Guide to *engaging* THE media IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

SPAN USA
SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA

SPRC
SUICIDE PREVENTION
RESOURCE CENTER

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Guide to engaging THE media IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

Introduction

The Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA) in collaboration with the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) is pleased to provide advocates throughout the United States with this *Guide to Engaging the Media in Suicide Prevention*.

SPRC was created in 2002 and, its mission is to support suicide prevention with the best of science, skills and practice. The Center provides prevention support, training, and informational materials to strengthen suicide prevention networks and advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP).

Speaking out to the media on suicide prevention is an important step in making the NSSP's vision a reality.

Funded through a cooperative agreement between the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), SPRC works in collaboration with partner organizations to implement training and other support programs relevant to suicide prevention.

SPAN USA, a national nonprofit organization with the largest grassroots advocacy network of suicide survivors in the United States, counts raising awareness of mental health disorders, eliminating the stigma attached to them, and advancing public policies that prevent suicide among its top priorities. SPAN USA played a key role in calling for the development of a national strategy for suicide prevention and, since the strategy's release in 2001, has partnered with SPRC and others to help advance the goals and objectives of the national strategy.

This *Guide to Engaging the Media in Suicide Prevention* will play an important role in helping to achieve our nation's suicide prevention goals by teaching suicide prevention advocates how to serve as effective media spokespeople and to generate media coverage to create awareness of this important issue.

- If suicide prevention advocates help educate the media about suicide prevention, you can raise awareness about both the problem and the solutions.
- With more people reading and talking publicly about suicide and mental illness, you can eliminate the stigma that keeps so many people from seeking the treatment they need.
- In the long term, increased awareness and understanding of the value of treatment will build support for mental health parity.

During the past three years, SPRC has hosted numerous conferences on suicide prevention and worked closely with advocates in regions across the United States to further the goals of the NSSP. The value of reaching out beyond the mental health community to educate more people about suicide prevention is well understood by suicide prevention advocates. Speaking out to the media on suicide prevention is an important step in making the NSSP's vision a reality.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION (NSSP)*

- Promote awareness that suicide is a public health problem that is preventable.
- Develop broad-based support for suicide prevention.
- Develop and implement strategies to reduce the stigma associated with being a consumer of mental health, substance abuse, and suicide prevention services.
- Develop and implement suicide prevention programs.
- Promote efforts to reduce access to lethal means and methods of self-harm.
- Implement training for recognition of at-risk behavior and delivery of effective treatment.
- Develop and promote effective clinical and professional practices.
- Improve access to and community linkages with mental health and substance abuse services.
- Improve reporting and portrayals of suicidal behavior, mental illness, and substance abuse in the entertainment and news media.
- Promote and support research on suicide and suicide prevention.
- Improve and expand surveillance systems.

* U.S. Public Health Service. *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action*. Washington, D.C.: Department of Health and Human Services. 2001

About this Guide

Our goal in delivering this guide is to provide suicide prevention advocates – both individuals and organizations – with the tools to generate media coverage and the skills to act as effective spokespeople.

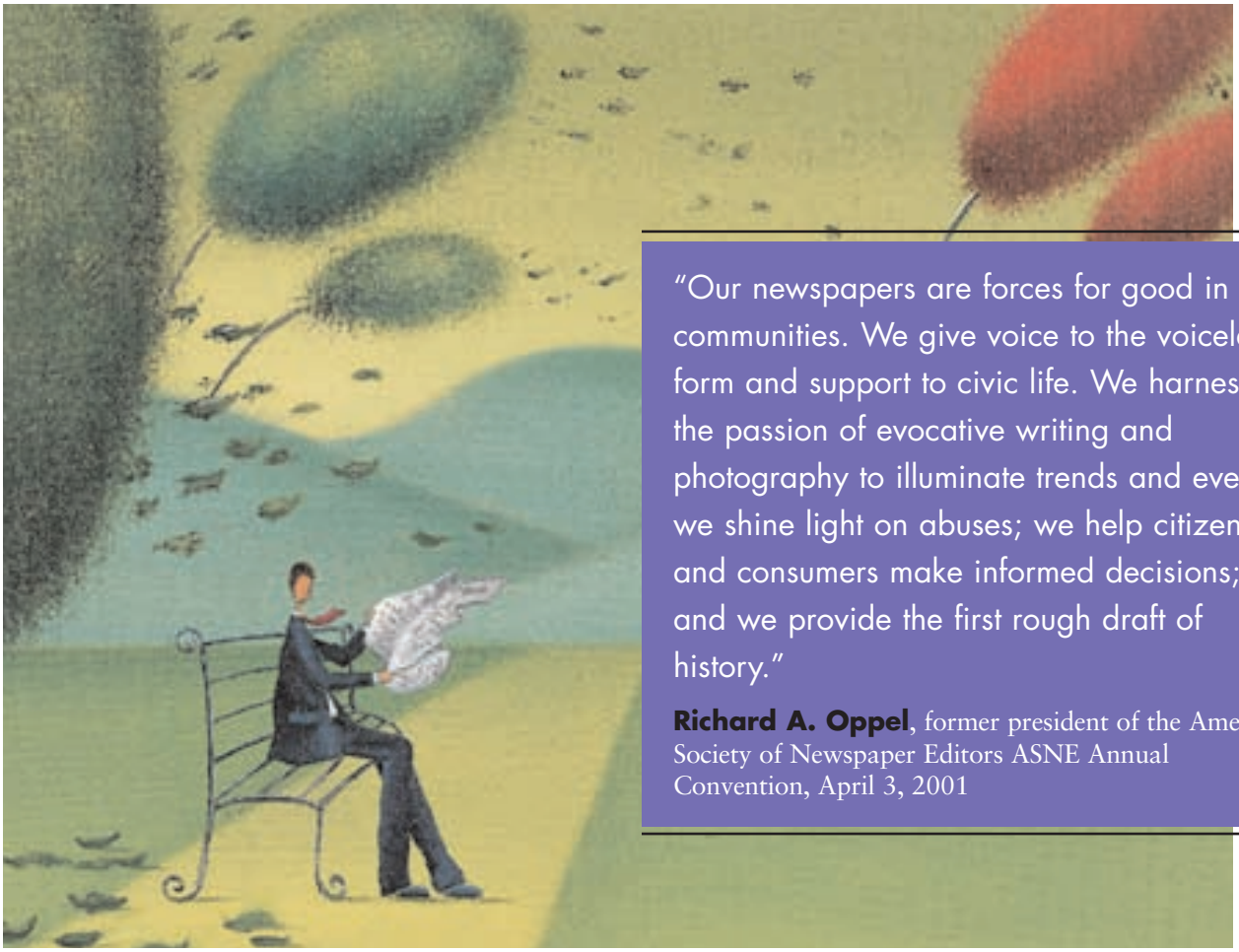
You all read newspapers, watch the evening news, listen to news on the radio, or receive periodic news updates over the Internet. The media informs the public, educates them, and, at times, may even inspire them to take action or behave in certain ways. There is no doubt the media is a powerful venue. It can propel individuals and organizations to new heights; conversely, it can destroy an organization or individual's reputation and image.

As suicide prevention advocates, you must work with the media to generate momentum for suicide prevention policies. This guide will help you understand the needs of the news media so that you can develop and implement an effective media outreach program.

Media outreach is a critical component of most advocacy campaigns. To be effective, media outreach must complement your advocacy agenda and enable you to reach individuals, including federal and state policy-makers, who make or can influence decisions.

Before you can develop an effective media outreach program, you must understand the needs of the media and what the media considers news. Although it's not the reporter's job to sell newspapers, he or she must convince the editor that your story should be printed in their newspaper because it covers an issue that their readers care deeply about.

If suicide prevention advocates are successful in educating their local media, then on a national level, they can eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illness, encourage those in need to seek help, and ultimately reduce the number of lives lost to suicide. Let's make it our goal to ensure that Americans understand that suicide is a preventable public health problem.



"Our newspapers are forces for good in our communities. We give voice to the voiceless, form and support to civic life. We harness the passion of evocative writing and photography to illuminate trends and events; we shine light on abuses; we help citizens and consumers make informed decisions; and we provide the first rough draft of history."

Richard A. Oppel, former president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors ASNE Annual Convention, April 3, 2001

