



chapter **5**

Working With the Media to Implement the Plan

Former Chrysler Corporation President Lee Iacocca once said, “You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can’t get them across, your ideas won’t get you anywhere.” In the context of promoting policy and environmental change, this statement underscores the importance of knowing how to communicate effectively with the masses, as well as with legislators, regulators, and other key decision makers, on issues of societal concern. The media are a major channel for accomplishing this.

In public health promotion, communication is like solving a complex puzzle — finding the right channel to reach the right audience, with the right message, at the right time. Considerable effort must be taken to identify the people you are trying to educate and influence; craft messages that will impart your information in accurate and appealing ways; and determine the best avenues and opportunities for reaching your target audiences. During the process of planning communication, you and members of your workgroup will establish a blueprint for undertaking these efforts. Chapters 5 and 6 explain how to execute your plan with a range of communication tools and tactics that can foster support for policy and environmental change related to cardiovascular health (CVH). This chapter focuses on working with the media, and Chapter 6 explains how to implement your communication plan by using a number of other communication tools and tactics, including presentations, exhibits, and legislative testimony.

Although media extensions may seem daunting, many of them can be incorporated into your existing efforts. For example, the workgroup meetings can address message development; your documents on disease burden and plans for State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Programs can be the basis for news releases and Op-Ed articles; and your scheduled speaking engagements can be opportunities to invite reporters and educate the media. Your colleagues and partners may offer many resources for media research and education, so consider how the activities you read about here fit into your ongoing work.

DEVELOP KEY MESSAGES

Before starting your communication efforts, you must determine the key messages. A message is the succinct statement of concern (e.g., “Few people know what the numbers in the blood pressure reading mean.”); impact

“Communications is much less about the technology or medium chosen as a vehicle and more about advancing the cause of your organization. An effective communications strategy reflects your organization’s mission, goals, and objectives and is well integrated into daily operations. It requires a clear articulation of audience, clarity of message, and choice of media platform. It also consists of an ongoing feedback relationship between planning and evaluation.”

—Benton Foundation,
Communications Capacity Building Program

(e.g., “High blood pressure is frequently misinterpreted and left untreated.”); and the solution of policy and environmental change (e.g., “State health departments are going to educate physicians on how to implement changes in practice that support better management of high blood pressure.”).

Collaborate closely with your workgroup to develop solid, unified messages for reaching each audience segment. Start by reviewing the list of media, policy makers, program decision makers, sources of funding, and other key CVH stakeholders you have identified as key audiences.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the problem?
- Who or what is causing the problem?
- Who is affected by the problem?
- What tangible actions or policies should be made in response?
- Who has the power to make these changes?

With this information, develop the best messages for reaching each group. Point out the problem you are addressing, why your intended audience should be concerned with this problem, and what they should do about it. The selling points provided in Chapter 4 can serve as a good starting point for developing audience-specific messages. Make your messages powerful and persuasive by incorporating supportive CVH data, emphasizing strategic plans from State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Programs, and “humanizing” the issue.

Before promoting your key messages, use one or more methods of formative evaluation, such as testing with focus groups, individual in-depth interviews, intercepts at central locations, and/or random-sample surveys, to assess the strength and effectiveness of the messages among members of your target audience. This evaluation will help you identify and correct any potential problems concerning comprehension and ensure that the messages are appealing and culturally and linguistically appropriate for the audience. *(See Chapter 4 for additional information about formative evaluation.)*

MARKET TO MEDIA

After the workgroup’s key messages have been completed, convey them through media advocacy. Media advocacy is the strategic use of mass media to advance a social or public policy initiative. It can help to build individual awareness of an issue, but media

advocacy primarily serves to promote population-focused solutions to widespread problems. As an essential part of your communication workgroup, media advocacy will relay your messages about CVH in a way that educates and informs and also generates public interest in changing policy, practices, and norms contributing to CVD.

Key decision makers — from state lawmakers to local elected officials — constantly monitor the news to stay abreast of the local issues, trends, and opinions that affect their daily work. Consequently, media coverage is one of the best ways to attract their attention and influence their policy initiatives. Media advocacy also will help you shape public opinion to mobilize grassroots support for policy and environmental change related to CVH.

Successful media advocacy requires you to identify the audience(s) you are trying to reach and gain access to the media that reach them. By determining your communication goals early, developing clear and consistent messages, and using the range of media tools described in this guide, you can start ongoing coverage of the CVD problem with persuasive discussion of policy and environmental solutions. As you develop the media outreach plan, be sure to incorporate a process for evaluating your progress and outcomes. *(See Chapter 4 for information on conducting evaluations.)* Following is an overview of the steps you can take to establish and sustain media relations that support your advocacy efforts.

Capturing Media Attention

Before starting media outreach, you and your workgroup members should work closely to identify the most promising opportunities for media placement. Consult your internal public information officers and other communication office(s) and partner staff to assess the collective media relationships, resources, and expertise. Several State Heart

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Disease and Stroke Prevention Programs have hired communication specialists to assist their efforts, and many find the resources for these staff members by sharing them with other programs to prevent chronic disease. If your program does not allow you to work directly with the media, consider working with your public information office or partner organizations. With thoughtful planning and the assignment of individual media research and development tasks, you can develop and implement a comprehensive plan for sustained media outreach. The 10 key steps presented here will guide you through the media outreach process:

Step 1. Select the Media Liaison

Assign one person to serve as the primary point of contact with the media. This person should have some experience in working with the media, because he or she will be responsible for disseminating your workgroup's information, receiving media inquiries, referring media to designated spokespeople, and coordinating interviews and appearances. All materials distributed to the media should include the name of your media liaison with his or her daytime and evening telephone numbers, so reporters can get answers to their questions whenever necessary.

Step 2. Develop a Media Contact List

Create a list of the statewide and local print, broadcast, and online reporters and media outlets that cover politics and legislation and health-related topics, particularly CVH. The state health department's public information officer or the American Heart Association's state representative may already have a media list you can use. Depending on

the positioning of your workgroup's CVH media advocacy efforts, you may decide to include media covering general health, lifestyles, women's issues, aging, science, economics, environment, fitness, and community "beats." You can identify which persons and news organizations to incorporate into your list by reading newspapers, magazines, and trade and specialty publications; monitoring television and radio news programs; and surfing popular Internet news sites that cover your area. Also, check several media directories available in public libraries, from local public relations associations, and through your program partners and public information and media relations staff.

