


Using the Media to Promote Awareness and Action

The power of the media is a tremendous asset when it comes to getting our message out to the public, and an educated, motivated public can create demand for change. In addition, media exposure can increase your legitimacy and clout within the community. Press releases are an excellent way to encourage local media (be it the school newspaper or the city's TV news) to cover your event.

View the slide show  [Public Relations 101](#) ^[1] (pptx) to learn more about working with the media and using public relations effectively.

To coordinate with Physicians for Human Rights, contact PHR's [Senior Press Officer](#) ^[2].

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The Press Advisory

The purpose of a press advisory is to notify the media in advance about an event or activity.

The press advisory should explain the “who, what, where, when and why” of the event and should provide just enough information to entice reporters to cover your story.

It is important to remember that press advisories are different than press releases. Advisories are meant to persuade the media to cover an event before it happens. The objective is to present your event as worthy of coverage; you want reporters to attend your event to get the whole story.

Note: One of the first steps in developing a media strategy is to build a media list. This requires some research on the web and on the phone to obtain the names and contact information for the media outlets in your area and the reporters and editors who cover relevant issues.

- Send the press advisory to your media list twice; one week before the event, and again, as a reminder, two days before the event.
- If you do not know the specific reporter, send advisories to “Assignment Editor” at television stations and newspapers and to “News Director” at radio stations.
- Even if you know a reporter or news outlet is not likely to attend your event, send advisories. You may get a one-on-one interview or a wire service or pool may cover the event for the outlet. This is particularly true for radio stations, which are often short-staffed and have a significant amount of airtime to fill.

Use a standard format for media advisories:

- Brief headline describing the event.
- Print “MEDIA ADVISORY” in the top left corner of the page.

- Provide contact names, phone numbers and e-mail.
- Highlight the date, time and place.
- Give a brief description of the purpose and format of the event, who will be speaking, and if there will be photo opportunities.

Media advisories should be no longer than one page. Indicate the end of the page by placing a “-30-” or “###,” universal “end” symbols used by news outlets.

The Press Release

The purpose of a press release is to summarize and present your story, help the reporter frame your message accurately, and provide background information and quotes from the spokespersons.

Distribute the press release at your event; directly after the event, fax it to all contacts on your media list who do not attend.

Format:

- Use PHR letterhead.
- Double spaced and one-sided.
- One or two pages.
- Brief headline.
- Highlight the release date and provide contact names and numbers.
- Indicate page continuation by placing the word “more” in parenthesis at the bottom of the page.
- Indicate the end of the release by placing a “-30-” or “###” at the bottom of the document.
- Include a short blurb at the end about your chapter and mention that it is affiliated with PHR.

Making Reporter Pitch Calls

After sending an Advisory or Release make a “pitch call” to the media outlets to ask them to cover the event or story. Before making the call think about the answers to these questions:

- Why is this event newsworthy? Why should they cover it?
- What makes this event different unique?
- Are there important/interesting people they can interview? Why are they important/interesting?

After thinking through these questions write your pitch out and practice it. Here is an outline of what you should include:

- Introduce yourself and PHR
- Brief details of who, what, when, where
- One reason why they should cover the story
- Description of important/interesting person or visual
- Ask for a commitment to cover the story: “Can you make it to this important event?”

Sample Reporter Pitch Call

Hi this is [your name] with the Physicians for Human Rights Student Chapter at [your school]. We are an organization of health professional students committed to human rights and dignity for all people.

On Wednesday we are holding a documentary screening of “Standard Operation Procedure” at 7pm in Zimmer Auditorium.

The film discusses the evidence of systematic torture by US personnel of people in custody at Abu Ghraib, and the implications of that evidence.

After the film we will have a live online discussion with Errol Morris, the filmmaker.

Do you think you can make it on Wednesday at 7pm to cover this important event?

...

Glad you can make it. Would you like me to send directions?

The Letter to the Editor

Letters to the Editor (LTE) should be around 150 words. The goal of an LTE is to offer insightful, expert, and timely commentary on something the paper has recently published. Before writing an LTE, check the publication’s website to see if they publish recommended word counts or guidelines.

Do your homework. Has the paper written on the topic before? If you are responding to a specific article, include the title of the article in your letter and the date it was published. Have other LTEs been written on the topic? What can you add with your LTE?

Know your audience and write to it. If you are writing to a local paper, remember that the readers are everyday people. Avoid statistics and be relatable – talk about your personal experience and connection to the issue.

Be clear and concise. Don’t tackle too much and keep the letter focused on one aspect of your issue. Get to your point quickly and keep your paragraphs short (two to three sentences).

Reread it before submitting for grammar and spelling errors and then submit with your name, email, phone number, and address.

Finally, don’t be discouraged if your LTE isn’t printed. Depending on the topic, publications can receive several LTEs on the same issue. However, the fact that you’ve taken the time to write a well-crafted LTE further draws attention to you and your issue.

Links:

- [1] **Public Relations 101:** <http://phrtoolkits.org/files/PR-101.pptx>
- [2] **Senior Press Officer:** <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/press/media-contacts.html>
- [3] **The Press Advisory:** #The_Press_Advisory
- [4] **The Press Release:** #The_Press_Release
- [5] **Making Reporter Pitch Calls:** #Making_Reporter_Pitch_Calls
- [6] **Sample Reporter Pitch Call:** #Sample_Reporter_Pitch_Call
- [7] **The Letter to the Editor:** #The_Letter_to_the_Editor

Toolkits > Student Chapter Toolkit > Advocacy and Education > Using the Media to Promote Awareness and Action

Printed from: <http://phrtoolkits.org/toolkits/student-chapter-toolkit/advocacy-and-education/media-and-publicity-raising-awareness/>

Toolkit: [Student Chapter Toolkit](#)

Posted on [November 24, 2010](#) by [dbaker](#)

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