Public Relations Toolkit

Resources for Our Community Partners

Updated August 2020

Office of Public Information

Over the years, our Office of Public Information has partnered with advocacy groups, community mental health centers, and other stakeholders to assist them in their public relations efforts. We realize that while several providers are large enough to have staff designated for public relations, most do not; which is why we want to continue to assist you through our Office of Public Information. They are available to advise you in building better community relations, enhancing your image, and disseminating stories through local media. One of the most powerful tools we have to combat stigma is sharing inspirational stories about our individuals, their challenges, and their victories. You will also find that the public is often more appreciative and respectful when they know about the work that is being done through your organization.

Therefore, we are offering to help you in two ways. First, when you send stories about initiatives or individuals (with releases) to the Office of Public Information, we can spread the word across the state through our quarterly newsletter and worldwide through our website. Second, we have developed a Public Relations Toolkit that has concise and relevant "how-to" information to help you create and disseminate positive messages on your own through your local media. Hopefully, the toolkit will encourage you to be more proactive with the media in your area. The toolkit contains numerous ideas about developing your own PR plan, writing press releases, and crisis message management.

We want to be of service to you.

All of the components of this toolkit can be found online at https://mh.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ADMH-PR-Toolkit.pdf. Please feel free to share the toolkit with others.

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Send us your News!

We can help you tell everyone what is great about your organization!

ADMH's Office of Public Information will take your stories about: Individuals, Employees, New Programs/Initiatives, and much more.

What we need from you:

A simple email or 5-minute phone call with a story "lead" (i.e. who, what, when, where, why, and how) and proper releases from individuals/employees, if necessary.

Contact the department's Office of Public Information if you have questions or want to submit a story at 334-242-3417 or publicinformation.dmh@mh.alabama.gov.

What can we do for you?

The Office of Public Information is available to advise groups in developing both educational and promotional materials.

We act much the same as a corporate marketing department or in-house advertising agency. Services we can provide include (but are not limited to):

Concept/Direction

- how to market a project
- materials and vendor suggestions

Graphic Design

- social media graphics
- brochures
- posters
- fliers
- direct mail pieces

Honor

The department has a few awards/citations to honor medical staff, non-medical staff and all other outstanding employees.

Press Release

Write a press release/feature story to submit to media outlets in your area and throughout the state.

Promotion

Feature your organization's story on our website - worldwide exposure for what is going on in your area!

Feature your organization's story in our Outlook newsletter, which is mailed out statewide to a variety of audiences and sent via email to an even larger audience.

Public Service Announcements

- radio scripts

Web/Interactive Design

- webpage
- emails
- video
- electronic forms

Resources available from ADMH

The resources listed below are what we normally have on hand.

We also have other resources from time to time that may not be listed here. We encourage you to contact the Office of Public Information at 334-242-3417 if you are interested in available resources.

Videos

- The Legacy of Wyatt (both MI and Intellectual Disabilities versions)
- The Legacy of Charley Pell
- Star Initiatives
- Addiction (HBO Special)
- Community Mental Health Issues Affect You! (also available from ACCMHB)

ADMH Specific Informational Brochures, etc.

- Annual Reports
- ADMH Advocacy services
- Parenting Assistance Line (PAL)

National Institute of Mental Health Brochures

These may be ordered for FREE directly from NIMH by visiting their website at infocenter.nimh.nih.gov.

- Anxiety Disorders
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Bipolar Disorder
- Depression
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters: What Parents Can Do
- Helping Children and Adolescents with Violence and Disasters: What Community Members Can Do
- Helping Children and Adolescents with Violence and Disasters: What Rescue Workers Can Do
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Schizophrenia
- The Teenage Brain: A Work in Progress
- En español
  - Bipolar Disorder
  - Generalized Anxiety Disorder Men and Depression
  - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

What is Public Relations?

Public Relations (PR) is defined as communication with various sectors of the public to influence their attitudes and opinions in the interest of promoting a person, product, or idea.

It involves managing the flow of information between an organization and its public. PR gains an organization or individuals exposure to their audiences using topics of public interest and news through various unpaid or earned communication, including traditional media, social media, and in-person engagements. Because public relations places exposure in credible third-party outlets, it offers a third-party legitimacy that advertising does not have.

If a company claims (for example, by means of advertisements), "We are the best!", then this is advertising. On the other hand, if others say, "They are the best," this is then a result of good PR.

Why is PR important?

Media coverage increases credibility

Paid advertising increases name recognition; media relations increases credibility. When people read a story about the excellence of your organization in a newspaper or see a story praising your company on television, they are much more likely to have a favorable opinion of your organization.

Media coverage makes you a player

Coverage in important publications, on TV or on social mediacan make your organization look much larger than it is. PR aims to establish a positive reputation for the organization, company, government, or individual you are working with.

Stretch your marketing budget

Because the media does not charge for news coverage, the relative cost of a good program is a lot less than for paid media or a direct mail campaign.