Pay close attention to the type of audience(s) that each publication, program, and Web site reaches. Because some of your media advocacy efforts are likely to target legislators and other key decision makers, and other efforts will aim to reach the general population of health consumers, you will want to assemble a list of media that encompasses all of the key audience segments. Be sure to include media outlets targeting African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, urban and rural areas, and other racially and ethnically diverse populations your initiative seeks to reach.

Do not forget to include electronic wire service contacts on your list. Wire services (e.g., *Associated Press* and *Reuters*) have regional bureaus that disseminate news to a host of print, broadcast, and online media outlets. In many major cities, they also produce and circulate a complete daily listing of scheduled news events, known as a "daybook." You may also want to include contact information for public relations wire services, such as *PR Newswire* and *Business Wire*, which will transmit your news releases and story ideas directly into newsrooms for a fee.

Once you decide which media to

A work sheet to help you organize and develop your media list is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources on page 107*.



include on your list, call and confirm the correspondent names and contact information. Be sure to obtain titles, addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. In general, your list should include contact information for the types of media representatives listed in the box below. (See *Media Contact Information List below*.)

Bear in mind that turnover in the media is high, so it is important to keep your list up-to-date. Try to verify the names of the media contacts every few months to ensure that your outreach is directed to the appropriate individuals.

Step 3. Get to Know Target Media

Take time to develop relationships with the media you have identified. Believe it or not, you are a valuable resource to them. With one simple telephone call to a savvy media liaison, a reporter on deadline can get in touch with dozens of experts and background resources to complete his or her story. How can you develop rewarding relationships with reporters? Get to know them. Before sending a media kit or picking up the telephone to deliver a pitch, read their articles and editorials, watch their television news reports, and listen to their radio programs. Media lists provide basic contact information, but you need to determine whether a reporter's style, format, background, and audience are appropriate for your messages. Whether by telephone or in person, it is important to introduce yourself and establish rapport. However, do not call when a reporter is facing a deadline (typically during mid- to late afternoon), and do not drop by without an appointment. When contact is made, be brief and to the point. Try to gain additional insight on your target media's day-to-day operations by asking the following questions:

- What type of content do you look for?
- When is it most convenient to reach you?
- How do you prefer to find out about news events (e.g., fax, mail, telephone call, or e-mail)?
- How far in advance do you like to receive information?
- When are your typical deadlines?
- Can you use stock photos/audio feed/video footage?
- Are there any special sections or talk shows scheduled to focus on CVH or related health issues?

MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION LIST

Newspapers — (dailies/weeklies)
News editor, assignment desk editor, city/metro editor, and relevant beat reporters and columnists

Magazines — (monthlies/weeklies)
Managing editor or department editor

Television — (basic/cable) News director, assignment director, and program producer

Radio — (AM/FM) News director, public affairs director, program producer, and/or host

Wire Services — (news/public relations)
News: Bureau chief and/or daybook editor
Public relations: Sales representative

Trade and Specialty Publications — Editor, managing editor, or community editor



Step 4. Frame Messages and Create Supportive Materials

The content you choose to disseminate through the media must be newsworthy. Local media focus heavily on hometown and regional developments. The more localized your information is, the greater chance you have of placing it in the news. Tying your story to an issue or trend that is receiving media attention and/or raising concern among local policy makers, such as soaring health care costs, can enhance the likelihood of media pickup.

Search your area's current media coverage for stories that can be directly linked to the need for policy and environmental change related to CVH. For example, you may find news about a local ban on smoking in restaurants that you can incorporate into a CVH-focused pitch to area media about how tobacco use not only causes lung cancer, but

is also a key risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Similarly, you may encounter coverage on response times for 9-1-1 calls and turn that into a pitch about how people experiencing heart attack and stroke do not call 9-1-1 early enough to receive the full benefit of immediate treatment. News media are always looking for ways to build on their recent coverage with new, thought-provoking angles. By the same token, local media outlets constantly seek information to show the local impact of national trends, so look for opportunities to share state data on the CVD burden. For example, you could use the CDC atlases related to cardiovascular disease to obtain state maps with county information on mortality rates by racial and ethnic groups. Data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may also be available for counties or regions of the state.



TIPS

HINTS FOR SUCCESS

- Relate messages to state CVH plans.
- Keep materials on hand for quick response.
- Remember that partners can say things that government employees cannot say.
- Keep a page of key facts, with sources for keeping them current, such as CDC's *Atlas of Stroke Mortality* and the American Heart Association's annual update of statistics on heart disease and stroke.
- Have a list of national and state media events you can use to generate media attention for prevention of heart disease and stroke.
- Prepare key quotations in advance or prearrange for spokespersons from priority populations and groups (e.g., American Heart Association, survivors of heart disease and stroke, and experts on high blood pressure).
- Promote the media priorities listed in the CDC Program Announcement 02045 (Cardiovascular Health Programs), such as the national tragedy of heart disease and stroke, the signs and symptoms of heart attack and stroke, the overall need for policy and environmental approaches to prevent CVD, and the need for specific policy and environmental changes in your state.¹
- Gather stories that illustrate the impact of heart disease and stroke on your state's residents. Obtain written permission from your storytellers before releasing their stories to reporters and policy makers.

Before approaching the media with a news pitch, it is important to understand what they want. Reporters and producers all seek similar story elements, including

- Audience appeal,
- Timeliness,
- Human impact,
- New or unusual perspectives,
- Issues that stimulate controversy and debate, and
- Reports that enhance readership and yield high ratings.

Members of the media also are always looking to “scoop” their competitors; they try to avoid duplicating stories that have already been covered. They also stay away from inaccurate or incomplete news accounts and people who are overly persistent when a pitch has been rejected.

After determining the best approach for reaching targeted media, incorporate your framed messages into a comprehensive range of media materials, such as a news release, media pitch letter, media lead sheet,

and/or an Op-Ed. Tips for developing and distributing these and other media materials are provided in step 6. Keep in mind that if your communication effort has a significant multicultural focus, you may find it necessary to translate certain media materials into different languages to capture non-English-speaking audiences.

Step 5. Verify and Solidify the Facts

After framing your key messages and channeling them into appropriate tools for media distribution, take a few minutes to verify and solidify your facts. While computer software can help you to avoid and correct spelling and grammatical errors, it cannot replace your ability to properly attribute facts or detect an embarrassing mathematical mistake. Before releasing any materials, check all the copy a final time — this time looking for errors and confusing statements that your computer will not catch. Here are a few tips to follow in your final review:

- Check for proper attribution (a phrase that provides the source of the information in a sentence).
- Make sure all the numbers add up.

