

Media Relations

Introduction

There will be times when the media will contact you about your COPP program and there will be times when you will want to contact the media (such as when your program is recruiting volunteers). The following are general guidelines to assist you in your media relations.

About the Media

Each reporter has a specific style when writing a story, which often is determined by the mandate of the media outlet he/she is employed by.

Reporters rely on the people they are interviewing for their information. If you are unsuccessful at getting your message across or choose not to provide the needed information, one of two things will happen. Either the reporter will go elsewhere to get the details (which may result in an inaccurate story) or they will decide not to do the story at all. Either way, your program ultimately ends up the loser. Therefore, you need to understand media relations and be prepared to address the media.

Policy

Your COPP group should have a designated person to deal with media relations. We suggest this be the group coordinator.

Protocol

- Provide the media with factual information – the truth.
- Make use of resource persons and agencies, if your knowledge base is limited - e.g. Police liaison officer, Provincial COPP Co-ordinator
- Never give a personal opinion - always refer to policy.
- Never say, "No comment". If you do not know an answer, just let them know that you will need to get back to them on the question.

Information Sharing

The person responsible for your media relations is the voice for your program. They need to be trained on all aspects of the program.

Some additional points to remember are the following:

1. The media relations spokesperson must be kept informed on all developments in the program. This will include statements made by the police about COPP.
2. They must have a "pipeline" to directly deal with the police and program volunteers.
3. They must be notified if any other program member speaks to the media. The details should be outlined in writing and include comments made, the date they occurred and who was spoken to. Where possible, the media should be referred to your Media Relations spokesperson.
4. In the event that the media spokesperson comments to the media about an outside agency associated with the program, the liaison person for that agency should be advised. Two examples are the police and Manitoba Public Insurance.

Finding the Right Candidate

The Media Relations spokesperson should:

- Be accessible to the media on short notice.
- Have a good command of the English language, have good writing skills, and have experience with public speaking. NOTE: A well written press release is an easier sell to the media, resulting in a better chance of follow-up calls.

Where to Begin – A Guide

- The spokesperson's first contact with the media is likely to be by telephone or fax. Take the initiative and introduce yourself and the program to them. Let them know that you are their contact person. Spend a few minutes with them to gain a better understanding of the media outlet's interview style relative to their mandate.
- As your program generally deals with information and not "hard news", the media interview will be one-on-one and pre-planned as a result of your initial contact. This gives you an advantage as you have plenty of time to prepare for the interview. The information submitted in your press release or introduction will be the basis of the interview.

Ways to Get your Message Out

1. News Release

Whether you are drafting an initial introduction letter or an update on program developments, the release should take no longer than 30 seconds to read. The exception is when the media requests additional information.

You need to get all of your information into a compact format. You want to give the media just enough information to get your message across. Otherwise, the reporter may lose interest and not finish reading the entire content. Your release then gets filed away or "recycled". Remember that if a reporter is interested and wants more information, they will call you.

Steps to Follow

1. The first sentence or two should provide the reader with your overall message. It will also keep the reader's interest piqued to read on. The first sentence should "grab" the reader. The first line should state the relevant facts: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
2. The middle section should expand on the facts.
3. The final section should conclude by reinforcing the primary message of the story.

What to include:

- Date of release
- Story content
- End of release
- Use at least one quote, two is even better
- Release submitted by....
- Date/time of release
- End release with -30-
- Identify the contact person, their address, phone and fax numbers

Once the release has been drafted, check for grammar and spelling mistakes. Ensure that all information is factually accurate and is not "opinion".

All releases and related news articles should be filed together as a record of events. This gives your COPP group an accurate, ongoing record of program developments and the publicity gained. All radio and television interviews should be recorded for the same reasons.

Sample News Release

April 17, 2008

COPP group working to make the community safer!

"The _____ Citizens On Patrol program (COPP) members are working hard to help make the community safer", says Bob Smith, COPP Co-ordinator.

"We rely on these dedicated volunteers who work in co-operation with our office and the community at large", says Cst. Jones. "We are pleased that the community continues to take a proactive stance on crime prevention and awareness. We fully support the program."

The COPP program has been in _____ since _____. The Program's goals are to provide a presence in the community through patrolling in car, on foot, on bike; to educate the community on crime prevention through members of COPP groups and to increase the community's awareness on crime related issues such as theft, auto theft and speeding.

Ultimately, COPP hopes to make the community members feel safer and reduce the incident of crime in the community.

The _____ COPP is part of the Provincial Citizens on Patrol Program, which provides support and resources to local COPP groups through a provincial network.

Community members interested in patrolling with the COPP can contact _____ for more information.

-30-

Contact:

Local COPP Co-ordinator: John Hertz
234 Anywhere Street
_____, Manitoba

Ph: 204-857-8741

Fx: 204-857-7652

2. Articles

Submitting articles about your program or related topics can be a good way to get your message out.

