

# Working With The Media

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## CHAPTER SIX

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The entire Domestic Violence Awareness Month Packet can be downloaded from the VAWnet web site at: <http://dvam.vawnet.org>.

# Working with the Media

## Why Do Media

“Many of us come to this work with an inherent distrust of the media. We’ve seen too many stories sensationalized, and too many victims and families revictimized in different circumstances. The media, however, is a very powerful tool. Reporters and editors are people just like you. You may find that once you make them aware of what the issues are, and what the shortcomings are in media coverage and publicity, that they are more than happy to correct their mistakes to ensure accurate and helpful coverage. Don’t shut yourself or your organization away from the possibilities of developing powerful allies in the press. They can build public awareness to the level that money can’t possibly buy.”

– D.B. Shawver, Public Awareness & Education Specialist, West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence

**T**he American public gets most of its news and information about the world from the media – newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the Internet. A report commissioned last year by the Newspaper Association of America found that 55 percent of Americans regularly get their news from television local newscasts, 46 percent get their news from a daily newspaper, 37 percent from national newscasts and 43 percent from radio newscasts. (The Newspaper Association of America. (2000). *Leveraging newspaper assets: A study of changing American media usage habits.*)

News media help shape public opinion and can focus public attention or increase public awareness on certain issues. If we are going to successfully educate the public about domestic violence, encourage them to take action to prevent or reduce domestic violence, or ask them to support our efforts, we must work with the media.

There are many ways to use the media to disseminate messages about domestic violence to the American public. They include: television and radio news programs and talk shows; newspaper and magazine articles, feature stories, editorials, columns, letters-to-the-editor and guest editorials; stories in community and ethnic or specialty newspapers; and public service announcements (PSAs).

Over the past few years, the Internet also has become a useful tool for disseminating messages on domestic violence. The Newspaper Association of America poll found that 18 percent of Americans regularly get their news from the Internet and 23 percent of Americans aged 18 to 24 get their news from the Internet.

This chapter contains tips and information on how to use the media to educate the public on domestic violence and promote your organization’s Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) activities. The chapter also includes fill-in-the-blank media materials for you to adapt to your needs, as well as sample media materials to provide you with successful, practical examples.

# Media Terminology

- **Backgrounders** – In-depth explanations of an issue that can be used to bring a reporter, who is completely new to an issue, up to speed.
- **Calendar Announcement** – A short, one-page notification of an event that is of interest to the public. A calendar announcement is intended to air or to be published.
- **Edit Memo** – A short memorandum addressed to an editorial page editor or member of an editorial board asking her or him to devote space to an issue. A good edit memo contains several well-written paragraphs that can be lifted and used in an editorial. You can use an edit memo to direct editorial writers to the issues. You may want to send an edit memo at the beginning of October to alert editorial page editors or editorial board members to DVAM and urge them to editorialize in favor of all people making it their business to help stop domestic violence. It's a good idea to make suggestions for actions people can take.
- **Fact Sheet** – A one-page information sheet that contains statistics or other data.
- **Letter-to-the-Editor** – A letter from a newspaper reader that responds to reports or editorials with a confirming or opposing point of view, often expanding on a point made in the original article. Letters-to-the-editor should be brief – no more than a page, four or five very short paragraphs – signed by the program director, another representative or a survivor.
- **Media Advisory or Media Alert** – A one-page dated announcement of an upcoming event such as a press opportunity or photo opportunity. It includes a contact name and telephone number that reporters can call for more information and is sent to assignment editors, reporters, editors and producers.
- **News Conference** – An event staged exclusively for the press. One or more spokespeople (but not more than four) read prepared statements and answer reporters' questions. You should call a news conference only if you have something newsworthy, timely and extremely important to announce. Announcing that October is DVAM will not be enough to draw reporters to a news conference. A proclamation by the mayor, in conjunction with DVAM may be a good draw if the mayor speaks at the news conference.
- **News Release** – A two to four page report of a newsworthy event. It is written as an article; portions of good news releases often appear in print. A news release must contain a contact to call for further information, a headline, a first or lead sentence that grabs the reader, a quote from a spokesperson and additional background information. You should put out a news release in conjunction with the events or activities you hold for DVAM. The news release is distributed at the time of the event, either by mailing, faxing, emailing or handing it out.
- **Op/Ed Piece** – A 500 to 700 word signed guest editorial that is submitted to newspapers. It should emphasize the writer's opinion or experience and be of interest to the general public. An op/ed on DVAM could talk about the pervasiveness of domestic violence and the importance of every person taking it upon herself or himself to take action to help prevent abuse.

