

GLAAD
MediaEssentials
Training Manual



*gay & lesbian alliance
against defamation*



MediaEssentials Training Manual

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Thanks also to the many training participants whose feedback provided us with important insights that have improved the quality of GLAAD's Training Services and Technical Assistance.

Our ability to bring local activists the media skills needed to improve coverage of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is enhanced through working with the dedicated individuals and organizations across the country who allow the public to look at their lives through the media.

Introduction

The media has tremendous power to shape public opinion. Media coverage—or the absence of it—can radically alter public perception of particular issues or groups. Traditionally, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people have been largely invisible in the mainstream media. There has been much improvement in the coverage of our community in recent years, but we are still most visible when we are at the center of controversy.

The recent explosion in media coverage of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community provides us with an unprecedented opportunity for focusing media attention on our lives. This training will provide you with the basic tools necessary to take that opportunity and bring fair, accurate and inclusive portrayals of our lives to the public. You will learn how to:

- identify opportunities to get your organization’s message out in the media
- construct a basic communications strategy in conjunction with an issue or event
- establish and maintain relationships with media professionals and media outlets in your area
- shape, control and direct your message according to the audience you are targeting
- use skills to persuade listeners, readers and viewers to understand your issues better
- be a resource to the media, to provide assistance in coverage and give you an opportunity to help create story ideas, provide sources, and create additional angles to cover, develop skills and techniques that will help you take charge of interview situations and use them to your advantage.

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) has developed this training to help us fulfill our mission of promoting fair, accurate and inclusive representation of individuals and events in all media as a means of combating homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation or identity. GLAAD is a media advocacy organization, working to improve the manner in which our issues and our lives are presented to the public by the media. Part of this commitment includes training activists on the grassroots level in media skills. An organization's ability to effectively work with media professionals and increase visibility for its issues is a vital component to any organization's overall strategic plan. Our opponents understand the importance of the media in shaping public opinion, and invest their time and energies into getting their message on the air and into print. Through training and continued efforts to increase and improve media coverage, you can make a difference in our struggle for civil rights.

Here is what some activists have to say about the GLAAD *MediaEssentials* Training:

"I would recommend the GLAAD media training to any activist on behalf of lesbian and gay equality...the experience and savvy of the trainers, coupled with a deceptively easy format...made it the most valuable media training I have ever experienced."

Meg Riley, Gay & Lesbian Outreach Director
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

"...it was satisfying to see them [participants] come away with a heightened confidence and with very practical advice and instruction for dealing with...the media. We are [in Upstate South Carolina] in one of the areas most hostile to gays and lesbians, but we have been successful in educating local media about the concerns of our community...GLAAD is partly responsible for our success."

Ken Sparks
Greenville South Carolina Activist
Television Producer

What are the media?

Webster's New World Dictionary defines the media as “a means of communication that reaches the general public.” However, the media are also a means of generating capital—in short, a business. And a very hectic business, at that. It is the media’s responsibility to provide the community it serves with fair coverage—and you are part of that community. However, recognizing that a media outlet is also a place of business, you must learn to address its specific needs, requirements and concerns—this is what will get your story placed.

What kind of resources do I need to deal with the media effectively?

An effective media strategy doesn’t require office space or a large outlay of money. It does require your time, effort and creativity. You will find it is well worth the investment. Equipped with the proper skills and knowledge, you can successfully garner media coverage and educate the public as well as promote the mission of your organization and increase visibility for your constituency.

The basic tools you will need access to are a word processor and fax machine to generate and distribute your materials, and in today’s sophisticated computer world, it is getting ever easier to create documents and distribute them efficiently.

While it is important to keep in mind that the media is at its core a business, the media functions on a variety of levels for viewers, readers, and listeners. The media, in its many forms, acts as an information source, an entertainment outlet and educational tool to consumers that are influenced by information and the manner in which it is presented. Your ability to understand and influence that process will shape public perceptions and effect change in attitudes about your issues.

Understanding the various kinds of media, their diverse requirements and deadlines, and specific needs of broadcast, print and other media is vital to your working with individual media professionals.

Categories of Media:

Print Media (newspapers, magazines, etc.):

Despite the fact that the majority of individuals in this country get their news from television, newspapers remain the most detailed source of information for media consumers. Over 1600 daily newspapers provide more than 113 million people with their primary news source. An estimated 63 million Americans read a national daily newspaper every day to get their news. Local newspapers, which can be daily, weekly, or monthly, are also an important source of news that readers use to learn about events, issues and personalities in their local community.

The key individuals to contact when pitching stories are assignment editors and local/section editors. Friendly reporters can also be receptive to story ideas, especially as you develop good working relationships with them. Call with non-breaking news in the morning, never when reporters and editors are on deadline (after 2-3 PM), and always ask if they have time to talk before launching into your pitch. Journalists are constantly working on deadline and are continually under pressure, so be patient yet persistent and find out the best time to speak to them. Offer to sit down and meet with them—over coffee, breakfast, or lunch—at their convenience. Take the time to get to know editors and reporters and cultivate a professional relationship—it is worth the time and effort!

Print media coverage is also an excellent tool to educate the public and your members about your organization and the work it does. It can easily be photocopied and distributed to other activists, concerned members of the community and other journalists.

Magazines:

Magazines are usually published weekly or monthly, so they have much longer lead times than newspapers. However, they can provide more comprehensive or in-depth coverage of an issue or person. In order to get coverage in magazine, you will need to plan in advance and be proactive in your strategy.

Magazines schedule well in advance what issues and personalities they will cover, so obtain their editorial calendar and see how your organization can fit into their calendar.

Television:

Television, arguably the most influential of all media, is a challenge to garner coverage from because of its unique visual approach to presenting the news. Your strategy when trying to generate coverage of an event/issue for television news is very different from the strategies for print, radio and other media. With television, you must find a visual hook to your story to get the attention of an assignment editor.

As with print media, assignment editors and reporters are places to start pitching stories. In television, you can also establish relationships with producers, who are always looking for story ideas. Complaints or praise for coverage should be directed to Executive Producers, who are responsible for the overall production of television news. Any correspondence should also be copied, as a courtesy, to News Directors. Television journalists work under a very tight deadline—and have less time to tell their stories—so it is important to be aware of their deadlines and determine when it is the best time to call.

Note: Appearing on public affairs shows can be an excellent opportunity to express your organization’s views in a longer format program. Contact the public affairs director at your local television network affiliate stations to find out what type of programming they produce and send them a press kit. Always keep them “in the loop” as issues come up in your community.



Radio:

Radio is an often overlooked medium that can provide you with excellent opportunities to get your message to the public. Radio interviews are frequently conducted live, and the wide variety of formats in radio give you flexibility and choice in controlling when, how and where you represent your constituency.

Some radio programming/format categories include:

- All news: listeners are mainly adults, with “drive-time shows” having the highest listener percentage
- All talk: listeners are mainly adults with daytime talk shows and evening talk shows most popular
- Other formats include easy listening, classical, country, top 40, soul, and alternative rock.