TIPS

HOW TO CREATE A NEWS RELEASE

- Type your release, double-spaced, on 8.5" x 11" letterhead, with the name and telephone number of your media liaison in the top right-hand corner of the first page.
- If the news is to be publicized right away, specify, “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE,” followed by the date, in the top left-hand corner.
- If you want the story to be disclosed after a particular date and time, list it as “EMBARGOED UNTIL (the date and time of release).” Realize, however, that although they usually do, the media are not legally required to honor this embargo.
- The headline should be centered two or three lines below the release instructions.
- If your copy exceeds one page, indicate that it continues on a second page by typing “more” at the bottom center of the first page.
- On the second page, type an identifying phrase with the page number, such as “Cardiovascular health, p. 2 of 2” in the upper left-hand corner. To signify the end of your release, type “###” or “-30-” centered below the closing paragraph.



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- Eliminate confusing and misleading acronyms, abbreviations, and medical jargon.
- Confirm that all the names, titles, headlines, graphs, charts, tables, and captions are correct and appropriate.
- Test all telephone numbers and Web sites that you include.

Step 6. Develop Your Media Materials

Once you have framed the messages and gathered the necessary supporting information, you are ready to create a range of media materials. The number of materials discussed here may seem daunting, but you may not need to develop all of the items every time you conduct media outreach. For example, some announcements require only a news release and fact sheet, and others require development of additional materials.

News releases are used to make announcements and provide print, broadcast, and online media with the relevant information about a story idea, issue, or event. Whether you are advising them of a news conference, issuing a statement, or releasing new data, your news release will be the single most important document in attracting media attention. Local newspapers in small towns often print news releases verbatim, but in larger communities, reporters typically use them to develop their own stories.

When drafting a news release, follow the “inverted-pyramid” style of writing by presenting your news in descending order of importance. Using active voice, try to answer the 5 Ws (“who, what, where, when, and why”) in the release’s lead, which is the first one to two paragraphs. The first paragraph should consist of one or two sentences — no longer than 30 words —



that give the reader a clear understanding of your announcement. Additional details should be presented in short, simple sentences throughout the body of the release. You may want to include a quote from a member of your workgroup or a supportive local official. Identify the people mentioned in your release by their titles and organizations. Attribute all comments that reflect opinion, and refrain from editorializing. The last paragraph should include boilerplate language that describes your workgroup and its mission in two or three sentences.

A sample news release is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 109.



Media pitch letters essentially are written sales proposals. Their purpose is to interest an editor or reporter in a potential story, interview, or event. Because the media receive literally hundreds of proposals each day, you must craft a well-written, original pitch that will stand out from the rest. Pitch letters that sell generally contain several key elements. First, they open with a “grabber” — an interesting statement that motivates the reader to read on. Next, they explain why the media representative should be interested in the invitation. Finally, they are personally written for specific people, rather than addressed simply to “Editor.” Present your pitch in the form of a standard, one-page professional letter. Double-check for clean copy; nothing frustrates a writer more than receiving a letter marred by errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

A sample media pitch letter is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 111.



Fact sheets are concise reference documents containing the essential information of an industry, organization, event, outcome, or discovery. Their short outline enables the media to identify the key elements of a story at a quick glance. With respect to your communication initiative, a fact sheet focused on disease should provide answers to the basic questions about CVH. An organizational fact sheet should include brief information about your workgroup’s mission and primary activities, top administrators, size, structure, office location, and historical background. Fact sheets announcing special events, outcomes, or discoveries typically take the form of the 5 Ws. The document should include the name, address, and telephone and fax numbers of your media liaison.

Backgrounders are detailed descriptions of an industry, organization, activity, or special issue. Approximately one to two pages in length, they explain the purpose of a company, profession, event, or formal position and provide the media with historical information including dates and statistics. Subject matter generally dictates the style of the backgrounder. Some are written like a news release, in a snappy and factual manner. Others take a more descriptive and narrative form.

Biographical summaries (“bios”) recount the most pertinent facts about an individual. Most organizations keep a file of bios on their key officers and staff. Bios can list straightforward, factual information in descending order of importance, with company-oriented facts preceding more personal details, or they can be written in a breezy, informal style, bringing the individual to life through narration. Narrative bios often form the basis for introductions of guest speakers.

A sample fact sheet is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 113.



TIPS

MEDIA CONTACT TIMELINE

In general, use the following guidelines on when to release information and follow up with the media. Local media deadlines may vary.

Initial Contact

- Magazine editors, television talk-show producers6–8 weeks in advance
- Radio talk-show producers and calendar editors3–4 weeks in advance
- Newspaper editors and television/radio assignment editors . . .2 weeks in advance

Second Contact

- All types of media5 days in advance

Follow-up Telephone Calls

- All types of media1–2 days in advance

Thank-you Notes and Telephone Calls

- All types of media1 day after coverage

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Media lead sheets are designed to generate media interest in a selection of key issues, news angles, and/or feature ideas. They usually run from one to two pages in length with three to five capsulated story suggestions. In developing a media lead sheet, you must determine which news stories, issues, and/or features your workgroup wants to promote. Try to provide a wide variety of topics relating to your key audience segments. A well-crafted lead sheet that presents a range of timely CVH topics can set the foundation for special segment coverage, lasting from several days to a week.

A sample media lead sheet is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 115.



Media advisories often are developed to provide advance notice or remind reporters of an upcoming event, such as a news conference or proclamation signing; they are designed to generate on-site coverage. These advisories are concise alerts that include information about interview opportunities and are framed using the 5 Ws. They also are used to update event information and note any changes to details publicized by earlier news releases. Their format is short, generally no longer than 75–100 words, and uses bigger and bolder typefaces than the standard news release. This catches the eye of the reporter and provides a quick update at a moment's glance.

A sample media advisory is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 117.



Step 7. Get Your Message Out

Depending on the nature of your efforts for CVH policy and environmental change, the stories you decide to pitch to the media may range from urgent, breaking news, to soft features, to in-depth issue analysis. The timeliness and depth of the content will dictate how quickly or far in advance you should approach the media. The Media Contact Timeline on page 45 provides a general timeline for media contact.

As you proceed with making your pitch, record the initial response of the media you contact, as well as the information you provided and any placement or plans for follow-up. To organize this information, use a database or a media contact work sheet. (See sample provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources*, page 107.) When media contact you unsolicited, you should incorporate the details of their correspondence into this record. By documenting both the process and results of your proactive and reactive media activities, you will create a useful tool for evaluating the effectiveness of your media strategy and overall success in capturing media attention.