- **Pitch Letter** – A personalized note that specifically urges a particular reporter to cover an event or an issue. Pitch letters often describe a particularly newsworthy aspect of the event.
- **Photo Opportunity** – A press opportunity that has a particularly good visual component, worthy of space in a newspaper or magazine.
- **Public Service Announcement (PSA, Public Service Spot)** – A brief announcement made on behalf of a nonprofit organization on both radio and television. Like commercials, PSAs are limited to specific lengths. They must be non-political and of wide interest and benefit to the public. October may be a prime month for media outlets to accept and run PSAs.
- **Pre-Interview** – A telephone conversation with a producer at a talk show. These are used to be certain that the guest is intelligent, articulate, well-versed in the issues, quick on her or his feet and interesting to hear. A pre-interview requires the same serious preparation as the interview itself.
- **Press Briefing** – An informal, by-invitation-only meeting at which advocates present reports, backgrounds and information. Press briefings often take place over breakfast and usually involve one to three briefers and up to twelve reporters. Ordinarily, you would hold a briefing to bring reporters up to speed on facts relating to an incident or a report that might be important to the program and the community. Fact sheets and other background materials should be distributed. DVAM might be a good opportunity to educate key reporters in your area about the pervasiveness of domestic violence in your city and nationwide.
- **Press Kits** – Sets of information for the media, usually in a pocket folder, distributed at news conferences, press briefings or in response to requests for information. Press kits contain news releases, statements, backgrounders, fact sheets and materials that are not designed specifically for the media (like newsletters or brochures). As you work to publicize your DVAM events and activities with the media, you will want to have press kits about your program to give to reporters.
- **Press Opportunity** – An event that is not planned for the media, but which reporters may attend. Rallies, marches, candlelight vigils, fund-raisers, public speeches or appearances, awards ceremonies and issue forums are press opportunities.
- **Statements** – Brief (one page or less) prepared remarks of a spokesperson. Statements should be dated and include a contact name and phone number. If you hold a news conference, a rally or any other public event, you will want statements for all the speakers to distribute to the press. Statements can also be used to respond quickly to a breaking story (such as a highly publicized incident of abuse). They must be prepared quickly and be less than one page. Dictate, deliver or fax a statement within an hour or two of an event. Statements **MUST BE** quotable. Good reporters often follow up a statement with a question, but having a statement helps the reporter insert commentary into the story immediately.

# How To Prepare A Media List

If you don't already have a list of area media to whom you distribute press materials, creating a list will make your distribution process much easier. Maintaining an up-to-date media list also will help you develop relationships with journalists who report on domestic violence.

## Building Your List

You can build a media list by supplementing the list of reporters, producers and editors you already know with a day or two of telephone calls to ensure that your list is comprehensive. Your media list should include:

### ***Broadcast (television, cable television, radio)***

- Talk or public affairs show producers, bookers (the people who book guests on the program) and hosts
- Television news assignment editors, reporters and producers
- Radio news directors, assignment editors, reporters and public service directors

### ***Print (newspapers, magazines and wire services)***

- Wire service bureau chiefs, assignment editors and reporters
- Newspaper editorial page editors, op/ed page editors (at the largest papers only), national editors, city or metro editors, health editors and reporters, columnists who write on women's issues, calendar column editors and any reporter who has written about domestic violence in the past
- Local magazine editors and reporters
- Managing editors at community, ethnic, foreign language, alternative, gay, lesbian or seniors' newspapers

### ***Internet (web sites and electronic newsletters)***

- Web site content editors or web masters and reporters
- Newsletter editors, reporters and publishers

## Updating Your List

Reporters, editors and producers change jobs and beats frequently. You should update your media list at least twice a year. You can do this by setting aside a day or two to place phone calls to the media outlets on your list and asking if the journalists on your list are still there and are still covering the same beat.