Best way to launch a brand

Public relations is also considered by many as the best way to launch a brand or new service. Develop effective messaging that will garner the attention of media outlets. When something is new the media often will write about it because of its news value.

Elements of a PR Plan

Press Releases

These are fundamental tools of PR work and will help you establish a reputation as a source. A press release, also known as a news or media release, is simply a written statement distributed to the media. They can announce a range of news items: scheduled events, personnel promotions, awards, new products and services, etc. They can also be used in generating a feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a release.

How can you use this resource: To promote an award the organization received, or to publicize new programs.

Feature Story Releases

They are written in the same format as a press release. Although a feature story must be newsworthy, in the broad sense of the word, it is also timeless. It can run in today's paper or tomorrow's or next week's. Unlike a news story, a feature can have a point of view, an "angle," and is often longer than a hard news story.

How can you use this resource: These are especially valuable to promote individual or mental health worker personal stories.

Letters to the Editor & "Op-Ed" Articles

These are both opinion pieces, and in that sense are very similar. The differences are often cosmetic. Letters to the editor are generally printed in the editorial page. "Op-Ed", which is short for "opposite editorial" means the page is physically opposite the editorial page. A Letter to the Editor is short – 200 to 300 words. An Op-Ed is a longer piece – 750 to 1000 words. A Letter to the Editor can be in reaction to a day-to-day or a larger issue. An Op-Ed should generally be about a larger issue. As a result, there can be many Letters to the Editor on a single topic. Here is an important difference – a Letter to the Editor is generally a reaction to an editorial or an Op-Ed or a news item. An Op-Ed on the other hand, often addresses issues introduced by the writer.

How can you use this resource: Employees or constituents could write a response to an article with misleading or wrong information about the organization.

Develop Media Lists

Establish a media contacts sheet with names of various newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations in your area with key contacts at each – i.e. feature reporter, assignment editor, city reporter, etc. This will allow you to avoid the shotgun approach of sending every piece of your news to every contact and allow you to target your distribution. This listing needs to be updated regularly as people leave positions, phone numbers/fax numbers change. Taking the time to do a little research can produce greater results for your efforts once you are ready to send something to the media.

How can you use this resource: Once you get ready to submit a press release, feature story release, Op-Ed article, or community calendar announcement, you will have an established list of media contacts in your area instead of having to take extra time to search for this information.

Fact Sheets

When you have more details and facts and figures than can fit in a one-page press release, you need a Fact Sheet. However, these can be used for other purposes than just the media – they can be used for public handouts, community meetings, etc. It can be just one page, or several pages long, and can include historical perspectives, anecdotes, and data. They are often done in a bullet point format with bold headlines for differing sections to keep the attention of those with a wandering eye. In addition, they usually have a "pitch" or introductory paragraph and a summation. They can have photos, charts, and graphs but they should only be used to illustrate truly important material.

How can you use this resource: To give details to the public about a certain program or special initiative at your organization.

Community Calendar Submissions

Community calendar listings are similar to PSAs – generally used by nonprofits and community organizations – except they usually promote an event rather than a cause or service. Newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations generally have community calendars, and will list the format for submissions in their publication or on their website.

How can you use this resource: To publicize a special event or public meeting that the organization is hosting.

Quarterly Newsletters

Another way to keep your strategic messages in front of your target audience is to communicate via a quarterly newsletter. A newsletter is an excellent place to recap the coverage you have received in the media. Not everyone in your target audience will have seen all the coverage your organization has received. When it is reviewed in its entirety the sum becomes greater than its parts. Newsletters can be either mailed or emailed to your contact list.

How can you use this resource: To provide a wide array of information about your organization's programs/initiatives, stories from individuals, etc.

Annual Reports

Annual reports are usually associated with public companies. They can, however, be used by any organization with enough to say. Annual reports not only report but they are an important place to publish your strategic messages.

How can you use this resource: To highlight for the community what your organization has accomplished for the year.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

PSAs are among common types of publicity for non-profit organizations. Since they are short, broadcasters run a lot of them and they are easier to get than specials, interviews, features, or news coverage. You can say a lot in 20, 30, or 60 seconds and since it is likely to be repeated several times, your message will have multiple impact. The least expensive kind of PSA is "live" copy, where the announcer reads your material live. You may also submit pre-recorded material, if you have a production budget. Live copy to TV stations should include visual material. And there are several different formats to be considered if shooting or producing your own PSA – you'll need to find that out in advance.

How can you use this resource: Partner with an advocacy group in your area to publicize what your services are in order to reach a broad group of people on a lower budget than purchasing media advertising.

Crisis Communications

Crises are not always necessarily bad. An emergency or controversy may give you the opportunity to reach large numbers of people with your company's perspective. "No comment" is often the worst comment implying evasiveness or guilt. Be prepared with a response to media inquiries or, if unable to answer, let the media know when an answer will be available. In other words, be prepared and forthright.