After a media representative accepts your pitch, he or she will focus on numerous details before your story runs. These will include conducting background research, constructing an appealing format, integrating the story with related subjects, and preparing a working script. In large media markets and for very popular programs, you may find that lead time is longer than the averages provided in the Media Contact Timeline. Monthly or weekly publications, special sections, and in-depth reports are exceptions. You should obtain information on these deadlines while creating your media list and allow time for your internal clearances.

Media contact #1. Your first contact with the media should be by fax or mail, or by e-mail in response to a specific request.

A news release may provide sufficient information for your first contact, or you may want to use a media pitch letter directed to a specific media representative.

Media contact #2. The second contact with the media generally should be made by telephone. Before calling, take another look at the stories recently produced or published by the individual you are calling. Try to identify how your CVH story might relate to his or her coverage and to other recent stories from the station or publication. You may wish to keep notes in front of you and practice your pitch with a colleague to develop a smooth delivery.

When you reach a reporter on the telephone, talk in headlines and sound bites, providing the key information quickly. Be careful not to sound like you are reading from a script. Ask for his or her impression of your ideas. Quickly reiterate why you think the topic is newsworthy and how it affects the station's or publication's audience. Bear in mind that even though the contact may be willing to cover your story, his or her top priority is to serve the interests of the readers, listeners, or viewers. Explain how your idea affects people and how the story will help to educate and inform the reporter's audience. Ask if the reporter has any questions or would like additional information. If he or she is interested, do not waste time in continuing the pitch. Just close the deal. If he or she is not interested, ask for a referral to another reporter, editor, or producer who might be interested.

Do not be surprised if the media representative failed to receive your initial information. Instead, give a brief explanation of the story (5 Ws of the event), reiterate its importance to the local community, and resend the information. In addition, do not hang up if your message is answered by a recorded message. Use this opportunity to present your 30-second pitch. Reporters often use

voice mail to screen calls. Eventually they will receive your message.

Media contact #3. The third contact should be made by mail or e-mail to support your initial outreach. A media kit is an effective tool for reinforcing the messages presented in your original news release with additional background information about CVH policy and environmental change issues. Media kits generally consist of the initial news release and/or pitch letter, fact sheets, backgrounders offering historical information about your workgroup and the CVH field, and related statistics. These documents can be provided in hard copy or electronic format, depending on the reporter's preference.

In preparing a media kit, you must weigh carefully how much information is required. The media do not appreciate receiving excessive materials. Regardless of the type of story, event, or study finding you are pitching to the media, reporters will only cover topics they deem newsworthy for their target audiences. Therefore, to enhance the likelihood of receiving coverage, you should supplement your kit with a media lead sheet. The media lead sheet, as well as the other components of your kit, should be enclosed in a sturdy and attractive folder with a media pitch letter attached.

Step 8. Follow Up

Shortly after pitching your story ideas to the media, you should have a clear idea of who is interested in providing coverage. Place follow-up calls to ensure that these individuals have the information needed to craft their stories and/or attend your special event. Call each publication and/or station periodically until you reach the person(s) assigned to your story. On the day of an event, try to secure the media who have agreed to attend by calling and offering additional assistance. Ask if there are any breaking stories that may prevent them from

attending. If so, offer to assist them in developing an alternative CVH story at another time.

Assignment editors are constantly receiving new stories and throwing out the old ones. It is not unusual for an editor to assign coverage minutes before an event. Therefore, it is a good idea to follow up with all of your contacts as time permits, even those who originally seemed uninterested. Another follow-up tactic is to fax a media advisory.

Do not get discouraged if a reporter decides not to cover your story. Simply thank the person for his or her time and move on to the next call. Do not delete the contact from your media list. Just because he or she could not cover one story, do not assume that the contact will not pick up the next one.

Step 9. Monitor and Evaluate the Coverage

One of the most important and often overlooked steps in media relations is monitoring and evaluating the coverage. Monitoring your news coverage serves two useful purposes:

- It enables you to evaluate the overall effectiveness of your media advocacy efforts and to identify areas that require improvement.
- It helps you to recognize which media representatives provided the most accurate reporting and are most likely to provide future coverage.

Establish a process to obtain the news clippings, tapes, and transcripts of every story on CVH policy and environmental change story that results from your media advocacy efforts. Local media coverage can be tracked fairly easily. One person from your staff or workgroup should be assigned to read all the local newspapers and Web sites you target or to gather and review all the articles you receive from a press-clipping service.

Others should tape the local television and radio programs with which you interacted. Work with your public information/communication offices and with workgroup members to determine the most cost-efficient and effective way to track the news.

If your story attracts coverage from a national wire service, newspaper, or magazine, you may want to search the Web site or hire a clipping service to retrieve all the placements. Three press-clipping services are popular among public relations professionals:

- Bacon's Information, phone: (800) 621-0561
- Burrelle's, phone: (800) 631-1160
- Luce, phone: (800) 528-8226

You also can purchase tapes and transcripts of television news and public affairs programs from the networks, cable systems, and local stations in more than 150 cities and national and local radio segments through Video Monitoring Services of America, Inc., phone: (212) 736-2010.

Use the database or the media contact work sheet you created to document all media coverage you receive. By indicating where placements have been achieved and which targeted media outlets either lack interest in your initiative or require greater outreach, this record will enable you to assess and refine your media advocacy efforts with ease.

Step 10. Provide Media With Feedback

Ask various coalition members and outside supporters to help you respond to favorable coverage. Phone calls to newspapers and stations will let the media know that people in the community saw and appreciated their work. Positive feedback demonstrating significant local interest in efforts for CVH policy and environmental change may spark additional coverage. Your media liaison also should call the media who provided

coverage, letting them know how their stories called greater attention to the CVD problem and promoted potential solutions. Thank the media for a job well done and offer to assist them in the future.

Conducting Media Interviews

Every interview you secure with a print, television, radio, or online reporter should be treated as a precious opportunity to send key messages for CVH policy and environmental change to influential audiences. In addition to profiling the work of your workgroup, media interviews allow you to discuss the problems contributing to CVD and introduce viable solutions of policy and environmental change. However, before committing to conducting or assisting in an interview, it is important for your workgroup to perform some background investigative work, consult with appropriate spokespeople, and explore the availability of additional resources to guide the story's development. This research and deliberation will help you to determine whether the media

opportunity is viable and to ensure that the best approach is taken to promote and protect its collective interests.