While your main targets for coverage may be news-oriented, all radio stations will have news programming and some carry talk shows during certain hours.

Radio stations are run in a similar manner to television—the best people to contact are assignment editors and producers. Talk radio has become one of the more “hot” forms of media in the past few years, and offer an opportunity for you to get your message out in a direct fashion. Call-in shows are another facet of radio that organizations should take advantage of—organizing your constituency to call in their opinions and voice your message can be very effective.



Wire Services:

News wire services are organizations that provide print and broadcast media with up-to-the-minute news. When a story is picked up by a wire service, it has the potential to reach a significantly larger audience than you could reach through any individual print or broadcast media outlet. Wire services are used regularly by smaller news organizations, and many times they will run a wire story verbatim. Wire services do not just run breaking news stories—they also run human interest stories, columns by well-known reporters, and other non-breaking news.

There are three main wire services with bureaus in major cities around the country:

- **Associated Press**
- **Reuters**
- **United Press International (UPI)**

Because wire service bureaus are staffed 24 hours a day, they have continual deadlines. The best time to call for information or to reach a specific reporter is on a weekday, during business hours.

The Internet:

The Internet is nicknamed the “Information Superhighway” for its miraculous ability to provide millions of people world-wide with a place to exchange ideas and information at such a rapid rate. It has quickly become engrained in our culture as the communication tool of the future. Clearly, it is our greatest grassroots organizing tool to date.

“Information is not power, information is currency. Unless you have a place to spend that currency, there’s no point in hoarding it. Communication, on the other hand, is the paradigm within which information currency may be spent. Together, the two are what creates power. Add to this dynamic the concept of community and you have an extremely strong catalyst for creating change.”

QUIRK

Founder of America Online’s Gay & Lesbian Community Forum.

The Internet is incredibly important to people who have a message that they want publicized. Through use of mailing lists, newsgroups, online community forums and Web pages, sending a message to millions of people around the world, or people in your community, can be as easy as pushing a button.

The Internet is also incredibly important for the lesbian and gay community. Not only has it become a major source of information for lesbians and gay men in isolated areas and situations, it is also the first form of media where lesbian and gay voices are equally heard.

After CompuServe removed 200 newsgroups, including those that were lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-themed, they received extensive feedback, and realized both the strength and the size of the community. When the company reinstated the newsgroups, a CompuServe spokesperson told *The Washington Blade*, "Our gay membership is an important segment of our audience, and that was reflected by the activities that we saw in light of the suspension of access...It showed that this is an active, vocal segment of our [subscriber] population."

Many lesbian and gay organizations also take into account the activist power of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community on the Internet. For example, in an effort to help increase positive e-mail to Touchstone Television in support of Ellen DeGeneres's character to come out on her television show, GLAAD issued a special Internet *GLAADAlert* urging people to write Touchstone. The item offered a short synopsis of the situation and contact information. After the alert was released, positive e-mail coming into Touchstone Television increased to a ratio of 5 to 1.

Now, most major lesbian and gay organizations have some kind of presence on the Net. The information in the appendix of this manual is designed to help you familiarize yourself with the unique communication capabilities on the Internet.

A word about the lesbian and gay press:

There is—as might be expected—a great deal of controversy and debate around relationships between the lesbian and gay press and lesbian and gay organizations. While initially the lesbian and gay press was primarily a social outlet and a community resource in a more activist sense, it has evolved to hold itself to a higher journalistic standard. The lesbian and gay press sees itself less and less as an “advocate” and more as all media outlets now do—as a business.

The lesbian and gay press, on a local level, may differ in their philosophy of purpose, so to best determine how your relationship can be mutually beneficial, get to know the outlet and its staff well.

The national lesbian and gay media outlets (e.g. the *Advocate*) have chosen as their primary responsibility to provide unbiased and accurate information about lesbian and gay issues to their readership. To expect anything more is to hold them to a lower journalistic standard than you would mainstream press. By following the same guidelines in working with the *Advocate* as you would with the *Washington Post*, you will be able to establish professional, favorable relationships on par with those you have with other media outlets.

Deadlines, deadlines, deadlines:

As we’ve said already, all media professionals work under strict deadlines, and respecting those deadlines indicates to them that you understand the way the media functions and will make them more receptive to working with your organization.

Simply asking “Are you on deadline?” when you call a reporter is the best way to determine if he or she has the time to discuss your story. If they are on deadline or otherwise busy, ask when would be a good time to call, and get in touch with them at that time.

Kinds of Stories:

There are two general categories of news stories; keep in mind how your story will best fit into either of the following:

Breaking news: A story that is happening quickly or has occurred suddenly. Examples of breaking news are court decisions, protests, defamatory comments made by public figures, or a “coming out” by a celebrity or other public figure.

Feature stories: A more in-depth manner of coverage about an individual, organization or issues, usually not as time sensitive per se, but customarily concerning an issue being discussed in the public arena. An example of a feature story is a profile of a long-term lesbian couple, with a discussion of how recent debate over same-sex marriage rights could affect their lives.

Be creative when pitching story ideas to media professionals and offer yourself and your organization as a resource whenever they cover lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. By having a good understanding of the different kinds of media and how they work, you can begin to establish the relationships necessary to garner fair, accurate and inclusive coverage of your community.

Getting in Touch with the Media:

The first step in establishing and maintaining good relationships with media professionals is identifying the proper person to make contact with, depending on what you wish to accomplish. In order to do that, you must have some knowledge of the media outlet. Researching who has covered lesbian and gay issues in the past and the quality of that coverage is vital. It is also important to know the audience that the media outlet tailors itself to, so you can shape your organization's message accordingly.

If there is a reporter who has been assigned the “gay beat,” that should be your primary point of contact. In many cases, depending on the size of the media outlet, there are one or a number of reporters who cover lesbian and gay issues that do not specifically have that beat. These individuals should be your initial contacts. If there has been very little coverage or poor coverage of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender issues at that media outlet, you may want to request a meeting with the editorial board (print), news directors (broadcast), or assignment editors. By knowing about past coverage, you are in a position to suggest new story ideas and offer yourself as a resource and source.

There are five major values necessary for effectively building and maintaining professional relations with media personnel:

- professionalism
- respect: not all journalists are informed about lesbian and gay issues, understand that these relationships are a long-term commitment and process. You need to respect the people you work with and should expect the same kind of treatment in return.
- honesty: never lie to a journalist! Saying “I don't know, but I will help you find what you need” will earn you the respect of any responsible media professional.
- commitment to knowledge of your subject matter and the specific media outlet you are working with: know your issues and know the media outlet before you approach its staff to cover your organization/issues.
- confidence in the presentation of your issues to the media: demonstrate your concern for your issues—they will think it is important if you show them how important it is to you.

