



Key points for Conducting Professional Public and Media Relations

Overview

Believe it or not, events worthy of media or community attention occur almost every day at your center! Some of these events are exciting, some intense. Most are happy, and nearly all can be considered “newsworthy,” if you present it the right way. You might ask yourself, “Why use the media to tell my center’s story? Isn’t word of mouth and referrals enough to let people know how wonderful ADS are?” During these hectic and often tragic times, wouldn’t it be nice to hear of good things happening in your own neighborhood? Perhaps a story or mention of your center may provide hope to a desperate daughter of a person with Alzheimer’s disease or overwhelmed mother of a disabled young adult.

What makes your story so special? See how many of these criteria could affect the way you tell your story:

Credibility

By someone else telling your good news, an objective voice is now heard, adding credibility.

Economics

There is no better advertising than free advertising. A “pick-up” of a press release or reporter’s or community leader’s acceptance of an invitation to a program will generate free press or advertising and, sometimes, even more credibility than a paid-for advertisement or something you did yourself!

Contentment

Even sending a photo to your local paper for a “filler” one a “slow news day” is not only more cost-effective than an ad, it generates a feeling that “good things are happening” and that things are right in the world. We know the hope and good will that is what Adult Services provide, now others can see it!

Inclusion into that “Big Picture”

Sometimes, in telling our story, we can be included into a larger picture. As an example, by co-hosting the annual Alzheimer’s Memory Walk, your Center will be rightfully perceived as a dependable partner and caring community leader; by announcing zero deficiencies during a state survey, you not only are lauding your success, you are telling the public that you are a safe place to care for their loved ones.

Newsworthiness

What is meant by “newsworthy?” Newsworthy means that somewhere, someone might consider your center’s event to be interesting or important enough to relay to a wider audience. Why not create that “need to know?”

But, remember, information must be managed. The first step is to decide if there is a story or idea worth developing and sharing. The simple solution is to identify the “five w’s” (and the “h”) of your story. (See Table on the next page.)



Judging Newsworthiness

The Question

Who . . .

Things to Ponder

- has the need to know (i.e., who is your audience)?
- is doing what to whom?
- is the person in charge
- will this story impact
- are the main characters?
- do you need to contact for additional information?

What . . .

- is the relevance of your story or program?
- is the event or story about?
- are the details?
- message are you trying to convey?
- is the “big picture?” (e.g., the story may be about a new participant, but the “big picture” is that this resident is third generation to join your center.)

Where . . .

- is the event happening?
- has the event occurred?
- shall this information be most noticed? Best used?
- has this information been used before?

When . . .

- is the story most timely?
- is the event happening?
- did the event occur?
- did the initial information get released?

Why . . .

- pursue this at all?
- is the event happening?
- did the subjects do what they did?
- is the information being perceived this way?

How . . .

- does this affect me? those around me? the Center? our community?
- is the best way to disseminate this information?
- did the information come to be in the present state?
- can we resolve any misinformation?
- can we correct and manage the rumor mill?



Why even spread news at all? A couple of reasons come to mind.

The Need to Know

Based on their affiliation with your center, many feel they have the “need to know” about events, issues and concerns that could impact them, the community, or someone they know. Also, many happenings may be deemed newsworthy by those affiliated with your center. (e.g., churches, the senior community, professional organizations, volunteers).

Publicity

An event of activity is going to take place or has just occurred. In these cases, perhaps we would like to invite the public to join us, or we would like to inform the public that something worthwhile has taken place.

The Art of Presentation

More stories are newsworthy than one might think. Despite the negative connotations to the “art of spin,” using it correctly can be a very good thing. An example: “Local Adult Day Services Center Celebrates Veteran’s Day.” The same event, “spun” a different way: “One WWI veteran, a former WWII canteen girl and a survivor of the Bataan Death March were just some of the many veterans who paid tribute to their fallen comrades at a Veteran’s memorial service, hosted by the Good Hills Adult Day Center and held at Main Street Library.” Same story . . . but with a bite. Notice too, that the who, what, where, when and why are all contained in this one sentence . . . Look for the spin, search for the unique character of every event that lifts it from the ordinary, to the extraordinary.

