

Involving the Media

In today's society, the media is an extremely powerful tool that brings legitimacy to issues and sways public opinion. Involving the media in SAAM events gives your agency positive coverage and allows the media to respond to you for a change. While it is good to have big media outlets at your events, do not forget to utilize your local media. Local cable TV talks shows and public and college radio stations are easy and affordable means of reaching your local community, especially in rural areas.

Media coverage is also powerful in shaping public policy opinions of elected officials. Many elected officials and their staff monitor media coverage in their home districts to determine what constituents' positions are on different issues. Please refer to the "Involving Political Leaders" section of this tool kit for more information on this topic.

Utilizing the Media

- It is very beneficial to develop a good rapport with reporters. Read their stories, invite them to events, and return their phone calls promptly—they are often working against a deadline.
- Interviews are a great way to gain PR for your agency and raise awareness about sexual assault. Use the interview to promote SAAM events or fundraising efforts. In some cases, you may be asked to do a pre-interview. This is to ensure a guest is intelligent, articulate, well-versed on the issues, quick on their feet, and interesting to hear. Normally this involves a telephone conversation with the producer of a TV or radio show. Pre-interviews are as serious as the interview itself and could determine whether or not the actual interview occurs.
- Everything you say to a member of the media could end up in print. It is okay to take a second before responding to a reporter's question. Speak slowly and in short, concise sentences that provide the reporter with good sound bites.
- If you do not know the answer to a question do not lie—tell them you do not know, but you will do your best to find the answer for them.
- Pitch your story to one reporter at each media outlet in person, over the phone, or through a letter that is followed up with a phone call (see sample radio pitch letter).
- Be aware of media deadlines so that you do not catch reporters/journalists at a bad time. Generally, the beginning of the week and around 10 in the morning are the ideal times to contact a reporter.
- Take advantage of the many free or affordable opportunities the media offers:
 - *Calendar listings*

- *Public Service Announcement, (PSAs, Public Service Spots)*—made on behalf of nonprofit organizations and are limited to specific lengths. Announcements must be non-political, of interest, and appealing to the general public (see enclosed samples).
 - *Letters to the Editor*—a letter addressing a certain issue or responding to articles or editorials with a confirming or opposing point of view. Letters should be short, concise, and no more than a page. Check with your local newspapers for word limits (see enclosed sample).
 - *Edit Memos*—a great tool to use in pointing out the issue of sexual assault in your community to editorial writers. This should be a short memorandum addressed to the editorial page editors or members of an editorial board asking them to allocate space to sexual assault during April. It should contain several well-written paragraphs that can be lifted directly from the memo and used in an editorial. Be sure to use your local statistics!
 - *Op-Ed Pieces*—these should express your opinion or experience regarding sexual assault and be of interest to the general public. Signed guest editorials are generally 500 to 700 words. Check with your local newspapers for word limits. Be sure to use your local statistics!
- Encourage your staff, volunteers and board members to be more active in the community during SAAM by asking them to write a letter to the editor, an edit memo, or an op-ed piece. Make sure they include your agency name and their affiliation (e.g., board member) after their signature.

Planning for Action

It is important to plan your activities with the media in mind. To involve the media in your SAAM activities, start with these steps:

Step 1: Craft a Message

You never know when an opportunity will arise for you to share your message with a member of the media, an elected official, or a community member. It is important that everyone communicates the same message. Designate spokespersons who can clearly communicate the message, respond to on-the-spot questions, and stay focused on the message throughout an interview. Our message becomes stronger when we speak with one collective voice.

If you would like to craft a message of your own, here are some helpful guidelines to follow. Keep your message short (like a sound bite, which is generally around three sentences). The media may only give you a couple of minutes to talk. Your message should create a visual image, appeal to people's values by using strong words, and explain the problem, solution, and an action that can be taken. It is also helpful to develop talking points for your message. This enables your spokesperson to elaborate on the messages and respond quickly during interviews.

Step 2: Compile a List of Media Contacts

A list of media outlets and specific reporters with phone, fax, and email information allows your agency to quickly distribute calendar announcements, media advisories, and press releases. If you already have a list, now is a good time to make sure it is up-to-date. If you do not have specific media contacts, SAAM provides an opportunity for you to establish them. Here are some places to start:

- *Television*—editors and producers for public affairs and news assignment.
- *Radio*—editors and directors for news, assignments, and public service.
- *Newspapers and Magazines*—editors and reporters for city/metro, health, women’s issues, and feature sections.
- *Internet*—webmasters and content editors.