Tips on pitching stories to the media:

- be creative, but keep your list of ideas short
- know your organization's priorities—what part of an issue or event do you want in the public eye?
- use statistics wisely—data can be powerful ammunition to back up your arguments, but keep it simple and to the point
- practice your pitch with other members of your organization or individuals who fit your audience profile—if they are interested, chances are the media will be interested
- keep notes with you when making a pitch by phone and refer to them when talking to the media—it will keep you focused and lessen nervousness
- be informed of a reporter/editor/media outlet's past coverage of lesbian and gay issues. Let them know you are informed about their past work
- reporters and editors are always short on time—if you don't grab them in the first few moments of your pitch, you won't secure their interest. Practice your opening line before you call.



Audience:

Another key component of your approaching media professionals is having a good understanding of the audience of their particular outlet. Determining the audience of a media outlet is vital to your strategy when establishing relationships with the media, pitching story ideas and shaping your message. An audience that is not as knowledgeable about lesbian and gay issues will need more basic information, whereas a media outlet whose audience *is* the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community will have a completely different set of needs around coverage.

One way to determine who the proper person to contact is at any given media outlet is through the use of media guides.

Some of the more useful media guides are:

- *Bacon's Media Guide*
(organized by category of media—magazine, papers, TV/cable)
- *Burrelle's Media Guide*
- *News Media Yellow Pages*
- *United Way Media Factbooks*
(local media markets only, call your local United Way office for information)

While these media guides can be very costly, recent editions can be found in your local library. Another excellent resource to take advantage of is the Internet, which has a myriad of sites with media lists. A good place to start is by browsing the links on the GLAAD web page (www.glaad.org).

Introductory Letters:

Once you have determined who to contact regarding coverage of your organization and its issues, the most efficient way to first approach them is by sending an introductory letter.

A basic introductory letter should contain the following:

- the name of your organization and its mission
- key individuals in your organization with brief biographical information
- what issues your organization speaks to, and why those issues are of importance to their readership/viewership
- any information you feel will give the media outlet insight into your work
- suggestions for stories with a local angle
- ways in which your local organization's issues/events tie in with a national story

After sending an introductory letter, be sure to follow up with the reporter/editor/producer, to see if they need more information, have any questions, or would like to further discuss your organization. Keep media professionals updated on your organization's activities and put them on your mailing list for any publications.

Media Releases:

When you need to get information about an event or breaking issue to the media, the standard tool of communication is the media release or advisory.

Advisories are generally used to inform the media of an upcoming event or press conference, and provide only basic "advisory" information. A media release, on the other hand, allows the opportunity to provide more background information on news items, along with editorializing and opining in the form of quotes. Examples of topics that would warrant releases include: breaking news items, key staff hires or board appointments, announcement of event winners, etc..

Here is a sample of a GLAAD media release:

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

Wonbo Woo, Communications Associate

phone: (212) 807-1700 x24

pager: (800) 689-0196

GLAAD RESPONDS TO INTOLERANT CALL FOR "HOMOSEXUAL CONTENT" TV RATING

"The notion of adding a distinct label for 'homosexual content' is clearly based on ignorance and prejudice. Such a label could only serve to stigmatize members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community by suggesting that something is inherently wrong with them."

-Joan M. Garry, GLAAD Executive Director

NEW YORK, NY, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 1999—The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) today spoke out against the Christian Action Network's February 16 request, made to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), that a "Homosexual Content" label be added to the existing television ratings system. In addition, GLAAD applauded Jack Valenti, President and CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and head of the television ratings board, for his condemnation of the notion.

"There is a system already in place which is designed to warn parents of violent, sexually-explicit, or adult-oriented material," said GLAAD Executive Director Joan M. Garry. "I certainly understand the benefits of the existing ratings system – I don't want my own three kids being exposed to sex or violence. *That* system's not perfect, either: the application of content labels is subjective as it is, and often unfairly targets shows with lesbian and gay themes. The notion of adding a distinct label for 'homosexual content' is clearly based on ignorance and prejudice. Such a label could only serve to stigmatize members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community by suggesting that something is inherently *wrong* with them."

In addition, implications of the television ratings system's effect are being dramatically changed by the introduction of "V-Chips," devices which allow viewers to block certain programs based upon their television ratings codes. Televisions utilizing "V-Chip" technology have been on the market since the fall of 1998, and a 1998 Congressional mandate dictates that all television sets must be equipped with the technology by the year 2000.

"The 'HC' label, coupled with V-Chip technology, could also give parents the ability to unilaterally block access to vital resources for their kids," Garry added. "When a youth-oriented show like *Dawson's Creek* or *Felicity* brings a character out of the closet in an age-appropriate manner, it sends messages to kids that they are not alone. We need to ensure that that message is there, for the millions of lesbian and gay youth who feel isolated and alienated, and to those who harass them."

On Tuesday, February 23, Jack Valenti, president and CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America and head of the Television Ratings Committee, told CNN's *Talkback Live*: "I thought it was an inhumane proposal. It's something that ought to be ignored. I think it lacks rationale, and most of all, it's kind of a coarse statement ... I don't think there's any chance of this becoming a reality — zero."

GLAAD is the nation's lesbian and gay media advocacy organization. GLAAD promotes fair, accurate and inclusive representation of individuals and events in all media as a means of combating homophobia and all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation or identity.

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When writing either an advisory or release, keep the following in mind:

- *Always* include a media contact. Should reporters have any questions about the information provided, you *must* give them a means of following-up with you.
- Keep your releases/advisories brief — whenever possible, they should fit on one page.
- Release date: for most releases/advisories, you should head the page with “for immediate release,” indicating that the information can be used by the media immediately. Sometimes, however, you may want to send information before it is ready to be publicly disseminated. In those cases, use an embargo date instead (“Embargoed for Release Until [Date]”)
- Close all releases/advisories with an end-stamp to indicate the end of the document.

The basic format of a media advisory is the following:

- Each paragraph should be preceded by one of the “five w’s.” You may or may not need to include all of them, but address each heading, usually in the following order:

What: What kind of event will you be holding and what is its purpose? (e.g. What: A press conference to address the recent rise in hate crimes in Washington, DC).

Who: Any notable figures who will be speaking, presenting or in attendance — politicians, celebrities, prominent academics, local or national activists, etc.

When: The time and date of the event.

Where: The location of the event — provide an exact address and cross-streets unless location is self-evident (e.g. on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, DC).

Why: Use this space to note briefly any compelling statistics or explain the relevance and/or significance of the issue (e.g. Hate crimes are on the rise throughout the country, and yet the United States still lacks federal legislation protecting lesbians and gay men from bias-motivated crimes. According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs...).

- In addition, you should have paragraphs addressing the following:
 - How: For paid events or those that require RSVPing, be sure to include ticket price and event contact information — which will often differ from the media contact information.
 - More: Your organization’s mission statement should always close the advisory.

