



Housing Assistance Council

**PUBLIC RELATIONS
GUIDE FOR
RURAL HOUSING
ORGANIZATIONS**

\$5.00

March 2005

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ISBN 1-58064-132-6

This report was prepared by Pat Cleman and Leslie R. Strauss of the Housing Assistance Council (HAC). The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under Cooperative Agreement H-21352 CA with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Ndeye Jackson served as Government Technical Representative. The substance and funding of that work are dedicated to the public. HAC is solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication and such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Government.

HAC, founded in 1971, is a nonprofit corporation that supports the development of rural low-income housing nationwide. HAC provides technical housing services, loans from a revolving fund, housing program and policy assistance, research and demonstration projects, and training and information services. HAC is an equal opportunity lender.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HAC gratefully acknowledges the help of the following people, who provided information for case studies or shared samples of their public relations work for use in this guide.

Glynis Laing, (formerly of) Proyecto Azteca, San Juan, Texas
Michael Lane, Self-Help Enterprises, Inc., Visalia, Calif.
Nicci Millington, (formerly of) Enterprise Foundation, Columbia, Md.
Linda Netherton, Housing Development Corporation, Hillsboro, Ore.
Anne Perkins, Rural Development Incorporated, Turners Falls, Mass.
Cheryl Walkley, Telamon Corporation, Martinsburg, W.Va.
Renee Wilburn, Lee County Community Development Corporation, Marianna, Ark.
Sharon Walden, Stop Abusive Family Environments, Welch, W.Va.

In addition, a one-day Web Clinic of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development demonstrated the ease with which local nonprofit organizations created their first websites.

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INTRODUCTION

This guide is aimed at organizations – small or not so small, private, public, or nonprofit – that are working to increase the stock of affordable housing in the rural United States. The consistent dedication and hard work such organizations bring to bear against seemingly insurmountable odds are admirable; anyone doing such work is a miracle worker and deserves as much help as possible.

The major premise of this public relations guide is that there has never been a more important time to focus on public relations (PR) because of increasing challenges in the housing business. At the same time, public relations work is becoming more powerful due to techniques presented by new information technology (IT). Tried and true steps can be combined with the new IT to accomplish more than ever.

The common theme expressed by the organizations surveyed for this guide is no surprise: there is not enough time to do PR work. In addition, funding is rarely available to hire the staff needed to do PR. This guide points out PR techniques that are effective and require little time once established.

This guide has six sections: 1) an overview of public relations work including definitions of basic public relations concepts; 2) a step-by-step guide that comprises a timeline for getting started with public relations and serves as a checklist for anyone who needs fresh inspiration; 3) a list of basic PR tools; 4) a list of PR tools for special occasions; 5) advice on planning events; and 6) new PR tools provided by the Internet and new communications systems. There are three appendices: templates for specific tasks, a chapter devoted to website development including free sources and services, and overviews of six case studies.

WHAT ARE PUBLIC RELATIONS, MARKETING, AND MEDIA RELATIONS, AND WHY DO WE NEED THEM?

Questions and concerns that may come to mind to the reader as s/he confronts public relations work follow.

What Is Public Relations work?

We're so busy doing our work. We can't spend the time to communicate our mission. (Clark 1997, 11)

Human beings are born with the instinct to communicate. We all communicate, even by deciding not to, consciously or unconsciously. Whenever we communicate, whether through speech, photographs, print, movement, inactivity, or silence, we are sending out information that reflects the deepest level of what we are all about.

Today our world offers the possibility of instant communication through computers, the Internet, and fax machines. Yet much of the rural population lives without access to these gadgets and in some cases without telephone lines. As organizations attempting to provide the rural population with the basic necessities of life, we are often operating without the advantages of the newer technology. Both circumstances aggravate the challenge of combating community issues such as "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) attitudes or concerns over smart growth and land use, which cry out for information sharing.

How do we best share the information fundamental to achieving our goals?

