examples from two groups from New Zealand, 'Women Against Pornography' and '12 Weeks':

The Women Against Pornography achieved a high profile by choosing a target that was sufficiently unexpected. They began by submitting an issue of a popular magazine to the Indecent Publications Tribunal for classification. The case attracted wide media attention and public debate because there was general disbelief that this publication would contain 'material degrading toward women.' The publicity they received enabled them to mount a general attack on what they saw as widespread incidences of pornography throughout the media, even publications which had escaped prior official scrutiny.

The organizers of a parental leave campaign, '12 Weeks,' designated a special focus week during which they planned events to attract public and media attention. The week was launched with an event featuring a prominent Maori woman entertainer. It was followed by a series of photo opportunities and concluded with the presentation of a petition to the Parliament. The petition was escorted by twelve attractive babies wearing caps numbered from one to twelve.

What we learn from the experience of our friends in New Zealand is not to be afraid to use some imagination.

Endless Possibilities

If you have not done so before, this is a good time to meet with your local government representatives.

Some governments have very innovative programs. In Nepal, Amaa Samuwa, or mother's groups (often referred to as women's groups,) are basically outgrowths of a government loan program for rural women. One such group protested against alcohol abuse in their city by organizing a march and blocking traffic--inhibiting the sale of alcohol and drawing attention to their cause. Although the purpose of the government's project was to elevate the self-confidence and status of women with income-generating activities, it had the side effect of giving women courage to change other aspects of their lives.

Ask yourself: Are there people locally, nationally, or internationally whom you want to know more about your issue?

Consider how you can use your media attention to help with the cost of your campaign. If you have been avoiding doing the fundraising necessary to sustain your work, now might be a good time to start. Think about whether there are individuals, companies or organizations who might contribute if they had more information about the work you are doing.

Have people been generous in helping you with your work? A way of thanking and acknowledging their support would be to send them copies of your published article, or an update letter on the media attention your organization is attracting.

Remember, focus on your media campaign. Make sure the follow-up action you take is in line with the long term goals of your work.

While compiling this guidebook, we received valuable information and advice from many women. A group of women in France offered the following: 'Be prepared to put in much energy for small or no immediate returns. Understanding and recognition of important issues doesn't happen overnight.'

It is important to keep reminding ourselves that this work is a process. That process will continue until we reach our goals.

Acknowledgments/Credits

Written and edited by: Suzy Shure, Iris Burnett, Martha Brown
Text Editor: Howard Cincotta

Design: Barbara Morgan

The editors wish to express their appreciation to First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton for her encouragement and assistance.

We also wish to thank Dr. Joseph Duffey, director of the United States Information Agency, for his support and continuing interest in this publication.

Special thanks also to the following: Abla Al-Nowais, Anne Barbaro, Gloria Bonder, Kathleen Brion, Judith Buttermann, Lynn Cassel, Mary Ellen Connell, Pamela Corey-Archer, Rina Jimenez David, Cristina 'Zucardi' de Flamarique, Edward E. Elson, Maria M. Fratus, Maha Gargash, M. E. Gawronski, Ejirah Gorre-Dale, David D. Grimland, Philip C. Harley, Salome Hernandez, J. Hogan, Anne Holden, Susan Hovanec, Mauricette Hursh-Csar, Tiffany Jackson-Zunker, Terry Kneebone, Aydan Kodalogulu, Joyce Kravitz, Kimberly Marteau, Mildred C. McCoo, Zita C. Montes de Oca, Julianne Paunescu, David Queen, Timothy M. Randall, Margery Ransom, Leticia Shahani, Robin Smith, Christopher Snow, Lael Stegall, Stephan Strain, Larry Taylor, Sandra L. Vogelgesang, E. Ashley Wills, Rebecca Winchester, Mary Carlin Yates, USIA Women's Task Force

United States Information Agency April 1995 [Back to Vital Voices Home Page](#)