The basic format of a media release is the following:

- first paragraph: who, what, where, when, why of the issue in question — the basics.
- subsequent paragraph(s): list your main points in order of importance (with supporting data when available and quotes by your designated spokesperson)
- final paragraph: your organization’s mission statement

Press Kit:

By combining a media advisory with your basic information kit, you can create a press kit that media professionals can access and utilize in a variety of ways. The essential elements of a press kit are:

- one-page summary of your organization (mission statement, constituency, goals, other important facts)
- fact sheet of upcoming events
- issues of concern, with any releases or background information you have available on the subject
- contact information, especially for your designated spokesperson
- list of key staff and/or Board of Directors with biographical information
- list of story ideas
- any publications or brochures your organization distributes

Whenever you receive coverage, call the reporter and editor/producer responsible and let them know what you thought of the coverage. Send copies of any coverage you receive to GLAAD, 150 West 26th St., New York, NY 10001 for our archives.

Interview situations: taking charge and using them to your advantage

As you establish good working relationships with the media, there will come the time that you and your organization will be called upon to give comment. An issue has broken in the media and you get a request to comment—your first impulse is to immediately agree to be interviewed and open the floodgates, tell them everything you’ve been waiting to tell the public. This is a temptation you have to resist. The worst thing you can do in response to a question from a media professional is simply answer it.

Before even agreeing to an interview, remember two things:

- you have the right—and the responsibility, if you want to represent you organization’s constituency—to first “interview the interviewer.”
- when the media call for comment, they are not just looking for information, they are trying to shape your answer to fit the slant of their story.

Before any interview, there are a number of questions to ask yourself, your organization, and the media outlet requesting comment:

- has anyone in your organization been interviewed before by this media outlet?
- does this media outlet/reporter have a history of covering lesbian and gay issues?
- what is the slant of the piece?
- who else has been interviewed/will be appearing with you representing “the other side” of the issue?
- what is the reporter/interviewer’s style?
- how long will the piece run (print or television)?
- if this is for television, will it be live or taped?
- who will the audience be for this interview?
- for live radio and television interviews— will there be an “audience call-in” session?

By approaching an interview as an opportunity to get your message out, and knowing exactly what kind of situation you are getting yourself into, you can take advantage of the situation to educate and inform the public about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues.

If a media professional is unwilling to answer your questions— be wary! Asking the above questions to any media professional who is fair-minded will only add to your credibility. If the premise of the piece is objectionable or if you feel you will be put in a compromising situation, you can and should refuse to be interviewed.

For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organizations are often asked for comment in cases of child molestation. The implication is that there is some sort of relationship between homosexuality and child abuse. Even though scientific research has disproved this association time and time again, it continues to be a prevailing stereotype that is used to frighten and misinform the public. This implication will also be reinforced by any response you make. So don't even dignify the idea with a negative response. Refuse to be interviewed on the grounds that child molestation has nothing to do with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals.

Another common situation you may find yourself in is when you are asked to appear on a television or radio program with a virulent homophobe. While some media have progressed enough to realize that having credible lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals debate extreme homophobes is akin to presenting "Hitler's view," it is still a frequent strategy to claim that a debate will present a "balanced" view of a topic concerning the gay and lesbian community. It is more often a ploy to sensationalize the topic at hand. It is impossible to have an intelligent exchange with an individual or organization that has decided in advance that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are evil, sick or immoral. By putting yourself in this situation without the proper experience, you stand a good chance of losing your temper and looking as irrational as your opponent. Try and suggest a more moderate alternative to blatant homophobes and consider your options when approached in these cases.

I've decided to be interviewed, now what?

There are two major points to keep in mind after you have agreed to be interviewed:

- do not utter a single word you are not prepared to see in print/hear on the air
- remember that you are not being interviewed to simply answer questions—you are there to convey your message

While many believe there is really no such thing as “off the record,” you should be familiar with terms reporters use during interviews as they pertain to their ability to quote sources. A good ground rule, however, is to not tell a reporter anything you do not want to see attributed to yourself or your organization.

Not for attribution/Under condition of anonymity: term used when an individual or organization does not want to be directly identified as a source, but still wants the information to be used freely.

On background: term used when your comments are strictly for background information, and cannot be attributed to you or your organization.

Off the record: term used when you do not want information attributed to yourself or your organization under any circumstances. However, if a reporter is able to find another person to confirm the information, it may be used in print. It is recommended that you rarely, if ever, resort to “going off the record” without complete confidence in the reporter and media outlet.

After you have had a chance to “pre-interview” the reporter, and know the situation you will be participating in, make sure you take the time to prepare yourself to confidently, accurately, and thoughtfully comment on an issue or event.

If you are not prepared for an interview, it is completely appropriate to ask the reporter what their deadline is to give yourself more time to research or discuss your reaction with other members of your organization. In some cases, media professionals will ask for comment on an issue or event that is inappropriate for you or your organization. Telling a reporter you need to get back to them or referring them to a more appropriate spokesperson will demonstrate to them that you are taking this opportunity seriously.

You can never be too prepared — or practice too much!

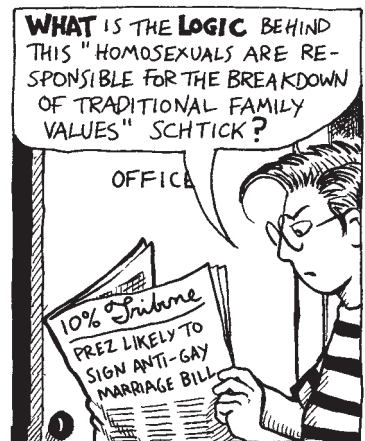
The main principle to keep in mind when being interviewed is that you are not there to answer questions, but to convey your message. If you only answer a reporter's questions, you will be led in the direction that the reporter wants to go- and be unable to get your message out to the public. Instead, your strategy should be to respond to questions and then steer back to your message—the one you formulated before the interview.

By being prepared to speak publicly and arming yourself with an effective message, you will be offering yourself as a credible, capable representative of your constituency and can counter years of media defamation and stereotypes the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community has struggled to correct.

Putting your message into “sound bites”:

Creating effective quotes and getting the audience to care about your issues

While most interviews—regardless of their medium—will be edited in some fashion, you can still ensure your messages get to the audience by shaping the main ideas into sound bites. Sound bites are short, memorable sentences that stand on their own and convey to the audience your organization's views on an issue. Think about what you see and hear every day in the media about any issue— short, simple and memorable phrases that get the point across quickly and effectively. By preparing sound bites in advance—and practicing them—your ability to effectively reach the audience increases greatly.



Elements of the Sound Bite

Besides the already mentioned characteristics of sound bites, there are a number of other elements to an effective sound bite:

- create short, punctuated sentences that grab the attention of the interviewer and the audience. Let your passion for the issue show in your sound bite—if you demonstrate that you care, the audience will see their need to care.
- personalize the issues—people respond to an individual’s personal story, especially when dealing with issues as personal as those affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.
- be clear about your goals—and lead with your best sound bites and arguments (especially in edited television inter-views, media professionals will take the first useable, effective quote due to tight deadlines)
- try to keep your sound bites positive—don’t fall into the trap of repeating a reporter’s negative phrasing or terminology. Rephrase your sound bites to reflect a positive position.
- when appropriate, include your organization or affiliation with the issue in the sound bite. It will lend credibility to your presence and publicize the work you are doing.
- use data wisely—data can be a powerful tool to convince the audience of your message, just be sure that you can back it up and keep any presentation of data simple and easily understandable.

