MEDIA RELATIONS FOR NONPROFITS: GETTING YOUR STORY TOLD

Presented by
Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor and Concentration Head, Public Relations
University of West Georgia
WRITING
EXERCISE: 3 PARTS

Part One: In three sentences, please tell me about your organization (your elevator speech).

Part Two: In one sentence, tell me why I should care.

Part Three: In 40 characters or less, tell me your story.

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
TOPICS COVERED TODAY:

• Who cares?
• Turn your Story into News?
• Know your Audience.
• What about Media and Relationships?
• Storytelling How To’s and Pitching to Media
• Get Social

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
WHO CARES?

Not a rhetorical question!!

- It matters WHO CARES
- Who wants and/or needs to know your story and why?
- Is your story relevant to the “audiences” of the media you’re targeting
- Will readers or listeners want to hear this story? Do you?
- What is your goal for getting news coverage?

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
How to Tell Your Story

- Storytelling begins **INSIDE** the organization
- The spokesperson should not be the only person who knows your story.
- Employees, volunteers, donors and other stakeholders are *voices* inside and outside your organization. They should receive training in knowing your story and how to tell it.
  - *Consistency and clarity of message*
  - *One message across audiences and media*

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
TURN YOUR STORY INTO NEWS?

- What is the overall message that you want to convey? (i.e., the reason someone would say yes to you, volunteer time and/or resources to your cause)

- Be quick. Speed matters. Journalists are on deadline, daily. You are also competing with other types of news.

- Make your point. Be on target with your messaging. Don’t waste anyone’s time. Have a “hook” to gain interest quickly.

- Compelling stories with real people gain traction.

- Be concise and colorful (as appropriate).

- Remember deadlines.

- Know your audience(s).
Know your audience(s)

Audience: This who your story should reach

- Donor?
- Partner?
- Potential volunteer/donor/partner?
- Recipient of your services? Should I be?
- How do your audiences communicate?

Hint: Sharing information is NOT communication
Audience Communication

- They meet in various places (often online communities, i.e., blogs, social networks, forums, have followers, etc.)
- They share commonalities, interests
- They comment, share, and “like” in multiple social spaces
- They self-promote; they’re political
- They organize, energize, and promote causes online
- They engage each others in active listening, participation
- They also want to be heard (they can become your voice)

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
Do your homework:

- Research/Acquaint yourself with Editors and Publications (know your media outlets; who covers your area; tailor your pitches accordingly)

- Relationship building is essential
  - PR is public relation(ships)
  - Build & cultivate relationships with journalists and producers
  - Build Credibility: The journalists need you as much as you need them.
- Media contact list
- Think “audience” when considering a news story

- Monitor media & your competitors
• You should be checking out your competition on Google (what’s being written about them?)

• What kinds of fundraising events; philanthropic efforts; Red Carpet events; brand activations around service i.e., Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are the news media writing about?

• Who’s blogging about nonprofits? Why aren’t you?

• Many writers are freelancers and want content. You can become their source of information.
COMMUNICATING WITH JOURNALISTS

Make a reporter’s job easy:

- KISS method – let simplicity be your standard
- Validation (answer why & how)
- Provide background info or Fact Sheet
- Bios of key people (spokesperson, board president, etc.)

- Photos (high resolution; proper format)
- Links available
- FAQs
- Press release (5W’s & H)
- Success stories
- Testimonial opportunity

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
STORYTELLING
HOW TO’S

• Compile your info in one place (online portfolio of your organization)

• Stories affect us.

• Telling the story about how an illiterate person learned to read their Bible for the first time is more compelling than saying you gave someone a Bible.

• Your story should:
  • Compelling: Unusual
  • Persuasive
  • Use Imagery: Pull at heart strings
  • Suspense: Wow! Factor
  • Share knowledge
  • Purpose

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
PITCH YOUR STORY

- Email usually works best on a first attempt; telephone follow up
- Have a conversation with the journalist about your successes and why your story is significant.
- Consider a hybrid (social media and traditional media)

Ideas to maximize coverage:

- Partner with another organization to leverage resources and service to community.
- Use all your networks to gain traction for your story.
- Action photos are more useful than words, sometimes
Social Media (SM) is not what it used to be:

- SM is basically people having conversations online = Engagement.
- Engagement is powered by blogs, message boards, photo/video sharing sites, online chats, etc.
- Analytics (likes, clicks, etc., means audience engagement)
- Have a social presence
- Generate content based on your story(ies)

- SM shouldn’t replace, but should enhance traditional media
- Self branding
- What do I offer? How can/do I help others?
- Have a place where others can learn about you (i.e., website, YouTube channel, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Set yourself apart from others
- Use visuals, often

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
FINAL REMINDERS

For the Media

- Appear successful, confident, competent
- Give them a story, not information.
- Make your story matter to their readers/listeners
- Offer context and add value
- Nothing is off the record
- Show your humanity and humility
- Respond in timely manner, respect their deadlines

For Yourself:

- Keep your audience in mind at all times
- Reiterate key messages (verbal and written)
- Control the story, the messages, yourself
- Be open, transparent, authentic
- Be strategic
- One more time…Stay on message!

Hazel J. Cole, Ph.D., UWG State of the Community 2017
Thank you!

Questions?
WRITING EXERCISE:

Part One: In three sentences, please tell me about your organization (your elevator speech).

Part Two: In one sentence, tell me why I should care

Part Three: In 40 characters or less, tell me your story
THINK STORYTELLING [FRAMEWORK]

State your mission.

State your vision.
Are your services tied to your mission and vision (i.e., transforming people, changing lives, building character, giving through sacrifice, etc.)

How compelling are your results/successes?

What testimonials can you share in your communications? Who needs to know this information (think donors, potential donors, volunteers, partners, etc.? How have you shared it thus far?

When people hear your organization’s name, do they immediately know who you are and what you do? If no, why not?

Develop key messages (to be used in conversations, in print, in speeches, etc.). Craft your elevator speech.

What are some roadblocks you encounter in telling your story?

Do you have established relationships with the local/regional media? Why not?

How are your partners including your story as part of their success story?

Rethink how you think of yourself/organization. Think outward (audience focused), not inward (work-driven or self-interest).

Your story develops over time.
- Use curiosity as a strategy.
- Use illustrations (paint a picture) and personal experiences (testimonials).
- Stories should shock and awe (i.e., unexpected results, against all odds, etc.)