Public relations means telling the public about something – in your case, telling the public about housing need, housing programs, and your organization's work. Public relations work includes marketing (distributing information about products or ideas) and media relations (communicating with the media). It also includes other interactions organizations have with the public – speeches, newsletters, publications, special events, annual reports, brochures, fact sheets, perhaps even funding applications. All of these can help enhance your organization's image.

Why worry about your image? Because if you exert some control over how people perceive your organization, programs, issues, and community, you may gain more funding, more volunteers, more support for low-income housing, more positive images of low-income people, more awareness of positive change in your community, and friendlier attitudes from neighbors, lawmakers, and voters.

It sounds like public relations work is very basic to my organization's work: Why?

Is there anything more basic to your work than getting funding? Private and public funding are on the decline; uncovering new funding sources is necessary.

A 1999 news article notes the importance of public relations in connecting to a particular funding source just starting to be tapped: the baby boomers.

Baby-boomers are replacing their parents as the new generation of donors. . . . They are not very motivated by [Washington] politics. Baby-boomers are more motivated by local solutions and impacts of an issue. . . . They also want to know the impact their money had on the cause. . . . Their donation is viewed as an investment – they want a return. Because of the importance of this issue, any communication strategy must satisfy these donor needs. . . . A large majority of baby-boomers are looking for organizations to have a clear and effective communications strategy that includes public education and a definite media presence. They believe this is central [to] social change. (*Giving in the 21st Century* 1999, 3)

Baby-boomers tend to equate public visibility with success, and they fund successful nonprofits.

I don't have time to think about public relations – I'm overwhelmed just trying to do the job at hand.

Telling the story of your success is as important as pursuing and achieving it. Repeating your success story will improve your relationship with the public in numerous ways, including serving more constituents; acquiring new and better board members and volunteers; increasing funding; and being part of community dialogue on social issues (Crocker 2000, 12). Also, consider the morale of your employees; that too will undoubtedly improve as your organization's "stock" in the community rises.

Your success is judged in ways even more basic than the amount of funding you receive or the quality of housing you provide; you are also judged in terms of your effectiveness within your community – how you work in the overall context, which depends on your reaching and involving more people in your community in your organization's goals.

A developer's reputation can have a tremendous impact on the nature and extent of community opposition to an affordable housing project. A reputation for involvement in the community, or for developing successful projects in neighboring communities, can reduce the likelihood of community opposition (Housing Assistance Council 1994, 125-26).

Each case of citizen opposition to affordable housing development is shaped by the local social and political environment, the reputation and actions of the developer, and local perceptions of the population to be served by the project. Housing advocates who feel their affordable or low-income housing proposals are likely to encounter local resistance can reduce the likelihood of NIMBY opposition by initiating a process of assessment and outreach to the community (Housing Assistance Council 1994, 125-26). Encourage and make possible your employees' volunteering at other nonprofits in the community or becoming well-informed about related issues. Share used, no-longer-needed equipment with other community-based organizations.

Establish yourself as an advocate for affordable housing in your community. Join leadership networks in your community.

Media Relations and Advocacy

Nonprofits are fundamentally about helping people gain some control over their lives, which is the defining value of democracy. Now you don't just sit in a room by yourself talking about values. You have to communicate, educate, persuade. (Gunther 1997, 33)

The public media exist to be used as vehicles of communication, education, and persuasion; they need us as much as we need them. "Journalists need information and ideas for stories with importance to the local community. Advocates need to think of themselves as sources for these stories" (Berkeley Media Studies Group 1995). This implies a much more serious endeavor than mailing occasional press releases and holding news conferences (Bonk and Sparks 1991, 3). "Artful media advocates can attract media attention while making it look as if they are simply doing their job" (Zeck 1991a, 22).