Some examples of effective soundbites:

“Gay men and lesbians are seeking equal rights, not special rights.”

“After months of speculation, ABC, Disney and the producers of Ellen have taken a decisive stand for programming that reflects the true America, which includes lesbians and gay men,” said GLAAD’s Entertainment Media Director Chastity Bono. “The public has voiced their desire to see Ellen Morgan come out, and now we can finally celebrate this truly groundbreaking event.”

“This is about fairness, freedom of choice and accurate portrayals of lesbians and gay men,” said Cathy Renna, GLAAD Community Outreach Liaison. “Having the opportunity to participate in such phenomenal work at the local level exemplifies GLAAD’s commitment to improving media representations of lesbians and gay men nationwide.”

While the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community has made great strides in educating the public about our issues, there is still a great deal of ground to be made in making the public aware of our community. When you are being interviewed, you are representing—in the eyes of the audience, at least—the “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community” in its entirety. While we understand that this is not only inaccurate, but likely impossible, keep in mind the following suggestions:

- localize the issue— when discussing issues receiving national attention, bring the effect of these issues into your message. This will give your audience an opportunity to see that lesbian and gay issues are not so abstract (e.g. limited to any certain geographical area) and that these issues affect the lives of people close to them.
- make issues that affect the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community “universal”— show that when one of us is discriminated against, harassed or otherwise mistreated, that your entire community is affected. Giving the audience some sense of commonality with your issue through the use of analogy is an excellent method of doing this. Use a concept your audience knows well and compare it to your specific issue.

- counter stereotypes and combat inaccuracies— while your primary goal will be to effectively present your message, many discussions about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues will put you in the situation of answering questions on general issues. The best way to ensure an effective response is to be prepared ahead of time. With practice, you will be more and more able to “think on your feet” in these situations.

The basis for effective sound bites is your organization’s mission statement. Nearly every sound bite you create will have its origin in some facet of your mission. Use the key elements of your organizational mission statement to create sound bites about programming, events and issues that affect your community.

Interview Style and Technique

While not all of us are destined to be public speakers, many people who don't see themselves in that role can be extremely effective with the proper training and practice. By keeping the following tips in mind and maintaining a positive attitude, you can become an organized and capable spokesperson.

- be ready—it cannot be said enough—practice, practice, practice! Any organizational spokesperson who is concerned about interview technique practices on a regular basis. While the content of an interview is important, so is the presentation. Excellent sound bites lose their “bite” when delivered without confidence. You must project a confident and expert image to the audience or they will not find you credible.
- know your audience—how much familiarity do they have with lesbian and gay issues? Tailor your message so as not to “talk down” to the audience but aim to be understood. Talk to your audience, not the interviewer—don't lecture.
- write down your messages and practice. Have a colleague act as a mock interviewer and ask challenging questions. Get feedback from others about how understandable, interesting and informative your messages are and the quality of your presentation.
- as stated before—personalize your message whenever possible. Audiences relate to the personal, and making what may be an abstract issue “real” for them can be extremely effective. Whenever possible, establish eye contact with audience members and interviewers—a shifting gaze is seen as nervousness at best, lack of credibility at worst.
- conceptualize one strong message and convey it at every opportunity during the interview
- reacting with humor can be a very effective way to give the audience a chance to see you in a personal manner, but can also be misinterpreted, so use humor sparingly and with caution.
- be animated—your energy level will indicate your enthusiasm about an issue. Use body language to emphasize your points and remember to be likable, show your concern and don't be afraid to show some emotion when appropriate.

- avoid nervous gestures— finger tapping, moving in your chair, playing with your hair or glasses— which indicate discomfort to the audience and undermine your effectiveness
- sit up straight and lean slightly towards your interviewer or audience
- once the first question is asked, seize the opportunity to go directly to your main message (example: “Before I answer that first question, why don’t I go directly to the issue at hand?”)
- steer the direction of the interview at every opportunity—respond, then go back to your message. With practice, this can be done without seeming evasive. The trick is to adequately respond—and move on to the salient message point.

Your main goal—the presentation of your message points— is not to answer the interviewer’s questions, but to respond to them and steer back to your message. There are two standard techniques used to ensure the presentation of your message points and sound bites that are very effective: flagging and hooking.

Flagging: By highlighting a particular portion of any sound bite, you can raise a “red flag” to indicate the importance of an individual facet of your message. This can be as simple as saying “The most important thing to remember about this is...” or any similar phrase. Flagging is a useful technique when you are wrapping up an interview, which will allow you the opportunity to sum up your message and indicate clearly the information you want the audience to take with them.

Hooking: One way to maintain control over an interview is to steer the reporter through your key messages by “dangling a hook” that will lead to the next question. By ending a statement with a phrase like “but that isn’t the only important part of this program,” you will lead the reporter to ask the next question.

Tips for Print Interviews

While many think that print interviews are easier than broadcast situations, they can still be very challenging. Most are done by phone, so it is easy for the individual being interviewed to let their guard down and lose control of the interview and their comments. Additionally, print reporters have more preparation time when covering issues and are able to cover issues in more detail. This can make an interview more challenging for

you, but you will also have the advantage of having prepared notes in front of you and more control over the amount of time the interview lasts.

A few points to keep in mind for print interviews:

- send any background materials to the reporter before the interview, if possible. This eliminates time spent on facts the reporter can retrieve from the information you have sent.
- use notes to stay focused
- stay aware of your vocal inflections—it is even more important in phone interviews, as your voice is all the reporter has to gauge your reactions
- speak slowly—most reporters tape interviews, but many will work solely from notes
- respect a reporter’s deadlines—it is acceptable to ask for time to prepare, but stick to your word and call back. If you are unable to be interviewed, refer the reporter to a credible source. They will appreciate it and remember in the future when they need comment on issues pertinent to your organization’s mission. Also, make sure reporters respect your deadlines as well. Be clear about your abilities and time constraints.
- it is not standard practice for sources to see the written copy of a interview until it is printed—so don’t ask. Most reporters would be offended by any requests to “preview” their work.
- be sure to offer to answer any further questions once the interview is written, and offer yourself as a resource on similar issues
- call after the article is printed to offer feedback, suggestions, and additional information for future stories. By being a reliable and credible source, you can establish good working relationships with reporters that will pay off in the future and foster more fair and accurate coverage of your issues.

