

This is the fourth in a series of periodic messages to assist in the planning and implementation of NCVRW Community Awareness Projects. CAP TIPS are also posted on the subgrantee page of the NCVRW CAP web site, <http://cap.navaa.org/subs>. Please feel free to send your individual questions or requests for assistance to Anne Seymour at annese@atlantech.net.

CAP TIPS #4

To Improve Public Awareness

How to Engage the News Media

Introduction

While National Crime Victims' Rights Week is a time-honored tradition for crime victims and survivors and those who serve them, it is just one of *many* important events that the news media are asked to cover in their communities. It's important to sponsor events that are *truly newsworthy* and *relevant* to the news media's varied audiences, from newspaper and web readers, to listeners and viewers of broadcast media.

One of the most important components of engaging the news media is to have a good, current media roster. The information in this CAP TIP can be augmented by the archival CAP TIP on "Building a Comprehensive Media List," which can be found at <http://cap.navaa.org/subs/CAP%20TIPS%201%20Media%20List.pdf>.

Ensuring That What Interests *You*, Also Interests the *Media!*

The media are always looking for a unique aspect of events they are asked to cover. Here are some helpful tips to create a special "angle" for your NCVRW events:

- Remember that most media are *visually-oriented*. It helps to plan ahead for compelling broadcast footage or photographs from your events. You can also use the artwork from the NCVRW Resource Guide to create visual templates that can be provided in advance to print, television and web-based media.
- The "power of the personal story" in our field is always important for media coverage. This year's theme – "Justice for Victims. Justice for All" – lends itself to powerful human impact stories about how crime affects ordinary people that the media's audiences can relate to. Plan ahead for victim speakers, or making crime victims and survivors available for media interviews, either prior to, on-site or following your NCVRW events.
- Consider the myriad options for media outreach, and not just those that require reporters to "show up" at events. These include:
 - Letters-to-the-editor (most newspapers have guidelines for how to submit letters that are posted on their websites).
 - Opinion/editorial columns (also used as radio and television "actualities") that express one's views about victim-related initiatives and issues, and/or publicize NCVRW events (again, most media feature guidelines for submission on their websites).

- Press releases (please visit <http://cap.navaa.org/subs/CAP%20TIPS%207%20Writing%20an%20Effective%20Press%20Release.pdf> for an archival CAP TIP on “Writing an Effective Press Release”).
- Public service announcements (please visit <http://cap.navaa.org/subs/CAP%20TIPS%206%20Creating%20Public%20Service%20Announcements.pdf> for an archival CAP TIP on “Creating Public Service Announcements”).

Guidelines for these “tried and true” media outreach strategies are included in the 2008 NCVRW Resource Guide.

Finally, when in doubt, pick up the phone and call a media professional (either a journalist, public relations professional, or other potential advisor). Describe your events, the message(s) you’d like to impact, and the activities you have planned. Ask for brief input and advice about how to make your NCVRW activities memorable *and* newsworthy.

Seeking Pro Bono Support for Public Awareness Activities

The range of strong media relations experience among victim advocates varies significantly. It’s helpful to consider sources within the community that can provide pro bono support for NCVRW activities and public relations throughout the year:

- Crime victims/survivors served by an organization who have media relations expertise and want to volunteer.
- Public relations and advertising firms (especially newer and small firms that are looking to make a name for themselves).
- Colleges and universities—including students from communications, journalism, public relations, and graphic arts programs—that can provide volunteers for specific projects or interns for entire semesters.
- Commercial art schools whose students can contribute to creative graphic design for public awareness activities.

In identifying pro bono sources, it is important to remember that public recognition of their contributions is essential. Pro bono contributors can be thanked through letters-to-the-editor, public recognition during NCVRW, and awards that honor volunteer support of an organization (using the “sample certificate of appreciation” included in OVC’s 2008 NCVRW Resource Guide).

Ten Practical Tips on Approaching the Media

Detroit Free Press columnist Desiree Cooper offers these suggestions for how to approach the media:¹

1. Know the difference between a news story, a column, and an ad.
2. Don’t call reporters on their deadlines. After 3 p.m. is the worst time for most reporters who work on morning papers or for evening news broadcasts.
3. Start with a reporter and work your way up, unless you already have a good relationship with an editor.

4. Speak in sound bites, not speeches.
5. Use e-mail and voicemail—don't insist on personal interactions at first.
6. Humor is your friend.
7. Be prepared to follow up conversations with more information: fact sheets, names and phone numbers, Web sites, and faxes.
8. If you are rejected because your pitch is not in the reporter's beat, ask if there is someone else at the media establishment who may be interested.
9. Make as many calls as you can yourself. Public relations professionals rarely have the same depth of knowledge or interest in the topic as an advocate.
10. Be upbeat and enthusiastic. If you're not interested, why should anyone else be interested?

For More Information

Please contact National Crime Victims' Rights Week Community Awareness Project Consultant Anne Seymour via email at annesey@atlantech.net; or by telephone at 202.547.1732.

ⁱ Desiree Cooper, "10 Practical Tips on Approaching the News Media," *Detroit Free Press*, 2001.