



ImPRESSive

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CREATING WORKING MEDIA LISTS

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA LISTS

A media list is a basic, yet essential, tool in media work. Use it to pitch stories to media; invite them to events; mail reports; and send press releases. Since the media list is something you will need each time you reach out to media, the information you include must be useful and accurate.

GETTING STARTED

There are many sources to aid you as you prepare media lists. Reading the newspaper, watching television and talking with other professionals who work on the issues you care about are good ways to find out who should be included on your media lists. Also, many news outlets have websites that give you access to their publications and staff, and some allow you to e-mail reporters directly.

There are directories that provide contact information for media outlets and contacts, but they are often expensive. Consider borrowing a list from a coalition member or using your local library.

The best way to build an accurate media list is by phoning individual media outlets. You don't necessarily need to speak with each reporter. If the outlet has a switchboard operator, let him or her know that you are updating or preparing a media list and would like information regarding some specific contacts. Interns can be useful in doing this work, but be sure they understand the need for accuracy.

Sample Script: [to switchboard operator/receptionist] Hi. My name is Nancy Julian with Hawaii for Health, and I'm in the process of updating my media list. Will you please tell me the name, title, phone number and fax number of the person who covers health care issues at your outlet?... Thank you for your time.

Note: *Be sure to ask for the correct spellings of first and last names.*

DECIDING WHAT LISTS TO CREATE

There are several factors to take into account when deciding what types of lists you need to create. You should have a general healthcare list made up of a variety of contact types (reporters/editors/writers/producers) that cover healthcare issues. This list will probably be the one you use most often. In determining what additional lists you need to create, assess which types of outlets and contacts are appropriate for the kind of work your organization or coalition does. Consider the following divisions:

By Outlet Type:

- Radio
- Television
- Print
- News Services

By Contact Type:

- Healthcare Reporters
- Editors/Assignment Editors

By Coverage Area:

- Local outlets
- Regional outlets
- National outlets

DECIDING WHICH MEDIA OUTLETS TO INCLUDE

Your list should include both print and broadcast media. Print media is comprised of newspapers (both daily and

weekly) and periodicals (newsletters and magazines). Broadcast media includes radio and television.

While you should target the major outlets in your area, also pay attention to smaller outlets, such as ethnic publications and college radio stations. Be sure to include radio and TV talk shows as well. The more outlets you target, the better your chance for coverage, so think broadly in terms of the available media.

EXPLANATION OF BASIC MEDIA JOB TITLES

Assignment Editor- If you do not have a specific contact at a print or television outlet, calling the assignment desk to speak with an assignment editor is a good place to start. An assignment editor or managing editor tracks news leads and decides which department will follow up.

Beat Reporter- A reporter's beat is the particular issue or topic that she or he covers. Local newspapers often have few staff members, so their reporters cover a broader range of issues and usually have more general titles (i.e., staff reporter, writer). The opposite is true of regional or national papers, which often assign reporters to specific beats such as "Health Reporter," "Welfare Writer," or "Capitol Correspondent."

Radio outlets usually do not have reporters who cover specific issues, so you would target the news assignment editor when pitching a story to a radio outlet. Television stations may have consumer or health reporters. If not, the assignment desk is the place to start when pitching a story.

Keeping these factors in mind, look for reporters whose titles best suggest they would be interested in your issue. In instances where a reporter's title does not clearly indicate the topic she or he covers, call the reporter or switchboard operator and ask if that reporter is the appropriate contact. If not, the operator or reporter should be able to point you in the right direction.

Editor- An editor within a particular department decides what stories his or her department will cover. The departments vary from outlet to outlet. Some examples of departments are *Business*, *Health* and *Features*.

Editorial Board Members-The editorial board ("ed-board") consists of a newspaper's editorial writers. They hold meetings with leaders of the community, advocates, and others who might have an issue that needs to be brought to the public's attention. They then determine if they will editorialize that issue. Some outlets hold these meetings regularly, while others conduct them as needed.

Op-Ed Page Editors-Whereas editorials are written by a member of the paper's editorial department, an op-ed is an opinion piece written and submitted by a

member of the community. An opinion page or "op-ed" editor decides which op-eds will be featured on the opinion page. (Look for upcoming issues of ImPRESSive for more on placing op-eds and editorials.)

Producer-In radio and television, the producer is responsible for organizing all the elements that bring a story or program together. The producer decides which segments will comprise a news story, including who will be interviewed. For talk shows, producers determine guests and subject matter.

