

Getting Free/Low Cost Media Coverage for Your Program

Effectively publicizing your program while staying within your budget can be done.

The success of every healthy marriage initiative depends on getting the word out about the program. In addition to making the community aware of the services offered, quality marketing helps recruit participants. While some organizations will have a media or advertising budget, many will not. This Tip Sheet provides ideas on how to get free or discounted print and broadcast media coverage for your initiative/program. Tips on developing radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs), TV PSAs, relationships with the media, and writing press releases are also available in the following resources:

- Writing Radio PSAs
- Writing TV PSAs
- Developing Media Relations
- Writing a Press Release for a Healthy Marriage Program

Broadcast Media

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

Many people are aware that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires radio and television broadcasters to donate free airtime for PSAs. While PSAs are helpful in promoting your program, this approach alone is not likely to net the level of awareness your program needs. One study

by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that only 17 seconds per hour were donated for PSAs, and 60% of donated PSAs on major broadcast networks run between midnight and 6:00AM. If you have a budget and plan to use PSAs, one approach might be to offer to buy a 30 second spot for each free spot they run. They are often willing to discount their less desirable timeslots as well. Although not primetime, these slots can increase exposure with minimal expense. For suggestions on writing an effective PSA for radio, see “Writing Radio PSA”; for television see “Writing TV PSAs.”

Traffic Reports

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people are traveling to and from work. Unsold slots can often be purchased for a discount price on the Friday prior to the week they air. Talk to the radio station and arrange to have first choice on unsold slots. They would much rather sell the slot at a discount, than not sell it at all.

Local Programming

For free media, local programming offers the most options. However, practitioners need to invest time developing relationships with local media personalities to effectively use this strategy. For more information on building relationships with media outlets, see “Developing Media Relations.”

Local cable television stations often air talk shows hosted and paid for by local government, or community organizations such as churches and other area not-for-profits. Contact the local cable station for a list of programs. These shows offer free exposure and an opportunity to network with community leaders which can lead to other opportunities.

Local news shows on network television stations are often looking for interesting topics. Contact the morning show producer and describe how your

program might be of interest to morning show viewers. Be sure to mention success stories or any upcoming events. Even if you speak by phone, send a follow-up email asking that they keep you in mind should last-minute guest cancellations occur. Include your contact information and web link.

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Radio and television offer similar opportunities regarding PSAs in that both offer national and local programming. Many radio talk shows are nationally syndicated, but there are also local opportunities. Smaller local stations, usually on the AM dial, tend to be receptive to having community organizations as guests on their talk shows. Faith-based radio

programs are another option for interviews especially since many local faith leaders have loyal audiences.

Although cable television and AM radio audiences may be smaller, the interview format offers significant advantages over 30-second PSAs. You can share much more information about your program, respond to

questions, and build relationships with the interviewer and broadcast organization.

Print Media

Print media is a way to 1) make the community aware of the services offered, and 2) recruit participants.

With a skilled writer on staff (or a volunteer or intern) and someone in touch with local resources, you can take advantage of the following ideas to get the word out.

Newspapers

Consider reading the local newspaper each day - at least the front page and local sections. Newspapers reflect the community, its events and its issues. As you read articles about community issues, note how your program either impacts, - or is impacted by - the issues discussed. If there is a connection, write a letter to the editor responding to the article. Letters that are well-written, brief, and on point are more likely to be printed. A word of caution here - don't stretch too much to show a linkage or it can damage your organization's credibility.

- **Community Calendars.** Most local newspapers will include events and marriage education classes on their Community Calendars for free. Information requested and submission deadlines vary by publication. For example, some may allow space for a description of your workshop; others may only allow space for date, time and location. Create a contact list that includes all of these publications and keep it updated.
- **Community Sections.** In larger cities, the local newspaper may have community-specific sections that appear in your newspaper depending on what area of town you live in. Editors for community sections are often looking for human interest stories that highlight organizations or individuals within their targeted community. Talk to the community editor about your organization and how it strengthens that

community. Offer to write an article about a family who has been through your program.

Invite the editor to attend a workshop or event.

Community Circulars

Most cities have community circulars - papers or magazines that have a different focus than mainstream media. They may highlight cultural events, health, business, women's issues, etc. and are usually distributed free throughout the community at local stores and restaurants. Contact them and tell them about your work. Ask them to donate advertising space for an upcoming event. Offer to write an article for their publication illustrating the relevance of your program to their audience.

Neighborhood and Community Newsletters

Neighborhood associations, churches, civic groups and other organizations have newsletters that are distributed to their network of contacts. If you partner with community organizations to offer marriage education, ask them to include a general article on marriage education along with the information about the upcoming class. Your article will have much more impact if it includes a success story about a couple/family from within the organization.

Employer Newsletters

Educate employers on the importance of marriage and family wellness (refer to "Marriage and Family Wellness; Corporate America's Business?" research available on NHMRC website). Ask if they will host a marriage education class or at least include information about marriage education opportunities in their employee newsletters.

Whenever your organization experiences a significant event, like hosting a volunteer celebration, kicking-off a new program, receiving a large grant or community recognition, etc., send a press release to all of your media contacts. The press release should be brief with the basic information: who, what, where, when and why.

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Conclusion

Regardless of whether your organization has a media budget or not, these tips will help you access free advertising to get the word out about your services. These strategies can also help you develop relationships with the media and other community organizations

to add to your network of program advocates.

Ultimately, these activities will assist with participant recruitment.

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