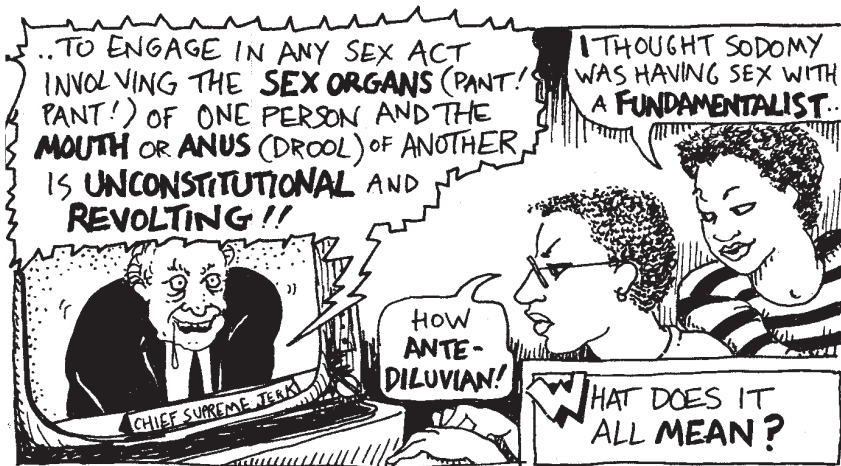
Tips for Television and Radio

Broadcast interviews can be edited or live, and being prepared is the key to your effectiveness in these media. Live interviews—most challenging of all—are not for the faint of heart, and should be approached with care.

With live interviews, everything you say goes out over the airwaves, but your advantage is that you cannot be quoted out of context or have portions of your message removed through editing. It is important to remember that live radio and television interviews can also include call-in questions from the audience. Be prepared for standard questions and criticism, and don't allow hostile guests to shake your composure.

Taped interviews are much more common, though, and it is important to keep in mind two things:

- no one is watching—yet. You can pause, stop to organize your thoughts, and steer back to your message points repeatedly. If you make a mistake, don't worry. Stop and repeat your entire thought—the better sound bite can be captured during editing.
- the vast majority of your interview will not be used. Only a small part will be used for broadcast, and that portion will probably just be your answer, not the reporter's question. It is imperative to keep your message positive, even if the reporter asks a negatively phrased question—remember the question will not be part of the broadcast.



Television appearances:

With visual media, it is not just what you say, but how you look and act that will determine your effectiveness during an interview. Anticipate

what questions may be asked and practice some prepared responses. Be sure and review any relevant materials, statistics or facts that you may need to refer to during the interview.

Some other tips when appearing on television:

- dress conservatively—your clothes shouldn't distract the audience from your message. Wear solid, tailored clothing without a lot of accessories. Avoid flashy prints or patterns, white shirts without a jacket, all black clothing, or shiny fabrics. If you cannot avoid wearing glasses, get anti-glare spray or glasses with anti-glare lenses.
- do not wear excessive make-up. Television studios generally have make-up artists who will assist, but if not, use powder to remove glare or shine from the face. Moderate eye make-up for women is acceptable. Men without beards should use powder and shave a few hours before a television appearance to reduce "five o'clock shadow."
- avoid dangling jewelry and pins—they distract the viewer from your message. If the audience is too busy trying to see what your lapel pin is, they won't hear what you are saying.
- remove all bulky items from your pockets. If you carry a pager or cell phone, be sure to turn it off before the interview.

Conclusion:

Developing and maintaining relationships with media professionals and representing your organization as a spokesperson can be a challenging and rewarding experience. The skills and techniques you have learned through the *MediaEssentials* training are just the beginning of a commitment to bring your message to the public, and ensuring fair, accurate and inclusive representations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in the media. Through your application of the principles you have been presented with today, you can significantly contribute to improved understanding of our issues and work to end discrimination based on sexual orientation or identity.

Additional resources, including a list of GLAAD offices that can offer further assistance in your media relations work and worksheets to guide you as you shape your media strategies, are contained in the appendix of this manual.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: The Internet

Getting Your Message Out Via The Internet

1. Get on the Internet!—If you are not already on the Internet, get on it! An investment in an e-mail address is crucial to anyone who wants to get a message out. Many people like to get their feet wet by using a commercial online service provider such as America Online or CompuServe. However, Internet service providers that offer direct Internet connection are often cheaper as they usually offer a flat monthly rate. Check out "The List" (<http://www.thelist.com>) for a complete listing of Internet service providers. It gives you comprehensive information such as pricing and local dial-up numbers.

2. Compile your own mailing list—Now that you have opened up an account with an Internet service provider, start collecting e-mail addresses of people who would be interested in your information. Especially important would be to build your own e-mail list of media people. Most e-mail programs and online service providers allow you to create an address book where you can store these addresses. When you have important, timely information to get out, you can send information to many people through one e-mail message. Also, see the section on "Mailing lists" on how to create your own automated mailing list.

3. Send e-mail to various mailing lists and newsgroups—post your message to relevant mailing lists and newsgroups. See the "Resources" section for a list of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender electronic news and information resources. However, it is bad "netiquette" (etiquette on the Internet) to invade a list with useless information. This is commonly known as "spamming." For example, you would not send a message about politics to a mailing list for discussion about bowling. So, pick your lists wisely.

4. Build a Web page—One of the best places to post information is on your own Web page. If you advertise your page throughout the Internet, people will begin to come back to your page for updates and more news. You can find HTML editors to help you create a Web page. Some places, like Geocities (<http://www.geocities.com>), offer free Web space on their servers.

5. Hold an online community forum—If you are on a commercial online service provider, you can contact either the provider or the managers of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender forums on these services and ask them if you can set up a community forum in one of their chat rooms. Real time chat is also becoming available on the World Wide Web as well.

Resources For Maximizing The Internet's Potential As A Form Of Media

Online Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Communities

Forming strategic partnerships with various online lesbian and gay communities on the Internet can often increase the chance of your message being seen. Most commercial online service providers have some kind of lesbian and gay community and more and more are growing on the World Wide Web. These communities offer a place in which people can interact and discuss lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues, giving you a unique way to present your message.

Some of the more popular communities are:

PlanetOut
www.planetout.com

PlanetOut is a San Francisco based company working to create a lesbian and gay community on various technology platforms. Already, it has created communities on Microsoft Network, the World Wide Web and America Online. It provides places for news and information. PlanetOut also makes it easy for non-English speaking lesbian and gay people to chat.

The Queer Resources Directory (QRD)
www.qrd.org/qrd

The Queer Resources Directory is the main library in the sprawling electronic metropolis that the Net has come to be. The QRD archives news, releases and information from around the world on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues.

Gay.Com
www.gay.com

Gay.Com is the largest lesbian and gay online community and chat network. Focusing primarily around its popular Web based chat, Gay.Com now also offers several ways to participate, from news and events to support resources.

The Data Lounge
www.data lounge.com

The Data Lounge is a popular online community on the Internet. It offers news and information as well as surveys, discussion forums and gossip.

onQ

(keyword on AOL: onq; www.onq.com) onQ is located only on America Online. It started as the Gay and Lesbian Community Forum and is the oldest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community on that online service provider. It offers news and information as well as message boards and a popular chat network.

Pride!

(Go on CompuServe: Pride, Go, Pride Universe; www.pridemedia.com) Pride! is located only on CompuServe. It offers news and information as well as message boards. In addition to these services, Pride! allows popular avitar chat.