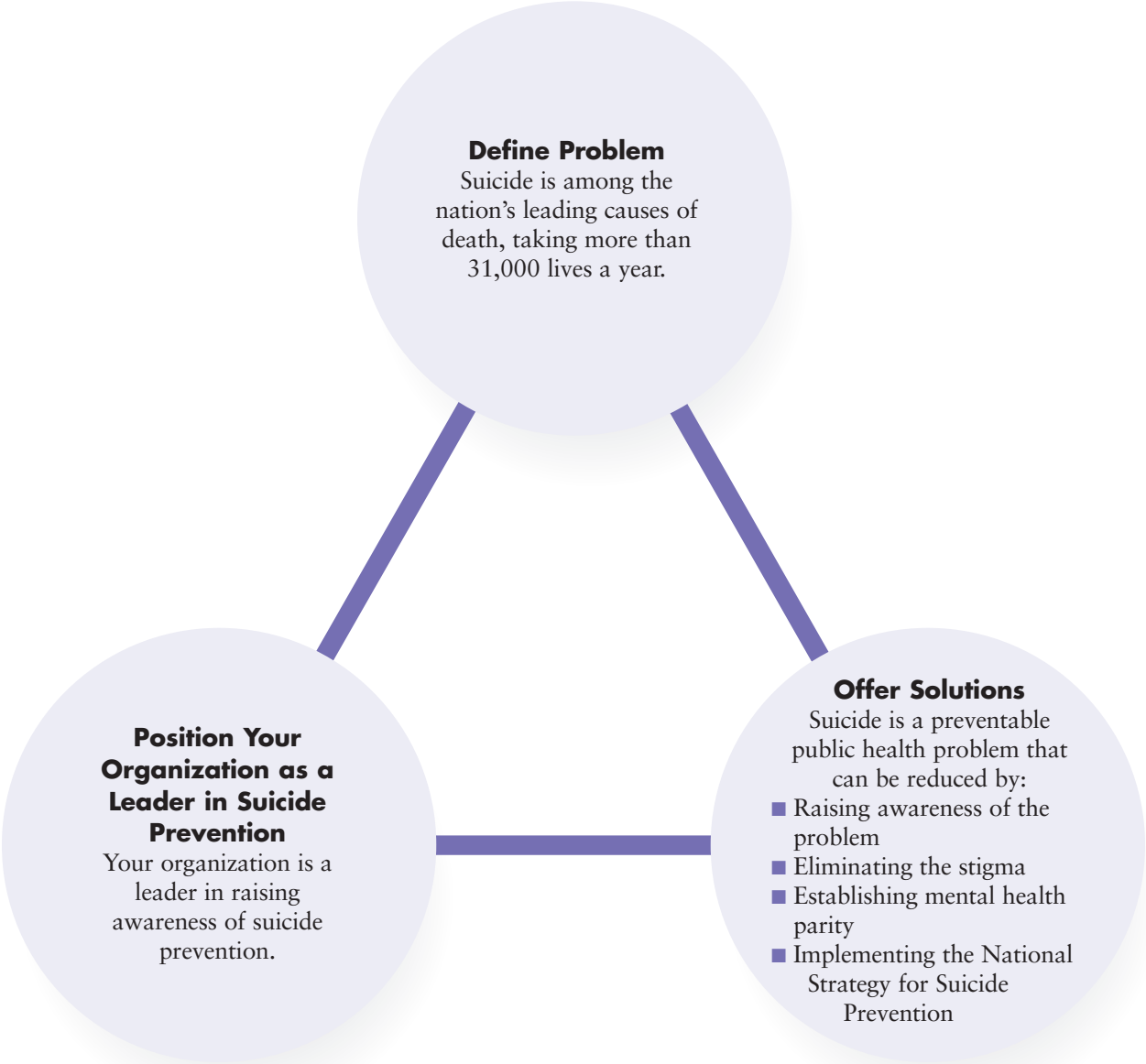
Creating Suicide Prevention Messages

Because suicide is an emotional issue, you face unique challenges in communicating about suicide prevention. You must give careful thought and attention to your messages. Otherwise, you may find the media focusing on the emotional aspects of suicide, including human-interest stories about individual deaths by suicide. Unfortunately, this type of media coverage will perpetuate the stigma surrounding suicide. If you want to change the way that people talk about suicide, you need to change your message and delivery.

USING THE MESSAGE TRIANGLE

Your organization should identify three core messages and diagram them as a "message triangle." The message triangle is a visual that can serve as a mental "safe harbor" when confronted by controversy or confusion during an interview by allowing the spokesperson to easily return to any one of three core messages. Like the equilateral triangle, all points are equally important. However, depending on the audience, you may want to customize the message by focusing on areas of specific concern, such as suicide and the elderly, or youth suicide prevention. For example, if you are being interviewed for a story in the *AARP Magazine*, you would focus on suicide and the elderly.

Outlined below is an example of a message triangle for a suicide prevention organization.



TIPS FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

- Messages should be clear and concise.

  "Many suicides are associated with mental illness or substance abuse."

- Memorable messages create an image.

  "Over time, we can make a difference. We must. We don't want any of our family, our friends to experience the pain that is associated with the tragedy of a person taking their life."
  — *Sharon Smith*

- Use anecdotes, metaphors, similes, word pictures.

  "Every 17 minutes means that in the last hour, four more people in this nation died by suicide."

Catching the Media's Attention With Your News

There are many types of news. It's important to know which category yours falls into, because the type of news will determine which editor or reporter to pitch your story to and whether your story should be published as print or broadcast media.

Types of news are:

- **Hard news:** New information that is just becoming public, a story that no one else has reported on, or a new angle to an ongoing story.

- **Soft news:** Typically involve a personal point of view on a story such as a profile, human-interest, or feature story.

- **Editorials:** Convey the opinions of editorial writers on a particular subject.

- **Events:** Can be hard or soft news depending on the type of event and participants.

- **Calendar announcements:** Notify the public of upcoming events or appearances. Newspapers, especially local papers, have calendar sections that detail upcoming events.

WAYS TO SELL YOUR STORY

What you may think of as news may not be considered newsworthy by a reporter. You can help make your story newsworthy by offering the reporter the building blocks of a news story.

Some building blocks of a news story are:

- **Basic appeal:** Make sure the story is of specific interest to the media outlet's target audience, with the potential to increase readership or viewership.
  Example: Pitch a story about a support group for mothers to a women's magazine.

- **The right timing:** Your story should be directly related to a current event.
  Example: "Today the local affiliate of SPAN USA applauded Congress' passage of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act."

- **A local angle:** Your story should feature local statistics or spokespeople.
  Example: "Rates of suicide are highest in the mountain states."

- **A human-interest element:** Your story must be relevant to people's daily lives and appeal to readers' emotions.
  Example: "A local mother who lost her son to suicide is traveling to Washington, D.C. to raise awareness of strategies that could prevent other parents from suffering the same type of loss."

- **Access to information and people:** Provide the media with access to data and statistics that will support the story and access to knowledgeable experts who can be quoted in the story. SPRC's state data sheets (**http://www.sprc.org/stateinformation/datasheets.asp**) and AFSP's "Talk to the Experts" page (**http://www.afsp.org/education/recommendations/6/index.html**) are good resources.

> It's important to know which news category your story falls into, because the type of news will determine which editor or reporter to pitch your story to.

HOW TO MAKE A GOOD STORY GREAT

- **Change, innovation, or discovery:** Passage of first-ever youth suicide prevention bill.
- **A significant trend:** High incidence of youth suicide.
- **Data and statistics:** More teenagers die by suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease combined.
- **Useful information:** Provide registration information for a local conference on youth suicide prevention.
- **Conflict:** Congress should provide full funding for the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act.
- **Drama:** Older Americans account for 17.5 percent of all suicides.

How to Work With the Media

Generating media coverage for suicide prevention requires a long-term commitment.

Generating media coverage for suicide prevention requires a long-term commitment. Often a single day's news story results from months of outreach and a series of information exchanges.

In order for any partnership to be successful, there must be ongoing give and take between the reporter and the story advocate.

A mutually rewarding experience for the media and the advocate involves goal-fulfillment for each.

What you want:
To reach the public
What the media provides:
Access to the public

What the media wants:
To capture the public's attention
What you provide:
Compelling stories that spark interest

Send the right message to the right people at the right time.

The key to successful media relations is developing a rapport with the media by first understanding precisely what they want in a story, and then presenting the relevant information to them clearly and concisely.

- **Identify the right people:** Make sure you speak to the right reporter or editor. Just because someone is listed as a "health reporter" does not mean he or she has an interest in suicide prevention; he or she may actually report on physical fitness. Research the reporters who are writing the types of stories you want to generate, and keep a list of these people.
- **Build rapport:** Keep reporters apprised of new information or items of interest regarding your organization, even if it won't necessarily result in a story. If they do write about your issue, write a follow-up note to let them know what a great job they did.
- **Help reporters do their jobs:** Reporters need timely information, expert advice, data, and access to spokespeople in order to do their jobs well. You can be a valuable resource to a reporter by providing breaking news, expertise and access.

Make your organization the "go-to" resource for information on suicide prevention.

The ultimate goal is to make your organization and its spokespeople the leading resources for local reporters covering suicide prevention. You can achieve this by consistently providing reporters with new information about the issue and the organization.

Helping the Media Report on Suicide

The media can play an important role in educating the public about suicide prevention and in helping to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illnesses. Stories about suicide can inform readers and viewers about risk factors for suicide, warning signs, and advances in treatment of mental illnesses.

But news stories about individual deaths by suicide also have the potential to do harm. In fact, research has shown that inappropriate coverage can fuel suicidal thoughts and behaviors among already vulnerable individuals. To minimize this risk, reporters need to be sensitive to tone, content, and language when reporting on suicide.

TONE

Responsible media coverage uses factual, nonjudgmental tones to communicate the full story and to educate the audience about suicide risk factors, including mental illness.

Overly dramatic stories that idealize those who take their own lives by portraying suicide as a heroic or romantic act may encourage others to identify with the deceased. Stories that blame a suicide on a single negative event are also irresponsible, as suicidal behavior is complex and often the result of several risk factors, including underlying mental health problems, which may not be readily evident. In addition, prolonged or repetitive coverage of a suicide can invite imitation, particularly when a celebrity dies by suicide.

CONTENT

Responsible media coverage should mention whether someone who died by suicide had a history of depression, mental illness or substance abuse.

Exposure to detailed reports of suicide methods or pictures of the location or site can encourage vulnerable individuals to imitate it. In addition, coverage that continually focuses on a grieving community may encourage some to view suicide as a method for gaining attention or as a form of retaliation against others.

LANGUAGE

Responsible media coverage should describe suicide in ways that do not contribute to "contagion" or "copycat" suicides.

Research indicates that referring to suicide as a cause of death in a headline can contribute to suicidal behavior; the cause of death should be reported in the body of the story. Avoid the term "committed suicide," which may imply criminal or sinful behavior and instead use "died by suicide" or "completed suicide."

To read real examples of appropriate and problematic reporting on suicide, visit the following Web site to access "Reporting on Suicide: A Resource for the Media," prepared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute of Mental Health, the Office of the Surgeon General, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the American Association of Suicidology, and the Annenberg Public Policy Center, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the National Swedish Centre for Suicide Research, and the New Zealand Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy: **http://www.afsp.org/education/recommendations/index.html.**

As suicide prevention advocates, it is our duty to help the media report ethically and responsibly about suicide-related issues. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has developed the following tips to help reporters write about suicide, reprinted below and available online at the following Web site: **http://www.sprc.org/library/at_a_glance.pdf.**

SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER

At-a-Glance: Safe Reporting on Suicide

Research indicates that the way suicide is reported in the media can contribute to additional suicides and suicide attempts. Conversely, stories about suicide can inform readers and viewers about the likely causes of suicide, its warning signs, trends in suicide rates, and recent treatment advances. The following recommendations have been developed to assist reporters and editors in safe reporting on suicide.

For Reporters

What to Avoid

- *Avoid detailed descriptions of the suicide, including specifics of the method and location.*
  Reason: Detailed descriptions increase the risk of a vulnerable individual imitating the act.

- *Avoid romanticizing someone who has died by suicide. Avoid featuring tributes by friends or relatives. Avoid first-person accounts from adolescents about their suicide attempts.*
  Reason: Positive attention given to someone who has died (or attempted to die) by suicide can lead vulnerable individuals who desire such attention to take their own lives.

- *Avoid glamorizing the suicide of a celebrity.*
  Reason: Research indicates that celebrity suicides can promote copycat suicides among vulnerable people. Do not let the glamour of the celebrity obscure any mental health or substance abuse problems that may have contributed to the celebrity's death.

- *Avoid oversimplifying the causes of suicides, murder-suicides, or suicide pacts, and avoid presenting them as inexplicable or unavoidable.*
  Reason: Research shows that more than 90 percent of suicide victims have a diagnosable mental illness and/or substance use disorder. People whose suicide act appears to be triggered by a particular event often have significant underlying mental health problems that may not be readily evident, even to family and friends. Studies also have found that perpetrators of murder-suicides are often depressed, and that most suicide pacts involve one individual who is coercive and another who is extremely dependent.

- *Avoid overstating the frequency of suicide.*
  Reason: Overstating the frequency of suicide (by, for example, referring to a "suicide epidemic") may cause vulnerable individuals to think of it as an accepted or normal response to problems. Even in populations that have the highest suicide rates, suicides are rare.