Step 3: Create a media packet

It is important to have packets on hand at events where you have invited the media. You will already have some of the materials in your office. The purpose of media packets is to provide accurate information to the media so when they leave your event, they can add to their story with information provided by your agency. Your packet should include the following:

- *Teal Ribbon*
- *Brochures*—Agency brochure and any other informational brochures.
- *Fact Sheets*—Keep it to one page and be sure to include your local statistics as well as North Carolina statistics (see enclosed “Facts & Statistics” section).
- *Backgrounders*—A one- or two-page, in-depth explanation of sexual assault that can be used to quickly educate the media.
- *Statements*—A short and to-the-point page of quotable remarks from your agency spokesperson on your event or on sexual assault in general. Include the date and your spokespersons’ phone number. These are also helpful to have on hand year-round in order to enable your agency to respond quickly to a breaking story.
- *Media Advisory/Media Alert*—This is a great way to pique the media’s interest in a story by announcing an upcoming press and/or photo opportunity. Generally no more than one page, Media Advisories are dated, clear, and concise. Include who, what, when, where, why, and how along with your organization’s spokesperson and phone number. Send it out four weeks prior to a calendar listing and send it again one to two weeks prior as a reminder. Always follow up 2-5 days before the event with a personal phone call.
- *Press Release*—Written as an article about your event (one to two pages in length). The press may use the release in full, in part, or as the basis for an article (see enclosed sample).

Tips for Writing a Press Release

Media outlets do not necessarily care about your issue as much as they care about filling space, which is why having a good hook in your release is important. The first paragraph is the most important part of the release and can often determine if your release is read in its entirety. It should be no longer than three sentences and capture the reader's attention.

- Indicate whether the release is “Embargoed For Release” or “For Immediate Release” at the top of the page. An embargoed release will be put in a folder for the date it is to be released.
- Include the name of your spokesperson with their contact information.
- Create an eye-catching headline.
- Keep text clear, concise, and no more than two pages. If your release is two pages, be sure to put “-MORE-“ at the bottom of the first page.
- Include at least one quote from your spokesperson, background information on the event, and information about sexual assault.
- At the end of the release, be sure to type “###” so they know they received the release in its entirety.
- Send a fax of the press release to a specific media contact. A news release can be distributed prior to, at the time of, or after an event either by mailing, faxing, or handing it out in the media packet.
- Make sure to send the release to the Associated Press (AP) so they will put you in their daybook. Many media outlets utilize this daily.

What the Terms Mean

Press Opportunity: April is full of press opportunities such as ribbon campaigns, marches, candlelight vigils, planting a garden, fundraisers, public speeches, and awards to name a few. This gives the media a story and can illustrate how your agency is involved in the community.

Photo Opportunity: The media is attracted to opportunities that have a great visual appeal. Many press opportunities are worthy of space in a newspaper or magazine and are enhanced by images. Be sure to tell them if your event will have a photo opportunity.

Press Briefing: This is an informal, invitation-only meeting usually with breakfast. The purpose of a press briefing is to quickly inform the media regarding an incident or event. Normally there are around 12 reporters present and one to three speakers present background and information.

News Conference: This is a staged event for the press, generally held only for very important or time sensitive information. Normally there are only one or two speakers who read a prepared statement and answer press questions.

Media Resources

NCCASA's resource center has the following materials related to the media:

- *Working Locally for Social Change: Transforming Political Rhetoric into Social Action.* (2002) League of Women Voters of Piedmont Triad, YWCA, Peace and Justice Network, League of Women Voters of North Carolina and Democracy South NC Money in Politics Project; 103 pgs.
- W. Rasulala, J. Dorman and D. Rice. *Media Messages in Good Times and Bad* (2000) N.C. Center for Nonprofits-Audio Tape.
- *On the Spot Media Interviews* (2000) N.C. Center for Nonprofits. Audio Tape.
- Lisa M. Cuklanz. *Rape On Prime Time: Television, Masculinity, and Sexual Violence* (2000) University of Pennsylvania Press; 187 pgs.
- Lisa M Culklanz. (1996) *Rape on Trial: How the Mass Media Construct Legal Reform and Social Change.* University of Pennsylvania Press; 135 pgs.
- Robert Freeman-Longo and Geral Blanchard. *Sexual Abuse in America: Epidemic of the 21st century.* (1998) The Safer Society Press; 221 pgs.
- N.C. Center for Nonprofit.) *Strategic Media Relations.* (1999) The Conference Cassette Company-Audio Tape.
- Marlene A. Young. *Victim Assistance: Frontiers and Fundamentals.* (1993) National Organization for Victim Assistance; 408 pgs.