How can you use this resource: Be prepared to answer questions from the media on sensitive topics.

Social Media

There have never been more ways to promote an organization than now, through the use of social media. Social media can be used in your PR strategies to promote the awareness and engagement of your organization. The purpose of social media is to expand the positive coverage of your organization as quickly and often as possible. Social media allows for a better chance of WOM (word of mouth) communication.

How can you use this resource: Social media accounts such a Facebook, Instagram, Twitter can allow more coverage for your organization. Social media plays a role in connecting with your target audience and interacting with journalists to pick up your story. Be sure to stay active and consistent. Post at least twice a day to remain current.

Community Relations

Community relations refer to the various methods organizations use to establish and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the communities in which they operate. The underlying principal of community relations is that when an organization accepts its civic responsibility and takes an active interest in the well-being of its community, then it gains a number of long-term benefits in terms of community support, loyalty, and good will.

How can you use this resource: Host a blood drive for the community at your facility.

Develop a Style Guide

Any organization that produces external publications (brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, websites, etc.) can benefit from a style guide. Style guides help to make your publications consistent, clear, and identifiable as coming from your organization by enforcing a similar sound, look, and feel.

How can you use this resource: Breed confidence and save time during the creative process.

Writing and Using Press Releases

A press release, also known as a news or media release, is simply a written statement distributed to the media.

They can announce a range of news items: scheduled events, personnel promotions, awards, new products and services, etc. They can also be used in generating a feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a release. It is a fundamental tool of PR work.

The Details

At the top of the press release, include the following important information:

- If the press release is for immediate release, you may write "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE." If the release is embargoed, put "EMBARGOED UNTIL..." with the date you want the story released. A release with no release date is presumed to be for immediate release.
- The date of the press release
- Who to contact for more information, and a phone number

The Headline

In about ten words or less you need to grab the attention of the editor. The headline should summarize the information in the press release, but in a way that is exciting and dynamic. Think of it as a billboard along a highway - you have just a few words to make your release stand out among the many others editors receive on any given day.

- Do not waste time writing the headline until the release is done. The simplest method to arrive at the press release headline is to extract the most important keywords from your press release. Now from these keywords, try to frame a logical and attention-getting statement.
- Headlines are written in bold and are typically larger than the press release text. Conventional press release headlines are present-tense.

Opening Paragraph

This begins with the originating city of the press release. Sometimes called a summary lead, your first paragraph is critical. This paragraph must explain "the five W's and one H" of the story – the who, what, when, where, why, and how. This paragraph must summarize the press release, with the following paragraphs providing the detail.

- The opening paragraph must also contain the hook: the one thing that gets your audience interested in reading more. A hook is not a hard sell or a devious promotion -- it's just a factual statement.

The Body

The press release should be written as you want it to appear in a news story. Using a strategy called the inverted pyramid, the body of the press release should be written with the most important information and quotes first. This inverted pyramid technique is used so that if editors need to cut the story to fit space constraints, they can cut from the end without losing critical information.

- The body copy should be compact. Avoid using very long sentences and paragraphs. Avoid repetition and over use of fancy language and jargon.
- Provide references to any statistics, facts, and figures raised in the press release. Refrain from expressing personal opinions unless they are done in quotes. Draw conclusions from facts and statistics only - not general opinion.

Additional Background Information

- Provide one paragraph of information about your organization, keeping it to about five or six lines. The paragraph should describe your organization, its purpose, and other key information.
- At the end of this section, point to your website if you have one. The link should be the exact and complete URL. For example: http://www.mh.alabama.gov.

Signal the End

End the press release with three # symbols, centered directly underneath the last line of the release. This is a journalistic standard.

Tips:

- Write the press release on company letterhead to add more credibility.
- The length of a press release should be no more than one to two pages.
- Tie it together. Provide some extra information links that support your press release. these should be listed after the ### symbols indicating the end of the release.
- The timing of the press release is very important. It must be relevant and recent news.
- Avoid jargon or specialized technical terms. If accuracy requires the use of an industry-specific term, define it.
- Writing in Third-Person Voice. A press release must be presented objectively from a third person point of view. Remove "you","I","we" and "us."
- Provide "Quotes" from the newsmakers. Put the most important message down into a quote. Journalists always use quotes from the newsmakers to add an authoritative voice to their reports. If the press release contains quotes that are important and relevant to the story, chances are high that they will be replicated in full in the published article.
- Always remember that editors are overworked and understaffed. If you can make life easier for them, you're more likely to get coverage. If you write a press release that's close to the way the editor will actually publish it, it may see publication with minimal editing.
- When emailing a press release, do not make the subject line of your email "press release." You will only blend into the crowd. Get the editor's attention by making the subject line your "grabber" headline.
- A follow-up call can help develop a press release into a full story.

Writing and Using Opinion Pieces

A Letter to the Editor and an Op-Ed are both opinion pieces, and in that sense are very similar.