- *Avoid using the words "committed suicide" or "failed" or "successful" suicide attempt.*
  Reason: The verb "committed" is usually associated with sins or crimes. Suicide is better understood in a behavioral health context than a criminal context. Consider using the phrase "died by suicide." The phrases "successful suicide" or "failed suicide attempt" imply favorable or inadequate outcomes. Consider using "death by suicide" or "non-fatal suicide attempt."

What to Do

- *Always include a referral phone number and information about local crisis intervention services.*
  Refer to: The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline toll-free number, 1-800-273-TALK (273-8255), which is available 24/7, can be used anywhere in the United States, and connects the caller to a certified crisis center near where the call is placed. More information can be found on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline website:
  http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

- *Emphasize recent treatment advances for depression and other mental illness. Include stories of people whose treatment was life-saving or who overcame despair without attempting suicide.*
  Refer to: Suicide Prevention Resource Center's research and news briefs:
  http://www.sprc.org/news/research.asp

- *Interview a mental health professional who is knowledgeable about suicide and the role of treatment or screening for mental disorders as a preventive strategy.*
  Refer to: The American Foundation for Suicide

continued ▸▸

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I. For Reporters *(continued)*

Prevention's "Talk to the Experts" page: *http://www.afsp.org/education/recommendations/6/index.html*

Reporters may also contact the Suicide Prevention Resource Center at 1-877-GET-SPRC (438-7772), the American Association of Suicidology at (202) 237-2280, or the Suicide Prevention Action Network USA at (202) 449-3600.

- *Emphasize decreasing trends in national suicide rates over the past decade.*
  Refer to: CDC's (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) WISQARS (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System): *http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars/* or talk with an expert (see previous recommendation).
- *Emphasize actions that communities can take to prevent suicides.*
  Refer to: CDC Recommendations for a Community Plan for the Prevention and Containment of Suicide Clusters: *http://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/PrevGuid/p0000214/p0000214.asp*

  Suicide Prevention Resource Center's Evidence-Based Practices in Suicide Prevention: *http://www.sprc.org/whatweoffer/ebp_factsheets.asp*
- *Report on activities coordinated by your local or state suicide prevention coalition.*
  Refer to: Your state suicide prevention contact will be able to tell you if there are local groups or organizations providing suicide prevention training in your community. See the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's State Suicide Prevention webpages: *http://www.sprc.org/statepages/index.asp*

For Editors

What to Avoid

- *Avoid giving prominent placement to stories about suicide. Avoid using the word "suicide" in the headline.*
  Reason: Research shows that each of the following lead to an increase in suicide among media consumers: the placement of stories about suicide, the number of stories (about a particular suicide, or suicide in in general), and dramatic headlines for stories. Using the word "suicide" or referring to the cause of death as "self-inflicted" in headlines increases the likelihood of suicide contagion.
- *Avoid describing the site or showing pictures of the suicide.*
  Reason: Research indicates that such detailed coverage encourages vulnerable people to imitate the act.

What to Do

- *Suggest that all reporters and editors review* Reporting on Suicide: Recommendations for the Media. These guidelines for responsible reporting of suicide were developed by a number of Federal agencies and private organizations, including the Annenberg Public Policy Center.
  Refer to: *http://www.afsp.org/education/recommendations*
- *Encourage your reporters to review examples of good and problematic reporting of suicide.*
  Refer to: The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's website: *http://www.afsp.org/education/recommendations/index.html*
- *Include a sidebar listing warning signs, or risk and protective factors for suicide.*
  Refer to: American Association of Suicidology's warning signs: *http://www.sprc.org/library/helping.pdf*

  National Strategy for Suicide Prevention's risk and protective factors: *http://www.sprc.org/library/srisk.pdf*

  National Institute of Mental Health's Suicide FAQ: *http://www.nimh.nih.gov/SuicidePrevention/suicidefaq.cfm*

The recommendations in this publication were adapted from *Reporting on Suicide: Recommendations for the Media*, a 2001 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute of Mental Health, Office of the Surgeon General, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Association of Suicidology, and Annenberg Public Policy Center. The original report and supporting documents can be found at *http://www.afsp.org/education/recommendations*.

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www.sprc.org

Conducting an Interview: Becoming an Effective Spokesperson

As suggested earlier, generating media coverage of your issue and organization requires a long-term commitment. It also requires a comprehensive media outreach program. Part of that program must be the development of an effective spokesperson or spokespeople for your organization. Whether it's a television or radio news broadcast, or a news story in a magazine or newspaper, the majority of news stories will quote at least one person in the story. That person should be you.

Once your organization has identified spokespeople, they should receive media training. Although interviewing with the media is not difficult, some people find it intimidating at first. Media training, offered by many public relations firms or a media training company, can help spokespeople overcome their fears.

THE ART OF THE MEDIA INTERVIEW

A good media spokesperson will establish credibility and be successful in promoting the suicide prevention message. Much can be achieved by a well-executed media interview, but it requires thoughtful planning and preparation. Outlined below are tips to help you prepare for and conduct your media interview.

Preparing for the Interview

1. **When first contacted over the telephone, do not do the interview immediately.** Tell the reporter you are busy and inquire about the story's deadline. Call the reporter back after you've had time to prepare.

2. **Identify what you want to accomplish:** Is it your goal to educate people who were previously unaware; or are you trying to diffuse inaccurate information?

3. **Gather background on the reporter.** Read stories that he or she has written about suicide or mental health in the past. Know the tone of those articles. Does the reporter have a history of being friendly, neutral, or adversarial to your issue, organization, or point of view?

4. **Understand the reporter's audience.** The reporter is not your audience. Who reads this publication and why would they be interested in suicide prevention?

5. **Tailor your message to the audience.** If the publication is read by the elderly, focus your message on suicide and the elderly. If the publication is read by mothers or youth, focus your message on youth suicide.

6. **Try to gather information about the focus of this particular story.** Is it a feature or a hard news story? Find out who else will be interviewed for the story.

7. **Anticipate negative questions and prepare responses.**

8. **Gather details about the logistics.** Ask the reporter how long the interview will take. Be sure to confirm the time, day, and location.

The Interview Process

1. Stay on message and be sure to state your message in 45 seconds or less up-front. There is no time during a media interview to save your bottom line argument for last.

2. Simplify your language, be conversational, and use language the audience will understand.

3. Use facts, data and examples to back up your messages.

4. Do not speculate or answer questions outside of your knowledge or expertise.

5. Be honest. If you don't know the answer, offer to find out and get back to the reporter.

6. Never say "no comment." It will make you look uninformed or as if you are trying to hide something. It's better to explain why you can't comment. For example, "It would be inappropriate for me to speak on behalf of the individual's family."

7. Never speak off the record. It's an easy way to get in trouble and a reporter may not honor your wishes. You should consider every conversation with the media as on the record.

8. Watch out for hypothetical, speculative, personal, or proprietary questions.

9. Be quotable. This means you must be prepared to offer "sound bites" that convey your message in a brief but interesting manner.

10. Share your experiences. Audiences relate best to people with whom they can identify.

11. Don't be intimidated, defensive, or combative. The reporter is only trying to do a job. He or she has as much to gain from you as you do from them. Your relationship should involve give and take, just like any other business interaction.

12. Be enthusiastic. Stress key points by raising your intensity level, not your voice. Vary your pitch and tone, especially for TV or radio interviews.

CONTROLLING THE INTERVIEW

Although you have no direct control over the story's editing, you do have control over the message and the strength with which you deliver it. Remember that how you deliver your message is as important as what you say. Effective delivery includes beginning with the message you want to convey, offering supportive points of proof, and reiterating your key points in the summary of the interview.

During an interview, you may be asked difficult questions or ones that stray from the topic you agreed to discuss. If you don't want to answer a question, simply acknowledge that you heard and understand the question but use the bridging techniques explained below to transition back to one of your key messages. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is okay to say, "I don't know the answer to that question but will get back to you"; never say, "no comment."

It is important during any interview not to repeat a negative question or comment by the reporter. Instead, block the negative question and bridge to something that you do want to talk about.

"Bridge" to Your Key Messages

Examples of blocking a question and bridging to your key message:

- "The best way to answer that question is to tell you what we are trying to do…"
- "That question raises an interesting point, but the more important point is…"
- "That is not really the issue. The real issue is…"
- "I can't speak to that. But what I do know is…"
- "The most important matter at hand is this…"
- "Let's focus on the facts…"
- "Allow me to frame my answer like this…"
- "Looking at that question broadly…"

You don't want the reporter to think you are simply avoiding answering his or her question. So practice choosing the right bridge phrase to turn any question into an opportunity to communicate your message.

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Reporters often use techniques to bait you into answering in a way that slants the story as they wish to report it. Knowledge of these techniques and ways of handling them can help you to remain on track.

Examples of handling difficult techniques used by reporters are:

Type of Question	How to Handle It
Hostile attack	"That is categorically false."
Words in mouth	"I wouldn't put it quite that way. What I would say is …"
False fact	Correct it.
Multiple questions	Pick the easiest.
Far-fetched	Refuse to speculate.

FOLLOWING-UP WITH A REPORTER AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Call or e-mail the reporter shortly after your interview. This will give you an opportunity to clarify any areas or provide additional perspective. Ask if there is anything else you can provide. Also, if you failed to deliver a key message during the interview, simply say, "There is one important point I failed to mention during the interview that you should find interesting…"

Using Television to Tell Your Story

Despite the intense competition for media coverage, the number of media organizations offering news continues to grow with the explosion of online media and 24/7 news. This is true for television, radio, print, and online media. While you may not get your first story on national television, there are many alternatives that will help you establish credibility and build toward national news over time. Don't be hesitant to consider all of your media options.

THE "VISUALNESS" OF TELEVISION

Television is a visual medium that requires appealing images that make your story come alive for the viewer. If you do not have a great visual to offer – a live event or interview, footage of people engaged in activity, or a compelling graphic image such as a LifeKeeper quilt – television is probably not the most appropriate medium for your story.

TYPES OF TELEVISION OUTLETS

In your community, there may be several television stations to contact with your news, such as local network affiliates, regional cable news networks, bureaus of national news and cable networks, university stations, public broadcasting stations, and specific television programs.

- If your story is local, pitch local network affiliates or regional cable news networks.
- If your story is national in scope, pitch the local bureaus of national networks such as ABC, NBC and CBS.
- University and public broadcasting stations often do not have news departments, but offer programs that appeal to local audiences.
- Local television programs may be ideal for feature stories and spokesperson interviews.