Respond to Media Inquiries

When a reporter requests an interview, find out what it was that he or she found compelling. Did he or she receive a copy of your news release? Was he or she inspired to call you by a suggestion from your media lead sheet for additional information about the role of public schools in promoting CVH among children, for example? If the reporter contacts you without solicitation, find out how your workgroup became a source. Then, focus on assisting the reporter with the story. Ask the following questions:

- What is the overall focus and tone of your story? Will it be informational or entertaining?
- What questions would you like to ask? How much time will the interview require?

TIPS

CONDUCTING TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

■ **Dress appropriately.** Wear clothing that is professional but not overly formal. Solid colors are better than prints, but avoid red, white, or light pastels. Pink, green, tan, and gray appear well on television. Bright colors are a good choice as long as they do not dominate your appearance. Keep jewelry simple. Let nothing dangle that can distract you from what you are saying. If you wear a uniform to work (e.g., lab coat, scrubs, or military uniform), consider wearing that for your interview. Although most camera shots are from the chest up, women should be aware of their skirt length and men should make sure their socks cover the calves when their legs are crossed.

- **Look at the interviewer.** Unless otherwise instructed, look directly at the host and maintain good eye contact. Do not look at the camera. Relax and avoid nervous motions or mannerisms. Use but do not overuse your smile and hand gestures.
- **If seated, sit up straight.** Try not to appear stiff. Lean slightly forward in your chair. Do not lean into the microphone or tap your feet.
- **Avoid sitting in a chair that swivels.** If you must sit in a swivel chair, plant your feet on the floor in a way that will prevent you from inadvertently turning the chair.
- **If standing, stand up straight.** Do not place your feet side to side, but plant more weight on one foot than the other. This will prevent you from swaying.

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- How long have you been working on this story? Is anyone helping you with the story?
- Have you interviewed other persons or received background information from any other organizations? Who else do you plan to interview?
- How long will this article or segment be? Is it part of a special series?
- What types of visual elements will accompany the story? Are you trying to obtain any photographs, graphic data, or video footage?
- When is your deadline? Do you know when the story will run? In what section of the newspaper or part of the program will your story appear?
- Have you covered stories on this topic before?

After obtaining this background information, tell the reporter you need to check with your staff to determine who might be available for an interview. Make sure that he or she knows that you will be in touch within the next day. During this time, try to gain additional insight about the reporter by reviewing samples of his or her previous work.



TIPS

SELECTING INTERVIEWEES

Follow these guidelines in selecting a patient with CVD or a family member for a media interview:

- **Enlist a person who is highly supportive of CVH promotional efforts and can address key consumer issues.** For example, if a segment is dealing with proposed legislation to increase public funding for blood pressure and cholesterol screenings, the patient or family member should be able to explain how this policy change would enhance early detection, treatment, and prevention of CVD throughout the community.
- **Select a patient who is comfortable about being interviewed and filmed in a medical setting.** Newspaper and television camera crews often want to obtain photographs and b-roll (background action footage) while a patient is receiving medical treatment.
- **Make sure the person's schedule is flexible.** Media interviews may be cancelled or rescheduled at the last minute because of competing demands for the reporter's time.
- **For local stories, try to select a patient or family member whose home is close to the news organization's office.** National news media are more flexible. They usually can travel greater distances or arrange to have a reporter and/or camera crew from a regional office or affiliate conduct the interview.
- **Be sure the patient and/or family member understands that even though an interview may be conducted, coverage is not guaranteed.** It is not uncommon for breaking news stories to preempt scheduled programming. Newspaper editors also have been known to "pull" or postpone articles.
- **Obtain news clippings, videotapes, and/or transcripts of every story and provide a copy to each individual involved.** Express your thanks for assistance with the interview by sending a note or a gift.

Evaluate his or her style of interviewing, writing, and/or production. If a story about CVH is part of the reporter's previous work, how was it presented? If the reporter gave you names of other CVH professionals already interviewed for the story, you may decide to call them. They should be willing to share the information they provided and tell you what they anticipate from the piece.

Train the Spokespeople

When you and members of your workgroup consent to an interview, take time to identify the most appropriate spokesperson. In addition to being knowledgeable about the CVH policy and environmental change issues at hand, this person should be able to communicate with clarity, confidence, and class. Your state public information officer or American Heart Association advocacy liaison may be able to help train your spokesperson. Brief the spokesperson on the information the reporter is looking for and what the readers or viewers most likely will want to know. Be sure to include details about the reporter's style of interviewing and experience in covering CVH issues.

Next, develop a media "question-and-answer" form, providing quick and easy answers to the questions you anticipate the spokesperson will be asked. In addition, determine your key message, and establish three main points in statement form that support it. You also should devise a strategy for handling potential questions or issues your workgroup wants to avoid. Conduct a mock interview to practice the spokesperson's presentation, and identify statements that he or she needs to revise. Here are some instructions for your spokesperson to keep in mind during an interview:

- **Relax.** Keep in mind that the reporter is just a person like you who is trying to do a good job. Speak in a natural, audible tone.
- **Keep your message simple.** Answer questions briefly, directly, and to the point. Begin by saying, "Yes," "No," "I agree," or "That's a good point."
- **Use quotable language, and avoid long-winded statements.** Reporters like quotes that can explain a difficult issue or concept with an interesting metaphor or analogy. Avoid using jargon and acronyms.
- **Support general statements with reliable facts, figures, and examples.** For example, do not say, "Many people in our state have heart disease." Say, "Recent studies show that (insert percentage) of men and (insert percentage) of women in our state have high blood pressure, elevated blood cholesterol levels, heart disease, or stroke."
- **Stay focused.** Concentrate on the primary message and three supporting points that the workgroup wants you to make. If questions start to move away from your main points, politely transition back to your key message.
- **Be assertive, but never argue or fight.** Correct any misstatements made by the reporter immediately, but in a positive way, such as, "Let's make sure we understand this clearly, because it's a very important point..." Then state the information correctly.
- **Never lie.** Credibility is your best asset. Do not squander it.
- **Do not dodge questions.** It is a signal that you have something to hide.
- **If you cannot answer a question, admit it.** Offer to find the answer as soon as possible. Then follow through on your promise.
- **Do not answer hypothetical questions.** Respond by saying, "That's completely hypothetical, but what I can tell you is...", and refer to one of your three main points.

