

## How to Publicize Your Events

*Community support is absolutely essential to winning and sustaining an organizing drive for community action. One sure-fire way to spread news quickly is publicity, especially through mainstream news outlets. You will want to do this especially after you make a policy change. Although the mainstream media is hard to access, particularly by youth groups, there are some basic tips that can help improve your chances. We offer some tips on how to publicize events here.*

### Press and Publicity for an Event

#### Pre-Event Publicity

Letting the public and the media know of an upcoming event is a key first step to attracting both the general public to your event as well as potential media coverage of your event.

1. **Notify Calendar Sections of Newspapers.** Notify, in writing, of the date, time, place, one sentence description and contact name with telephone number. The "one sentence description" should be catchy enough to get people to call for more information.
2. **Public Service Announcements.** PSA's can be sent to radio stations. A public service announcement should be short and to the point with the pertinent where, when, what and who in the first sentence.
  - o Send the PSA to the station's public-service director or community calendar at least two weeks in advance.
  - o Call after you send it to make sure it arrived and ask whether they can use it.
  - o Your message should be in "live copy", the actual announcement you wish them to read. Most stations prefer 15 - 30 second spots. As a reference, remember that 20 words = 10 seconds, 50 words = 20 seconds and 75 words = 30 seconds.
  - o At the top of the page give the station the date the PSA should start and stop running.
  - o Send a thank you note to the station after they air your PSA.
3. **Print Flyers and Distribute.** Flyers are very helpful in publicizing your event. Print as many as you can, make them colorful and eye-catching and easy to read. Post them all over your community about two weeks before the event and re-post those torn down or worn away again a few days before the event. Some groups have found it helpful to create a different second poster. This will make people stop and read again.

## Event Publicity - Press Releases

A press release should be written and sent approximately 2 weeks prior to an event. The first paragraph should have the important Who, What, Where and Why. Often a reporter will only read the first paragraph. Be catchy in your title and direct in your point. Press releases should be sent to all newspapers, television news stations and radio stations in the surrounding area.

- **Newspapers:** Press releases should be sent to the City Desk (or equivalent). If there is a unique speaker at the event, the press release can also be sent to the Features writer (or equivalent) for a feature story or profile that includes the event.
- **Television:** the press release should be sent to the Assignment Editor. In order for TV to come, there has to be a strong visual element to the event, something unique to photograph or someone noteworthy to interview. Televisions stations will often want to film interviews prior to an event.
- **Radio:** The best bet with radio is often the pre publicity. All talk radio, however, will often cover events through interviews either on the spot, or more likely, in the studio prior to the event. Press releases should be sent to the News or Program Director.

**REMEMBER:** It is always best to send press releases directly to a person instead of a title i.e. Bob Jones instead of News Director. It is to your advantage to take the time and call to ask for the appropriate person's name.

Call the media outlet to verify the arrival of the press release and quickly highlight the points of the event.

Make sure someone is assigned to work with the press at the event. People for interviews should be designated and available. Be sure your spokesperson is well prepared. Be very careful to stay within the Amnesty mandate while speaking with the press. It's OK to say you don't know the answer to something but you will find out - then be sure to get back to that reporter when you have the information.

### **After the Event:**

1. Calls should be made to reporters who were interested in interviews that could not be scheduled prior or during the event.
2. A call to the press person offering any further information is always appreciated and helps remind that person how important and newsworthy your information is to them.
3. Any press person who covered the event should be kept on a list and sent any further information about the subject at a later date.
4. Thank you notes are very important and will help cultivate the relationships you are developing with reporters.

## Tips for Using the Media

**Develop Relationships.** All organizing is about developing relationships. Relationships with the media are always professional. Honesty is crucial. You want them to know that when your organization seeks press, it is about something newsworthy and it is true. No matter how friendly a press person is, you should always assume that what you say can and will be published. Assume nothing is secret and act and speak accordingly.

It is OK to tell a reporter that you don't know the answer to something right now but you will find out and get back with them. When you offer to get back to a reporter, do so promptly. Develop a reputation for providing solid, accurate and timely information.

**Develop a Media (Press) List.** You should not have to compile a new list each time you contact the media. Computerize a mailing list so that you can generate labels at a moment's notice. Keep the list updated. Keep track of personal contacts with reporters so when group members change, there is a "memory" in place for press work.

**Think Pictures.** When press coverage is likely, think pictures, both TV and newspapers. Notifying the press that there will be "photo opportunities" can increase your likelihood of media coverage. Use your group's creativity to develop visuals and symbols to support the message.

**Press Releases.** The object of a press release is to get the media to cover your story, not to pack in as much information as possible. The release should be the hook to get their interest. Press releases should be received two to four days before the event. Weekly newspapers usually have deadlines of three or four days before publication, so check before hand. If possible, schedule your event to maximize coverage.

**Follow Up Press Releases with a Call.** No matter how good your press release is, you will have a better chance of getting covered if you follow up the release with a phone call.

**Recognize Luck.** As in all life, luck plays a role, good and bad. You may have the greatest story to tell or the best event in town, but if there is an earthquake in San Francisco or dancing on the Berlin Wall, you won't be covered. On the other hand, you may schedule an event on a slow news day and be the star of the evening news. Such is life. Good Luck!