



NHMRC July 2008 Webinar Frequently Asked Questions

Getting the Message Out: Working With the Media

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The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center broadcasted a webinar entitled “Getting the Message Out: Working with the Media” on July 23, 2008. During the course of the webinar, we received more questions than we were able to answer. This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is a follow-up to many of the questions posted during the webinar.

1. What is an effective way to engage and educate the media about the healthy marriage initiative?

Healthy marriage programs should be sure to spend quality one-on-one time with the media. At these meetings, explain the healthy marriage initiative and dispel any myths about healthy marriage that are held by members of the media community. Come prepared to each discussion with clear responses to common misconceptions about your program and the healthy marriage initiative in general. Programs should be very specific about what they do and do not offer, rather than speaking in broad overtures. Also, it is important to remember that many media outlets have high turnover rates and new staff members must be educated on a regular basis. Be proactive and consistently talk to all members of the media groups of interest to your program (assignment editors, reporters, editors).

2. Several programs have found that instituting a Marriage Hall of Fame has been a great way to engage the community and pique the interest of the media. Is there a set of tools that helps healthy marriage programs establish a Marriage Hall of Fame?

Wedded Bliss Foundation (as part of their Black Marriage Day toolkits) has developed suggested guidelines and application forms. The organization also explains how to select judges and provides other

resources to people who want to establish a Marriage Hall of Fame in their community. Interested programs can request a starter kit at (www.blackmarriageday.com).

3. How does a healthy marriage program begin forming partnerships with media/marketing firms?

One good way to begin forming partnerships is to turn first to your personal network. Who do you know that works for a company that uses a media/marketing partner? Ask your connections to put you in touch with the right contact from their company to provide feedback on their media partner’s philosophy and work product. Can they provide a glowing recommendation? If possible, choose media/marketing partners who are passionate about their work and will have a vested interest in helping your organization reach its marketing goals.

4. What are strategies used when trying to develop the right “hook” for a public awareness campaign or program name? How can a program incorporate feedback from the community prior to launching a public awareness campaign?

Several programs utilize focus groups to both generate marketing ideas and provide feedback on slogans and logos created by the marketing partner. Using a focus group comprised of individuals from the community helps generate feedback on whether the logo and slogans will resonate with potential participants and community partners.

5. How frequently should a healthy marriage program or other community organization advertise an annual event such as Black Marriage Day? How can programs best leverage the media to get the mes-

sage out early and often?

If your program is doing a Black Marriage Day or other annual event, consider beginning to publicize it as early as six months in advance. Organizations can piggyback off their previous year's marketing material until the new material becomes available. Another way to keep your annual event on the forefront of your community's mind is to link it to other current events in your community. For example, if crimes begin to rise, send a message to your media contacts that this is not a community with strong marriages. Be sure to connect your event to positive community occurrences as well. For instance, place an ad in the local paper congratulating members of the community who recently got married. Include information on your event with each contact or advertisement.

6. What are effective (and cost-effective) marketing strategies for healthy marriage programs located in small, rural markets with only one daily newspaper and no local TV?

It is important to become very creative and advertise in as many places as you can.

Make use of the local newspaper by placing ads, writing letters to the editor, and writing features on marriage related issues. Consider every place where people gather or frequent, then develop relationships with owners and staff at these places. They may allow you to display posters and other marketing materials in these locales, which may include barbershops, diners, dry cleaners, grocery stores and other such establishments. Other possible marketing strategies include:

- ✓ Building a relationship with the water and electric company – they may allow you to insert “stuffers” into bills.
- ✓ Promoting a website campaign that may include posting a video on the site. However, this requires a billboard or some other “primary” media outlet to “drive” or direct people to the website. Men, in particular, may be more willing to log onto a website regarding marital issues than to seek

other assistance since websites offer anonymity.

- ✓ Having a float in the high school homecoming parade with staff or volunteers passing out flyers about your events.
- ✓ Connecting with a broader event taking place in several places throughout the country, such as National Marriage Week and Black Marriage Day. A small community can become excited about participating in a nationwide event.

7. What are some first steps for a program just developing its media budget?

It is important to catalogue the resources you have available when determining your budget. There may be individuals in your community - perhaps a stay-at-home mom or a college student pursuing an internship – who would be able to provide much needed skills or expertise at a fraction of the typical cost or even on a volunteer basis. Building relationships with people in your community will also yield great benefits. Consider leveraging whatever resources are available, including free advertising in churches and other community organizations. If you're a federal healthy marriage grantee, be sure to take advantage of the wealth of resources available in the Community of Practice media library. The Smart Marriages community also offers additional avenues to learn about strategies that other healthy marriage programs are using (www.smartmarriages.com).

8. What are strategies for approaching a potential media and marketing partner to handle your project's advertising?

Typically, the process begins by speaking with managers and editors and explaining what the project wants in a media campaign. At this juncture, the managers will likely assign a dedicated staff member to the project. Ideally this is someone who feels passionately about helping your organization and takes the time to learn about your program's goals and the broader healthy marriage initiative. Consider discussing matching with your potential media partners.

Some programs have found it beneficial only to do business with marketing firms that will match their money. Finally, it is important to know your target audience. For example, if your program is geared primarily to teens, try partnering with a firm that has experience marketing to this population.

9. Have other programs had success inviting members of the media to become participants in healthy marriage programs?

Many programs have been successful in inviting members of the media to go through their healthy marriage classes. Experience has shown that they have often become some of the program's best marketers.

10. How can programs help ensure a good response from men to their healthy marriage programs and events?

One way to ensure a good response is to keep the needs of men in mind during the initial planning and programming phase. For example, when you choose a locale for your classes consider selecting a place where men are comfortable going- perhaps a hardware or home improvement store. You may also want to use men in your advertising. It is important to be conscious from the beginning not to make advertisements too feminine or geared too much towards women. Remember, many people are waiting for information and education about relationships, including men.

11. What cultural considerations should programs consider when thinking about outreach and advertisements?

It is important to look at various incomes and education backgrounds that are represented in the community. Consider tailoring marketing efforts to these different groups. Other suggestions for reaching out to different cultural groups include working closely

with African-American newspapers and weeklies, teaching classes in other languages prominent in your community, and launching parallel campaigns-- each dedicated to a different target audience.

12. In terms of media and marketing, where can healthy marriage programs see the largest returns?

The most effective outreach is done by couples or individuals that have participated in past healthy marriage programs or events, who then relate their experiences to other individuals or organizations. Your program graduates are some of your best advocates and recruiters. The program facilitator is also a key person to consider in marketing a program. An excellent program facilitator can be the driving factor in whether a program recruits (and retains) a large number of participants.

When considering the effectiveness of the media outlets being used, be sure to ask participants how they found out about the program. This can be done informally at intake, during one of the breaks, or via a questionnaire passed out at the end of the first class. Programs can also measure the number of phone calls or website hits they receive following specific advertising campaigns. Often a marketing firm can help gauge the impact of advertising on a program's attendance. Knowing how participants learned of your program enables you to determine what marketing tools and outlets work well (or not so well) in your community.

Finally, take advantage of all of the resources in your community. This includes networking with colleagues in other community-based programs to find out what media outlets have proved effective in your community.