

The following information comes from a workshop presented at the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration Conference in Seattle in 1999. Cheryl Murfin Bond from Northwest Parent Publishing was the guest speaker.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

1. **KNOW YOUR MEDIA OUTLET.** If it's a print publication, read back issues to get a feel for the editorials they carry. Look for places where your organization might take advantage of free publicity. Example: Seattle's Child Eastside Parent runs the "Community Voices" column. Hint: Do not paint all media with the same brush. If you have had a bad experience with one reporter or outlet, don't assume all media will treat you the same way. If you want to get your story out, you need to be accommodating. Television coverage is hard-hitting and has the potential to reach a very large audience.
2. **FIND THE STORY.** If you want a reporter, who hears all sorts of stories all day, every day, to cover your organization or write about your issue, sell them a real story. You need a hook. Give good info to interest the reporter. A story with a real person who is willing to talk and possibly be pictured works well. Photos make people read stories. It is very hard to sell - or write - a story on an issue when nobody will talk on the record. If you want a reporter to write about pedestrian safety, offer her a family who has lost a child to the issue.
3. **DO NOT EVADE REPORTERS OR TRY TO HIDE INFORMATION.** It will eventually come around to kick you. Be honest. Reveal problems. Make the reporter aware of the whole picture. Answer media inquiries as honestly as possible and if you don't know, find out who does and help the reporter get what he/she needs. Better for you to be able to provide all information, even non-flattering information, than for an annoyed, over-worked reporter to dig it up and sling it to the masses.

4. **BE ACCESSIBLE.** We cannot stress this enough. Your company or agency media contacts need to be there, return calls, and offer their home phone numbers and email addresses for emergency follow-up on deadline.
5. **DO NOT PESTER EDITORS/REPORTERS.** If you have sent a press release, do not call to see if someone got it. Chances are they did. If you are really concerned, resent it a week or two later. If a reporter is interested, they will call you if you leave your phone and email. If you've provided the nugget (see #2), chances are good someone will call.
6. **PROVIDE REPORTERS WITH AS MUCH DOCUMENTATION AS POSSIBLE ABOUT YOUR ISSUE.** If the topic is pedestrian safety, collect the accident data, the stories, the examples of what works and what doesn't. Give them the local, regional, and national death and injury statistics if possible and if not tell them where to go to find the info. Give examples of and contacts for places (schools, etc.) where things are working well.
7. **PREPARE PRESS KITS.** Include who, what, where, when, and why they should care. Include contact names if they need more info.
8. **ALWAYS TELL THE REPORTER THE DOWN SIDE.** If pedestrian safety is your concern, be sure to tell the reporter that the reason so little is done because of lack of funds. For example, if it is in fact true that the "squeaky wheel gets the grease," or the school that bugs its city planners enough gets the traffic signal money, then give the reporter that hint. If the issue is the lack of nurses in schools today, be sure the reporter knows that the other side is the mandate to reduce class size and that the two are competing for the same funds.
9. **THINK OF IMAGINATIVE WAYS TO TELL YOUR STORY.** Example: Find a very nasty intersection that particularly demonstrates your point about safety issues and arrange to take the reporter there at its worst.

10. **FIND OUT WHO IS ON YOUR BEAT.** Do not call the health reporter if your issue is traffic. Call the traffic or school reporter. Get to know reporters on the beat that concerns your issues. Meet them. Send them a profile or resume, and offer to be an expert source if they need one. It is also important to know their deadlines for a story.
11. **RESPECT THE FACT THAT EVERYONE GETS THINGS WRONG ON DEADLINE.** There is a lot of pressure in a newsroom. If your reporter gets the facts wrong, call him respectfully and let him know. If it is an egregious error, ask for a correction. If it is something you can deal with in a letter to the editor, that's a better way to go. It is also an additional opportunity to make your point. Most publications welcome letters to the editor.
12. **YOU ARE ALWAYS ON THE RECORD WHEN TALKING TO A REPORTER** unless you specifically arrange otherwise. If you want to be quoted, spell your name or offer your business card.