Example: Washington, D.C., Television Outlets

- **WJLA-TV**, D.C.'s "7 News," is the local ABC affiliate
- **NewsChannel 8** is the Washington, D.C., metro area's regional cable news network
- **WETA-TV** is D.C.'s Public Broadcasting Station (PBS) affiliate, owned and operated by the Greater Washington Education Telecommunication Association
- **WHUT-TV** is also a PBS affiliate, owned and operated by Howard University
- **Inside Washington** (WJLA-TV), **The Washington Report** (NewsChannel 8), **Hometown Heroes** (WETA-TV) and **Evening Exchange** (WHUT-TV) are local public affairs programs
- **NBC News Network** and **CNN/Cable News Network** are national networks that have bureaus based in D.C.

WHOM TO CONTACT AT A TELEVISION STATION

News Assignment Editors

- ***Who they are:***
  News assignment editors choose the stories the station will cover and assign specific reporters to cover them.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact the news assignment editor when you have a breaking or hard news story, or more general news that does not fall into a specific reporter's beat.
- ***Remember:***
  There are different assignment editors for the morning, afternoon, evening, and weekend, so make sure you talk to the correct person.

News Planning Editors

- ***Who they are:***
  News planning editors assign reporters to long-lead stories. They also list events on the station's planning calendars.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact the news planning editor when you want to publicize an upcoming event.
- ***Remember:***
  Stations in small markets may not have a planning editor, in which case the news assignment editor would be an appropriate contact.

Beat/Feature Reporters

- ***Who they are:***
  Beat reporters cover a specific issue for the television station such as health care or business. Feature reporters cover soft news and human-interest stories.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact beat or feature reporters when your story fits with their type of reporting.
- ***Remember:***
  Beat reporters who cover mental health are likely to be knowledgeable about the issue. Anticipate the types of questions they might ask and be prepared to provide them with accurate and detailed information.

Program Producers

- ***Who they are:***
  Program producers select features for specific television programs, such as talk shows.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact a producer to suggest a topic or spokesperson for their talk show.
- ***Remember:***
  In large media markets, talk shows may have a "booker" who is solely responsible for securing guests.

Example: SPAN USA 10th Anniversary National Awareness Event

- Contact the **news planning editor** weeks in advance to get the event listed on the station's planning calendar.
- Contact the **news assignment editor** days before the event with any relevant updates.
- Contact the mental health **beat reporter** to attend a breakout session about effective suicide prevention strategies.
- Contact the **producer** of a local public affairs program to pitch a story about suicide prevention advocates delivering a petition to Congress.
- Contact the **booker** to schedule an appearance for your executive director.

Using Radio to Tell Your Story

Radio can be a great medium to get your message out because there are many local and national radio programs that address specific issues, such as health care, that are of concern to the stations' listeners.

There are many different types of radio programs that you should consider as a medium to convey your message and to communicate news about your organization:

- **News segments:** Provide a quick and timely update of the day's news as it happens.
- **Listener call-in programs:** Focus on a specific topic of discussion and solicit listener feedback.
- **Morning and afternoon "drive-time" programs:** Feature a mix of light chat, news, traffic, and weather updates, often interspersed with music.
- **Talk shows:** Offer the viewpoints of a radio personality and often feature interviews with a variety of guests.
- **Public affairs programming:** Focus on local government and community events, often pertaining to specific issues such as health care. Many public affairs programs offer opportunities to position your organization's spokesperson as a panel speaker.

WHOM TO CONTACT AT A RADIO STATION

News Assignment Editors or News Directors

- ***Who they are:***
  News assignment editors generate story ideas and assign stories to reporters. News directors are considered "gatekeepers." They choose the stories the station will air.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact the news director with a breaking or hard news story. Contact the news assignment editor with soft news, a feature story, or an interview opportunity.
- ***Remember:***
  In small markets, a radio station may only have a news director or news assignment editor – not both – who plays a dual role.

Reporters

- ***Who they are:***
  Reporters cover news and events for the station, often on location.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact reporters directly when they are assigned a specific beat relevant to your issue.
- ***Remember:***
  Radio stations have limited resources and may have only one or two reporters to cover many issues. Assignments are sometimes based on schedule and availability more than individual beats.

Program Producers

- ***Who they are:***
  Program producers develop ideas, manage requests, line up guests, and brief the program host.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact the producer to suggest a topic for a program or to offer an expert to serve as a guest.
- ***Remember:***
  In small markets, the host of a radio program may also serve as the producer or be the only contact for the show. Radio programs often have a highly targeted focus, so make sure your news is relevant.

Example: SPRC Hosts Conference on Suicide Prevention

- Contact the **news director** at your local talk radio station to pitch hard news regarding the conference, such as the release of new, groundbreaking research.
- Contact the **news assignment editor** to ask if the station is interested in interviewing a representative from your organization to discuss the importance of suicide prevention, and what your organization is doing to raise local awareness.
- Invite a **reporter** to attend a conference session featuring a prominent speaker.
- Contact the **producer** of a local health program to suggest suicide prevention as a show topic; offer a spokesperson from your organization to discuss warning signs.

Using the Print Media to Tell Your Story

Print media provides numerous opportunities to convey your messages to targeted audiences. In addition to daily and weekly newspapers, consider the number and variety of venues available to communicate your messages through print media.

Examples of print media are:

- Health care magazines such as *Prevention*.
- Publications that address issues of concern to the elderly such as *AARP Magazine*.
- Publications that focus on suicide and mental health issues such as *Advancing Suicide Prevention*.
- Parenting magazines such as *Parents* and *Parenting*.
- Publications focused on youth such as *Youth Today*.
- Magazines geared toward women and women's issues such as *O: The Oprah Magazine, Redbook, Reader's Digest*, and *Women's Day*.
- Newsletters of industry trade associations such as the National Mental Health Association, American Psychiatric Association, and American Association of Retired People.
- National, local, and regional newspapers.
- Regional magazines.

NEWSPAPERS

Major daily newspapers and weekly community newspapers all offer great variety in the types of stories they cover. From in-depth interviews with local business and community leaders to announcements about local community events, newspapers strive for balance and variety.

To provide balance and variety, you can:

- Consider providing a local or regional perspective on suicide prevention that highlights groundbreaking activities of organizations in your area.
- Provide reporters with warning signs and offer tips on how and where people can receive treatment or help.
- Encourage reporters to consider significant trends: *"Researchers Find that Safely Storing Firearms Saves Young Lives."*
- Provide reporters with local human interest stories: *"Relative of Suicide Victim Urges Support for Survivors."*

It is unlikely that one reporter would cover all of these issues. Identify and establish a rapport with a variety of local reporters who may be interested in some aspect of your organization such as:

- Health care reporters
- Business reporters
- Workplace reporters
- Philanthropy or nonprofit reporters
- Education reporters

MAGAZINES

With nearly 19,000 magazines in circulation in the United States, magazines provide opportunities to reach key segments of your target audience such as youth, elderly, parents, teachers, students, and health care workers to name a few. The large number of health-related and special interest magazines in the United States provides numerous opportunities for bylined articles and feature pieces on issues related to suicide prevention. Magazines cover hard news, soft news, general interest, human interest, profiles, and other feature stories.

One drawback with monthly magazines is their deadline. Because they are published monthly, they have a very long lead-time of approximately three months. That means if you want to pitch a story for the December issue, you need to have your story to them in August or September. You might plan to pitch a story by linking it to a month which recognizes the topic as a public health observance. See the Suicide Prevention Resource Center's "Public Health Observances" page (**http://www.sprc.org/featured_resources/trainingandevents/calendar/pubobserv.asp**) to plan ahead for mental or public health stories.

NEWS WIRES

News wires, such as AP, UPI, Reuters, Bloomberg, and Dow Jones, write news articles that are distributed to newspapers all across the country. Often, they are first to break a major news story. Wire services are appropriate to pitch only breaking news, and only if a local story has some national appeal.

WHOM TO CONTACT AT PRINT PUBLICATIONS

Section Editors

- ***Who they are:***
  Editors are "gatekeepers" who decide which stories will run and oversee the content for a specific section of the publication.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact health and medicine editors with news about suicide prevention. Contact city or metro editors with information about an upcoming local event. In a small media market, there may only be one general news editor who oversees the content for the entire publication.
- ***Remember:***
  At national publications an editor is usually not the best first point of contact. Although editors do assign stories to reporters, it is better to pitch a specific beat reporter, who will then pitch the story to the editor. The pitch is more likely to be successful coming from someone within the publication.

Beat Reporters

- ***Who they are:***
  Beat reporters focus on specific issues. You may want to contact health, mental health, community affairs, local interest, political, or congressional reporters depending on your story.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact a beat reporter when you have news or information that is relevant to the issues they cover.
- ***Remember:***
  Beat reporters have a deeper understanding of the issue. Be prepared to answer specific questions.

Calendar and Daybook Editors:

- ***Who they are:***
  Calendar and daybook editors manage a listing of regional events.
- ***When to contact:***
  Contact calendar editors at newspapers and magazines when you have an event that is open to the community. Contact a daybook editor at a news wire when you host a media event.
- ***Remember:***
  Contact calendar and daybook editors far enough in advance of your event to help maximize attendance.

Some additional contacts:

- **Bureau chiefs** manage a branch of the newspaper or wire service located outside the publication's home city and prioritize what needs to be covered in that city. For example, many regional newspapers such as the Boston Globe also have a bureau chief in Washington, D.C., to cover Congress and the White House. Contact a bureau chief when something happening in your area has local relevance to that publication's home city.
- Some print outlets, especially wire services, may also have an **assignment editor** who assigns day-to-day responsibilities. Contact the assignment editor when there is not a specific editor or reporter assigned to your issue.
- **Columnists** write opinion pieces and are often syndicated in newspapers across the country. Columnists are good contacts for lending a well known and widely read voice to your issue.

Example: Washington, D.C., Print Media Market

- **Daily newspapers:** *Washington Post, Washington Times, USA Today, Baltimore Sun*
- **Free dailies:** *Washington Post Express, Washington Examiner*
- **Community Newspapers:** *Georgetown Current, Rockville Gazette, Alexandria Metro Herald*
- **Newspaper Bureaus:** *Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times*
- **Magazines:** *Washingtonian* (general interest), *CQ Weekly* (government), *Psychiatric News* (trade)
- **Wire Services:** Associated Press, Reuters, Bloomberg

Informing the Media with a Press Release

Press releases should be an important component of a media outreach program, but they should never substitute for a comprehensive media campaign. Many organizations rely too heavily on the press release to achieve their media objectives.

WHEN TO USE THE PRESS RELEASE

Journalists receive thousands of press releases every day. To stand out, yours must be relevant to the journalist's beat, contain newsworthy information, and be timely. Examples of what makes a press release newsworthy include:

- Hard or breaking news
- Release of a new study
- Statement outlining your organization's position on passage of legislation
- Announcement of a new partnership, program, or campaign for your organization

Soft news, human-interest, or feature stories rarely merit a press release. Those are better conveyed to journalists through pitch letters and phone calls.

