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Media How To

Building good relationships with your local media will make sure that your action group is effective at getting the media out to your events, and covering the issues. Good media coverage will help raise awareness of the issues of development and poverty, and the urgency and the need for Canadians to take action.

This tool will help you:

Build effective relationships with your local media

Give you tips on how to get the media to cover your events

Perform effectively in media interviews

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Using the media to publicize your events or tell your personal volunteering story can be a great way to gain extra exposure for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Make Poverty History campaign.

With that in mind it is important to realize that it is also a great responsibility. What you say and do will reflect the whole campaign, and it is essential that media relations are undertaken with the utmost care.

Top Four Key Media Guidelines:

Work with your local media

Where you will have the most successes and where your group can have the greatest impact is working with your local and community media. Approaching the local media to promote your events, and potentially run a human-interest story is a great way to build awareness and create action in your community.

Use your volunteering story

You know first hand how urgent the need is. You also know that ordinary Canadians (in Canada) can make a difference. With your volunteering experience you have an interesting angle to add to the campaign. There is a good chance that your local media may see a human-interest story in how a local person was effective in making change happen. The key is to make your story accessible - do not use acronyms or unfamiliar language! Give a simple explanation of your placement, you may want to get involved with the broader issues but start with a simple story of where you lived and what work you were doing.

Deal only in facts

It is essential that the information you give out in a news release, media advisory or interview are all accurate, and factual. Be prepared. Research before you send anything out and work from notes if you are providing information to media representatives. The Make Poverty History website www.makepovertyhistory.ca is an excellent source of information.

No matter how prepared you are there will always be things you just don't know or are not sure of. Never ever guess or make things up. If you don't know the answer to a question, or if you're not certain you can always find out the correct answer and call them back promptly. Your media contact will be happy that they are getting accurate information.

Watch Your Language

Language can be an incredibly powerful thing; be careful of the words that you use, as they can convey things that you may not necessarily want to say. No matter how strongly you feel about a situation, always keep in mind that you are not just voicing your own views you are speaking on behalf of the campaign.

Contacting the Media

Before you call a media representative, be prepared. They may want to know statistics about the MDGS, the Make Poverty History campaign in general, as well as facts about your local Global Citizens for Change Group. Be sure to let the person know why they should care about your group, and why your group's actions and events are important to the local community. After your conversation, you may wish to send the reporter a package of resource information about the MDGS and Make Poverty History Campaign.

Media List

You will need to create or acquire a media list or local media in your area. A media list is a listing of the name, contact, phone number, and fax number for all the local papers, radio and television stations, blogs, internet publications, student, city and ethnic papers in your community.

Ideally someone on your committee may have access to such a list, or know someone who does. You can also contact your sending agency or the Citizens for Actions Against Poverty to get one that you can build on. Building on the list is a good research project to set someone on your committee to task on, info can be found on websites and by calling the media you are looking to build relationships with.

Build Good Relationships

- When distributing a news release try to do it by hand – this can be an effective way of preventing your release from getting stuck at the bottom of an inbox!
- If you send your advisory or release by fax, mail or e-mail, follow up with a phone call. Confirm that the information was received and offer to answer any questions.
- When a reporter provides an accurate or positive story on your group or event, be sure to contact them to say thank you! This could be a phone call or letter.

Public Service Announcements

A public service announcement or PSA is an announcement that is played free on TV or radio. Global Citizens for Action Against poverty can provide you with a list of radio stations that will read PSAs in your area. You will need to provide them with an announcement to be read. Your announcement should be short and catchy, only contain the basic information about your event.

Media Advisory

When you are hosting an event you will want to send out a 'media advisory'. A media advisory essentially lets the media know the who, what, where, and when of your event.

Your media advisory should include:

- "Attention City and Photo Editors" at the top to indicate who should pick up the story
- A brief description of what the event is
- Why the event is happening – "part of the national Make History Poverty campaign"
- Who of interest will be at the event
- How much the event will cost
- Description of an interesting photo opportunity
- Clearly stated date, time, and location of the event
- Your contact name, phone number, and email address

You should fax the advisory about a week before your event, a couple days before your event and the morning of your event. Call the person you sent the fax to the day you sent it to make sure it was received, to see if they have any further questions, and to ask if they will come out. Be polite and persistent.

You will find a sample of a media advisory at the end of this section.

News Release

You should send out a news release on the day of your event. A news release is something that an individual could pick up and use to write the entire story about the event.