In addition to phone calls, you can update the Internet media on your list by spending time "surfing" the World Wide Web. Take some time exploring web sites that have content on domestic violence, health or women's issues – sites that would be interested in your program. Often, the contact information you need to update your list is included on the web site or you can send an email to the site requesting the information.

You also should update your list when you learn of information from members of the media while talking to them on the phone or when responding to inquiries from journalists who are not already on your media list. It is better to have a media list that is long than one that does not include key people.

## Media Outreach Forms

As you add names to your media list, you will need a form on which to write all the information about reporters, editors, producers, etc., as you receive calls and research new media outlets. At the end of this section, there is a sample media outreach form that can be adapted to meet your needs.

## Formatting Your List

Media lists are best maintained in a computer database or on large index cards that contain: the name, media outlet, address, phone number, fax number, email address, title and beat of each person. You should also have a space in which you note the last date on which the entry was updated and notes about previous contacts or conversations.

## Sample Media List Card

<i>Media List Card</i>
<b>Name:</b>
<b>Outlet:</b>
<b>Address:</b>
<b>Phone:</b>
<b>Fax:</b>
<b>Email:</b>
<b>Title:</b>
<b>Beats:</b>
<b>Notes:</b>

# Sample Media Contact Form

## Media Contact Form

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Job Title:** *(Circle one)*

- |           |                   |                       |               |
|-----------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| anchor    | articles editor   | assignment editor     | bureau chief  |
| columnist | daybook editor    | editorial page editor | news director |
| editor    | op/ed page editor | producer              | reporter      |
| publisher | web master        | other: _____          |               |

**Media Type:** *(Circle one)*

- |              |              |                 |            |
|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| chain        | magazine     | newspaper       | newsletter |
| web          | daybook      | radio news      | wire       |
| tv news      | tv talk show | radio talk show |            |
| other: _____ |              |                 |            |

**Beats:** *(Circle all that apply)*

- |       |        |                   |     |
|-------|--------|-------------------|-----|
| women | health | domestic violence | law |
| metro | crime  | other: _____      |     |

**Specialty:** *(Circle all that apply)*

- |                         |                     |                 |            |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Latino                  | national            | Native American | syndicated |
| African American        | community newspaper | gay/lesbian     | Asian      |
| alternative publication |                     | other: _____    |            |

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# How To Respond To Media Stories

Statements and letters-to-the-editor are the most common and effective ways to respond to media stories that are breaking or have already been in the news.

## Statements

Statements are brief prepared remarks that quote a spokesperson. Good reporters often follow up a statement with questions, but having a statement helps the reporter insert commentary into the story immediately.

Statements should be two to three paragraphs long and no more than one page, double-spaced. Because its purpose is to be included in a news story, a statement must be powerful, succinct and quotable. It should reflect and make a persuasive case for the position or policies of your program. Any statement you issue will probably be in the name of your program director or executive director. A statement should be dated and include a media contact name and phone number.

If you hold a news conference, a rally or any other public event, you will want statements for all the speakers to distribute to the press. Statements also can be used to respond quickly to a breaking story (such as a comment by an official on domestic violence, passage of a piece of legislation or a highly publicized incident of abuse). They must be prepared quickly. Dictate, deliver or fax the statement within an hour or two of an event. A statement faxed the next day, when stories already have been filed, is useless.