- **Do not restate a negative question.** Always try to convert a negative question into a positive answer. For example, if a reporter asks, “Isn’t it true that when people have a stroke there is not much the hospital can do for them?” an appropriate response would be, “The problem is that most hospitals are not equipped to treat patients who have had a stroke. With proper, swift treatment, death and disability from stroke can be decreased, and stroke patients can return to work and to independent living, instead of needing a nursing home.”
- **Do not ask for a statement to be off the record.** If you never want to see a comment in the morning print or hear it on the evening news, do not say it. Likewise, do not assume that an interview is over just because a recorder is turned off, a notepad is tucked away, or a cameraperson appears to be distracted.
- **If you have promised a reporter additional information, get it quickly.** Failing to fulfill a request may come back to haunt you when the story runs.

Refer Media to Outside Sources

On some occasions, a reporter may ask you for assistance in locating persons outside your workgroup who will consent to an interview. These individuals may include patients with CVD and their family members, physicians and other medical professionals, health care researchers, and policy analysts. It is helpful to have an up-to-date media resource list of people you can call on for an interview.

Work with the members of your workgroup to identify persons who fit appropriate profiles and are articulate and well-versed in delivering important messages about CVH.



TIPS

ORGANIZING A NEWS CONFERENCE

- **Schedule the conference for a day and time that is convenient and accommodating to local media deadlines.** Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, between 10 am and 2 pm, generally is a safe window to work with.
- **Hold the conference at a well-known location that is easy for media to access.** Aim for a location that is central to most major local media offices. Hotel conference rooms, private clubs, and other common meeting rooms are good options if your news does not demand a special on-the-scene location, such as a statehouse or other public venue.
- **Prepare visual aids that reinforce your key messages.** Charts and graphs help reporters to better understand facts, figures, and comparisons more quickly. Television crews appreciate visuals that can enhance their film footage.
- **Anticipate on-site requests for interviews.** Be prepared to schedule media interviews with key spokespeople on the spot, and have a quiet area set aside to conduct them.
- **Make arrangements to videotape and audiotape your conference, using broadcast quality equipment.** This approach will enable you to create and distribute a video and/or audio news release of the event for reporters who are unable to attend.
- **Set up a media sign-in table.** Have a sign-in sheet ready to record the reporters’ names; stations or publications; office and e-mail addresses; telephone and fax numbers; and deadlines. This information will tell you where to look for coverage of the news conference and help you determine which reporter(s) to target for future media events.

Ask these persons if they would be willing to share their CVH perspectives with the media, should the need arise. If so, add their names to your list, along with their titles, work and home addresses, telephone and fax numbers, and a brief description of their association with efforts related to CVH policy and environmental change. Note the best times to reach them and any experience they have in working with the media. Before referring a reporter to an outside source, verify that the person is still receptive to being interviewed. Provide a list of the reporter's questions and information about his or her reporting style and history covering CVH issues. When appropriate, discuss the messages your workgroup would like the person to promote and offer to send background information that may be useful for the interview. (*See additional tips in the chart on Conducting Television Interviews, page 49.*)

Call News Conferences

Consider holding a news conference if your workgroup has a major event or announcement of widespread importance that can be enhanced through charismatic CVH spokespeople and compelling visual elements. News conferences generally are held to allow reporters an opportunity to obtain breaking news that they otherwise would not receive and to have their questions answered. Keep in mind that drawing media to a news conference is one of the greatest communication program challenges. The media are extremely busy people. They are not likely to take an interest unless your news is timely; is taking place in a newsworthy setting, such as a statehouse or community rally; and involves high-profile spokespeople, such as a governor or state legislator.

Avoid a news conference if

- **The information is of interest only to a small segment of the media.** News conferences should be reserved for events or

announcements that are likely to attract coverage from the mass media.

- **The workgroup cannot answer questions beyond the content of its prepared statement.**

Reporters become irritated when they sense they are being used to “stage an event.” Do not call a news conference unless you are willing and able to provide additional information.

- **The news is not urgent.** Ask yourself, “Would I interrupt a reporter on deadline to tell this story?” If not, a news conference is not warranted.

In determining whether a news conference is warranted, you and members of your workgroup should also ask the following questions:

- Can this information be disseminated just as effectively through a news release?

NEWS CONFERENCE KITS

A specialized media kit will help reporters to cover your news conference by providing useful background information they can refer to after the event and for associated interviews. Consider packaging and distributing the following informational resources to the media who check in at the conference site:

- A basic one- to two-page news release;
- A copy of the news conference agenda;
- A copy of each speaker's statement;
- A brief biography of each speaker;
- Background information about your workgroup and cause; and
- Relevant “issue papers,” reports, and/or statistical fact sheets.

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- Will e-mail or news-focused Web sites be equally quick and efficient in delivering this information?
- Can a teleconference or satellite videoconference save time and money and accomplish the same task?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, consider options other than a news conference. However, if you and members of your workgroup decide that a news conference is in order, begin planning immediately. Your first task will be to determine the specific goals, objectives, and message(s) of the news conference. Who will serve as the spokesperson(s)? A general rule of thumb is to arrange for three to five “issue experts” with varied backgrounds to speak for three to five minutes each. For example, if the purpose of your news conference is to release the results of a study showing a relationship between obesity and consumption of snack foods from vending machines, you may wish to feature a physician who can discuss the study’s CVH implications; the lead researcher, who can explain the study’s background and methods; a nutritionist who can present heart-healthy snack alternatives; and/or a business leader who is advocating healthier food choices in the workplace. One spokesperson should serve as the moderator of the news conference by making the opening remarks, introducing the remaining speakers, and directing questions from the media. After selecting your spokespeople, work with each person to draft a list of potential media questions with their appropriate responses. Then

conduct a rehearsal to help the spokespeople prepare. (See the chart on *Organizing a News Conference*, page 52.)

Pitching Your Opinion

Newspaper editorial pages are excellent channels for reaching members of the general public with messages supporting CVH policy and environmental change. Local elected officials and other key decision makers scour editorial pages regularly to stay in touch with the perspectives of their constituents. Editorial pages also are a great way to promote your workgroup as a credible local resource for CVH information. In addition to publishing guest editorials, most newspapers take editorial positions on important local, state, and national issues. You need to take time to identify and pursue opportunities to establish supportive relationships with the staff of the editorial section at local newspapers. Your workgroup can take various approaches to generate widespread support for its initiative.

