

Reaching Out To The Media

Planning Media-Friendly Events

- > What kind of event will attract the attention of the press and other targeted audiences? Here are some ideas and special considerations for involving media in events.
 - A breakfast to honor foster families in your community. The breakfast could include a few speeches by elected officials, child welfare advocates, alumni and foster parents. It should be celebratory and fun.
 - A press conference at the Governor's Mansion to unveil the proclamation about National Foster Care Month.
 - Invite reporters to meet with some foster parents and former foster youth who have made the transition to adulthood.
 - Encourage reporters to attend a short version of foster care training or orientation session so they can see what's involved in becoming a licensed foster parent.
 - Invite reporters to a Ribbon Ceremony in your community. Visit the National Foster Parent Association at www.nfpainc.org for information about creating your own ceremony. For a list of scheduled events, log on to www.fostercaremonth.org.
- > The media – particularly television reporters – are looking for good visuals. Make sure your event has lots of color, action and signs or banners with your program name and “National Foster Care Month” prominently displayed.
- > Choose two or three spokespersons. They might include a well-known local child welfare advocate, a foster parent, a young adult who has made the transition from foster care to adulthood, or an elected official. Make sure the spokespersons are well prepared. Develop and distribute talking points featuring your core messages and important event details. Refer to the *Core Messages* developed for the National Foster Care Month campaign and adapt these to reflect your community's priorities, statistics and needs. Be sure your spokespeople are comfortable addressing the issues. Reporters typically want to hear about possible solutions, not just about the problems.
- > Once you have designed your event, use the media to promote attendance. Send an announcement to all local community calendar editors of media outlets four weeks prior to your event. See the *Sample Calendar Listing* in [Tools](#) as a guide. Attach a short note asking the editor to run the announcement as often as possible. Include your phone number in case there are any questions.
- > On the day of your event, set up a “press check-in” table. This area should be easily recognizable to reporters and located at the entrance to the room where your event will take place. A staff person or volunteer should be at the table throughout the event to assist press people as they arrive. Use a sign-in sheet with “name of reporter” “media outlet” and “phone number” written in columns at the top. Each reporter who signs in should be given a press kit. Give them a special identification or nametag as they enter your event so everyone knows they represent the media.

Using a Press Advisory

- > An advisory is very basic document indicating the: *who, what, where* and *when* details about your event. A Sample Press Advisory is included in [Tools](#). Send a press advisory one week prior to your event. This advisory serves as an invitation to reporters.

- > If you have a news service bureau in your community (AP, UPI, Reuter's), be sure to fax a copy of the advisory to the "Daybook Editor." This is a person who publishes a calendar of newsworthy events for other reporters to check each day. Mail or fax it to everyone else on your press list.
- > The day before your event, call all reporters, editors and producers to whom you sent the advisory and make sure they received it. Find out if they (or someone from their media outlet) will be attending the event. If they are unable to make it, ask if you can send them a news release on the day of the event. Many news outlets are willing to print a press release word for word, even if they are unable to send a reporter to an event.

Prepare a News Release

- > About a week before your event – or as soon as all the details are nailed down – you should write a news release. A *Sample News Release* is included in [Tools](#).
- > The news release is written like a news story, but has the advantage of being written from your point of view. It contains quotes from important people, background on foster care in your community, and always contains your top core messages.
- > The release should be no longer than two pages in length and double-spaced. It is essential to list a contact person with both daytime and evening phone numbers. Release content should be written in the past tense as it will be distributed on the day of your event as part of the press kit materials.

Develop a Press Kit

- > As soon as your news release is written, it's time to put together a press kit for distribution at your event. You won't need to prepare a large quantity of press kits – compile only as many kits as the number of reporters you think will show up.
- > The press kit should contain no more than ten pages of paper. Make sure to include contact information in case a reporter wants to call someone in the weeks after the event.
- > The kit should contain:
 - News release
 - One-page background sheet on foster care in your community
 - Facts About Children in Foster Care (national data included in [Tools](#))
 - Your State's Facts About Children in Foster Care
- > Optional items to consider:
 - List of agencies in your community that recruit and train foster parents
 - A proclamation from your mayor declaring May to be "Foster Care Month"
 - State or county requirements for licensing foster families
 - Profiles of some exceptional foster families and foster care alumni from your community

Finally...

Don't let the story end on the day of your event. Make copies of any press coverage and circulate these clips to your Board, funders, parents and potential foster parents. Assign people to monitor local TV news shows and tape any stories that appear about your event. Keep those tapes to show at future fundraisers, orientations and meetings. Stay in contact with reporters who attended your event or produced stories. Cultivation of these media relationships will pay off the next time you are looking for some publicity.