OTHER CONTACTS

News Services (i.e., Associated Press [AP], Knight-Ridder, Reuters, United Press International [UPI])-A news or "wire" service is a news outlet that tracks stories which are then wired by computer throughout a city, region, state or country. News services are a great way of maximizing the number of outlets that place your story. Since most other outlets get information from news services, if an outlet doesn't cover a story directly they may use the wire version. When pitching a story to a news service, start with the assignment editor or ask the switchboard for the appropriate contact for the issue you're addressing.

Daybook-The daybook, which is a calendar of news events, is distributed to reporters daily through a news service. Daybook editors should receive your media advisory, which contains the who, what, when and where of your press event.

WHO SHOULD BE ON YOUR MAIN MEDIA LIST

Newspapers

News:

- ✓ *Assignment Editor*
- ✓ *Editor*
- ✓ *Beat Reporter*

Community Events:

- ✓ *Calendar Section*

Editorial Page/Opinion Page:

- ✓ *Editorial Page Editors*
- ✓ *Editorial Board Members*
- ✓ *Op-Ed Page Editors*

Television

News:

- ✓ *Assignment Editor*
- ✓ *Features Editor*
- ✓ *Beat Reporter*

Talk Shows:

- ✓ *Producer*

Radio

News:

- ✓ *News Director*

Talk Shows:

- ✓ *Producer/Booker/Host*

Magazines/Community Newsletters

- ✓ *Editors*
- ✓ *Reporters*

News Services

- ✓ *Assignment Editor*
- ✓ *Daybook Editor*
- ✓ *Beat Reporter*

Weeklies

- ✓ *Editor*
- ✓ *Calendar Section*

ORGANIZING YOUR LISTS

Once you've decided who should be on your list, there are several pieces of information to include:

- ❖ Name (be sure to spell names correctly)
- ❖ Title
- ❖ Outlet
- ❖ Beat
- ❖ Mailing address
- ❖ Phone number
- ❖ Fax number
- ❖ E-Mail address
- ❖ Outlet type (print/radio/tv)

The best media lists go beyond general contact information and contain more specific information about your experiences with individual reporters, so it's important to supplement basic information with your own notes. If space allows, include the following.

- ❖ Summary of phone or written communications;
- ❖ Names of the reports you've sent to the contact;
- ❖ A history of stories the contact has covered pertaining to your interest;
- ❖ The contact's preferred method of receiving press releases; and
- ❖ Information about their approach or biases (i.e., needs a lot of data; prefers stories of "real people"; a friend of managed care).

USING YOUR LISTS

Usually, you will not need to use your general healthcare list in its entirety. Depending upon the nature of the event you are holding or the information you are releasing, you may only need a subset of that list. For each event or release, target the type of outlet that is most amenable to your story. Most stories are suitable for print and radio. If your story is visual in nature (e.g., you will be holding a press conference about Medicare in front of a nursing home), target television as well.

While it is important to develop rapport with reporters and editors, be careful not to overuse your media lists. Call or send materials to reporters or editors only for those specific issues and events that you know will appeal to them.

UPDATING YOUR LISTS

It is extremely important to update your lists on a regular basis to ensure that the information you disseminate reaches the intended contacts. Media outlets often have high turnover rates, so the health reporter you contacted for your last release may no longer be employed at that outlet or work the same beat. Call each contact or outlet before a major release or event to ensure you are reaching the appropriate person.

Once the release has gone out, you will probably learn of more changes when you pitch the story, as you are referred to alternate contacts, so be sure to update your lists after your event.

CREATING A DATABASE

A database allows you to select particular contacts from your larger media list and is a tool for using your records with ease. It should be more flexible and sophisticated than a word processing program. An efficient database will:

- ❖ Allow you to quickly search for individual contacts within your lists;
- ❖ Include a sorting function that allows you to create subsets of your lists for projects that don't require use of the full list (e.g., just radio outlets, just consumer reporters);
- ❖ Alert you when you are entering a contact that is already in the database to avoid multiple listings of the same contact;
- ❖ Allow easy updating of records;
- ❖ Provide room for additional comments you wish to include;
- ❖ Allow you to merge letters; and
- ❖ Organize your information in a user friendly, accessible format.

Basic programs such as Microsoft Access will work fine for your database. Since such programs may already be installed on your computer, you will save money by avoiding the cost of purchasing specialized database programs.



The logo for Families USA, featuring the word "Families" in a serif font, "USA" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, and "FOUNDATION" in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font below it. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic of silhouettes of people.
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