Tips for Writing a Press Release

- Grab the reporter's attention with a hard-hitting headline in boldface type.
- Include a strong lead paragraph, which persuasively conveys your key messages.
- Write in short, concise sentences and paragraphs – provide essential information, data, and statistics, but avoid extraneous details.
- Emphasize the local angle when applicable.
- Always include a quote from your organization's spokesperson or other issue expert. Reporters frequently lift quotes from a press release to use in a news story.
- Present the information in order from the most important to the least important facts.
- Be sure to answer the basic questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- Keep it to one page, but never more than two pages.
- Include contact information and your Web site.
- Don't forget to include the date.

An example of a press release follows.

For Immediate Release: Enables reporters to publish the release immediately.

Organization's logo: Identifies and brands your organization.

Headline: Grabs reporters' attention. Subhead can be added to provide additional detail.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:
Lidia Bernik, 202-449-3600
lbernik@spanusa.org

Suicide Prevention Action Network Joins in Regional Effort to Promote Suicide Prevention

Dateline: The location where the release originated and the date the news is being released.

Lead: First paragraph describes the news; the reporter should be able to read only the lead and know the purpose of the press release.

Washington, D.C. (June 6, 2005) – National and local leaders are gathering in Meriden, CT this week to address the crucial national issue of suicide prevention. The event, taking place June 6 - 8 at the Meriden Four Points Sheraton, is organized by the national Suicide Prevention Resource Center as part of their efforts to promote suicide prevention planning, implementation and evaluation in states and communities around the country. Conference speakers include, CT Public Health Commissioner J. Robert Galvin, M.D., M.P.H., Miss North Haven 2005 Dianna Baitinger, and Sharon Smith, wife of U.S. Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) and a suicide survivor. Representatives from eight states across the Northeast will also be participating in the event.

The Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA) is participating in the conference to help educate local communities and regional leaders on suicide prevention. At the event, SPAN USA's Executive Director Jerry Reed will speak about suicide prevention for the elderly and how to educate decision makers about suicide prevention. Sharon Smith, the wife of U.S. Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) and a SPAN USA board member, will speak about her experiences as mother who lost her son to suicide.

Supporting information: Provides supporting details and information a reporter can use to write a story.

"Suicide is devastating on an individual level and on a community level," said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA. "SPAN USA's goal is to lift the veil of secrecy around the more than 31,000 people who die every year by suicide to make sure we include their voices in the public policy agenda around suicide prevention. Community efforts like these can make a real difference in preventing suicide-related deaths nationwide."

In addition, Miss North Haven 2005 Dianna Baitinger will speak about youth suicide prevention, part of her platform in the Miss Connecticut Scholarship Pageant. "The stigma surrounding mental illness and suicide is a huge roadblock in educating the public about suicide prevention," said Baitinger. "If America can bravely move together and talk about suicide and mental illness, I believe we can save the lives of many young Americans." Baitinger serves as a community organizer for SPAN USA.

Quote: Always include a quote from your organization's spokesperson.

To arrange an interview with Jerry Reed or Dianna Baitinger, please contact Lidia Bernik at 202-449-3600.

SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that prevent suicide. Since its founding nine years ago, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures. For more information, please visit www.spanusa.org.

Boilerplate: Brief paragraph that defines your organization.

###

Pound sign: Signifies the end of the release – if more than one page, insert –*more*– in place of the ###. Limit your release to one page, never more than two.

Advising the Media with a Media Advisory

A media advisory is used to inform reporters about an upcoming event. The media advisory should be sent to the media about two weeks prior to an event.

Tips for Writing a Media Advisory

- Include details of the event such as when and where it is taking place, featured speakers, and topics that will be discussed.
- Answer the basic "who, what, when, where, why, and how" questions.
- Include a contact person who can field media calls, provide background information, and schedule interviews with your organization's spokesperson.
- Some reporters (especially broadcast) prefer to have advisories faxed to them, while others prefer e-mail. Try to determine the best approach prior to sending the advisory so that you don't start off on the wrong foot.
- Follow up is essential: Call reporters on the day you send the advisory to see if they received it, determine their interest in attending, and of covering the story even if they cannot attend. If they cannot attend, ask for the name of another reporter at their organization who might be interested in covering the event.
- Send out a reminder advisory a week to a few days prior to the event.
- Send out a reminder advisory the morning of the event and call the reporters on your list to follow up again after you have sent the reminder.
- Send a press release following the event to all reporters who received the advisory, including those who did not attend.

A variation of a media advisory is called a "media availability." In a media availability, you are informing the media that your organization's spokespersons are available at a specific date and time for interviews regarding a hard news issue.

An example of a media advisory follows.

Contact Information: Name, phone number and e-mail address of contact person.

Media Contact:
Lidia Bernik, 202-449-3600
lbernik@spanusa.org

When: Specifies time, date and place of event.

What: Summarizes purpose of event.

Where: Specifies location of event.

Who: Identifies event participants.

Why: Provides additional information about the issue.

Media Advisory

SPAN USA Marks World Suicide Prevention Day at 10th Annual National Awareness Event
Suicide prevention advocates, celebrities, and students will "Hike to the Hill" to raise awareness

What: **The Suicide Prevention Action Network's (SPAN USA) 10th Annual National Awareness Event and "Hike to the Hill"**

When: **Saturday, September 10, 2005, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.**

Where: **Freedom Plaza and the U.S. Capitol**
Event participants will meet at Freedom Plaza, on Pennsylvania Ave. between 13th and 14th Streets NW, at 10:00 a.m. to "Hike to the Hill" for the program at the Capitol from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Who: **Jeff Alt, author of the award-winning memoir *A Walk for Sunshine***
Jeff will lead participants on a hike from Freedom Plaza to the U.S. Capitol in support of suicide prevention. Jeff will also be launching his new book, *A Hike for Mike*, which tells the story of how he turned his hike along the John Muir Trail into a national depression awareness campaign in memory of his brother-in-law, who battled depression and died by suicide.

Dianna Baitinger, Miss Connecticut 2005 and SPAN USA community organizer
Dianna will speak about youth suicide prevention, her platform issue for the 2005 Miss America Competition, and the need for attention from state and federal lawmakers to this important issue. Miss Baitinger speaks to schools and other organizations about youth suicide prevention.

Sharon Smith, wife of U.S. Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) and SPAN USA board member
Mrs. Smith will speak about her experiences as mother who lost her son to suicide and the importance of advocacy efforts to promote suicide prevention.

Jerry Reed, Executive Director, SPAN USA
Available to discuss the importance of making suicide a public health priority and eliminating the stigma associated with mental illness.

Why: September 10, 2005 is World Suicide Prevention Day. Nearly 1 million lives are lost to suicide worldwide each year. Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the United States, claiming over 30,000 lives annually. These deaths are preventable. In fact, research shows that many people who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder that can be treated. Every year for the past ten years, the nation's leading advocates for suicide prevention have gathered in Washington, D.C. to honor loved ones lost to suicide, raise awareness, and promote suicide prevention programs.

To arrange an interview with Jerry Reed, Jeff Alt, or Dianna Baitinger, please contact Lidia Bernik at 202-449-3600.

About SPAN USA
SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that prevent suicide. Since its founding nine years ago, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures. For more information, please visit *www.spanusa.org*.

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Writing An Effective Pitch Letter

While you may believe that your story is important and warrants media coverage, reporters are inundated with story ideas from businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations that feel that their stories are also important.

Convincing a reporter to cover your story takes careful planning and preparation. Even if you are successful in encouraging a reporter to report your news, he or she must then sell the story, or convince their editor or producer that the story will be of interest to the publication's readers or to the station's viewers.

Reporters can be pitched over the telephone, in person, or with a pitch letter. A pitch letter followed by a phone call is an effective way to communicate a story idea to the media. Different media outlets prefer to receive pitch letters in different manners. Although the majority of reporters now prefer to receive pitch letters by e-mail, some television and radio journalists still prefer the fax. Always call to determine their preferred method. When e-mailing anything to a reporter, remember that they often cannot open attachments. Copy and paste the text of your pitch letter (or press release or media advisory) into the body of an e-mail.

The Making of a Good Pitch Letter

A good pitch letter will immediately grab a reporter's attention and cause him or her to give serious consideration to your story idea. To achieve this, your letter must:

- Pique the reporter's interest in the first sentence by offering something new or creative.
- Get to the point quickly within the first paragraph.
- Be no longer than one page.
- Convince the reporter that the story matters to his or her readers, or has local relevance.
- Briefly outline evidence that supports your main point.
- Pitch letters should always be followed-up with a phone call.
- Be sure to thank the reporter for considering your story idea and to provide your contact information for follow-up purposes.

TAILORING YOUR PITCH

Example: Suicide Prevention Action Network USA hosts first annual "Hike to the Hill" at 10th Anniversary National Awareness Event, during which suicide prevention advocates hike to Capitol Hill to deliver a petition urging Congress to support Mental Health parity legislation.

TAILORING YOUR PITCH

- **Mental Health Reporters:** Focus on the coming together of suicide prevention advocates and mental health organizations to achieve a common goal: Raising awareness about suicide and eliminating the stigma associated with mental illness.
- **Health Reporters:** Focus on the idea that physical activity, such as hiking, not only contributes to a healthy body, but a healthy mind, as well. Mental wellbeing is an essential component to curbing depressive thoughts that could lead to suicide.
- **Congressional Reporter:** Focus on the role of grassroots advocacy in encouraging Congress to recognize suicide as a public health priority, to fully fund the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, and to implement the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.

EXAMPLE OF A PITCH LETTER

Date
Name
Title
Address

Dear Name:

Every 18 minutes, someone in the U.S. dies of suicide. It is the leading cause of violent deaths worldwide, followed by homicide and armed conflicts.
The Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA), a national nonprofit organization with the largest grassroots network of suicide survivors in the U.S., is holding its ninth annual **National Awareness Event** in Washington, D.C, September 19-21. With the recent passage of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, legislation that supports statewide youth suicide intervention and prevention strategies, this event underscores the timely importance of suicide awareness.
The event will kick off on Sunday, September 19, at the Lincoln Memorial at 4:00 p.m. Speakers include:

- Carla Fine, author of *No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One*, survivor of her husband's suicide
- Parker Bruce, a 13-year old survivor of his father's, aunt's and grandfather's suicides
- Linda Falasco, SPAN USA Community & Quilt Organizer, and survivor of her brother's suicide

Following the guest speakers, there will be a reading of 600 names from 30 *Lifekeeper Faces of Suicide Memorial Quilts*, moving depictions of people lost to suicide that will be on display. Sunday will conclude with a candlelight vigil. On Monday, September 20, **Surgeon General Richard Carmona** will give a keynote address to more than 100 National Awareness Event attendees. Several experts and distinguished professionals will give presentations aimed at providing SPAN USA members with tools for advocacy and outreach to their communities and legislators. On Tuesday, September 21, SPAN USA members will visit Capitol Hill to meet with their representatives.