Submit Letters to the Editor

Every newspaper has a “letters to the editor” section on the editorial page. This section allows you to express your point of view on a particular story or editorial that ran earlier. The letter you submit can either support or oppose the message in an article, or it can offer additional commentary. If you are responding to a previously published piece, you must provide the name of that article, the section in which it appeared, and the date of publication.

When seeking opportunities to promote CVH messages through letters to the editor, keep in mind that your response is not limited to articles specific to CVH. Consider reacting to coverage on related issues, such as the rising costs of medical care or the nation’s growing need for long-term care. Your workgroup’s advocacy for CVH policy and environmental change can easily be incorporated into letters addressing these



To assist your news conference planning efforts, an on-site media checklist is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 119.



issues and any number of other health- and consumer-oriented topics.

Letters to the editor should be short (100 to 350 words) and to the point. Before writing a letter, consult the target newspaper’s guidelines for submission, which usually are listed on the editorial page. Editors almost always limit letters to a specified number of words and require writers to sign their letters. Letters that do not comply with the specified requirements tend to be discarded or edited. Here are general tips for writing a letter:

- **Confine the letter to a single subject.** State your principal opinion clearly at both the beginning and the end, and reference the article you are addressing. Explain how the subject relates to your state and/or community.
- **Incorporate reliable facts and figures.** Be sure to confirm the accuracy of all your data.
- **Provide solutions.** For example, explain to the reader how CVH policy and environmental change can address the issue you are presenting. Always stress the possibilities, not just the problems.
- **Make sure your letter is appropriate for the average reader.** Ask individuals outside the CVH arena to review a draft of your letter to ensure that it can be easily understood.
- **Maintain a professional tone.** Humor helps, but sarcasm hurts. Do not deal on a petty or emotional level.

Unless the target newspaper’s guidelines specify a different format, type the copy of your letter single-spaced on letterhead. Include your name, title, address, and telephone number, so the editor can contact you with any questions. Most newspapers will verify your identity before printing a letter. Also, be sure to include your signature, letters requesting use of initials only are not

usually published. Submit the letter via postal mail, fax, or e-mail, depending on the newspaper’s preference. If you do not receive a response from the editor within two weeks, do not hesitate to contact the newspaper and inquire.

Place Op-Eds

Op-Ed articles are brief opinion pieces, usually published opposite the editorial page in newspapers. Typically 600 to 800 words long, these columns allow the newspaper’s readers to present a particular position or thought on timely or controversial topics in more depth than is possible with letter to the editor. Studying the style of a newspaper’s Op-Eds will help you get a sense of the format and approach most likely to appeal to the editor who selects them. Before developing your Op-Ed article, call the editorial page editor of the newspaper and request information about the submission requirements. Make sure your Op-Ed complies with the newspaper’s editorial guidelines.

A sample Op-Ed is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 121.



When drafting the Op-Ed article, use the following guidelines:

- **Concentrate on one idea.** For example, focus on the heart-healthy value of zoning for sidewalks, green spaces, and bikeways. The first paragraph or two should capture the reader’s attention by stating the central idea and establishing your credibility on CVH.
- **Support your thesis with pertinent facts and statistics.** State your opinions, avoid rhetoric, and do not quote other people. Make certain that the Op-Ed stands alone; do not assume that the reader has any knowledge about the issue.

- **Avoid the use of acronyms, abbreviations, and jargon that may confuse the reader.**
- **Make sure that a reader unfamiliar with CVH will understand your article.**
- **Reinforce your thesis at the conclusion of the Op-Ed.** Your article should be thorough and persuasive, leaving readers with a new perspective on CVH. Be firm with your opinion, but avoid coming on too strong, which may undermine your credibility.
- **Before submitting your article, ask someone who is unfamiliar with the issue to proof it.** If it makes sense to them, it will probably make sense to the average reader.

Type the copy double-spaced on standard white paper, and include a cover letter with your name, title, address, telephone number, and a few sentences detailing your expertise

on the subject at hand. In addition to submitting your Op-Ed to a newspaper's editorial page editor, it is a good idea to send a copy to the health reporter. It may prompt him or her to write a related article.

Once you submit an Op-Ed article, the editor may take two to three weeks or longer to decide whether it will be published. In many cases, the editor will call you if your editorial is accepted. Sometimes he or she will send a letter or postcard rejecting an Op-Ed because space is at a premium. If your article is rejected, try submitting it to another newspaper. If your article is printed, make copies and incorporate them into your outreach efforts targeting policy makers, general consumers, and other key audiences. Share each placement with the members of your workgroup and other colleagues, and encourage them to submit their own editorials.



TIPS

MAKING YOUR EDITORIAL BOARD BRIEFING A SUCCESS

- **Be prepared.** Your ability to clearly state the background and significance of CVH policy and environmental change is critical. You likely will have only 5 to 10 minutes to state your case as persuasively as possible, before receiving questions.
- **Be enthusiastic.** Personal demeanor and nonverbal cues can reveal a lot about your commitment and sincerity. Let your excitement for the issue you present shine through your body language and tone of voice.
- **Be honest.** Do not dodge challenging questions. If you are unsure of the answer to a question, say so, but offer to seek and provide the requested information immediately after the meeting. The editorial board will forgive you for almost anything but dishonesty.
- **Focus on your goal.** Editorial writers are paid to be skeptical and to recognize public relations gimmicks. Sometimes they are friendly. Sometimes they are not. Your goal is to convince them to publish columns and letters in support of CVH policy and environmental change. Do not get angry or defensive if the editorial staff challenges you on the issue. Stay calm and focus on your agenda. Be careful not to get sidetracked with unrelated topics.
- **Ask for support.** As with any good sales presentation, it is important to close the deal. Summarize your message, and ask for their support.
- **Say thanks.** Immediately after the meeting, send a thank-you note to the board members, even if they have not indicated immediate support for or intent to promote your issue.

Conduct Editorial Board Briefings

Another highly effective avenue for “pitching your opinion” about CVH policy and environmental change to local media is the editorial board briefing. This meeting is held with both the governing body of editorial writers and the editors who guide the editorial voice of a newspaper. The purpose may be to challenge biased editorials or to persuade the media outlet to take an editorial position on your issue and/or to publish your Op-Ed. It may be the most effective way to educate the media about CVH and other health-related issues, because it enables you to

- Sit down face-to-face with the editorial staff of a newspaper and discuss at length your perspectives on key issues;
- Establish your workgroup as a reliable and accessible source of local news and information on CVH;
- Assess their knowledge and opinions on CVH issues, and identify the topics attracting their greatest interest;
- Address their specific questions, clarify any misconceptions, and provide in-depth explanations and analyses of complex subjects; and
- Determine how to tailor your message in the future to meet their editorial needs.