The differences are often cosmetic. Letters to the Editor are generally printed in the editorial page. "Op-Ed," which is short for "opposite editorial" means the page, is physically opposite the editorial page. A Letter to the Editor is short – 200 to 300 words. An Op-Ed is a longer piece – 750 to 1000 words. A Letter to the Editor can be in reaction to a day to day or a larger issue. An Op-Ed should generally be about a larger issue. As a result, there can be many Letters to the Editor on a single topic. Here is an important difference – a Letter to the Editor is generally a reaction to an editorial or an Op-Ed or a news item. An Op-Ed on the other hand, often addresses issues introduced by the writer.

Steps to Writing an Editorial

Choosing a Current Issue: For your editorial to be good, it will have to address an issue or topic that is on the public mind as of the day it gets into print.

The Hook: A hook is a catchy headline, an anecdote, a strongly controversial statement, etc. It is something that will grab the attention of your reader.

The Thesis: The thesis doesn't have to be stated up front, but your thesis is the foundation for your editorial. The thesis represents a clear stance you are taking on a particular subject. It may or may not refute the other side's point of view. (e.g., It is said that ... but I believe that ... because ...) The use of "I" is allowed when writing an editorial.

The Body: The body of your editorial should have at least three points to argue your thesis, written from weakest argument to strongest. Do a little light research on the topic, enough for you to knowledgeably make use of statistics or anecdotes you find as support for your position. This will reinforce your arguments and give them credibility.

The Conclusion: Your conclusion should restate your thesis. It may also offer something extra such as a call to action, something for readers to continue thinking about, or a vision for the future.

Things to Keep in Mind

Strike a balance between off-topic banter and dry reporting: Intersperse your facts with emotional or social appeals to the reader. A lot of editorials use persuasive language to "connect" the reader, and as a result, editorials often get read more than news stories. A headline that says, "Party Blunders" might get more readership than a news headline like "Local Party Undergoes Change." Likewise, readers will follow along more easily when the piece includes direct persuasion and personal touches not found in news reporting.

Feel free to use emotion, but in a limited manner: An editorial written out of anger or another strong emotion is not going to hold the persuasive power of one written with a limited range of emotion. Strong, reactive emotion will turn off readers, while a more personal and subdued emotional theme will draw readers in.

Try to be entertaining: Keeping all of the above steps of clarity, relevance and fact-checking in mind, there is still room to write in an entertaining manner. Readers usually expect to get more out of an editorial than simple facts, so don't disappoint. You can use humor to illustrate your points if appropriate.

Adapted from: How to Write an Editorial
By: eHow Careers & Work Editor

Contacts for Major State Newspapers

Anniston Star
https://www.annistonstar.com/site/contact/

Birmingham News
https://www.alabamamediagroup.com/contact/

Dothan Eagle
https://www.dothaneagle.com/site/contact_us.html

Decatur Daily
https://www.decaturdaily.com/site/contact.html

Huntsville Times
https://www.alabamamediagroup.com/contact/

Mobile Press Register
https://www.alabamamediagroup.com/contact/

Montgomery Advertiser
https://static.montgomeryadvertiser.com/contactus-form/

Times Daily
https://www.timesdaily.com/site/contact.html

Tuscaloosa News
https://www.tuscaloosanews.com/contact

Tips:

- There is no correct length for an editorial. However, most newspapers will not print overly long editorials, so try to keep it to no more than 200 words. Make your point quickly. The idea is to succinctly and convincingly express your opinion with as few words as possible.
- Include your full name (including middle initial), complete street address and daytime phone number for verification purposes.
- All letters are subject to editing. MOST letters are edited for clarification and length.
- Choose your words carefully. Letters that contain libelous or slanderous statements will likely either be edited or rejected.
- Newspapers prefer to have letters submitted in typed or electronically transmitted form. However, most will accept handwritten letters, providing the handwriting is legible.
- If you are sending handwritten letters by fax, please be sure the writing is dark enough to transmit clearly.
- Letters from the newspaper's circulation area receive publishing priority.
- Newspapers won't publish form letters, anonymous letters, poetry, or letters without contact info.
- Please limit letter submissions to once every 30 days.

Media Coverage

You want to get your event covered or have your story told the public.

But how do you go about it? What will make the media want to cover you or your event? It's all in the marketing.

First up, don't hound the assignment editors and reporters incessantly. It will only make them shy away from covering your event. While it's fine to check in and make sure that your press release was received, it can only hurt your coverage if you annoy the person whom you want to cover your story. Next, don't forget to leave a contact number for the day of the event. This can be crucial. If a news organization decides to cover your story at the last minute and they only have your office number and it's Saturday, then you're out of luck. It's ideal to have a cell phone number listed so that you can be contacted in case the press needs to speak to you.