A press release should include:

- “For immediate release” in the top left corner
- Date
- A brief description of why the event happened
- A brief description of what happened
- A quote from a spokesperson at the event – quote should be something that is really brief, to the point, and sounds catchy
- Your contact name, phone number, and email address

You will find a sample news release at the end of this section.

At the Event

Even if you do all the right things, the press may or may not show up at the event, but you need to be prepared either way. Make sure that you have a person who feels comfortable talking to the press that will greet them at the event, answer any questions they may have, and put them in place to get a good photo. You will also want to have a press kit available for any member of the press to pick up.

Press Kit

A press kit is a folder that contains essential information of the day’s event. It should include:

- A fact sheet about issues of extreme poverty (available on the www.makepovertyhistory.ca website)
- A fact sheet about the Make Poverty History Campaign (available on the www.makepovertyhistory.ca website)
- A fact sheet about your local group – who you are, where and when you meet, how you are connected to the national campaign.
- A media advisory and news release if you sent one out
- A white band

A few extra tips

If you are hosting an event invite your MP, MPP and Mayor to attend – make sure to give them as much notice as possible. If you have confirmation that they will attend be sure to add that to your media advisory. Try and get a public figure involved in something that will make an interesting photo opportunity

Always try for an interesting photo opportunity. Wrapping a building in White will make a good picture, and sometimes a good picture is all it takes to convince the media that it is a story worth running.

Media people like to get involved so if you are having an activity get them to participate.

Media Interviews

How to give an interview

If you ask the media to attend one of your events they may ask you to do an interview. This is a great opportunity for you to get out important messages and to gain very useful professional skills. The number one rule for media interviews is to be prepared.

Pre-interview

Ask the reporter what section they are from, and their story will be about. What angle are they looking to cover? Are they going to take pictures? Will they be recording the interview or merely taking notes? Will the interview be live or taped?

Think about questions that you might be asked. What different "angles" might the reporter want to cover?

Prepare some of your answers. Decide upon one or two key points that you want to get across in the interview, and try to incorporate these into your answers. You may want to write down your points before hand. But you *do not* want to prepare a set speech.

Practice what you're going to say. If you're nervous, you may want to ask a friend to help you practice.

Draw on your personal experience. Give a concise overview of where you were and what you were doing, while keeping it simple. Practice by writing it down trying to capture your placement in less than 100 words. If there is the opportunity tell a short personal story. Practice beforehand so that your story is concise.

Chose one or two facts you would like to highlight.

During the Interview

Relax smile, and be honest. If you don't understand a question, ask the reporter to clarify it for you.

Try not to talk too quickly, or for too long, and keep your answers concise.

If you don't know that answer to something, don't make something up – instead, offer to find out the answer. Be straightforward and emphasize the facts.

Use only a few facts, too many numbers will lose the effect, and not be memorable.

If you don't want something to end up in the public record, don't say it!

After the Interview

Be sure to get a copy of final product to hear or read how your interview was reported. Send a copy to Heather or Suzanne.

Call or write the reporter to thank them for covering the story.

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Television Tips

- Sit comfortably; lean slightly forward.
- Dark colours and simple patterns look better on television.
- Look at the reporter, not the camera or monitor.
- Talk clearly in short phrases. Try not to talk too fast.

Dealing with Difficult Questions

"It's a natural human reaction to respond with defensiveness or irritability when our integrity or competence is attacked, or when an initiative we've championed has been maligned or misunderstood. But the best communicators know that in a professional interaction – such as a media interview or a company meeting – they're best served by a calm, well-considered transition."

-James Gray, *The Globe and Mail*, March 7, 2003

A difficult question can leave an interviewee scrambling, and can derail you from saying what you want to the audience. Transition or bridge phrases can be used to respond to difficult questions without being thrown off the messages that you want to convey.

Effective Transitions

- "I see things differently." (Respectful, but firm.)
- "That's not the issue. The issue is . . ." (Forceful and authoritative.)
- "Let me provide you with some context." (Needed perspective, your way.)
- "That would be speculation. What I can tell you is that . . ." (You can only speak about what you know.)
- "That's true. However, what you need to keep in mind is . . ." (Polite yet direct.)
- "I don't know -- that's not my area of expertise. What I do know is that . . ."
- "Before I wrap up, I'd like to emphasize . . ." (To solidify your point.)