



## Tips for Successful Events

### Tip #1

**SELECT A CONVENIENT SITE** for your event and a time for reporters that will avoid deadlines and rush-hour traffic. Mid-morning or early afternoon is good. Respect reporters' time constraints in meeting deadlines.

**Outdoor sites** for media events can be attractive - for example, in front of your health center. Then TV crews don't have to bother with artificial lighting. Yet, be aware, outdoor events also carry the risk of weather changes and unexpected noise (planes, traffic, emergency sirens). Always have a back-up site ready and listed on your media advisory.

Prepare for the event by anticipating what equipment will be necessary. For instance, if you expect cameras or radio reporters, you must have a podium and microphone. In many cases, television and radio reporters rely on a "multi-box" to record what is said - or tape their own mikes directly onto the podium. Also make sure you have a table nearby for press releases and statements.

**For indoor sites**, know beforehand where electrical plugs and light switches are located. Be able to turn off air conditioning should the fan noise interfere with sound recording. Unplug phones so they don't create interference.

**Be creative about visuals.** "Dress up" your event site with blow up graphics, banners, or posters in advance. Make sure your speakers are lined up behind the podium to create a "crowd effect" for television wide shots. Also have the speaking order worked out prior to the press conference.

**DEVELOP A MEDIA LIST** by compiling name, addresses, phone, emails, and fax numbers for key members of the media. Include health reporters, consumer and government reporters, newspaper city editors, and TV and radio news directors. Keep an extra set of mailing labels on hand - and update your list regularly.

Make sure reporters get a "Five W" **MEDIA ADVISORY** at least two days before the event or news conference. An advisory is similar to a press release. The main difference is that rather than incorporate the "Five W's" in narrative sentence form, simply list - such as on a party invitation - the **Who, What, Why, Where, and When**.

Make sure that you send your media advisory to the Associated Press Daybook. (Call your local AP bureau and ask for the regional daybook editor.) The Daybook is a calendar listing of press conferences and media events that television and print reporters consult daily to figure out which media events they will cover.

Call each reporter to confirm receipt of the advisory and ask if they plan to attend. Target certain reporters for special nudging, even up to the last minute. For reporters who do not attend, arrange for speedy fax or hand-delivery of your news conference handouts, including a press release.

**PREPARE A FULL PRESS RELEASE.** Not only is this helpful to reporters in writing a story, but it also will help guide you in making your own verbal presentation. Essentially follow the points in the press release. Read it over several times before the news conference and then speak from notes or highlighted sentences in the press release. Five minutes usually is plenty of time for an opening presentation. **Practice delivering the main points** - the messages that you will keep coming back to - regardless of where reporters' questions may lead.

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### Tip #2

**PREPARING PRESS KITS** can be handed out at a news conference or any other event when background information about the health center is needed. Contents should be printed on health center letterhead with a contact name and phone number. The press kit should include the following:

- A news (press) release.
- A copy of the spokesperson's statement.
- A fact sheet on the issue at hand.
- An agenda of your event with correct names and titles of participants with copies of any charts and graphs that are to accompany the health center presentation.
- A fact sheet on the health center.
- Relevant news articles or other materials that will help the media understand the issue, including biographical information about your health center's leaders and/or speakers.

#### DEALING WITH THE PRESS

- Don't assume reporters know what you mean. Avoid jargon, initials, and acronyms. If you think a reporter is not following your point, state it a different way. Keep a positive attitude.
- A consistent message is more important than a catchy sound bite.
- Keep eye contact with the questioner.
- Anticipate questions, especially the hard ones, and don't get angry or defensive if a sensitive question is asked. "No comment" is never a good answer.
- If you are not the best person to be interviewed on a certain topic, put the reporter in touch with that person.
- Make your point by appealing to the public and overall community interest.
- Know the facts. Never lie. Never guess, and never think less of yourself if you don't know the answer. Tell the reporter you will get back with the answer - and always do so. If you realize that you gave a reporter misinformation, call immediately to set the record straight.