Media has such tremendous potential for helping us achieve our goals, in part by helping us counter those who oppose our vision, that we have to embrace the creative process of getting our messages out and establishing our own symbols and labels to reframe public policy debate. (Pertschuk and Wilbur 1991)

Marketing as an Approach

How marketing applies to nonprofits

"One and one makes two, and two and two makes four, and four and four makes ten if you know how to work it right" – attributed to Mae West (Stern 1997, 9).

In the broadest sense, all public relations work is marketing; the products you are marketing are your organization and the work you are doing. Within this guide, the term "marketing" implies disseminating information of any sort. "[Nonprofits] are seeing that any organization has to communicate effectively with its 'customers' – the public, policy-makers – people who have so much impact on how they can carry on their work" (Clark 1997).

Sharon Walden, director of housing development programs for a nonprofit in Welch, W.Va., has said she "sometimes feels like a salesman." Sharon initially founded Stop Abusive Family Environments (SAFE) in order to provide temporary housing for victims of domestic violence. By the time she was interviewed for this guide, her organization provided affordable housing for the entire community. Sharon worked with the community every step of the way to gain wide support. Everything she did was out in the open and done with the benefit of the community in mind.

Sharon made every endeavor to strengthen her relationships with her funders; even her PR efforts were based on showing her current and former funders that they were appreciated.

Sharon maintained that it was very important to develop a personal rapport with individual people at foundations. Exceptions to funding limitations were sometimes made on her behalf based on an individual relationship. Funders liked doing business with her. Sharon made sure that they were aware of her past successes; consequently they were quick to observe her potential. In every conversation with representatives of funders, Sharon encouraged them to give – again and again. Everything she said was put in a positive way, opening a door for more funding opportunities.

Most foundations are still very reluctant to fund efforts to publicize and market the programs they are funding, but I think that is slowly changing. And organizers [and perhaps nonprofit organizations in general] are seeing that marketing their work and organizations is not “selling out” but simply being a good manager. (Clark 1997, 3)

The housing development field, tied as closely as it is to the for-profit world, should always have as its *modus operandi* the advice given above by Mae West; in this world, four plus four must equal more than eight.

Comments

If you are reading this guide, chances are that you are looking for PR methods that are more effective or less costly than what you have been doing. At the very least, you need to be informed about the free PR that you are entitled to; you also need to hear of examples where the right kind of PR at the right time has led to a unique opportunity.

As you read through the sections on public relations tools, look for the one or two items you can prepare ahead of time and use at just the right moment. Appendix A hopes to make this task easier by providing templates for you to copy.

By now you should be convinced that public relations can recover from its image of pressure tactics and manipulation, and that, used correctly, it can help spread the good news of your organization, promote your goals in your community, and save you valuable time and effort at a time when your resources are being stretched as never before.

By now you are eager to read of new ideas or to be reminded of the importance of methods used in the past. The “tried and true” may take on renewed energy due to new personalities involved, new technology, or a worsening housing scenario in your community. All of these are factors prompting the refocus of your public relations strategies.

STEP BY STEP

“Opportunity is when luck meets preparation.” (McCarren 2002)

This section of the guide is intended mainly for novices. Even if you are an old pro, however, a quick read of step-by-step preparations might help you identify an area of weakness in your public relations efforts. At best, following these steps will increase your effectiveness.

Make a Commitment to Public Relations Work.

To make sure your public relations work happens, make a commitment. Include PR in your organization’s strategic plan. Assess what you will need.

Intangible Assets

The most crucial resources for public relations work are *time* and *initiative*, not funding. This is fortunate, since very few, if any, programs provide funding specifically for public relations activities. The necessary skills are not complicated – a media strategy is a do-it-yourself project. Consultants are available but are not essential. Once systems are in place, PR tasks do not need much time to accomplish. The Internet provides endless examples of public relations work that do not require much effort.

The other major resource is *patience*. Do not expect immediate results. The long-term goals justify a sound investment of your time and talents; however, the results are accumulative.