1. **Identify what's "newsworthy."** The media will cover just about any event if there's a good hook to it. Hooks are the things that attract the media to cover a story. News media look for interesting hooks, such as famous or important people, an odd or colorful occasion or a timely event. If the story involves certain people, places or things, it can be newsworthy. Even if your story doesn't directly seem to have that newsworthy quality, you can try to pitch the story in a way so that it seems more newsworthy.

   Newsworthiness is determined by a few factors, which are basically the same as the five W's and the H.

   Who—Make sure you tell the media who will be at your event; who is sponsoring your event and who your event benefits.

   What—Tell the media what they can expect if they choose to cover your story. Make sure they are aware of what will be happening. Be sure to specify what the best time is for coverage.

   Where—Be as specific as possible when noting a location. Include a map if necessary, but don't neglect this detail. The media will appreciate your attention to detail and will be less likely to get lost on the way to your event.

   When—Include details of what time and what location your event/story will happen. A press release without a time and date is worthless. Don't overlook the obvious—be sure to include all dates, times, and locations.

   Why—What is the purpose of your story? Are you hoping to accomplish a goal, like raise funds for a charity or raise awareness for an illness? The "why" part is what reaches out to the media's audience.

   How—Tell the media how your story will be told. Make the technicalities of your story known and let the intricacies of your event shine through.

2. **Develop written materials,** such as press releases and/or fact sheets.

3. **Develop a targeted media list.** It is important to think about which reporters will be interested in your story. Are they reporters who cover health? entertainment? etc. Is it a story that's good for newspaper, radio and/or television? From there, develop a list of reporters' names and numbers to call.

   Some media don't have reporters who cover specific topics, and editors will simply assign a story to a general assignment reporter who covers all sorts of topics. If you can't find specific reporters, address your communication to an editor or the news desk. It's their job to direct your story to the appropriate person. If it is possible to reach specific reporters, get as much contact information as you can. At a minimum you will need the reporter's name, publication/station affiliation, phone number, fax number, and email.

4. **Send by email, don't fax.** Disperse your press release, etc. to targeted reporters via email.

5. **Identify strategic spokespeople.** The messenger is often just as important as the message when it comes to the media. It is important that spokespeople are articulate and knowledgeable on the issue, and easily reachable by reporters on deadline. (Not having a cell phone can sometimes mean not being included in a story!!) Having experience speaking to the press is always a plus. Remember - reporters are not your friends. Be careful and strategic when doing interviews.

6. **Practice your telephone pitch.** A press release alone may not get reporters to cover your story. After sending out a press release, it may be advantageous to follow up with a phone call. Reporters get hundreds of calls a day. What's likely to make a reporter not hang up on you, or immediately delete your message, is if you develop a well-focused, 30-second pitch that highlights the essence of your news story. Once you "hook" them, you can describe in more detail why you are calling and how you can get them more information. Don't forget to leave your phone number if you leave a message.

   Don't get insulted if media people are brusque. When they're on deadline, they can't chat with you. But if you have a story that sparks their interest, they will get back to you.

7. **Don't take no for an answer.** If a reporter says no, try another reporter, or call them again when you have a different story. If you get one out of ten reporters to write about your story, that is a huge success! Remember, one reporter can represent thousands of readers, listeners, or viewers.

8. **Say thank you.** Developing friendly relationships with reporters is helpful when trying to pitch news stories. If a reporter writes a story you like, call them up and say thank you. They appreciate it and will be more likely to return your phone call the next time around.

9. **What if I do all the above and nothing happens?** Don't assume you've failed if you just don't hear anything. Sometimes newsworthy stories may get passed over if there are many other things happening that day/week. Besides remembering to be patient, remember the old saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" – with a fresh angle.

Tips:

- Brainstorm questions you may be asked and prepare answers for them.
- Speak slowly and give brief answers to questions.
- Tell a reporter what you think is the most important point you've made.
- It's okay to be nervous; anxiety can actually add vigor and clarity to your thoughts and remember: Everybody Gets Nervous!
- Refer to concrete examples, personal experience, and clear images.
- Remember that reporters want stories, as well as data.
- For television, look at the reporter or camera operator — not directly into the camera.
- Warm up your voice before your interview.
- Never assume journalists agree with you, though they will often act as if they do.
- Eliminate insider jargon and acronyms from your speech.
- If you don't want to answer a hypothetical question, simply say so.
- Have talking points written down in order to carry on an effective interview
- If you don't have an answer to a question, say so and try to track down an answer later.
- Be yourself.

Crisis Management and Communications

The most effective way to deal with crisis communications is to have a crisis communication plan in place ahead of time.

In the event of a crisis, effective communication and public education are key, as misinformation, fear, and ignorance can fuel public panic. So, it is essential that accurate information be released promptly to the public in the immediate and surrounding areas.

Pre-Crisis Communications Planning:

Identify and Prepare Staff Spokespeople

- Identify individuals in the organization who can serve as spokespersons. These individuals may be experts across a variety of disciplines.
- Prepare spokespeople with key message, facts, answers to relevant question, and the mission of the organization.
- Be prepared to notify employees before issuing any kind of statement or press release to the media.

