

DHHS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Section III:	Communications
Title:	Media Training Manual
Chapter:	Communication Plans
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You should develop communication plans to help you get the most from free media. If you are lucky enough to have a budget, then you can include purchase of public service announcements or advertising in the plan. Public affairs staff can help you develop your plans. We have lots of experience in creating media plans. Divisions, sections or offices might choose to develop plans for the entire organizational structure. You might choose to develop a plan for one (1) particular program or issue.

There are some questions you need to answer before you develop a media plan:

- What is your goal?
- What do you want the media to tell the public about your division, office, section or program?
- Who is your audience?
- What media are you going to use to reach your audience?
- What resources are available to you?

Once you've answered those questions, then you can work on putting the plan together. Communications plans should include a calendar that lays out what you want to accomplish in a particular month, week or even day.

Communications plans can include a number of elements. Press releases, fact sheets, news conferences, web sites, media events, interviews, columns and editorial boards are all part of a good media plan. If you have a budget, then you can also include public service announcements and other forms of paid advertising. The communications plan for NC Health Choice is included in this chapter.

Press Releases

A press release provides information about an issue in a standardized format. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) public affairs office must approve all DHHS press releases. We can also write your releases. The public affairs office must distribute all news releases.

Press releases need to be concise. In general, you should try to keep a release to one page. The purpose of a press release is to announce an issue of importance to your organization.

Press releases should answer the five (5) W's in the very first paragraph:

- **Who?** Who will make/is making the announcement?
- **What?** What does the media need to know?
- **Where?** If you're announcing an event or a news conference include where will it take place. Make sure to include clear directions. Include information on parking.
- **When?** When will/did the event/announcement take place?
- **Why?** Why is this event important? A release should give a reporter a compelling reason to cover your event or announcement.

Press releases are a good way to communicate, but they only get you so far. You should never rely on a press release as your only communication tool. If you are announcing an event or a press conference, you should always make follow-up calls to make sure the media receive the release. These calls should be short and to-the-point. Don't keep a reporter or assignment editor on the line for more than a minute or two (2). Be careful about tag-teaming a news organization. One (1) call is usually enough. Some news organizations get really tired of receiving multiple calls regarding a marginal news event. They may blow you off because they're tired of your harassment.

You should be careful about sending out too many press releases on one subject, especially if the releases contain little that is actually new or interesting. It is like the old story of the boy who cried wolf---multiple boring, useless, non-newsworthy releases will end up accomplishing just the opposite of your goal. Those releases end up in the trash can, not in the newspaper or on television.

You can also think creatively with releases to make them more attractive. For instance, a few years ago DEHNR's Project Assist, which helps smokers quit, sent out a news release accompanied by two airplane erasers. The point was that smoking in North Carolina kills the equivalent of two (2) fully loaded jet airliners each week. Example press releases are included in this chapter.

Fact Sheets

Fact sheets are easy to do. They lay out the main points of your program. Fact sheets should be concise and easy-to-read. Fact sheets can include the following information:

- What your program does
- Who it affects
- Real life examples of folks who have benefited from your program

Fact sheets are good to have on hand. You can give them to anyone who wants more information. They are also a good basis for web material. In this chapter, you'll find a couple of sample fact sheets--"Adoption in North Carolina" and "North Carolina's Work First."

Web Sites

Web sites can also be fairly easy to create. Public affairs can help you create your site. Some of the most useful sites are very simple; they just respond to frequently asked questions. These FAQs are a good place to refer folks with more questions about a particular program.

The web is also a great place to post reports or lists, making them easily accessible for lots of folks. You can do a news release that hits the high spots of a report, then use the release to refer reporters to a web site for more information. In this chapter you will find a couple of examples of releases using this technique--"DHHS announces grants to operators of 134 homeless shelters" and "Industrial Hog Operations Emissions Study Released."

News Conferences

If you're going to have a news conference, then you better have something newsworthy to announce. Reporters and media get news conference overload. Be judicious in scheduling news conferences. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I really need a news conference? Could I accomplish the same goal with a news release and making someone available to do interviews if needed?
- Is the person making the announcement newsworthy in and of themselves? You can focus attention on an old issue by having someone interesting talk about it.
- Is a news conference the best way to get attention? Or, should you have a media event?

Media Events

In general a media event is going to get more coverage than a news conference. In addition to providing reporters with news, it also gives them pictures. A good picture can mean better placement in a newspaper and it is a virtual requirement for a television story.

Ask yourself these questions?

- Who does this announcement affect?
- Can you get affected parties to participate in the media event?
- Is the location the story?
- What pictures will help tell your story?

Interviews

Some newspapers and television stations have reporters who cover particular beats, like health or the environment. You might choose to sit down with that reporter and talk about your particular issue. If you're new to a situation or your program is new or the beat reporter is new, this is an excellent tactic. Don't always expect a story from an interview, but this is an excellent way to establish yourself as the expert on a particular issue.

Similarly, if there are small developments in a news story that aren't really worth a news release, press conference or media event, you might want to call interested reporters (folks who have already covered the story) and give them updates.

Columns

Smaller newspapers, especially weeklies, may be interested in a regular column. This usually works as part of a media plan for a division or a large program. Public affairs can help you write your column and market it to newspapers.

Op-Eds

This is an opportunity for you to write a column that provides more than just information. The "Op" stands for Opinion. The "Eds" for Editorials. This is your chance to share your division, section or office opinion about a given issue. Most large newspapers will not run op-eds if they are running anywhere else. Smaller papers may run op-eds that ran elsewhere. "My thoughts on Education for the Deaf," included in this chapter, is an example of an Op-Ed.

For questions or clarification on any of the information contained in this policy, please contact [The Office of Public Affairs](#). For general questions about department-wide policies and procedures, contact the [DHHS Policy Coordinator](#)