## Letters-To-The-Editor

Letters-to-the-editor respond to reports or editorials in newspapers or magazines with a confirming or opposing point of view, often expanding on a point made in the original article. Letters-to-the-editor is one of the most widely read sections of the newspaper and is relatively easy to get into. You should monitor all area print media for stories on domestic violence, including alternative, ethnic and community newspapers and magazines, and respond with a letter-to-the-editor whenever appropriate.

A letter-to-the-editor should be no longer than one page, four or five short paragraphs. If it is much longer, it may get edited when it is used. The letter should be signed by someone who has credibility on the issue it addresses, probably your program's director, another program representative or a woman aided by your services.

The letter should be addressed to "Letters-to-the-Editor" at the address of the newspaper or magazine. It is a good idea to both mail and fax the letter and then follow-up with a telephone call to be sure it was received.

# Talk Radio

Talk radio and radio call-in shows are extremely popular and can be a good way to get your message out and educate the public about domestic violence.

Before agreeing to go on a talk show, you should find out:

- What is the format of the show?
- What kinds of guests does the show usually use: people offering community services or people discussing issues?
- When does it air?
- Is it live or taped?
- Is it a call-in show?
- How long are the guest or interview segments?
- What is the host's interview style? Is she or he aggressive, hostile, a good questioner?
- Is there a producer other than the host?

## Booking A Guest On Talk Radio

Try to schedule appearances on programs that air during drive time (7 am to 9 am or 4 pm to 7 pm) or other maximum exposure slots.

Before you book anyone on a show, find out what kind of show it is. If the show is in your area, listen to it. If not, ask the producer about the type of show it is and the style of the interviewer. Many radio stations have web sites; visit the web site to learn more about the talk show and the host. Sometimes, you can even listen to the show on the web site.

Send the producer a pitch letter proposing a topic and spokesperson. In your letter, highlight DVAM and the events or activities your program is initiating or involved in. Briefly explain your spokesperson's qualifications, provide some simple background material and include a daytime phone number. Follow up with a telephone call.

When booking someone on a talk show, be sure to ask the following questions:

- Will the regular host be there or will there be a substitute host?
- How long will your spokesperson be on the air?
- Will there be live telephone calls with questions?
- Will there be other guests? Who will they be?
- At what time should the guest be at the studio?

## Getting Your Message Out

Write up two or three key messages you want to use and practice saying them succinctly and crisply. Avoid acronyms, technical terminology or movement jargon.

Prepare answers to the most difficult questions that may come in. You may want to write down the answers and rehearse them aloud.

Ask people you know to call in with preplanned questions and comments. If the show is extremely popular, ask them to call before it goes on the air so that they get through before the switchboard gets tied up. People use this tactic all the time; it is not cheating!

# How To Generate Coverage Or Draw Media Attention To A Story

To get media coverage on a story or an issue, you must “pitch” the idea to the media. This section outlines ways to present information to the media.

## Proclamations

It is sometimes possible to encourage your Mayor to proclaim October DVAM and encourage residents to take action against domestic violence. Although generating a proclamation usually requires several months lead time, if you have a good relationship with the Mayor’s office, you may be able to do it in a matter of weeks.

Write a letter to the Mayor’s Chief of Staff requesting a meeting to discuss the possibility that the Mayor will officially proclaim October DVAM. In your letter, discuss the prevalence of domestic violence in your community and offer local statistics. Indicate that you will follow up in a few days with a telephone call.

If you are able to get a meeting with the Mayor or the Chief of Staff, bring a sample proclamation, using language you would like the Mayor to use in issuing a proclamation in your city. If you are going to hold a news conference around the proclamation, you will need to coordinate the date, time and place with the Mayor’s press secretary.

Work with the press secretary to select a suitable date, time and place for a news conference, if you are going to hold one to announce the proclamation. You will want to work with the press secretary to coordinate media work, including drafting an advisory and contacting area journalists. Information on press lists and drafting advisories is included in this chapter. If you hold a news conference, you also will need media statements by the Mayor and your program director, as well as copies of the proclamation to distribute to the media.

