

VI. Working with the Media

Media coverage is very important to the success of your Community Summit. Stories in newspapers, magazines, on the radio, TV and the internet about your event and noteworthy participants and speakers can help you reach the broadest possible audience and raise awareness of your Summit and of Citizen Diplomacy.

You play a very important role in raising the media's interest in your initiative, in providing the media useful and timely information, and in getting them to your event. Try to make your event a newsworthy one. Choose a topic that might particularly interest your community, try to get a keynote speaker with name or title recognition, and work the media.

Here are a few tips to guide you as you promote your event with the news media in your community.

IDENTIFY YOUR LOCAL MEDIA

Develop a list of media outlets. Include daily newspapers, weekly newspapers, community and university magazines or newsletters, radio stations, television stations, online news or blog reporting that cover local or international issues, and government access television or radio.

Identify key editors and reporters in each outlet.

- For news coverage or a feature story on the Summit, contact the assignments editor (television), news director (radio, television), city desk editor/travel editor/metro editor/assignment desk editor (newspaper). Depending on the theme and the participants you attract, your Summit may be of interest to several different editors or reporters (for example, travel, international, education, local news).
- For free public service advertising, identify the public service director, advertising manager or publisher.
- Ask for publication deadlines.

Need Help? Consult your mayor's office or Chamber of Commerce, the phone book and the internet, watch and listen to local TV and radio stations, and read the local newspapers/newsletters for names of reporters who cover city/town news, education, travel.

Keep a record of news outlet, editor/reporter's name, mailing address, phone number, newsroom fax number and email address. You'll need these to send out press releases, media advisories and make follow-up phone calls.

CONTACTING THE MEDIA

Preparation

- Call a specific person. Know their title and issue focus. Make sure they've received your press release/advisory.
- Think carefully about how to pitch your event. Be ready to explain succinctly why your Community Summit merits media attention. Emphasize the impact this event will have on your community and for the national Citizen Diplomacy movement.
- Try not to call at a busy time. If the reporter is working on deadline, determine this early in the conversation and offer to call back at a convenient time.
- Have your information ready at hand to answer any questions.
- Know in advance your specific objectives and the key messages you want to communicate. Anticipate the questions a reporter may ask and have ready answers. If you can't answer a question, be prepared to get the answer and get back to the reporter/editor.
- Have a list of persons willing to be interviewed about the Summit (before or after) that you can offer the media: Coordinating Committee chair, your keynote speaker, panelists, moderators.
- Refer the media to the Coalition for Citizen Diplomacy. Note that your Summit is part of a larger initiative of the Coalition. Refer the journalist to the website (www.citizen-diplomacy.org).

Questions Media May Ask About the Event:

- Who is sponsoring the event?
- Who will participate in this event (organizations and individuals)?
- What elected officials will speak/attend?
- Who else will speak?
- What is the agenda and schedule?
- What does the Summit hope to achieve?
- How does this Summit and Citizen Diplomacy benefit our community?

MEETING WITH THE EDITORIAL BOARD(S) OF YOUR LOCAL PAPER(S)

Meeting with an editorial board is a crucial step in generating interest and coverage of your event, and should be done as early as possible, once you have a firm plan for your Summit. Your goal in such a meeting is to convince the editorial board of the importance of your event, and more broadly, the importance of international engagement to your community and state or region. To do this, you will need to be well prepared with facts and figures, and may wish to bring along one or more high profile figures (e.g., mayor, city manager, school superintendent, university leader) to help make your case.

For an editorial board meeting, you should be ready to answer questions such as the following: how many foreign students study at local universities and colleges? How much do they contribute to our local economy? (Note: these figures are available at www.nafsa.org). Can you identify prominent people overseas (government or business leaders, for example) educated in your area? How many local businesses and jobs depend on foreign trade? What impact do international activities have on your schools? How effective are foreign language programs for your students? How many ethnic groups, especially newly arrived groups, are present in your community? What relationships and organizations already exist (e.g., Sister Cities, World Affairs Council, Rotary, Partners of the Americas, university or college linkages) and what have they accomplished?

An effective editorial board meeting will interest the paper in covering your event, and may encourage the paper to do its own editorial about the value of citizen engagement in international activities.

PREPARE A NEWS RELEASE AND MEDIA ADVISORY

The best way to inform the media is by sending them a news release and/or media advisory. Include direct quotes from key participants or organizers for best effect. Send by fax or email.

News release: Announces the event and provides background information on your Community's Summit, its objectives, the participants and featured speakers, and on the Citizen Diplomacy movement.

- Keep it to one page.
- Attach the Fact Sheet (see Toolkit).

- Send to the attention of the assignments editor and to any reporter you think will find the event of interest.
- Include the Coordinating Committee contact point (name, telephone, email) on any information sent to the media.
- Send to editors/reporters two weeks in advance to allow for follow-up, additional information.
- Invite them to cover your event.

Media advisory: reminds/alerts the media to the event, and succinctly states the “who, what, when, where, and why.”

- Send a week before an event (sooner for the calendar sections of most newspapers).
- Send to the attention of the assignments editor or reporter you think will find it of interest or to an assignment editor.
- Follow up with the reporter or editor to confirm that they received it.
- Invite them to cover your event.
- Resend the advisory the day of the Summit and follow-up with a phone call.
- Notify the newspaper’s photo desk of your event.

POST-EVENT MEDIA FOLLOW-UP

- Immediately after the Summit offer an interview with the keynote speaker to reporters who did not cover the event.
- Radio stations or newspapers that were unable to attend will often be willing to do a telephone interview.
- Send out a news story about your Summit to media outlets that didn’t attend.
- Include a photo of keynote speaker, other notables, action shots, with captions. Identify the individuals and action in the photo.
- Maintain a file of all media coverage.
- Keep your media contacts informed of any follow-up activities you organize.

PREPARE A POST-SUMMIT NEWS RELEASE

- If you didn’t get all the media coverage you had hoped for, generate your own.
- Write a story about the event’s highlights, keynote speakers, VIP attendees, your findings, your action plans, and future events.
- You might also ask if the paper would be willing to publish an op-ed piece on this topic written by a prominent figure involved with your Summit.

- Send to every reporter/ editor on your press list, whether they attended or not.
- Include quotes from key community leaders who spoke.
- Include your contact information on the release.
- Consider writing a letter to the editor of any or all local papers. Read the letters column in your papers to get a sense of what the paper looks for. Typically, papers like letters that express a clear point of view in a short space. A succinct statement about your Summit, signed by a prominent local official, the keynote speaker, or the Coordinating Committee chair is likely to be printed.