Newsgroups

One great place to post news and information is on newsgroups. You will be able to access newsgroups through your Web browser or commercial online service provider. Also, there are thousands of newsgroups devoted to lesbian and gay issues.

Some popular newsgroups for posting news and information about the lesbian and gay community are:

clari.news.gays

This is a moderated newsgroup on lesbian and gay news belonging to the ClariNet group, an online news service much like the newspaper wire services. The benefit of posting to clari.news.gays is that many newspapers pick up and use news fed through ClariNet.



alt.journalism.gay-press

A newsgroup from the alt.journalism family in which journalistic news about the lesbian and gay community is posted.

Also remember that you can post to non-gay newsgroups as well. But remember not to “spam” newsgroups with information not pertinent to that group.

<http://www.dejanews.com> offers a complete list of newsgroups.

Mailing lists

Posting to various mailing lists can also ensure that your information is well-publicized. GLAAD has an automated mailing list called GLAAD-Net that has thousands of members on it. The information sent to our members is also often disseminated to their friends as well, allowing maximum potential for publication. In most cases, you must be a subscriber to the list in order to post information, and in others (such as GLAAD-Net) the lists are read-only (no outside posting allowed).

Some popular mailing lists to post news and information to are:

Gay-Net is a very popular mailing list, but it is also very high volume. If you subscribe, you can sometimes expect up to fifty messages a day. Fortunately, you can actually post to Gay-Net without having to subscribe:

Subscription information—Send e-mail to majordomo@queernet.org with the command “subscribe Gay-Net” in the body of the message.

Submitting information—Send your message to GayNet@Queernet.org

GLB-PRESS is a mailing list specifically for the posting of announcements, press releases and articles of interest to and about the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. In order to post, you must be a subscriber, or have received special permission from the list’s owners.

Subscription information — Send e-mail to LISTSERV@LISTSERV.AOL.COM with the command “SUBSCRIBE GLB-PRESS your full name” in the body of the message. For example: SUBSCRIBE GLB-PRESS Elaine Noble.

Submitting information - Send your message to glb-press@listserv.aol.com

ACTION-ALERT If your news and information demand for people to take action, Action-Alert is one of the best places to post your message. Please note that ONLY alert items may be posted to this list. The item must contain some sort of information about whom you are asking the community to write to.

Subscription information—Send e-mail to majordomo@vector.casti.com with the command “subscribe action-alert” in the body of the message.

Submitting information—
Send your message to action-alert@vector.casti.com

GLAAD-Net is GLAAD's read-only automated mailing list. GLAAD uses the list to transmit its press releases, *GLAADAlerts* and *GLAADLines*.

Subscription information—Send e-mail to majordomo@vector.casti.com with the command “subscribe GLAAD-Net” in the body of the message.

Submitting information—Read-only. No outside messages may be posted.

For a list of other lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender mailing lists, visit Vivian's list of lists at <http://catalog.com/vivian/interest-group-search.html>.

Also, if your address book is getting too large, an automated mailing list, like the ones above, might be the way to go. An automated list allows people to subscribe to your list through a series of commands rather than you having to subscribe them manually. There are several free automated list nowadays. Queernet.Org (<http://www.queernet.org>) has been a pioneer in hosting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender automated mailing lists. Check their Website for more information.

Web pages

The World Wide Web has become a major source of information. Almost every large company and organization has a Web page. Almost every educational institution offers free Web space to its students, faculty and administrators. Ask your Internet service provider (ISP) how you can set up your own page.

If you can't afford space on your ISP's server, there are some companies that should offer free Web space. One such company is called Geocities. By registering with the company, you can set up a free Web site and e-mail address. They even offer an html (hypertext markup language) editor to make it easy for you to create your Web site, especially if you do not know html. Visit their Web site at <http://www.geocities.com> for more information.

Some places that you might want to visit on the World Wide Web are:

GLAAD

<http://www.glaad.org>

GLAAD's Web site is your online resource for promoting fair, accurate and inclusive representation in all media as a means of challenging discrimination based on sexual orientation or identity. The site offers an electronic version of the *GLAADAlert*, with messages already pre-written so that people can sign their name and send off.

NLGJA

<http://www.nlgja.org>

The Web site of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. Get the latest updates from an organization that helps shape the way that news media represents the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

The Gay/Lesbian International News Network (GLINN)

<http://www.glinn.com>

The Gay/Lesbian International News Network is a newswire service for the lesbian and gay community. You will be able to find information on how to submit your news for possible broadcast on their service.

NewsDirectory.Com

<http://www.newsdirectory.com>

NewsDirectory.Com makes it easy for you to look up your local news outlets on the Internet. By entering your area code, it searches through a database of over 12,000 newspapers, magazines and local television stations.

American Journalism Review (AJR) NewsLink

<http://www.newslink.org>

The AJR NewsLink also allows you to look for your local news on the Internet using a database of over 9,000 newspapers and magazines on the Web.

Appendix B:

GLAAD MediaEssentials: Worksheets

The following worksheets can be used as a guide when you strategize with your organization around an issue that will garner media attention, or if you find yourself in a situation where you are proactively seeking media coverage of an issue, event or individual.

Also included in this portion of the manual are guidelines and tips for organizing a press conference. This requires a great deal of work but can be very effective way to reach a large number of media when an extremely important or fast-breaking issue occurs.



1. What are your publicity goals?

Why are you seeking coverage?

- to advertise an event
- to promote an organizational opinion on an issue
- to educate the public/counteract misconceptions or bias
- to mobilize your constituency (to vote, complain, praise)
- to increase attendance/participation in your organization's work

Who is your audience?

- broad, mass appeal
- highly specialized (eg. lesbian and gay men, allied groups)
- widest audience possible

What media will you target?

- national
- regional
- local
- specialized

Demographics: How does the public feel about this issue?

- not supportive
- supportive
- uninformed

Identifying who your audience is and how they feel about your issues will affect how you shape your message.

2. Preparing a “background sheet” on your organization:

A one-page informational piece about your organization can be very helpful for media professionals, who can refer to it whenever they are covering your issues/events. It is also useful to hand out at media events and can be included in your press kit.

Your backgrounder should contain:

- name and contact information for the organization
- mission statement

As well as highlights of:

- constituency you serve and summary of issues of importance to them
- summary of funding base
- tax status
- organizational history (accomplishments and highlights)
- publication and brochures distributed by your organization

3. Press Conferences

First, your organization needs to determine if a press conference is truly necessary. Can your message be disseminated through a media release or by other means?

Press conferences are usually in response to breaking news (either a “hot” news item or a fast-breaking story), release of a report, a celebrity announcement, or a major event. Materials are ideally sent at least 5 days prior to the press conference to your media lists and all pertinent:

- assignment desks
- editors
- daybooks (especially at wire services)
- weekly calendars
- editors
- allied/supportive organizations

Two or three days prior to the press conference, a media release is sent to the above individuals, and media outlets should be called the day prior to the press conference to ensure that it is on the day books.

