

Tips for Working with the Media

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The Importance of Positive Media Coverage

Positive media coverage, in any medium, is a powerful and effective vehicle to reach potential event participants and donors. However, the goal of successful publicity or media outreach is not just to get your event and its participants in the paper or on television – its overall goal is to build awareness of your event and to drive donations to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

When making decisions concerning media outreach, it is important to consider the scope or size of the campaign. Will this be a large or small effort? If you will be inviting reporters to an event, will this be a one-time project or part of an ongoing relationship-building program with reporters and editors? Try to make these decisions as early as possible in your planning process as this will give you a good indication of the number of people and volunteer hours that will be necessary to successfully manage projects.

Positive media coverage can be rewarding in two important ways.

- *Positive media coverage delivers your message through a critical third party.*

When people read an article about your event or its participants in print or they hear about your activities on a newscast, they consider the message to be much more objective than paid advertising. Your audience may be interested in your program simply because an independent third party considered it newsworthy.

- *Positive media coverage promotes the value of your event.*

Positive media coverage referencing your event reinforces its value to potential participants and donors.

Tools for Positive Media Coverage

The proper tools are necessary to successfully execute your media outreach and develop relationships with reporters. ALSAC/St. Jude has developed information and templates to assist you. These resources should be used as you follow these six essential steps for successful outreach:

1. Develop a list of local media contacts to send them news about your event.
2. Customize templates developed by ALSAC/St. Jude.
3. Reach out to media.
4. Host media at your event.
5. Conduct a media interview.
6. Follow up with the media and track coverage.

Step 1: Develop a list of local media contacts to send them news about your event.

- Identify key editors at the local newspaper(s), news directors at local radio stations and assignment editors at local television stations to whom you can direct your event news. You will want to find out their phone number and e-mail and, if possible, the best time to contact them.
- Compile all of your contacts in a database or Excel spreadsheet, which ensures that your data will be easy to update and maintain. This will also allow you to perform a mail merge should you ever have a need to create labels, envelopes and form letters.
- Update your list of media contacts each year, as roles will change at outlets with staff relocating or taking on new assignments.

Step 2: Customize templates developed by ALSAC/St. Jude

ALSAC/St. Jude Communications provides your event with a suite of templates for media outreach, including a media alert and calendar listing alerting outlets of your event; a press release previewing the event; and a press release to announce fundraising results. More information about the function of each of these templates is below.

For all templates, collect the data for your event and complete the template accordingly. Make sure you carefully proofread the template once it is populated, and ask a colleague to review it, as well. Once your template has been reviewed, you're ready to move on to Step 3.

Media Alert

News editors and reporters are bombarded with press releases every day, which makes it difficult for them to keep track of key events and news. That's why it's important to send your local media a brief preview of your event via media alert.

Calendar Listing

The calendar listing template developed by ALSAC/St. Jude for your use is the same format as a media alert; however, the calendar listing is not to draw media to cover the event; the calendar listing template's purpose is to alert the public of your event. You send it to publications and websites that list local events, as well as contacts at other local organizations who can share it with members or participants.

Press Releases

A press release provides your media contacts with a concise summary about your event. ALSAC/St. Jude has prepared two press release templates – one that can be customized and distributed to build awareness before your event and one to report fundraising results after your event.

Step 3: Reach out to media

Most members of the media prefer to be contacted via e-mail. When notifying the media about your event or fundraising accomplishments, remember that deadlines are crucial. Deadlines for daily, weekly or monthly publications differ greatly, so keep this in mind when considering when to contact the media representative. Find out the publication or television program deadlines and respect them — doing so will give the news media enough time to react to your event notification or press release.

- **Daily publications** — Morning is the best time to contact daily publications with breaking news. If you plan an event designed to draw media attendance, it's best to schedule the event in the morning or during lunch to give reporters enough time to complete their stories. This is especially important for reporters with same-day deadlines.
- **Weekly publications** — Reporters at weekly publications are more likely to take interest in your event if it does not coincide with the issue's deadline day. However, contact these publications as soon as the information is ready for release. If it does not make it into that week's issue, it is possible that the information will appear in the next issue.
- **Monthly publications** — Monthly publications do not encounter the tight and constant deadlines faced by daily publications. However, content must be provided to some outlets up to three or four months in advance, so plan accordingly if you are targeting a monthly. Monthly publications are not as responsive to breaking news; however, they are able to develop and expand deeper themes and issues.
- **Television/radio** — Avoid contacting producers and guest bookers when their programs are on the air, as this is the most frantic part of their day. Send a media alert or press release a week before an event for local daily news programs and follow up with a phone call the day of, if you do not hear back. Typically, television and radio reporters, anchors, producers and guest bookers do not attend events unless they are truly newsworthy on a large scale. It is important, however, to keep them informed of what your event entails. Be aware that follow-up calls and other exploratory efforts may not result in coverage of your event.
- **Calendar of events** — If you are submitting information about an upcoming event to a calendar of events, you should know that the deadline for that section might be different from the regular news cycle. If you are targeting online outlets, such as websites and blogs, listings are commonly received on a rolling basis.