Tangible Assets

Staff

Commit to making PR work a priority in your staff assignments. Either hire new staff who have PR experience or train existing personnel. While you are making a plan and committing time, be realistic about how much time media work will take.

Pick one person to be responsible for or coordinate the public relations activities, and make that work explicitly part of that person’s job. The brainstorming and decisions can be made by a team within the organization, but someone must be designated to take the time to carry them out.

The public relations person may or may not be the organization’s chief spokesperson. Usually the executive director or chief executive officer is not easily available in person or by telephone for contact with the media. A mid-level staffer can be the main communications person, reserving the executive director for more sensitive interviews. A staff person who has worked with the executive director over a substantial period of time can often be trusted to use basic quotes from the director, with his/her approval, saving much valuable time.

For example, at Lee County Community Development Corporation (LCCDC) in Arkansas the director was the spokesperson for the media. Since the director was often not available, however, an assistant was her backup. A third staff member was trained to be the assistant's backup; having a backup for every procedure was general office practice for LCCDC.

Consistency is important when establishing an image. This supports the argument for having one staff person in charge of public affairs. Failing this, an organization could use the person closest to the individual project in question, so long as the same person from each project talks to all the press.

The designated communications person should have good writing and interpersonal skills as well as the ability to follow through. Writing skills are so basic to PR work that Linda Netherton, director of a housing group in Hillsboro, Ore., has advised that nonprofit organizations recruit people with journalism experience to serve on their committees and boards of directors, or to become volunteers for their organization.

More likely than not, the job of coordinating public relations involves the ability to juggle several tasks simultaneously. As with any public reflection on your organization, quality is more important than quantity. Judicious use of time and good groundwork will reflect your organization's serious commitment to furthering your public presence.

The communications person should be able to establish ongoing relationships with media people; do not make a summer intern the centerpiece of your PR strategy. This person should have a personal commitment to the organization and to the work that you do. Temporary staff such as interns or volunteers (e.g., members of AmeriCorps) can be called upon to do the time-consuming tasks of public relations – mailings or contacts that do not require answering detailed questions. On the other hand, there is a side benefit from using well-chosen volunteers to be interviewed on behalf of your organization; they are usually enthusiastic and inspire your community's participation in your organization.

If your community is bilingual, it may be helpful for the communications person to be bilingual. Otherwise a designated volunteer or assistant to the communications person can answer basic questions over the telephone in the second language.

Equipment

It is more important to have quality PR personnel than to have state-of-the-art equipment. This guide addresses issues such as Internet access and web sites in subsequent sections, but it should be noted that no matter what your budget is or what equipment your organization has at its disposal, nothing is as fundamental to public relations work as human energy.

Identify Your Public Relations Objectives.

Have a brainstorming session with people from your staff or board who are interested in public relations or have PR experience to discuss how you want your organization, issues/programs, and community perceived.

Some of your objectives might be:

- △ to increase local/state awareness of rural residents' housing problems;
- △ to increase awareness of your organization's role in solving those problems in your area;
- △ to increase aid (volunteers, money, supplies, support, etc.) to your group to help solve these problems; and
- △ to attract potential clients.

For example, Rural Development Inc. (RDI) in Turners Falls, Mass., developed an objective based on its past experience. RDI met with stiff resistance when it proposed to build seven houses on 48 acres – considered to be high density housing by local residents. New England's anti-development sentiment, added to the prevalence of substandard existing housing stock, resulted in a severe housing shortage in rural Massachusetts. Because the local attitude against development was so discouraging, RDI was very careful about its PR work, but its objective was clear: to change public sentiment about housing development.

The Telemon Corporation in Martinsburg, W.Va. based its 2002 PR objective on the need to update its public image. Almost two years after Telemon's Martinsburg local office became Jefferson and Berkeley counties' first Community Action Agency in response to severe needs in the region, residents still called it "the farmworker office" because it had initially focused on migrant and seasonal worker needs. The office was working to publicize its new role in order to attract potential clients. Good PR would also help to bring in badly needed volunteers, supplies, and funding, as well as the support of the community.