SPAN USA can offer you the following:

- Interview with Surgeon General Richard Carmona
- Interview with Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR), who spearheaded the Senate's passage of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, named in honor of his son
- Interview with Jerry Reed, M.S.W., executive director of SPAN USA
- Interview with Carla Fine, author of *No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One,* and a copy of her book
- Advance viewing of *Lifekeeper Faces of Suicide Memorial Quilts*

I have attached photos of last year's *Lifekeeper Faces of Suicide Memorial Quilts* as well as information about SPAN USA and facts about suicide. You may reach me or my colleague Laura Brinker at (202) 775-1401 for more information or to discuss available times for media interviews.

Sincerely,

Controlling Your Message with an Op-Ed

Op-eds derive their name from the fact that they appear opposite the editorial page in a newspaper. They are opinion pieces that express the writer's position on an important issue. Op-eds are normally written and submitted by someone who is considered an expert on the issue.

It is not easy to get an op-ed published since a newspaper contains far fewer op-eds than news stories on any given day. You have a better chance of getting your op-ed published if it's written by a subject area expert who is well known in the community and if the topic is receiving a lot of attention in the media. For example, you may be more likely to get an op-ed on suicide prevention placed immediately following passage of legislation such as the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act.

WRITING AN OP-ED:

When drafting an op-ed, assume the reader has little or no knowledge of the issue. Be brief, clear, and conversational. Follow a simple structure:

- Express your opinion.
- Support your opinion with facts, data, examples, or statistics.
- Conclude by summarizing your position and hooking the reader into wanting to know more.

Tips on Writing an Op-Ed

- Editors often look for op-eds that express opinions that have not been articulated elsewhere in the publication.
- Make sure the op-ed is timely, clearly written, expresses a strong argument and backs that argument up with hard facts.
- Include personal experiences, particularly as they relate to the issue.

SUBMITTING AN OP-ED:

Most op-eds are between 600 and 800 words. Since most publications have special requirements, call the publication before you write or submit an op-ed to determine word length and submission requirements. Guidelines for submitting op-eds can often be found by visiting the publication's Web site.

Include a short letter or e-mail with the op-ed, asking the editor to consider the article and to contact you if they use it or if they need more information. Include your complete contact information. If the issue is time sensitive, mention that in your letter. For example, "This article is particularly timely in light of the upcoming World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10."

If you send an op-ed to a national newspaper such as the *Washington Post, New York Times, Chicago Tribune*, or *Boston Globe*, these newspapers generally require an exclusive, so do not send it to more than one paper at the same time. If your submission is rejected by the national newspaper, you should send it to another paper for their consideration.

If you submit your op-ed to a small local newspaper, it is generally acceptable to send it to other small newspapers as long as they are not in the same media market. Call the newspaper to determine their rules.

EXAMPLE OF AN OP-ED

By Jerry Reed, Executive Director, Suicide Prevention Action Network, USA
Published in the Chicago Tribune, October 21, 2004

When childhood obesity received national recognition as a public health epidemic, the nation began marshaling its resources to educate parents, teachers and child-care providers of this potentially deadly threat. The National Institutes of Health will spend more than $440 million on obesity research in fiscal year 2005 alone.

There is no similar outpouring of support for another serious and preventable health problem.

Suicide, which takes the life of one person under the age of 25 every two hours and 15 minutes, is the third-leading cause of death for that age group. One in 12 college students has made a suicide plan.

Yet the nation's spending on obesity research dwarfs suicide research by $400 million.

Why the stark difference in the nation's response to these two preventable health problems?

Suicide is a very serious problem, as the Tribune has pointed out ("Student suicides spur action on campuses," News, Oct. 12).

We continue to stigmatize individuals and families who deal with suicidal tendencies, depression, bipolar disorder and other mental health illnesses. Individuals suffering from these conditions are afraid to talk about their illness for fear they will lose their jobs, their insurance or even friends or loved ones.

We must remove the stigma surrounding these conditions so that people will receive the treatment they need.

What value is a suicide prevention program if the stigma is so overwhelming that people are afraid to seek treatment? We must also make progress in achieving the formidable goals and objectives established by the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, the nation's blueprint for preventing suicide.

The recent passage of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act is a significant milestone in achieving the nation's youth suicide prevention goals. If fully funded over three years, the legislation will more than double the amount of money the federal government allocates to suicide prevention. This bill puts funding in the hands of community and local programs – 85 percent of the funding must go to service providers.

A recent survey by the Suicide Prevention Action Network and Research!America shows that the majority of Americans believe that mental and physical health are equally important and that treatment for depression and suicide prevention is fundamental to overall health. Not surprisingly, however, 62 percent of respondents recognized that mental and physical health are not treated with equal importance in our health-care system.

We have an opportunity to give suicide the recognition and resources to stop its deadly impact on America's youth.

Congress must provide full funding for the youth suicide prevention and intervention programs created by the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act. Americans deserve nothing less than total parity in mental and physical health care.

Reinforcing Your Message with Letters to the Editor

Most newspapers and magazines welcome letters from readers. A letter to the editor offers your organization the opportunity to respond to positive or negative coverage that has already appeared in the publication. A letter can also be used to correct inaccurate or misleading statements or omissions of key facts made in previously published stories.

Letters to the editor should include:

- The writer's contact information, including phone number.
- A specific reference to the article you are responding to and the date the article was published.
- The specific points your organization wants to convey to readers about the article and the issue.

Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

- Make your most important points in the first paragraph or two, because your letter may be edited by the publication.
- Limit your letter to one page, no more than 400 words.
- Respond immediately after a story appears; many publications will not print letters referencing articles more than a week old.

SUBMITTING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Check with the publication to find out the best way to submit your letter. Most publications will accept letters via e-mail or fax.

Unfortunately, not all letters to the editor are published. Don't be discouraged if yours doesn't make it into print. Your efforts will help your organization gain recognition with the newspaper as one that is genuinely interested in and knowledgeable about the issue.

EXAMPLE OF A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

Michael E. Ruane's May 1 article ["Md. Physician Masked Despair," C1] on the suicide death of a local physician highlighted a major public health problem facing our nation. Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in this country. It is a tragedy that claims more than 31,000 lives each year, 87 per day, or one death every 17 minutes. Suicide has huge emotional and economic costs and families, friends, and communities feel the devastating rippling effects.

As a society, we need to do more to prevent suicide. Increasing public awareness of this health problem, including warning signs and risk factors, is one of the best prevention tools we have. Furthermore, legislation establishing mental health parity and providing full funding for suicide prevention programs, along with implementing the national strategy for suicide prevention, would go a long way toward helping to save lives.

It is also crucial that we provide resources to those who need help or to the friends and family who are concerned about a loved one. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which is staffed 24 hours a day by trained counselors, will connect individuals in need to the nearest available suicide prevention service provider in their community. The toll-free number is 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Thank you for helping to increase readers' knowledge of this important public health issue. Suicide is a preventable public health problem and help is available.

Jerry Reed
Executive Director
Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA)
Washington, D.C.

Educating the Media with a Press Kit

Press kits are a key component of a media outreach program and all organizations should have one. Press kits should be prominently featured on your organization's Web site since most reporters who cover your organization will visit your Web site for additional information.

Press kits are almost always made available to reporters during events. In addition to containing information specific to the event such as speaker bios, they also include background information on the organization and the issue.

While press kit materials must provide reporters with enough information, including supporting facts and data, they should be kept brief, and on message. No reporter has time to wade through mounds of unnecessary detail. Try to keep each fact sheet to one-page.

TYPICAL ELEMENTS OF A PRESS KIT:

- **Fact Sheet(s)** - Provide background information about the organization and the issue such as:
  - About us
  - Warning signs
  - Suicide statistics
  - Resources
  - State-specific fact sheets
  - History of the organization or chronology
  - Partners or sponsors

- **Spokesperson bios** - Provide background information on the organization's spokespeople and/or other third-party experts scheduled to speak at an event.

- **Charts, graphs, photographs, research findings**, or other materials that provide a visual image and support your message.

You should also make the contents of your press kit available online.

Identifying Appropriate Media Outlets

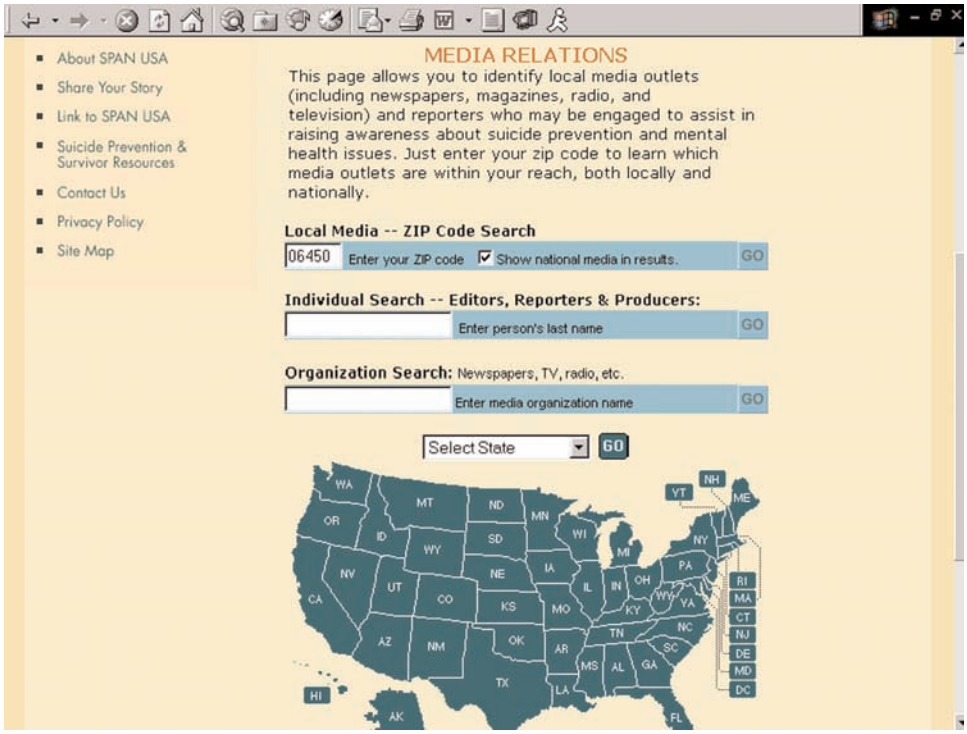
There are a number of online resources and published directories that will enable you to identify media outlets as well as the names and contact information for specific editors and reporters. (A list of resource guides is provided in the Appendix of this media guide.) Alternatively, your organization may choose to use a service, such as PR Newswire, Business Wire or North American Precis Syndicate (NAPS), which will distribute your news for a fee. PR Newswire and Business Wire disseminate press releases to print, radio and TV newsrooms in specific geographic areas, while NAPS distributes news articles to a network of community newspapers. At other times, it may be appropriate to pay a service to distribute an audio news release or arrange a radio or satellite media tour for your organization.

