

Radio and Television

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A broad audience

Local radio and television stations often have talk shows or other community-based programming that generates lots of interest among listeners and viewers. These public affairs shows are always looking for ideas and they are a good way to reach a broad audience.

As with other forms of media, getting a spot on radio or television is not as tough as you might think. Here are some general guidelines:

- Contact the producer of a radio or television show that you think will be interested in your message. Suggest that a spokesperson from your organization appear on the program.
- Send a follow-up letter and a packet of information on your group or issue.
- Follow up with a phone call. Be helpful. Explain why this program or issue would be of interest to readers/viewers.

Talk radio

Talk radio is becoming increasingly popular and can provide a good way to get your message across to the community.

Consider these statistics from the Radio Advertising Bureau:

- Americans average about three hours of radio listening per day.
- Two out of three Americans listen to radio during prime time.
- Radio is the first morning news source for most people.
- Seventy-seven percent of all adults can be reached through car radio.

Talk radio is just that—talk. It's not a lecture and it's not news. Audiences tune in, researchers have found, because they value the intimacy, immediacy and anonymity of talk radio; they are looking for personal information and often respond to advice and on-air counseling. Both listeners and callers tend to personalize their relationship with the host, as if they were a friend or co-worker.

Talk radio can be an effective tool for sharing information about child welfare. Consider the issue of child care. Working women in your community may have concerns about availability of services, costs and other issues. They might welcome the opportunity to talk to an objective expert who could respond to their questions.

To secure a spot on your local talk radio show, follow these guidelines:

Contacting talk radio—Listen to the talk radio shows in your area and determine which ones would be receptive to you and your organization and which have the desired target audience. Remember that talk show hosts and their listeners have children and grandchildren. They may be very interested in the expertise you could bring to a show. Write or call the host or news director and present a brief description of your issue or program, along with biographical information on yourself and any others who would appear on the show. (It is a good idea to have two people on to field questions; one can be thinking while the other is talking.)

Remember, you're on the air—Be prepared with a brief statement of the issue or program you are discussing. Personalize your talk with anecdotes or an example of a child your program has helped. This will hook listeners and humanize your issue.

When to use talk radio—Talk radio can be especially useful in responding to a current local or national crisis. For example, when a national network airs a segment on abuses in child care, local agencies can use that as an opportunity to speak publicly about what is working in their communities. Radio is also a good format for promoting upcoming events. Invite your community partners to share the spotlight and emphasize local collaboration. Or invite a guest speaker conducting a training for your staff to share his/her expertise on local talk radio. Small community stations are often strapped for cash and might welcome the chance to feature an expert at no cost to them.

Radio coverage of events—Radio stations can also do remote broadcast

from events that you sponsor. Talk to the community affairs or promotions person at your local radio station in advance to explore the possibilities.

Live television

In many communities, the top-rated television program is the locally produced talk show. In most cases, the talk show hosts book their own guests and are eager for new stories to interest their viewers. Your organization could have the angle they want.

Here are some guidelines for taking advantage of television opportunities:

Schedule—Like many in the media, television people are often overworked and underpaid. When approaching them, get to the point. Call the host or news director and explain why and when you want to be on the show. You should expect to schedule these appearances four to six weeks in advance.

Appearance—Many of the rules that apply to talk radio also apply to television, with one major exception: Image is everything! When appearing on television, give careful attention to your appearance.

Support materials—Because television is a visual medium, consider having pictures, video clips of children, children's artwork or something about your program or issue that will catch the eye. Consider putting relevant statistics in graphic form. Discuss options with the host or producer prior to taping.

Capture their interest—Local news programs are always looking for positive "puff" pieces to surround the typical hard news of the day. Always invite television news to cover your event. Call several stations and reporters until you find someone who is interested.

Insider tip:

Radio producers love guests who are able to handle phone calls from interested, but sometimes contentious, listeners. Consider people in your organization who can present information clearly and concisely without getting rattled. If you have someone who is a great storyteller, even better.

ACTION AGENDA

You're on the air!

- Speak directly to the reporter—it is less intimidating than looking at the camera.
- Sit up straight and lean slightly toward the interviewer; don't cross your legs.
- Have your hair neatly combed.
- Avoid distracting earrings or busy ties.
- If wearing a coat, sit on your coattail (this will hold your shoulders back).
- Wear a bit of face powder (You will be under bright, hot lights and there is a perception that someone who is perspiring is not telling the truth.)
- Keep your hands casual and motionless on your lap; don't fidget or clench your fists.
- Wear a solid color but not black, white or light pastels. Avoid glossy and reflective colors. Pink, green, tan or gray all photograph well on television.
- Avoid busy patterns such as herringbone, checks or stripes.
- Never say "No comment." It looks like you are hiding something.
- Always give viewers a contact name and telephone number for more information.
- Request a video copy of your interview for review and critique purposes. You will get better each time!

Don't Forget!

Everything in an interview is on the record. If you don't want something taped or printed, don't say it!

Airing public service announcements

In the United States, radio and television stations allot a certain amount of airtime to run public service announcements or PSAs as a community service. Television stations are required by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to air PSAs. Radio stations are not. PSAs are primarily used by non-profit organizations to announce events or messages in the public interest.

Due to increasing competition and limited space, it can be difficult to place a public service announcement. It is important to get the information to the right person at each station and to explain why your cause is important to the community. In some cases, stations may partner with an organization and produce a spot at no charge.

Radio PSAs

Radio PSAs are usually read from

scripts provided by a non-profit organization. Local radio stations appreciate having public service messages available for broadcast. They seem to especially like announcer-ready copy that on-air talent can read. Sometimes, local professionals or celebrities will tape the announcements in advance at the radio station. In either case, radio PSAs should be brief and to the point. Most are intended to fill no more than 30 seconds.

Television PSAs

A television PSA is anywhere from 10 to 15, or even 30, seconds long and is broadcast at no cost to the organization involved. According to a 1997 survey of public affairs directors, 47% of television PSAs were affiliated with non-profit organizations. In addition, public affairs directors were more likely to consider children's issues than any other cause.

ACTION AGENDA**Distributing TV or radio PSAs**

- Call each station and find out who is responsible for reviewing public service announcements (usually the public affairs or promotions director).
- Find out the preferred format for PSAs. Most TV stations do not accept standard VHS tapes for broadcast; they need a broadcast-quality version. Video production studios can assist you with obtaining the correct format.
- Call each station, introduce yourself and describe the PSA briefly. Request a meeting or ask if you may send the PSA for their review. Make sure to inquire about the station's priority issues and include this as part of your pitch packet.
- Although a meeting is ideal, it is often difficult to obtain one. If you are able to get a meeting, bring plenty of background information about your issue/organization.
- If you are unable to schedule a meeting, send a letter that describes your issue or organization.
- Distribute PSAs as early as possible prior to the time you would like them to air.
- Call a week later to follow up regarding the station's interest. If they agree to run the PSA, ask if they would be able to provide a log of the dates that it is aired.
- Always include a kill date—the date in which the PSA should be pulled from rotation.