Identify Target Media Outlets and Specific Journalists

- Mainstream traditional media such as television, radio, and local newspapers are the most efficient means of communicating with large, general populations.
- Develop a specific list of local journalists to contact in the event of a crisis to share with them information that would be of importance and value to the public. Targeted journalists should include those who cover emergencies, health, and government.

Immediate Response in the Aftermath:

Identify Tools for Proactive Outreach to the Media

- Email – A short email offering your organization and its spokespeople as credible sources of information are a welcome communications tool for journalists, who are typically on deadline when writing about a disaster.
- Phone call – A brief phone call (and brief message if the journalist is not available) is also a welcome communication strategy
- Special feature on homepage of organization website, if applicable. This resource can identify the expertise the organization has to share regarding a particular crisis.
- Develop informational fact sheets on your organization or program to distribute to the media as well as the general public.

Respond to Inquiries from the Media

- If your organization is successful in proactively connecting with a journalist or if a journalist contacts your organization for an interview regarding a crisis matter, be prepared to respond quickly. As reporters have hard deadlines, they typically need quick responses to requests for interviews.
- If you are not prepared to participate in the interview due to a lack of time or other work commitments, let the journalist know immediately, but try to offer another spokesperson within the organization as a contact.
- If you agree to do an interview, make sure you are prepared. Never "wing it." You should always view an interview as an opportunity to communicate what YOU want to say. Before you begin, decide what two or three points you want to get across and have both data and human examples ready to highlight each one. Be sure to make these points during the interview, even if the journalist does not ask about them.

- Anticipate difficult questions and prepare responses to them. Never say, "No comment." Instead, explain why you can not or will not answer the question. If you do not know the answer to a question, simply say, "I don't know but I'll try to find out for you." Then follow up.
- Give simple, direct answers and be brief. Journalists will likely use short quotes, clips, or sound bites. Avoid jargon and explain the topic as simply as possible. It is best to avoid flippant or joking comments that sound acceptable in conversation but might be taken out of context.
- Use anecdotes. Nothing reinforces credibility and believability as much as stories about real people.
- Always remember that nothing is "off the record." Do not say anything you do not want to read in the newspapers or see on the evening news. Be especially mindful of conversations during introductions – before the formal interview begins – and small talk once the interview concludes.

Long-Term Communications Strategy:

Maintain Ongoing Dialogue and Good Relations:

- Once the immediate aftermath of a crisis passes, an organization will want to maintain solid relations with the media to continue to build awareness of the organization and position it as a valuable resource to the community.
- Organizations may wish to continue to share with journalists any follow-up stories that may be related to the recent crisis. Perhaps your organization has developed some new resources or processes as a result of the crisis.

Social Media

Mental health is worthy of powerful, positive conversations.

Much of our media is focused on negativity in the world. Why not sprinkle a bit of hope into the mix? Why not change the positive language of mental health to become a normal topic of discussion?

Start an account on social media outlets and start promoting your organization!

The Main Social Media Platforms

Facebook
Facebook is still the most popular platform among all age groups, particularly with older adults. Facebook is a great place to write longer narratives, post entire photo albums, create events and invites, and establish networks of friends and long-lasting partners.

Twitter
Twitter is also an incredibly popular social media platform. It has the power and potential to spread massive amounts of mental health awareness. The ideal way to spread that awareness is by getting important topics that are mental health-related on the trending list. Unique hashtags that gain momentum quickly are more likely to be on the trending list. The more we share these hashtags; the more awareness will be spread.

Here is a list of some hashtags you can start tweeting to help promote mental health awareness:

#mentalhealthawareness
#mentalhealthmatters
#mindfulness
#itsoknottobeok
#endstigma
#stopthestigma
#selfcare
#loveyourself
#suicideawareness
#mentalhealthhero

Instagram
Post well photographed or 'real-life' pictures of what is happening in your organization on a daily basis with short descriptions, links, and hashtags that exemplify what is going on in the photo. Using hashtags like you would on Twitter helps to share your post more widely. Spreading helpful hashtags that are positive is a great way to spread mental health awareness. It can also send inspirational messages to people online who are struggling.

Snapchat
The Snapchat app is very common among teens, and it is growing rapidly. Posting impactful stories on Snapchat that influence viewers to take positive action when it comes to mental health is very powerful. Snapchat also has one to one chatting capabilities that is great for directly spreading mental health awareness.

Ways to Positively Promote Mental Health

Share Who you are and How you Help
Social media is a prime place to share self-care tips with others. You can make videos or create picture posts to show the ways in which your organization makes a difference in the community.

Be an Example for Others
If you are positively talking about mental health, others will likely do the same. Use your platform to focus on positive vibes and lifting others up.