SPAN USA also offers an online media tool, which is available to suicide prevention advocates at **www.spanusa.org**. This tool will enable you to identify media outlets and main contact information for most news organizations.

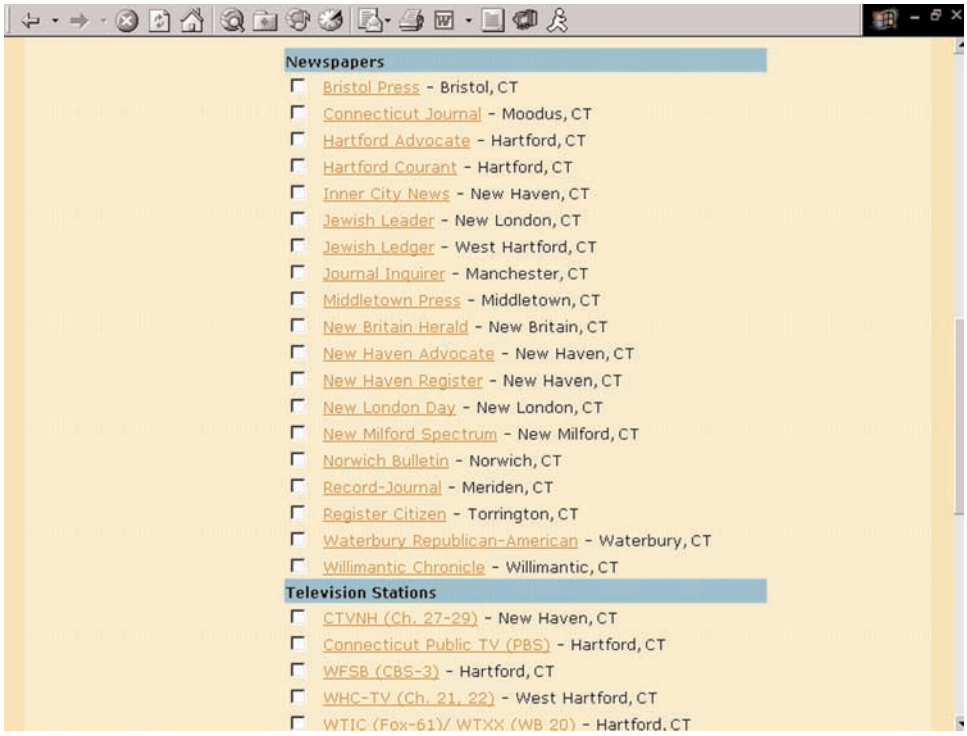
USING SPAN USA'S ONLINE MEDIA TOOL

1. On the SPAN USA Web site (**www.spanusa.org**) click on "Alert the Press" on the green menu bar at the top of the page.

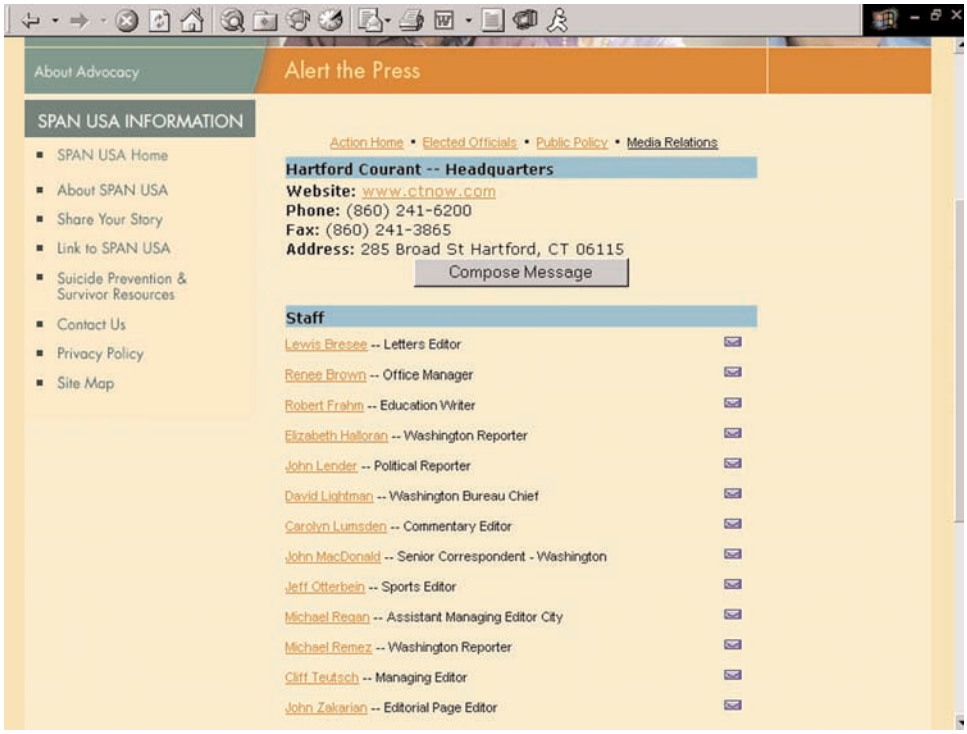
2. If you know the zip code, name of individual editor, reporter or producer, or the title of the publication or broadcast station, you can enter it on this page. Otherwise, you can search for contacts in a specific state by clicking the state on the map.



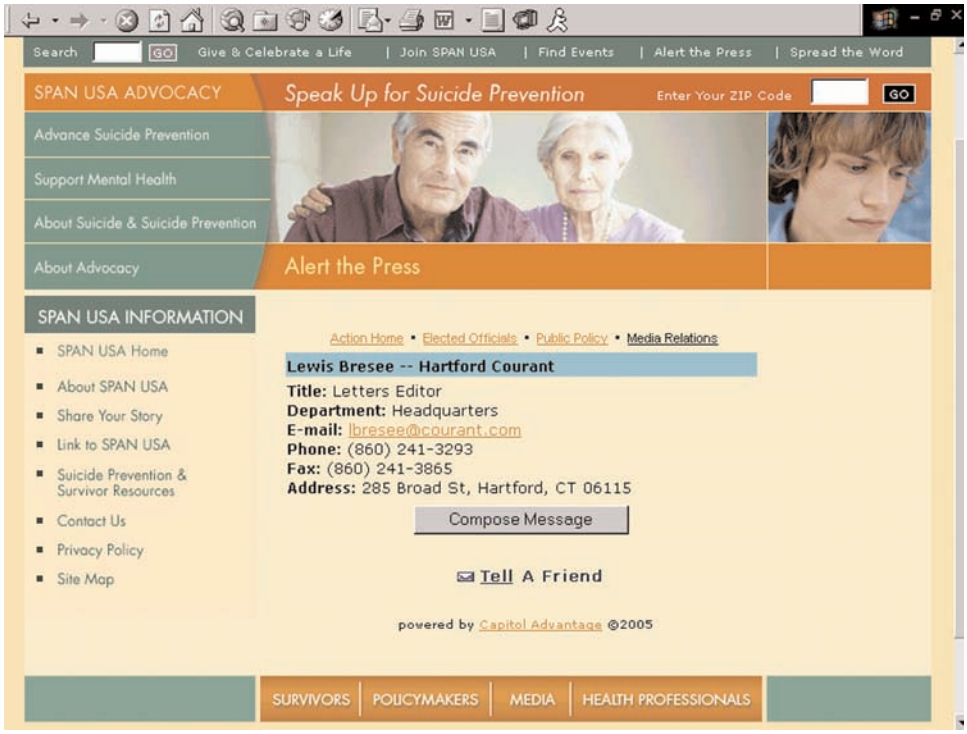
3. For example, after entering a zip code, an appropriate list of media contacts in that area will appear.



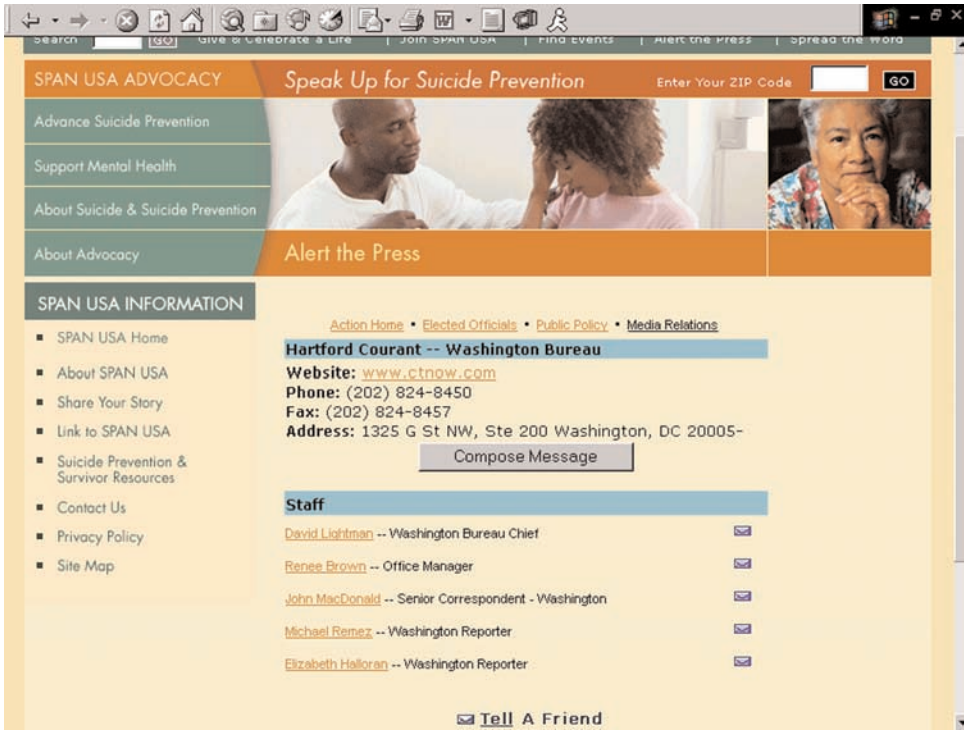
4. Click on the publication or station you are interested in to access basic contact information including Web site address, mailing address, and main phone and fax numbers.



5. Click on a selected reporter from the list to view his/her contact information.



6. In some cases, additional contact information is available by clicking one of the links at the bottom of the publication screen. In this example, information about the Hartford Courant's Washington, D.C., bureau is available.



If you are not able to get from the media tool all of the specific names and contact information for editors and reporters you need, there are several ways to track down this information.

- Call the main contact number for the media outlet and ask for the name and contact information for the health reporter or other contact.
- Visit the media organization's Web site for specific reporter names and contact information.
- Purchase a resource such as Bacon's Media Directory that lists the names of media organizations and contact information of journalists by beat. Note that these directories are not always completely up-to-date, so it is sometimes best to just pick up the phone.