Have a Mission and a Message

Whether it is a motto or a creed by which your center operates, or a goal to which your center aspires, employ your message like a mantra. Use it in promotional material and give-aways, and use it as an inspiration for everything you do. If you don’t have a motto or message, employ NADSA’s annual motto for Adult Day Services Week. Use NADSA preprinted or downloadable material to tell your story and create a common theme and message with other Adult Day Service centers nationwide.

Authorized Spokesperson(s)

Your center should have one voice speaking on behalf of all staff and participants. The person(s) identified as spokesmen or points of contact and their designates must be able to speak on and to the issues on your center’s behalf. These persons should be well-versed in policy, procedure, and have an understanding of THE BIG PICTURE. Additionally, they must be poised and professional. Of course, there is no reason that the media or visitors should not speak with staff and participants – this should be encouraged! However, in order to provide an accurate response to any inquiries of a more technical nature (e.g., Medicaid, HIPAA rules, Equal Opportunity, etc.) the spokesperson(s) should ensure that they are available. This may avoid back-tracking, retractions, apologies, or misunderstandings.



Most reporters or guests that you invite to your center will be excited to help you tell your story. However, if you decide to talk to the media, here are some things to remember:

- You don't have to answer every question. If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- If you don't like a question, tell the reporter you prefer not to answer it.
- Don't argue with a reporter. Be polite and firm, but don't become emotional or agitated.
- It is your right to stop an interview at any time. If the reporter is rude, stop the interview. Deal in known facts.
- If the reporter says something you know is incorrect, correct him or her.
- Avoid speculating or answering "what-if" questions.
- Don't allow a reporter to rush you. When asked a question, take time and think through your answer. Don't hesitate to tell a reporter or guest that you need to check out a response, and will get back to him/her. **Follow up!**
Respond if you say you will.

HIPAA

And speaking of paperwork . . . like all healthcare facilities, your center abides to HIPAA regulations. This means that no one except designated and authorized medical personnel may discuss private medical care with anyone except other authorized personnel. Likewise, in accordance with HIPAA, no statements of any kind or discussions of an individual's personal or private medical care will be discussed in any part at any time by those not authorized. For more information, on HIPAA, consult your legal advisors, your state association, NADSA, or visit www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa.

Photo Releases

As mentioned earlier, photo releases should be in place and signed before any photos are released to outside parties. There is a sample photo release as part of this guide on the NADSA website.

Media Relations Tools

The Press Release

The press release is sent to all relevant media venues detailing an upcoming event, story idea, or announcement. Press releases are usually brief and to the point. Press releases are not pre-written articles; rather, they are a brief overview of the five w's/h that offer an external media venue an opportunity to publish or pursue the contained information. Examples of press releases with successful pick-up rates include announcements of new key personnel and introductions of new programming. A template of a press release may be found as part of this guide on the NADSA website.



The Media Advisory

The media advisory announces to the media an opportunity they many want to cover. Similar in theory to an invitation, it contains the five w's/h, as well as detailed information for the press if they should choose to attend or cover the event. A press advisory is sent before the event, while a release is usually sent out after the fact.

The Pitch

It is highly recommended that the media be called with a story idea. Pitches are made to the reporter you think will be most interested in covering the story. As an example, introducing a new crop of volunteers from the local high school will be of interest in that school's newspaper and local gazette; a new program may be better suited in a professional journal. Don't forget alumni magazines and, of course, your state and local NADSA news outlets!

Press Kits

The "press kit" (also known as "marketing kits") should be at the ready for any reporter or visitor who comes to call. At a minimum, press kits should contain points of contact, fact sheets, and any statements or press releases that are relevant to the reporter's queries/activity being covered. Also include your business card.

Give Aways

Little gifts are thoughtful mementos that go a long way. Magnifying glasses, glasses repair kits, nail clippers, purse-size mirrors, etc., with your logo, phone number, or website will always be handy in case of emergency. Remember, while pencils and pads of paper are useful, they are expendable. The goal is to find a give-away that is both practical and advantageous for your center. No need to spend too much on a give-away – useful gifts with consideration for those with low-vision (magnifying glasses) or nostalgia (tape measures and change purses . . . things you just don't see much of anymore but that mean a great deal to another generation!) are not expensive when purchased in larger quantities and may prove a good investment.

Website

What? No website? Many seniors are computer savvy, as are today's caregivers. A simple informational page may be set up for a low fee. (Inquire of your volunteers or, better yet, maybe one of your participants to create a simple site for your center.) Be sure to link into your state association's website and NADSA's website for maximum exposure!