

## GETTING IN THE NEWS

**Easy steps to help you become part of the dialogue!**

**By Holly Armstrong, Friedman Associates**

Many organizations are doing great work but not getting noticed. In the community development industry, NOW is the time to be a part of the dialogue and it does not necessarily take a lot of money or time. Knowing how to use the media as a tool to reach your community is essential to getting heard.

Journalists today are busier than ever – there are fewer resources and more competition. At the same time, because of new technology, social media, the blackberry and the iPhone, and limitless blogs, there is more information available for those journalists to sort through and decipher.

Why is your organization so important? What can you add to the conversation? How can you possibly break through all of this noise?

Believe it or not, journalists NEED you. Journalists rely on experts and trusted sources so that they can best tell a story to their readers. There are simple ways to ensure that you stand out as a trusted source and an expert in your field.

### **Five Steps to Help You Get in the News**

1. **Read, watch and listen to the news.** Every day, there are stories that appear that relate to your organization and your work. Today more than ever, there are stories about the economy and what is being done in communities to address the current crisis. YOU are part of the solution and can ensure that reporters and editors know who you are and what you do. *See a story where you could have served as an expert, or provided information to help tell the story?* Pick up the phone and call the reporter, editor, announcer or blogger. Introduce yourself and let them know that you are available when they are writing future stories on the subject and give them some helpful information to demonstrate your value.
2. **Be prepared.** Before you pick up the phone, have your thoughts in order – even write them down. Are there things you want to be sure to pass along? Write down notes – or talking points – for your conversation. Remember that they are busy so you need to get your points across quickly and succinctly.
3. **Get to know your reporters.** Use these opportunities to establish a relationship with reporters but reach out to others as well. Are there reporters who cover business issues? Is there a radio announcer who frequently uses wire

service news but could use “local flavor” for national stories? Pick up the phone. Introduce yourself briefly, ask for their e-mail so you can send them your contact info and follow through. Send them your contact info with some brief information about your organization and what you do. Check in regularly as you have news to report and keep them on your distribution list for press releases, events, success stories, board additions and other news.

4. **Maintain your contact list.** Keep in touch with your press contacts. Because of the current climate, many journalists (like others) are moving to other news outlets, leaving the industry or switching their coverage areas (or “beat”). If you keep in touch with these people, you will be the first to know when there are changes. Think of reporters as colleagues – they have a job to do and so do you, and you need one another to do your respective jobs.
5. **Get everyone involved.** Everyone has a role to play to get in the news! Ask everyone to keep their eyes and ears open for stories. Be sure to use the best spokesperson for each opportunity, too. Is there a resident “expert” who would be a better spokesperson for a story? Is there a board member who can address their expertise while delivering your message? Act as the facilitator but, as a resource for your press contacts, they need to know that you are a one-stop shop for information, experts and anecdotes to help them write their stories. Help your spokespeople by identifying messages (or “talking points”) you would like conveyed and some common rules when working with your press contacts (see below).

### **Working with Reporters: Rules of engagement** *Helpful hints by Holly Armstrong, Friedman Associates*

- Don't be scared; be confident
- Nothing is “off-the-record”
- Never answer hypothetical questions
- Never lie
- Never speak for other elected officials, organizations or individuals
- Never answer a question that wasn't asked – unless it is a question you *wanted* asked
- Always remember that you are speaking on behalf of the organization
- Always be okay with silence/long pauses
- Always find out what the reporter is asking and, if needed, hang up and call back after you have collected your thoughts
- Always think about ways you can coordinate the topic with other priority areas
- Always let the communications staff know who you have talked to and the nature of the call – if possible, check in before