A broader agenda was evidenced by Proyecto Azteca, a nonprofit developer working in the colonias around its base in San Juan, Texas. It had so many applicants for housing that it usually turned down offers to have a booth at local fairs and other community events. What motivated its public relations work was the concern that the country as a whole did not know about colonias and how local organizations were solving housing needs along the border between the U.S. and Mexico. More knowledge of the unique circumstances in that part of the country would help attract funding for Proyecto Azteca's ambitious programs.

Develop A Message.

A PR message is more than a catchy slogan. Your PR message reflects your organization's mission statement. It is a one-sentence statement behind all of your communications content.

The Telamon Corporation has a short mission statement. "Our mission is to promote the development of human potential by providing resources and creating opportunities in the communities we serve" (Telamon Corporation 2001). The public relations message might be "developing human potential" or "creating opportunities." Other examples follow.

- △ "We provide affordable family homes" (Rural Development Inc.).
- △ SAFE's message is in its name: "Stop Abusive Family Environments."

- ⊞ “We help local organizations in rural America build affordable homes” (the Housing Assistance Council).

To determine effective messages, housing organizations should be aware of research conducted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition in 1997. The Coalition convened focus groups throughout the U.S. to determine what messages about assisted housing were most effective. It found that middle-income American voters were not moved by messages about the severity of housing problems, and in fact tended to blame people for their condition. Instead, focus group participants responded positively to messages rooted in self-help and to specific examples of successful local programs and community action. Stories about the economic importance of housing to communities, and especially to children, were effective. Also, the word “home” was far more effective than “housing.”

Define your message and use it consistently. Advertisers accomplish this with slogans: “Just do it,” “The real thing,” “Welcoming families home for over 50 years” (the slogan on Ryan Homes’ web site). Homes for Hillsborough in Ruskin, Fla., says, “Families Need Housing.” “Yes! You can own your own home” is used on Rural Development Inc.’s web page.

Housing organizations may have an image instead of a slogan. The Telamon Corporation uses a symbolic architectural feature as their name in order to communicate what they do. “Early Roman builders adapted the use of human figures, some called ‘Telamons,’ that were symbolically cast as columnar roof supports. Since 1965, Telamon Corporation has provided supportive assistance to untold numbers of recipients” (Telamon Corporation 2001).

Identify Your Target Audience(s).

You may want to reach:

- ⊞ local residents, to combat NIMBYism or obtain volunteers;
- ⊞ funding sources, to increase awareness of your organization as an option for funding;
- ⊞ local government officials, to solicit their support for your projects;
- ⊞ potential and current clients;
- ⊞ or others.

Consider the Best Way to Reach Those Audiences.

Some options include local television; radio stations; local, regional, and state newspapers; local magazines and newsletters; trade magazines; the Internet; chamber of commerce publications; and word of mouth.

In general, newspapers precede television and radio coverage. Regional and state newspapers are likely to have separate sections or pages devoted to your community, in which case it is important to know the address of the particular news bureau and the name of the reporter assigned to your community. Do not discount a personal connection with a business that publishes a trade journal. Energy producers or building suppliers may be eager to feature a housing story that showcases their product.

Think “News.”

To attract media attention, your message must be presented as news. What is news? It is something timely, local, visual, interesting, new, or novel. It involves important people or conflict, features a family with whom others can identify, or relates to a current hot topic at the state, national, or international level.

Many things can be presented as news: a significant anniversary of your organization, a new program, receipt of funding, awards ceremonies, outreach initiatives, speeches, training programs, publications (including newsletters), statistics on your impact in the community, a family’s success story, free services or information, or the impact of legislation on your organization. The trick is to present the facts as news, whether you are writing a press release or staging an event. For example, “the Housing Development Corporation provides housing for farmworkers” is not as newsworthy as “the Housing Development Corporation has been awarded a million dollars,” and that is not as interesting as “the Smith family will get a new home thanks to a new program run by the local Housing Development Corporation.”