A “paper release,” through which you distribute a news release about the Mayor’s proclamation (and a copy of the proclamation) is a much less labor intensive route. On the day the Mayor proclaims that October is DVAM, you can fax your news release and a copy of the proclamation to the press. If you do not have a fax machine, the materials should be sent to reporters in the mail and you should mail them two days beforehand. You also will need to coordinate a “paper release” with the Mayor’s press office, as they may have their own plans for publicizing the proclamation.

## Op/Eds

Op/Eds are brief opinion pieces focusing on a particular issue from a particular point of view. They run opposite the editorial pages of newspapers. (Op/Ed stand for Opposite Editorial page.)

An op/ed should be no longer than 500 to 700 words and signed by the author. In it you should emphasize the signator’s experience and opinion. Approach your topic so that it will be of interest to the general public or the newspaper’s readership, if you are submitting an op/ed to a community, alternative or ethnic newspaper. For instance, an op/ed on DVAM could focus on the pervasiveness of domestic violence and how important it is for everyone in the community to take action to help end abuse.

You can submit an op/ed to more than one newspaper, but once you know that a paper is going to use it, you must contact the others to withdraw the op/ed from them. Op/Ed page editors can get very angry if an op/ed they are considering runs in another newspaper in the community.

Send the op/ed with a brief one to two paragraph cover letter to the op/ed page editor (you can call the newspaper to get the editor's name and phone and fax numbers). Frequently, the op/ed page editor and the editorial page editor are the same person. As with a letter-to-the-editor, send the op/ed via both mail and fax to the editor. In both the op/ed and its cover letter, include the name, title, organization and telephone number of the author. In the letter, explain the author's expertise on the topic which the op/ed addresses.

A few days after you submit the op/ed, follow up with a telephone call to make sure it was received. If it was not, you can resend it.

## **Editorial Memoranda (Edit Memos)**

An edit memo is a memorandum addressed to newspaper or magazine editorial page editors or writers encouraging them to editorialize on an issue from a particular perspective. An edit memo also can request a meeting with editorial page staff members.

An edit memo should be no more than two to four paragraphs long. Include some paragraphs that can be lifted and used in an editorial. It is all right to make an emotional plea in an edit memo – the more compelling your argument, the more likely you are to convince the editor and, subsequently, the readers. Use short sentences and avoid jargon.

You may want to send an edit memo at the beginning of October, alerting editors and editorial board members to DVAM and urging them to editorialize to encourage every reader to make it her or his business to help stop battering. You may want to make suggestions for actions people can take.

Near the beginning of the edit memo, specify that you are requesting that the newspaper publish an editorial and explain your expertise in the area of domestic violence. If you are requesting a meeting, spell that out and suggest a time period within which you would be available. At the end, give your full name and title, as well as telephone number.

Timing is very important. If possible, you should send an edit memo two weeks prior to the date on which you would like the editorial to appear. Weekly newspapers need more lead time than that. A few days after you have sent the edit memo, follow up with a telephone call to be sure it was received. If not, resend it.

## **Columnists**

Newspaper columnists are often widely read and they are interested in writing about timely issues of importance to the community. Many respond well to letters or telephone calls suggesting topics. Before you pitch a columnist on an idea, read his or her column a few times so that you get an idea of the kinds of issues she or he tackles.

Address your pitch letter to the columnist directly. Explain why your topic is timely (October is DVAM) and why readers should know more about it (domestic violence affects x out of every x women in your community). Indicate that you are writing to ask the columnist to address domestic violence in her or his column.

With your pitch letter, you may also want to include information on your program and your DVAM activities. Keep in mind that the columnist may want to focus on a personal story, and want to interview a survivor, so you may need to identify and prepare someone.

Mention that you will follow up by telephone in a few days. Also, be sure to include your name, title, organization and telephone number at the end of your letter.

After you have sent your pitch letter, follow up with a telephone call to ensure that the columnist has received your letter, to determine the level of interest and to see if you can offer any additional information.