Creating Media Lists

Media outreach requires a long-term commitment. Because you will be communicating with reporters on an ongoing basis, it is advisable to create a media list or several media lists that provide names and contact information for journalists. These lists enable you to contact the media quickly with news about your organization. Because reporters change beats frequently, your media lists should be updated on a regular basis. It is advisable to develop separate media lists for trade publications, Washington, DC area media, and state-based media.

An example of a spreadsheet formatted for a media list is pasted below.

Organization	Name	Title/Beat	Phone	Fax	Email
Mental Health Trade Publication	First Last	Mental Health Reporter	(202) 555-5555	(202) 555-5555	name@mediaoutlet.com
Top Daily Newspaper	First Last	Health Staff Writer	(202) 555-5555	(202) 555-5555	name@mediaoutlet.com
Local Community Paper	First Last	Local News Editor	(202) 555-5555	(202) 555-5555	name@mediaoutlet.com
Radio Public Affairs Program	First Last	Producer	(202) 555-5555	(202) 555-5555	name@mediaoutlet.com
Local Network TV Affiliate	First Last	News Assignment Editor	(202) 555-5555	(202) 555-5555	name@mediaoutlet.com

Tracking Results

Tracking the results of your media efforts is encouraged because it provides important and useful information about who is writing and what they are writing about. For example, if a reporter from your local newspaper has mentioned your organization or quoted your spokesperson in numerous stories, you should build a rapport with that reporter for a possible feature story at a later date.

Tracking your results also enables you to share examples of positive media coverage with key stakeholders such as members and potential members, donors and potential donors, and your Board of Directors. It tells your stakeholders that your message is being heard and that your organization is effective in achieving results.

Unlike advertising, there is no precise science or industry standard in the field of public relations for measuring an organization's success. The closest the field of public relations has come to standardized measurement is to track media impressions.

MEASURING MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

Many organizations like to calculate "impressions" to gauge approximately how many people receive their news. Impressions are calculated using the following guidelines. Some organizations use these guidelines to compare what it would have cost in advertising dollars to reach the same number of people using public relations.

- **Newspapers – Circulation * 2.5**
  The 2.5 multiplier accounts for the "pass-along rate," meaning that a single copy of a newspaper is likely to be read by 2 or 3 people.
- **Magazines – Circulation * 3.3**
  The 3.3 multiplier accounts for the approximate "pass-along rate" for a single copy of a magazine.
- **Television – Average number of viewers per broadcast**
  Most television stations use data generated by Nielsen Ratings to estimate how many people tune into their broadcasts.
- **Radio – Average number of listeners per quarter hour**
  Radio stations track the average number of people listening during any 15-minute increment.
- **Online – Average number of unique monthly visitors**
  The number of new people who visit a Web site each month provides a good estimate of online traffic.

While it is not essential to measure impressions, it is recommended that you track your results for information that will enable you to do your job better in the future. There is no right or wrong way to track this information.

Pasted below is an example of spreadsheet formatted for tracking results:

Name of Campaign or Activity								
Outlet	**Type**	**Contact**	**City**	**State**	**Date**	**Circulation**	**Impressions**	**Hits**
TOTAL:								

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

The following resources are useful tools to help engage the media. Many are available at public libraries.

Bacon's Media Directories list stations or publications with their addresses, phone numbers, and key contacts. They are also available in an online, searchable format. For costs and subscription information, call 800-PR MEDIA or visit **www.bacons.com**.

Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook covers the television, cable, satellite broadcasting, and radio industries in the United States and Canada. Updated annually. For costs and subscription information, call (888) 269-5372 or visit **www.bowker.com**.

Editor and Publisher International Yearbook provides information on editors and publishers of newspapers. Entries include circulation figures, basic advertising rates, key personnel, and detailed production details. Published by *Editor and Publisher Magazine* and updated annually. For costs and subscription information, call 800-562-2706 or visit **www.editorandpublisher.com**.

Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media provides detailed information on periodicals (newspapers, magazines, and journals). Also covers radio stations, television stations, and cable systems. Circulation and audience statistics are also given. Published annually. For costs and subscription information, call 800-877-GALE or visit **www.gale.com**.

Gebbie Press All-In-One Media Directory lists all U.S. print and broadcast media, including TV and radio stations, daily and weekly newspapers, trade and consumer magazines, and news syndicates. Updated annually. For costs and subscription information, call (845) 255-7560 or visit **www.gebbieinc.com**.

Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directory provides a directory of Washington, D.C. news media contacts. Contact information for the Washington bureaus of newspapers, wire services, radio networks and more. For costs and subscription information, call (845) 876-2081 or visit **www.hudsonsdirectory.com**.

News Media Yellow Book contains contact information for executives, bureau chiefs, editors, anchors, etc. for news media in the United States (including Washington bureaus of the international media.) Some biographical information is also included. Updated quarterly. For costs and subscription information, call (212) 627-4140 or visit **www.leadershipdirectories.com**.

Newslink is a free online resource that provides links to the Web sites of U.S. newspapers, radio, and television outlets by state and type. This tool is available at **http://newslink.org/menu.html**.

The Associated Press Stylebook is the essential tool for all writers, editors, students and public relations specialists. The *AP Stylebook* offers guidelines on spelling, usage, grammar, and punctuation, with special sections on business and sports. Available online at **www.ap.org** or at your local bookstore.

Yahoo! provides links to a variety of online media directories, available at **http://dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media/Newspapers/Web_Directories/**.

GLOSSARY OF MEDIA TERMS

Assignment editor: The person who assigns stories to journalists and reporters.

Audio news release (ANR): A 60-second radio news story, packaged to include a 15-20 second sound bite from your spokesperson, that is pitched and fed to radio stations and networks around the country.

Beat: The territory or subject assigned to a reporter (e.g., "health care").

Byline: Name of the writer or reporter, usually printed at the beginning of a story.

Bylined article: A manuscript written by a member of your organization to establish your spokesperson as an expert on a subject matter

B-roll: Rolling video of supporting pictures that play during the narration of a television news package (e.g., footage of a speaker during a news conference).

Circulation: The number of subscribers to a newspaper, magazine, or journal.

Daybook: A daily roster of events maintained by a wire service that informs journalists of upcoming news and events.

Deadline: The latest time material to be used by the media can be received or approved.

Editor: A person who revises and corrects material for a print publication, or corrects tape or film for a broadcast outlet.

Editorial: A commentary expressing the opinion of the editor or publisher of a particular publication.

Feature story: A longer, more probing special article, section, page or story (as opposed to an "objective" news item or account), in which human-interest is stressed over immediacy.

Lead: The opening sentence or paragraph of a news story.

Letter to the editor: Response to a news story or opinion item submitted to a publication or broadcast outlet by a member of the audience.

Local affiliate: A local television or radio station serving as a national network's primary outlet for the presentation of its programs in a given market.

Long-lead: Publications, such as monthly magazines, that have longer production times and therefore require the submission of media materials far in advance.

Major dailies: Major daily newspapers in national media markets such as The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, or Boston Globe.

Media impressions: Estimate of how many people are reached by a particular medium.

Network: Often used in the past just to refer to the three big broadcast networks – ABC, NBC, CBS – the term now applies to any radio or television system with local affiliates, such as Fox Television, Mutual Radio Network, or the Public Broadcasting System.

Op-ed: A commentary featuring the opinion of someone other than the editors or publishers of a particular publication.

Pass-along audience: Individuals who do not subscribe to a publication but still access it.

Pitch: Contact with a reporter, producer, or assignment editor to suggest a story idea or offer news to report.

Producer: An individual who oversees the development, creation, and public presentation of a program.

Rating: The size of the television audience as measured by the number of TV-equipped households watching.

Readership: The total number of people actually reached by a publication; the primary and pass-along audiences together (versus circulation).

Satellite media tour (SMT): A series of pre-booked television and/or radio interviews with stations and networks across the country, conducted from one location during a set block of time.

Secondary markets: These are media markets outside of major cities such as Cherry Hill, NJ, and Bradenton, FL.

Sidebar: A short accompanying piece for a larger story, often with a human-interest angle and usually blocked off from the main text.

Sound bite: A 7 to 10-second statement from a spokesperson that is incorporated into a radio or television news story.

Syndicate: An organization that buys, sells, and distributes stories, columns, features, Sunday supplements, etc., to newspapers, magazines, and periodicals for simultaneous publication.

Syndicated feature: A short audio or video program containing news, personalities, critiques, etc., that is sold to individual broadcast stations.

Syndicated program: Any non-network program sold, licensed, distributed, or offered to television stations' licensees in more than one market.

Syndicated writer or column: A writer or column carried by a number of different newspapers.

Trade press: A newspaper or magazine that serves the interests of a particular industry, such as healthcare, design, computers, pharmaceuticals, food service, etc. Also called a trade journal, trade magazine, trade paper, or trades.

Video news release (VNR): A packaged 90-second to two-minute news story crafted especially for airing as "filler," or to add impact and images in news blocks. VNRs also have B-roll, or background footage, tagged onto the end for producers who are looking for generic footage to enhance their stories.

Viewership: A generic term for television audience in general; a term similar in scope to readership.

STEPS TO DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE MEDIA OUTREACH PROGRAM

Use the worksheet below to develop the key elements of your organization's media outreach program.

1. Define your media objectives.

a. _____

_____

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b. _____

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c. _____

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2. Create a realistic timeline for achieving your objectives.

Quarter One

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Quarter Two

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Quarter Three

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Quarter Four

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3. Identify your primary and secondary target audiences.

Primary

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Secondary

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4. Develop key messages.

a. _____

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b. _____

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c. _____

_____

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5. Identify and draft appropriate media materials.

___ Media Advisory
___ Press Release
___ Spokesperson Bios

Fact Sheets
___ About Us
___ Suicide Statistics
___ Warning Signs
___ Resources

6. Identify credible spokesperson.

_____

_____

7. Conduct media training as necessary and appropriate.

8. Develop an effective media lists(s).

Organization	Contact	Beat/Title	Phone	Fax	Email	Address	City	State	Zip Code	Notes
Print										
Television										
Radio										

9. Develop news "angles" or story ideas.

___ Change, innovation or discovery
___ A surprising or disturbing trend
___ Data and statistics
___ Useful information

___ Conflict
___ Drama
___ Pocketbook
___ Health

10. Identify appropriate pitch.

___ Pitch Letter – E-mail, Mail, or Fax?
___ Media Advisory – E-mail, Mail, or Fax?
___ Press Release – E-mail, Mail or Fax?
___ Media Kit
___ Phone Call

11. Make your pitch.

___ Follow-up
___ Provide reporter with any additional information or resources.
___ Arrange interviews.

12. Track results.

Name of Campaign or Activity								
Outlet	Type	Contact	City	State	Date	Circulation	Impressions	Hits
TOTAL:								