News must also be simple. It seems to be almost impossible to describe the entire process of developing affordable housing in a way that can be repeated accurately in a news report. If your development used six financing sources, no news story will explain the roles of all six entities and the names of their programs. A reporter is far more likely to focus on a family, or on the role of your organization, and might simply mention the financing sources near the end of the story.

Use the calendar. Many people remember their less fortunate neighbors during the holidays, so highlight local needs in November and December. The idea of joining the rest of the country in an observance can be appealing, so plan an event during National Homeownership Month in June.

Finally, remember that your news should interest your target audience. If you are targeting state policymakers, give your news policy implications. If you are targeting neighbors who are resisting the idea of affordable housing, develop a story that includes information about benefits to the entire community.

Some sources warn against overstaying your welcome and say that something truly newsworthy is written about only once. “The first time it may be news; the second time, it’s propaganda” (Pertschuk and Wilbur 1991, 3).

Develop A Contact Database.

Put together a database of the people you need to reach in order to contact your target audience(s). Be thorough. Include contact information for people or media with whom you might currently have only a minimal connection. In smaller communities, word-of-mouth connections and casual introductions will bring additions to your list of contacts. It is far worse to leave important contacts off your list than to have many more than you will ever use.

Get the names, titles, addresses, and phone numbers of important people in the community. Look up radio and television stations in the phone book or on the web and call them to find their talk-show hosts, news directors (radio) or producers. Read local newspapers to find out which reporters might be interested in your issues. If there is a local magazine that might be interested in your work, put the editor or a relevant staff writer on your list. Use e-mail discussion lists and newsletter editors to get names. Include any public affairs staff from local banks – they are usually very interested in community affairs – especially if they are banks with which you do business.

Keep your list current; the news business experiences a heavy turnover rate. It does not make a good impression if you have not kept up with recent changes.

If your organization has a newsletter, make sure that the most important potential media contacts all receive it (free of charge, if there is usually a fee for a subscription). Do not hesitate to provide free copies, even if your newsletter is relatively casual or comes out infrequently. The more times the media see your organization's name in print, the more you are helping your cause.

Build Relationships.

This aspect of PR work should be constant. If you have never done PR work in your community, talking about the history of your issues in the community with reporters and media contacts would be a way to establish rapport.

Cultivate Reporters

The first step in cultivating relationships with journalists is to know who is covering your issues. Getting to know people who do media work will lead to a good understanding of the media's role in the community as well as inform you of what enables the media to work better with you.

“The success of your media strategy will largely depend on contacts with reporters, assignment desk editors, and other media representatives. Never underestimate the importance of maintaining good media contacts” (Bonk and Sparks 1991, 25). Send a cover letter initially that introduces the organization and individual contact. Organizations in smaller communities should also attempt to introduce themselves to the editor of the editorial page.

Sometimes it works to invite the press to your office for a roundtable discussion (not really a press conference), especially if you are attempting to establish interest in an issue in your community.

Phone each reporter every time you send out a press release or a media advisory. Help them do their jobs – provide them with quotes, photos, facts, or anything else they need at the time they specify. When phoning, be sensitive to the time of day; try to reach them when they are not facing a daily or weekly press deadline. You can always verify that the time is convenient for the reporter by starting the conversation with the question, “Is this a good time to talk?” Even

if the reporter is not under pressure, attempt to get the most pertinent facts of your story expressed early in the conversation so that precious time is not wasted.

Be sensitive to what is important to the reporter/editor. To make good use of her/his time, find out what s/he considers “newsworthy” – this may vary from one reporter to another. Be open to how you can format your news in a way that helps the press.