## **Calendar Announcements**

The event listings, which appear in most daily and many weekly and community newspapers, are a great way to publicize events you are holding in conjunction with DVAM.

Contact the calendar editor at your local newspapers (check local community, ethnic and alternative newspapers to see if they also have events calendars) and find out what kinds of events they include, when the calendar runs and how far in advance you need to submit an announcement.

Send or fax the calendar editor a one paragraph calendar announcement of your event or activity. Briefly describe the event in one or two sentences and include the sponsors. List the date, time and place for the event or activity. Mention whether or not there is a charge to the public and how much is being charged. Include the name and telephone number of the person whom the public should contact about attending the event or participating in the activity.

If you are in a rural community, be sure that you maintain contact with the editors of weekly and/or monthly community newspapers or newsletters. As you plan your activities for DVAM, be sure to alert them with advance telephone calls, as well as media advisories and news releases. Newspapers and newsletters that come out weekly or monthly require more lead time than dailies, so ask the editor about how much time she or he will need to ensure that your event is mentioned in the calendar or in an article. You will want your event or activity to be included in the community calendar, and you might consider submitting an article about the event afterwards, accompanied by a black and white photograph of the event or activity. Ask the editors of community papers and newsletters if they would be willing to let you place advertising for your DVAM event at a reduced rate or if they will donate space for an ad.

Local radio and cable access television stations also often have community calendar listings. Ask the public information or community affairs director at the stations about their community calendars. In most cases, you should be able to get information about your event or activity included in the calendar, if you submit the information to the station before the deadline.

In addition to using media calendars, you can get the word out about an event or activity by posting the information on a community bulletin board. Ask area churches, synagogues, mosques, YWCAs or YMCAs, grocery stores and community centers about access to their bulletin boards. In rural areas, community bulletin boards are usually more accessible and efficient public outreach tools than media calendars.

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# How To Place A Public Service Announcement

Television and radio stations, newspapers and magazines can run Public Service Announcements (PSAs) if time and space allow. The following tips will help you place PSAs.

## Submitting PSAs To Television Or Radio Stations

Using your media list or the phone book, compile a list of all the radio and tv outlets in your area (include cable tv stations in addition to regular broadcast tv) and call each to find out if they run PSAs. If they do, get the name of the community affairs director.

Write a letter to the community affairs director in which you ask her or him to run your own PSAs or the Advertising Council's *There's No Excuse for Domestic Violence* PSA. (Launched in 1994, *There's No Excuse for Domestic Violence* was the first national public education campaign against domestic violence. The Advertising Council developed the *There's No Excuse for Domestic Violence* PSAs in conjunction with the Family Violence Prevention Fund.) Be sure to mention the length of the spot. You might want to include some local statistics on domestic violence to better make the case that they should run the PSA. Include a copy of the script (radio) or story board (tv) with your letter. Include in the letter your name, title, affiliation and a telephone number.

Follow up your letter with a telephone call to the community affairs director. Ask if she or he received your letter and if the station is willing to consider airing the spot. If the letter was not received, explain why you are calling and offer to resend the material.

## Submitting PSAs To Newspapers Or Local Magazines

Compile a list of all the newspapers, including weekly, community, alternative and ethnic newspapers, newsletters and local magazines. Call the display advertising department or the advertising department (if there is no display advertising department) at each outlet to find out if they accept PSAs. In some cases, you may get referred to someone else at the outlet. Keep trying until you find the right person to talk to.

Send the appropriate person at each outlet a letter in which you ask her or him to run the PSA. Enclose a camera-ready copy of the PSA with your letter. Use a large enough envelope so that the PSA does not get bent or folded. In your letter, include local statistics on domestic violence, along with your name, title, affiliation and telephone number. Also mention that you have enclosed a copy of the camera-ready PSA.

Follow up your letter with a phone call. Ask if your letter has been received and if the outlet is willing to run the spot. If the letter was not received, explain why you are calling and offer to resend the material.