3. Public Service Announcement (PSA)

PSAs are normally formatted to a specific number of words and should never include business advertising. As they are a free service provided by most media outlets, the public demand for using them is quite high. If you draft a PSA, there is no guarantee how often or during what time of day it will air on radio or television. In the event that your PSA is dated, forward it to the media well in advance.

Where to Send Your Message

- ❑ Television stations – including community and/or major broadcasters - if in your area
- ❑ Radio stations – including community and/or major broadcasters - if in your area
- ❑ Newspaper - including community newspapers, local and/or major outlets – if in your area
- ❑ Schools for their parent newsletters

Now, a word about media...

Television

The majority of people obtain their news from television. As television is primarily visual, your presentation style on screen may be more important than the content of the material you are presenting. Television provides the greatest opportunity for visual retention compared to the other media.

A self-assured interview with direct responses to each question has a lasting effect on the viewer. As television best illustrates your emotional state, be very prepared, dress for the occasion and try to be as relaxed as possible.

With television, the deadline for stories is in terms of hours; however, it is not unusual for “on-the-spot”, live, on-location interviews to occur.

Community Television

This is probably your best source for publicity. Given that the programs aired are community-based and staff is mostly volunteers, the program director is probably looking for local story ideas.

Generally, the format is either taped or live in the studio, lasting anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour. In most cases, the program will be aired several times.

Radio

In most cases, radio reporters do their interviews by telephone. With the exception of feature stories or talk shows, the length of the news story is under one minute. Generally, the story will include a voice clip with the remainder being filler material written and read by the reporter.

Newspapers

The print media are able to spend more time on the story resulting in more time spent on the interview. Newspaper reporters are likely to be more knowledgeable about the various subjects they are writing about than reporters in radio and television. Because much of the content of newspapers is news, the reporter is likely to have done some background research prior to the interview. Take extra time when preparing yourself for a newspaper interview.

With community newspapers, the reporter may be very willing to do a story about your program as the focus is on local news.

The deadline for newspapers is in terms of hours or even days depending on whether the newspaper is published on a daily or weekly basis.

Interviews

Interviews will happen when:

- The media responds to your news release, article or PSA
- You contact them directly without using a news release, article or PSA
- The media approaches you on their own when they are looking for a story that relates to your program

The success of any good interview depends on sound knowledge and an ability to convey the message. The media relations person's job is to help the media to understand your message. Remember that no reporter ever wants a bad interview. They are the voice for the program at a local level. What you say and how you say it will often be the difference between positive and negative press. Always be professional with your content and delivery. Give others a positive impression of your program.

When it comes to COPP, remember that others will perceive your actions as the norm for the other COPP programs.

How to handle an interview

Prior to the interview

- Clarify the content of the interview - ask the interviewer about what information they are looking for, as a specific question may need to be researched in advance.
- Know your material. Do your homework and get the necessary background information from the correct source, whether it is the police, Manitoba Public Insurance or some other agency.
- Do not be intimidated.
- Look professional in appearance.
- Do not wear light coloured clothing for television interviews.
- Do not wear "glitzy" jewellery.

At the start of the interview

- Keep your head up.
- Look at the reporter and talk to him/her as you would in any conversation.
- Ignore the presence of the microphone or camera.
- Keep your hands away from your face.
- Talk in your normal tone of voice.
- If you are nervous, pace your breathing.
- Pace your speech (you may find that you are speaking faster or slower than you normally do).
- Sit or stand as you normally do.
- Use your normal hand gestures.

During the interview

- Clarify 'what if' questions so your answer is factual and not opinion.
- Ensure you understand the question - don't be afraid to ask the reporter to repeat or clarify the question.
- Paraphrase questions in your answer if the reporter asks more than one question at a time.
 - e.g. Is it true that the community supports this program but the school district is not involved with it?
- Remember to include specific points you want mentioned, even if you are not asked.
 - e.g. Let me just add that...
- Do not embarrass the reporter or talk down to them. This will only result in the following:
 - less free publicity for the program
 - a lack of personal and program credibility in future media dealings

Follow-up to interview

- Situations may arise when the reporter asks for information you cannot provide at the time. If you assure a reporter that you will get back to them with the information, keep your promise.

1. Terms to remember

2. "Off the record" - Remember that nothing is ever off the record. If you say it, expect that it will become public information. Get your facts straight and think before you speak.
3. "No comment" - In some cases it may not be appropriate to provide comment, but ensure that you qualify all answers.
4. "Written before oral" - Whenever possible, forward your statement or release in writing rather than giving oral comment. You will have more time to prepare and correct any errors before publication.

"Opinions" - Keep your comments to the facts and express your views in terms of "policy". Avoid terms like "in my opinion", "my view is", "I think that"... Use terms like "The COPP policy is" or "the facts of the matter are".