

Sharing the Message about STD Awareness Month: Tips on Working with the Media

Accessing the Media

These tips cover several common formats for accessing the media:

- Meeting with editorial boards
- Press briefings
- Press conferences
- Media advisories
- Press releases
- Feature stories
- Op-Ed pieces
- Letters to the editor
- Public access TV stations
- Media interviews (television, radio, and print media)

Meetings with Editorial Boards

Requesting a meeting with the editorial board of a newspaper or magazine is appropriate when you are trying to:

- Have the newspaper or magazine establish or change its position on a public policy issue.
- Have the newspaper or magazine increase or change the content of its sexually transmitted diseases (STD) prevention coverage.

Before meeting with an editorial board, it is important to do your homework:

- Review the newspaper or magazine's previous coverage of STDs and its perspective on public health issues. Use this information to develop an effective approach for communicating with the board.
- Work with partners to gather data and create a brief (15-20 minute) compelling argument for supporting your points, which should clearly state the importance of this issue to the magazine or paper's target audience.
- Work with two to four credible experts (e.g., medical, scientific, and at-risk populations) or partners who will attend the editorial board meeting and make the presentation.
- Anticipate and prepare for questions.

Press Briefings

Press briefings can establish positive relationships with journalists while providing them with important background information on STDs, such as symptoms, cost-effectiveness of prevention, and any information that may support a potential policy change. Since journalists must cover a wide variety of topics, a well-run press briefing is an efficient way for them to do their homework. Press briefings might be organized to coincide with STD Awareness Month or to promote your events and activities.

When organizing a press briefing, it is important to:

- Invite journalists, including columnists, who regularly cover health or social issues from influential print and broadcast media, including those whose target audiences are at-risk populations.
- If possible, work with a trusted media colleague who can provide guidance on the best location and time of day for the briefing, as well as how best to market the briefing to influential reporters.
- If possible, make the meeting more appealing by providing food, such as a continental breakfast.
- Work with partners to identify and prepare written materials for participating journalists, such as fact sheets on STDs and the history and work of your organization.
- Prepare a 10-25 minute briefing made by those with appropriate areas of expertise, followed by time for questions.
- Prepare speakers in advance to anticipate questions and answers and to ensure that your representatives speak with one voice.
- Start and end on time. Journalists have tight publication deadlines. You lose credibility when you are unable to keep to your schedule.
- Have a skilled moderator to ensure the briefing keeps on topic and on schedule, as well as to encourage questions.
- Be available immediately following the briefing for radio, TV, or print journalists who may wish to conduct brief individual interviews.

Press Conferences

Conducting a press conference is appropriate when you have national or international experts or celebrities visiting your area, to break important news, or to address important changes in the HIV data in your area.

Media Advisories

Media advisories are written announcements of your press briefings, press conferences, and public events that are sent to the media you hope will attend.

Press Releases

Press releases contain breaking news that media outlets can develop into print and broadcast news stories. A good press release communicates objectively about breaking news and provides background information. Opinions can be expressed using quotes from credible sources. The press release also lists one or two knowledgeable contact people who are prepared to provide additional information. Make sure these contacts are easy to reach during normal business hours. Many media outlets receive large quantities of press releases daily, so you are facing stiff competition for media attention. An eye-catching headline and compelling first paragraph are essential to being noticed. A trusted relationship with the media (i.e., they see you as reliable and credible) will greatly increase your chances of receiving coverage.

Feature Stories

Feature stories provide in-depth information, often from a human-interest perspective. For example, you may wish to profile a specific person with an STD or someone who can share the importance of testing (with their permission). These stories are usually negotiated with a single media outlet. They can promote a positive image of your agency and its services.

Op-Ed Pieces

Opposite-Editorial (Op-Ed) pieces are opportunities to write an editorial for publication. Op-Ed pieces are usually limited to about 800 words in length. A simple phone call to a media outlet can provide you with its Op-Ed guidelines. Op-Ed pieces usually appear on the editorial pages with their own headlines and bylines. They can be effective ways to raise support and awareness of issues about STDs by providing a leading expert's opinion on prevention issues, data, or testing needs.

Letters to the Editor

Newspapers and magazines usually dedicate space to letters expressing readers' viewpoints about the publication's content and editorial positions. Letters to the editor are often widely read. They are most effective when they are brief and limited to one or two key points. It is important to note that most print media reserve the right to edit (for length) letters they publish.

Public Access TV Stations

Some public health agencies have regularly scheduled weekly programs on their local access television stations. Videotapes of programs presented can be used as longer-term educational tools. Though access is free, ensuring your program is interesting and informative and does not create fear or distrust of high-risk populations can be challenging but important.

Media Interviews (Television, Radio, and Print Media)

Media interviews can occur in a variety of settings. They may involve talk-show formats, brief sound bites used by broadcast journalists, or extensive interviews for print media features.