Location, Location, Location

The setting for your press conference should:

- be accessible to the media (i.e. central location, with provisions for the “unexpected”—bad weather, crowds, noise, security concerns)
- have a visual hook (dramatic backdrop, graphics, visual presentation of materials, celebrities and/or other public figures on-hand for photo opportunities)
- be relevant to the issue/announcement (e.g.: in front of the offending fire station for a conference addressing the mistreatment of a transgender person by Fire Department personnel)

Site Logistics—what you’ll need when it happens

- a microphone w/a stand (ideally with a podium and mult box)
- media registration table (or an individual who will approach attending media with packets and find out what outlet they are from)
- logo on the podium/banner or other visual that will indicate your organization
- press kits for distribution
- food (donuts, bagels) and drinks (coffee)

The best days for press conferences are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The best times to hold a press conference are between 10am-11am and 1pm-3pm.

Speakers

- have a moderator to keep the flow of speakers punctual and steady
- keep number of speakers to a minimum
- enforce short speaking times
- include personal statements by your speakers—humanize the issue/report/event

Plan ahead—think about what can go wrong and how it could be fixed. Follow up with those media outlets that cover the conference—and those who don’t!

4. Planning for Controversy

- what is the potential for controversy?
- how can your organization/spokesperson best respond? (gather facts/figures before hand)
- plan ahead for tough questions (think about the “worst case scenario”)
- who are your potential allies on this issue?
- who will attack you and why?
- does your organization have a position on any particular controversial issue that may be brought up?



Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organizations need to be prepared to respond to “controversial” issues, as our community has been the target of stereotyping and misrepresentation by the media. Some of the issues to be prepared for are:

- “recruitment” of young people to the gay “lifestyle”
- pedophilia
- undermining “traditional family values”
- morality and Biblical admonishments
- stereotypes (“sissy,” “butch,” promiscuity, unable to have stable relationships, able to “choose” heterosexuality)
- the “homosexual agenda”
- “nature vs. nurture—” is homosexuality/bisexuality a choice?
- sodomy laws
- lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people are not a “real minority”
- HIV/AIDS issues
- “special rights vs. equal rights” (especially as they can relate to the “wealth, power and privilege” of lesbians and gay men)

5. Creating a “news peg” or “hook”

When developing a “news peg” to interest a reporter or editor in your story, the following checklist will help you find the right “hook” to sell your story:

- ___ what is different, new or unusual about your event/issue that will make it of interest to readers/viewers?
- ___ can you tie this event/issue in with something of national significance (i.e. find a local angle to a national story, or vice versa)?
- ___ can your organization offer new information about an issue?
- ___ can your organization offer expert information about a particular issue?
- ___ can your organization refute information of the opposing viewpoint?

Message Development Worksheet

Follow these basic steps:

1. What is your goal—what new information do you want to get across?
2. What is your target audience?
3. What is your issue and how is it newsworthy?
4. Review past media coverage. Study the opposing message and any misinformation or criticism about your effort. Determine a counter-strategy and anticipate questions from reporters.
5. Even when providing ‘neutral information’ the media will look for another point of view. You may choose not to counter an opponent’s argument, but you will need to be prepared to answer their charges and correct their factual errors in your talking points.
6. Identify five key points you want to get across.
7. Identify facts and data to support your message.

8. Identify anecdotes—real life examples that put a face on your message.
9. Identify the ‘big picture.’ What is the universal appeal?
10. Take your five points and find the most colorful visual terms in which to express them. Add the facts, data and anecdotes to those messages they fit. Rank your messages in order of power and importance.
11. Review your work. Do the messages reflect your original goal?
12. Consult with others and practice your message. Stick to these in the interview, repeating them whenever possible.

Suggested Reading:

Media Guide to the Lesbian and Gay Community

(produced by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation).

To obtain a copy call GLAAD at 1.800.GAY MEDIA

Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America

by Rodger Streitmatter, Faber and Faber

Straight News: Gays, Lesbians and the News Media

Edward Allwood, Columbia University Press

In your work with the media, GLAAD can offer technical assistance and provide resources where possible. Call the GLAAD office nearest you and ask for assistance when you need it. Also, for our archives, send GLAAD any coverage your organization has received to GLAAD at 150 West 26th St., New York, NY 10001.

Working with Smaller Market Media

One of the challenges in working effectively with media professionals is understanding the needs of diverse media outlets. Media outlets in smaller markets, media that target a particular segment of your community or issue specific media should not be overlooked in your strategies for garnering coverage. In fact, the vast majority of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender media could easily fall into this category. Most smaller market media you will encounter are print outlets, and keeping the following tips and guidelines in mind will maximize your efforts in getting coverage.

For example, a smaller market paper like the *Fairfax (Virginia) Journal*, might not have thought that actress Ellen Degeneres coming out would be important to their readers, until they learned of local parties celebrating the historic “coming out episode” in April of 1997. This local angle was just what they needed, along with background material and local people to interview, to provide coverage of this issue to their readers. Another example of taking creative advantage of a media outlet is tailoring your story to their focus—one of the larger weekly newspapers in Washington DC is the *Senior Beacon*, which is distributed to hundreds of thousands of senior citizens in the DC metropolitan area. A front-page story about lesbian and gay grandchildren and the organization Parents, Friends and Families of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG) was an educational and informative experience for readers that brought lesbian and gay issues to light in a forum appropriate for that outlet.

The key component of your work with smaller market media will be to make covering your issue or event as easy as possible for them. With a small staff (if any), less time and resources and less ability to research and cover stories, smaller market media outlets will rely on you much more than larger outlets, giving you more influence on coverage and more control over your message.

Smaller market outlets will not have the time or resources to read a large press packet or a great deal of background, so all materials should be pared down accordingly. Just send the most important information and provide a story. Because of their limited resources, smaller outlets are looking not for leads, but actual stories, easily covered and interesting to their audience.

One strategy for getting fair, accurate and inclusive coverage is asking what the submissions policy of a particular outlet is, and then tailoring your media relations materials around the policy. By sending professional, well-written materials that fit submission guidelines for the outlet and acting as if you are the reporter, you have a greater chance of having your story told.

Be sure to ask about deadlines for coverage, especially with weekly, biweekly or monthly media outlets, and emphasize that you are willing to make it as easy as possible for them.

Some other tips for dealing with smaller market media:

- offer to write the story itself—who knows better what the issue is than you? If you need to be quoted as a representative of your organization, have someone else as the author, and make it a collaborative effort.
- find out the easiest format to send materials in—fax, e-mail or regular mail. Most lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender print media are more high-tech, so sending e-mail submissions makes it that much easier for them.
- submit photos! For events, make photos available by mail or on disk. Be sure to have stock photos of spokespeople and general events, which can be sent by e-mail.
- inquire about op-ed and column submissions. Smaller papers are always looking for local community members to voice their opinions.
- when e-mailing media releases or other materials, put them in the body of the e-mail, not as attachments. This way, they are more easily manipulated by the outlet you are sending them to.

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