Share Testimonials and Stories
What you are doing at your organization and the people who are served, and whose lives are being improved there is inspirational. It's a matter of sharing special experiences with others. They can be learning experiences or motivational experiences. Either way, you are helping others when you share a great story. This is an amazing way to connect with others and spread mental health awareness in the process.

Encourage Others to Talk About Mental Health
Talking about mental health is very important. It helps us to not internalize, and it helps us not to reach breaking points. We can lead steady, stable lives just by opening up to others about our mental health challenges. It gives others someone to relate to as well. #endstigma

Educate Others
There is so much to learn. Share evidence-based information about mental health. Share warning signs and coping skills.

Use Social Media to Create In-Person Meet Ups
Connecting and networking with others through social media is an amazing way to increase awareness of your organization and to increase participation in events that you host.

Start a Mental Health Blog
Another great way to spread mental health awareness is to start up a mental health blog. You can promote your blog through social media, and you can educate others on mental health and your organization.

Tips

- What should I promote on social media?

You can promote anything you do or engage in on social media. If you have a live event, a Twitter chat, or a graphic you developed, pushing it out on social media is a great way to reach your intended audience.

Here are a few examples of things you can promote on social media:

Facebook events, Twitter chats, Live events, Studies and research, Social campaigns, Graphics

- Which platforms should I promote on?

You should decide where to promote your materials based on whichever platforms your audience is on. If you want to reach middle-aged females, for example, Facebook is your prime platform. If you want to reach youth and teens, Snapchat might be the best option.

Know where your audience is and meet them there. Dedicate some time to researching where your intended audience is engaging. However, you should have a realistic idea of how much capacity your team has to maintain that presence. Social media platforms take a lot of time and energy to maintain, so make sure you master one before moving onto the next.

- What should I include?

Each platform has specific requirements and best practices. If you are promoting on Twitter, you may not use the same language or content as you would use on Facebook or Instagram.

Here are a few general best practices for all social media platforms:

Include a call to action (tell your audience what they can do).

This may be signing up for an event or just clicking a "like" button. Whatever your post is, there should be a suggested action for the user to keep them engaged with your content.

Include an image.

- Social media posts with visuals get 180 percent greater engagement.
- Tweets with images receive 150 percent more retweets.
- Images make up 93 percent of the most engaging posts on Facebook.

There are many free resources (with free tutorials) that will help you create images without investing a ton of time.

Here are just a few: Canva, PicMonkey

Include a link when appropriate.

Don't just reference an event, research, etc.—include a link to the relevant web page with more in-depth information. Since social media is geared toward bite-sized, short-form content, give your users a brief snapshot of what it is you're showing them, and then direct them to where the information is kept.

Include relevant hashtags and handles.

One of the strengths of using social media to promote your content is that you can leverage relevant audiences to send out your message to a wider group of people. Make sure that when you promote specific campaigns or reference a user, you mention the individual or organization in the post. As events and campaigns often have specific hashtags associated with them, make sure you add those hashtags when applicable; the organizations running those campaigns will be looking for content.

Here are a few guides on how to tag on different social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

Source: SAMHSA

Community Relations

Community relations refers to the various methods companies use to establish and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the communities in which they operate.

The underlying principal of community relations is that when a company accepts its civic responsibility and takes an active interest in the well-being of its community, then it gains a number of long-term benefits in terms of community support, loyalty, and good will. Community involvement builds public image and employee morale and fosters a sense of teamwork that is essential in long-term success.

Examples of Community Relations Activities:

- Partner with other groups such as NAMI, Mental Health America, etc.
- Providing counseling to community members when a disaster occurs
- Host a blood drive for the community
- Participate in things like Green Ribbon for Children's Mental Health Awareness Week
- Making offices or other facilities available to community organizations
- Supporting local charity drives
- Rewarding volunteers
- Holiday greeting card contest
- Participating in local parades
- Media tours
- Setting up a speaker's bureau that will speak to area groups or at conferences
- Distributing a newsletter around the community
- Taking informational materials or brochures about mental health and your organization to groups such as area Probate Judges, County Commissioners, Hospitals, etc.
- Hosting special events such as
  - Art Shows
  - Open Houses
  - Holiday Festivities
  - Special Olympics local competitions

Whichever types of community relations activities/programs are used, it is important to keep the media informed about your organization's activities.

Style Guide/Manual

Any organization that produces external publications (brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, websites, etc.) can benefit from a style guide.

Style guides help to make your publications consistent, clear, and identifiable as coming from your organization by enforcing a similar sound, look, and feel. Branding your organization in this manner breeds confidence for your audience as well as saves time during the creative process.