To arrange an editorial board briefing, call the appropriate editorial staff liaison and briefly describe the CVH topic(s) you would like to discuss and the positions or expertise of the persons who could accompany you to the meeting. Be receptive to meeting at a time in the day that is most convenient for the media, typically during the morning when reporters are least concerned about deadlines. If you succeed in locking in a meeting,

- Do your research. Identify which members of your workgroup are most appropriate

participants, based on the commentary you plan to present and the questions the media are likely to raise. Develop three to five points outlining why the newspaper or station should support your advocacy for CVH policy and environmental change. Think through the local angle — why should the newspaper’s readers care about the issue? Research the newspaper’s editorials, and be prepared to reference those that will help your case.

- Conduct a preparatory session. Brief all of the individuals who will be with you at the session about the media who will be present, the information they will be looking for, biases they may have, and their writing and editorial styles. Develop a list of potential questions, and determine the best answers. Practice presenting your workgroup’s key messages.
- Develop supportive materials. Prepare a media kit or comprehensive handout that provides facts, statistics, and other background information about the issues you plan to present for distribution to every member of the editorial board. Be sure to include the name and telephone number of the workgroup member who will respond to follow-up questions.

Pursuing Media Partnerships

Establishing formal partnerships with the promotions and advertising divisions of your area media is another effective approach to promoting messages on CVH policy and environmental change to your target audiences. The promotions and advertising arms of media organizations often support local public health education efforts independently of news and editorial operations by publishing print public service announcements or “advertorial” supplements (*see Glossary of Key Terms in Chapter 7: Tools and Resources on page 75*); producing and airing public service announcements on television and radio; and/or sponsoring special events.

Media partnerships will reinforce your workgroup’s earned media activities and enhance the overall reach of your communication initiative in ways that are mutually beneficial to your workgroup and the local media outlets. In addition to helping your workgroup maintain the clarity, consistency, and continuity of its messages, promotional support from local media will help to ensure that the initiative resonates among its target audiences. A general rule of thumb in advertising is that, on average, media consumers need to see or hear a message at least three times to retain it. Partnering with media organizations can help you achieve this saturation through a series of promotions. In turn, media partners benefit by

- Building awareness of an important issue throughout the community;
- Showing concern for their readers, viewers, or listeners — creating goodwill and visibility as a caring corporate citizen; and
- Becoming associated with a high-profile CVH initiative of the state health department and the community.

Begin to explore media partnership opportunities by assessing your workgroup’s current media relationships and the various avenues for garnering local media support. Identify key media — newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations — that you can potentially recruit as official partners. It is likely that one or more of your regional or local media organizations will take an interest in supporting your efforts to promote CVH, particularly if they can gain recognition as a lead partner. Look for stations or publications that have staff members with CVD and/or have supported CVD education efforts in the past.

Members of your workgroup may have paid advertising arrangements in place with local media, which can be leveraged to negotiate

free advertising. For example, if a restaurant owner in the workgroup has purchased time to air commercials through a local radio station, he or she may be able to persuade the station to exchange a certain amount of free air time to run CVH public service announcements on behalf of your workgroup.

You may want to explore the possibility of having a community newspaper publish a customized CVH supplement or insert that includes a series of feature articles promoting initiatives on CVH policy and environmental change, information about your campaign, and related content. This type of partnership activity generally is paid for by a publication’s existing base of advertisers. Likewise, a television station may be receptive to producing and airing a public service announcement promoting “strategies for heart-healthy living,” and a local radio station may agree to sponsor and help promote a local “heart-health” walk event or fair that offers free blood pressure and cholesterol screenings and referrals for the public. Media outlets often fund and advertise special events in exchange for their logo/identification on program materials, such as posters and on-site signage.

Although the promotions and advertising divisions of your local media work independently from news and editorial operations, activities within each department sometimes can be coordinated to promote an important public health education effort simultaneously. For example, a local newspaper’s advertising department may agree to publish a public service announcement that calls attention to CVD and promotes the availability of free local screenings. At the same time, the newspaper’s health reporter may write an article about the growing incidence of CVD in the local community while the editorial page editor publishes a column on policy and environmental change “solutions” for eradicating CVD. As you discuss partnership opportunities with a media organization’s promotions and advertising

staff, alert them to news and editorial outreach efforts you have planned or started so they can attempt to reinforce them.

You should take the primary steps presented here to facilitate media partnerships. Once you have identified the key media targets,

Step 1. Plan the Approach — Craft “The Ask”

Work with members of your workgroup to prioritize the media outlets you will approach and to determine how you would like each organization to support your efforts to promote CVH policy and environmental change. Develop a list of key selling points that clearly describe “what’s in it for them.” Contact each organization to obtain and/or verify contact information for the individuals overseeing advertising and promotions.

Step 2. Contact Targeted Outlets — Request Face-to-Face Meetings

Call the advertising and promotions contacts at each outlet, and explain that you would like to discuss a potential partnership opportunity that may be of interest to them. Give them a 30-second pitch, detailing the goals and messages of your initiative for CVH policy and environmental change and explain how their participation will benefit the health and well-being of their audience. Integrate CVD facts that are specific to your community into your pitch to build an even stronger case for their support. Request an opportunity to meet face-to-face to discuss the possibility further.

Step 3. Pitch the Plan

When meeting in person with potential media partners, provide them with an overview of your workgroup — how it was assembled, its objectives, and how the media organization can contribute to your State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program’s success in communicating important messages about CVH policy and environmental change. Define your organizations’ mutual benefits.

Describe the ways in which you envision having the media outlet serve as a partner in your efforts to promote CVH, and assess their level of interest. Ask the advertising and promotions representatives for suggestions on how the media outlet might support your effort. By the end of the meeting, you should have a pretty clear sense of whether the outlet is interested in pursuing this partnership opportunity. If interest exists, the representatives are likely to request time to review your proposal internally and follow up with you in the near future. Supply each representative with “leave-behind” materials about the initiative, and thank them for taking the time to meet with you.

Step 4. Follow Up

Immediately after your meeting, send a thank-you letter to your media promotions and advertising contacts. Restate your interest in establishing a partnership with their station or publication, and encourage them to call you if they have any questions or would like to schedule a follow-up meeting. If you do not receive a response within the next week, place a follow-up call to your contacts to determine whether your partnership pitch is still under consideration.