Build rapport and establish a continuous dialogue with reporters. Share timely information from your health center or health data you receive from government agencies, NACHC or other sources. Remember to include your name and phone number on any information you give to reporters.

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### Tip #3

**MAKE YOUR CONTACT by calling your Representative's District Office of Senator's primary state office.**

**Ask to speak to the scheduler. Some Members have one staffer who schedules both District and Washington events or meetings; others have a separate scheduler for in-state functions and another for Washington events or appointments.**

**BE SPECIFIC AND PERSISTENT**

*My name is..... I am calling for (Name of Health Center and location). We are planning an open house to celebrate National Health Center Week, which is August 7-13, 2004. We expect press coverage and a large turnout from the community and would like our Representative/Senator to join us and to speak to the gathering. We will make every effort to accommodate his or her schedule.*

**Note! It is important to be polite but insistent. The job of the scheduler is to prioritize their Member's schedule. Make sure you emphasize that you expect many people in attendance - and/or that your Representative or Senator had indicated in previous contact his desire to visit your health center in connection with ongoing efforts in Congress to expand resources and strengthen America's Health Centers.**

**FOLLOW UP IMMEDIATELY after your telephone conversation or message with a fax or written invitation giving full details.**

**If you do not hear back within a week, call again. Do not accept an open-ended delay. Advise that you that you need confirmation for news releases, etc. If you have trouble getting a response, don't hesitate to ask other people who may have ties or connections with the Member to call on your behalf and encourage a favorable response.**

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### Tip #4

**Write to the Editorial Page Editor** requesting an editorial board meeting. Explain the purpose of your visit and why the issue is timely and important to the community. Also, include the names of people who will accompany you. Follow up a few days later with a phone call.

**Before you meet with the editorial board**, make sure you are familiar with what the paper has written on your subject in the past. This is part of good preparation and common courtesy. If you are asking a newspaper to highlight a particular issue, know what the paper has already written about it. It will help you tailor your case to the special interests of your target audience - the editorial board.

**It is especially important to read the paper on the day and week of your meeting.** If an article about your issue or your health center has appeared in the paper, the editorial board will expect you to **KNOW** about it.

**Prepare one-page fact sheets** in support of your position and bring enough copies for everyone at the meeting. Also provide copies of any memoranda you have prepared on the issue and the names/phone numbers of people who can be contacted for more information.

You might want to have other experts accompany you to the meeting, but **a good general rule to follow is - the smaller the group, the better.** Some advise that one person is often the best way to present the necessary information and answer questions from the editorial staff. You can always get back to the board with more information or answers that you were not able to provide at the meeting.

Some advocates prefer bringing along people who can enhance the credibility and importance of their message, such as prominent citizens from the community.

A typical editorial board meeting will start with the opportunity to "state your case". This opening statement should be brief, but concise. It should summarize your position on the issue, the evidence that supports this position, and any anticipated criticisms of your position and responses to those criticisms.

**Once you have stated your case, you can expect questions from the editorial board.** Not all of the questions will seem friendly, even if the board is predisposed to agree with you. This is because editorial boards must consider the counter arguments they will receive from their readers. Board members will often test the validity of your position by playing the role of devil's advocate.

**It is crucial to anticipate** the most common criticisms of your position ahead of time and be prepared to defend against them. Prior to your meeting, try a practice session with one person reading from questions prepared in advance on 3 x 5 cards. If possible, use a home video recorder to tape the session. Critique your performance.

**If the newspaper decides not to write an editorial** or takes an editorial stand that is contrary to your position, suggest that it print an op-ed piece or a letter from your health center. Do not offer this alternative unless you are certain that an editorial will not be run.

Remember that when you meet with the editorial board or staff of any newspaper, you are meeting on its turf. The newspaper is extending you a courtesy by listening to and considering your point of view. Return the courtesy by respecting the editorial board's opinions, positions, and constraints.

**Send a thank-you note afterward** and continue to press for an editorial. Also, keep the editorial staff apprised of relevant new developments.