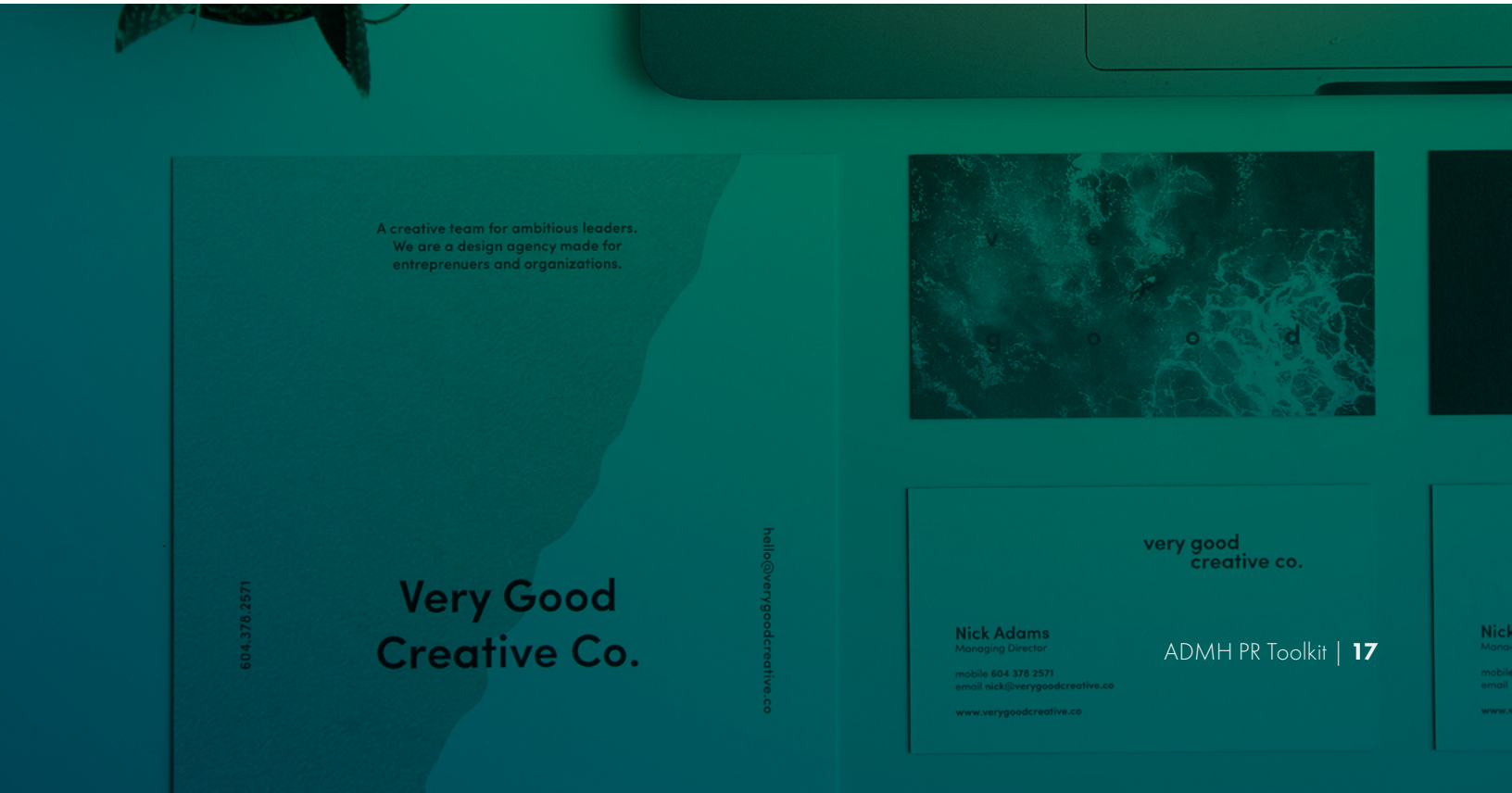
A style guide/manual is a set of standards for the design and writing of documents and educational materials. Some style guides focus on graphic design, covering such topics as typography and white space. Other style guides focus on prose style, best usage, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and fairness. Style guides are revised periodically to accommodate changes in conventions and usage.

Communications and public relations departments of business and nonprofit organizations often have style guides for their publications (newsletters, press releases, websites). The style guides should include a glossary of suggested terms that are culturally sensitive to their constituency.

Many organizations use graphic design style guides to demonstrate the preferred layout and formatting of a published page. These can be extremely detailed in specifying, for example, which fonts and colors to use. Such guides allow a design team to produce visually consistent work for the organization.

Items that may be included in your guide:

- Logo
- Fonts
- Colors
- Proper usage
- Terminology



Examples

Media Guide
https://mh.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ADMH-Media-Guide.pdf

Media Clippings
https://mh.alabama.gov/news-articles/

Outlook
https://mh.alabama.gov/newsletter/

Press Releases
https://mh.alabama.gov/press-releases/

Social Media
https://www.facebook.com/ALMentalHealth
https://www.instagram.com/almentalhealth/
https://twitter.com/#!/ALMentalHealth

Style Guide
https://mh.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ADMHStyleGuideAndIdentityManual2018.pdf

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