Step 4: Host media at your event

Call the reporters on your distribution list two or three days after they should have received the media alert to confirm its receipt, offer to answer any questions, offer an interview with an appropriate spokesperson(s) (as long as he/she agrees to this beforehand), and ask if the reporter plans to attend and/or would recommend inviting a colleague.

Because of the unpredictability of the news business, reporters are notoriously disinclined to commit to attend or cover something, and frequently fail to show even if they have RSVP'd.

Notify your coordinator and spokesperson(s) of the reporters who plan to attend the event. It is a good idea to keep track of the reporter attendees, including their publications and general contact information, in a spreadsheet or document to reference for future media outreach efforts.

Assign someone to be a reporter's "buddy" during the event to help the reporter network with participants, answer questions, etc.

Step 5: Conduct a media interview

What reporters want from an interview:

- Concise statements
- Something useful to their audience
- Solid facts

What reporters will detect:

- Insincerity
- Inconsistency
- Overly commercial or biased messages

Be prepared:

- Anticipate tough questions and gather facts.
- Decide 3-5 key points you want to make.
- Memorize these points or jot them down on a note card to be worked into the interview.

Tips for print or telephone interviews:

- Anything you say may be quoted.
- Print outlet interviews are longer and more in-depth than broadcast interviews, so be prepared with more facts and background information.
- Print outlet interviews can seem more relaxed than a televised interview, but don't let your guard down.

Tips for televised interviews:

- Stay calm.
- Keep your hands away from microphones.
- Keep your eyes focused on the person who is asking you questions.
- Refrain from any activities that signal you are nervous – wringing your hands, rocking back and forth, etc.
- Avoid quick body movements or you'll move out of the camera's view.
- Respond in complete sentences.
- Dress tastefully. Avoid wearing solid black or white, or busy patterns. Don't wear large, shiny or noisy jewelry.

Take charge:

- Remember your key messages.
- Take time to think about your answers – don't feel pressured into instant responses.
- Answer briefly and directly.
- Always assume the microphone or tape recorder is on.

Key messages

Key messages are clear, concise statements that your program's spokesperson can use to guide the flow and direction of an interview. Key messages about St. Jude are below, but you should also develop some broad messaging about your group's core identity and your event.

St. Jude Key Messages

St. Jude opened in 1962 and was founded by the late entertainer Danny Thomas.

Its mission is to find cures for children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases through research and treatment.

St. Jude is the only pediatric cancer research center where families never pay for treatment not covered by insurance.

No child is ever denied treatment because of the family's inability to pay.

St. Jude has treated children from all 50 states and from around the world.

In 1962, the survival rate for acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), the most common form of childhood cancer, was 4 percent. Today, the survival rate for this once deadly disease is 94 percent, thanks to research and treatment protocols developed at St. Jude.

St. Jude is a national resource with a global impact. Not only are all research findings freely shared, St. Jude plays a critical leadership role in groundbreaking studies on childhood cancer, sickle cell disease and infectious diseases. These efforts are instrumental to improving care for children around the world.

Step 6: Relationship building with the media and tracking coverage

After your event

Follow up with each reporter who attends your event. Consider sending them a letter of thanks for their support of the event. Also, be sure to extend an invitation to future events.

After you distribute the post press release

Call the reporters on your distribution list after they should have received the release to confirm its receipt, offer to answer any questions and offer an interview with an appropriate spokesperson(s) (as long as he/she agrees to this beforehand). This is also a good time to offer suggestions for appropriate photographs that might accompany an article.

Don't be disappointed if your media contacts are not immediately interested in reporting your event's accomplishments. Your long-term goal is to build a relationship with these contacts that can result in future coverage of your event.

Tracking coverage

Make sure to monitor outlets with which you have shared news about your event in the days and weeks following your media outreach.

If you have worked directly with a member of the media to develop an article or a television segment, it is perfectly acceptable to ask them to let you know when the content is published or airs, and to share a copy with you for archival purposes.

If coverage results, note this in your media contact database with the appropriate contact.