Helpful website links for locating and working with the media:

- Public and Media Relations The Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits http://www.mapnp.org/library/pblc_rel/pblc_rel.htm
- Newspapers and magazines <http://www.newsdirectory.com/news.php?co=USA&p=nc>
- North Carolina Press Association, newspaper search www.ncpress.com
- The Associated Press <http://www.ap.org/>
- Gebbie Press All-In-One Media Directory—all media, including radio www.gebbieinc.com

Sample Press Release

(Printed on agency letterhead)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT:

[Contact Person]

[Agency Name]

[Telephone Number]

[Fax Number]

[Email address]

[Website address]

Sexual Assault Awareness Month 2007—“One Victim Is Too Many. Speak Out.”

[City, State, Date]- April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Representatives from [agency name] invite the community to join in speaking out against sexual assault by attending [SAAM event]. The event will be held on [date] from [time frame] at [location]. The event will include [event details].

Sexual Assault Awareness Month is nationally recognized throughout the month of April. This special month is an opportunity to draw attention to the issue of sexual assault and honor those whose lives have been impacted by sexual violence. The North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NCCASA) chose “*One Victim Is Too Many. Speak Out.*” as this year’s statewide theme for Sexual Assault Awareness Month to reflect the idea that when one person—be it a child, woman, or man—is victimized by sexual violence, the entire community is impacted and should be concerned and outraged.

Anyone can become a victim of sexual assault, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, sexual orientation, occupation, or physical and mental ability. Last year, [agency name] provided services to [number] of sexual assault victims in [county/counties].

[Include statement from agency representative].

[Agency name] provides [description of services, clients, etc.].

[Agency name] joins organizations and individuals around the state of North Carolina in recognizing Sexual Assault Awareness Month this April.

###

(### indicates press release is finished)

Sample Letter to the Editor

(Printed on agency letterhead)

[Date]

[Editor Name]

[Newspaper Name]

[Street Address]

[City, State Zip]

Dear Editor:

Every year, thousands of North Carolinians—women, men, and children—are victimized by sexual violence. Last year, according to the N.C. Council for Women, North Carolina’s rape crisis centers provided assistance to over 7,000 victims of sexual assault. [Agency name] provided assistance to [number] of victims of sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence in [county] last year. Sexual violence not only affects those who are victims, but it impacts families, friends, churches, communities, and our society as a whole.

While the statistics are staggering, isn’t just one victim cause for concern and action? When one person is affected by sexual violence, we are all affected. One victim is too many. As a community, we have a responsibility to support each and every individual whose life has been impacted by sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence and to speak out against this devastating problem. Only by speaking out can we make our community safer.

The month of April is recognized as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This is a special opportunity for each of us to take time to bring attention to the issue of sexual violence. The North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault has chosen “*One Victim Is Too Many. Speak Out.*” as the statewide theme for Sexual Assault Awareness Month 2007. On behalf of [agency name], I would like to encourage your readers to help make their community safer by speaking out against sexual assault during the month of April and throughout the year. Only by working together and supporting one another can we make our community safer.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

Enclosure

(Enclose Sexual Assault Facts & Statistics information)

Sample Radio Talk Show Pitch Letter

(Printed on agency letterhead)

[Date]

[Name of radio contact]

[Name of radio show]

[Radio station]

[Street address]

[City, State Zip]

Dear Mr. /Ms. [contact name]:

As you may already know, the month of April is nationally recognized as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. During this month, sexual assault programs nationwide hold events and activities that draw attention to the issue of sexual violence and honor and support those whose lives have been affected by sexual assault.

I am writing to ask you to interview [agency representative], the [title] of [agency name] about the issue of sexual violence and the activities and events [agency] will be sponsoring in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. [Agency name] provides [description of services, clients, etc.]. On [date] from [time frame] at [location], [agency name] will be holding a [event and description of event].

Every year, thousands of North Carolinians—women, men, and children—are victimized by sexual violence. Last year, [agency name] provided assistance to [number] of victims of sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence in [county]. Sexual violence not only affects those who are victims, but it impacts families, friends, churches, communities, and our society as a whole. When one person is affected by sexual violence, we are all affected. One victim is too many.

I hope that you will consider inviting [agency representative] to be a guest on your show. We would greatly appreciate an opportunity to promote awareness of the issue of sexual assault and its impact on the community. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [phone number and/or email address].

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Title]