Get a sense for which section of the newspaper would be most likely to publish your story. An announcement of a funding grant might become an item in a business section, while a human interest story featuring a family in their new home might run in the lifestyle section.

Some media guides tell you to be persistent with the press, even to the point of being a pest. But if this will make you uncomfortable, you will act uncomfortable and then the strategy will not work. Develop your own style.

Some points to keep in mind before you contact a reporter or editor:

- △ Verify the pronunciation and spelling of the name of the reporter/editor who covers your issue.
- △ Find out her/his requirements if s/he takes verbatim copy (that is, if s/he will accept an article written by you).
- △ “Let her/him know about her/his publication’s popularity within your target audience. This information can be beneficial for the publication’s advertising and sales department, and may help you generate support in your outreach efforts” (National Migrant Resource Program 1995, 43).
- △ State reasons that your issue should be covered. “Explaining why your story is of interest to the average person in simple, tangible terms works wonders” (Center for Community Change 1997, 18). For example, “Our housing project will create jobs for local workers.” “Our self-help housing project involves the mutual effort of all the prospective homeowners, thereby creating a healthy community of neighbors.” “We need the community’s help in building this playground because a community needs a park in order to succeed.”
- △ Provide a list of spokespersons as possibilities for interviews.
- △ Include human interest stories – tell a story rather than give a report.
- △ Give the reporter a calendar of your upcoming events.

As part of your media strategy, staff persons responsible for answering phones should be trained to record incoming calls from any media contacts carefully – not only the name of the medium and the reporter’s name, but the time of day and date of the call and the purpose of the call. All staff should be aware of who in your organization is handling media calls. (As noted above, be sure to have one or two backup people in case that person is out of the office.) All reporters who call should be added to your database of media contacts.

Keep in mind that whether your story is used depends on a variety of circumstances, most of which reporters do not directly control. This is why the best approach is to cultivate an ongoing relationship that is based on more than how many times they cover your stories.

“Media relations can make or break you,” according to Renee Wilburn, director of Lee County Community Development Corporation (LCCDC) in Marianna, Ark. Admittedly, part of Renee’s success with reporters was based on her office location – right across the street from the local newspaper’s office – making it very easy for the newspaper to come to her for last minute articles and photographs. But a good bit of her success was due to her keeping in touch with the news media. Frequently nearby radio and TV stations called Renee asking for good stories to cover. “There is one reporter from the Little Rock TV station who always keeps in touch with us,” she said. Media coverage helped LCCDC to become so well known in the region that Renee did not need to do much advertising.

Use Your Library

Chart past press coverage by browsing the archives of newspapers and periodicals.

Spend time in the public library or the reference room of your local newspaper. Review how the national media covers the issue. Find out if the local media have done similar stories. If they have, track by-lines and start a notebook of the coverage. If they have not, suggest stories when you approach reporters and editors with ideas. (Bonk and Sparks 1991, 13)

Why was a certain story done? What made it newsworthy? Could a similar story be done about your group or leaders or programs? (Center for Community Change 1997, 15)

Note trends in news coverage. It is amazing how the media will latch onto a story or issue for a while, then totally drop it. One key is to relate your issue or perspective to these fads. (Center for Community Change 1997, 19)

Prepare Written Background Materials.

It is a very good investment of your time to have assembled a collection of all the items you would want distributed to the press well ahead of time, since the media have a way of catching you off-guard. This kit should include everything you would distribute as a response to general inquiries about your organization. This material is also put in conference, training, and event packets, even if you think the attendees already know about your organization. Always make sure your materials reflect current information, such as turnover of staff or board members or changes in the programs you offer.

If your organization does not already have a short one-paragraph description, create one. Write it in a way that makes the facts interesting to someone you like. Use this paragraph consistently on your brochure, fact sheets, web page, press releases, and media advisories. Translate it into other languages used in your community as an invitation for non-English-speaking individuals to approach you.

Brief fact sheets can be very helpful for reporters. If your organization does not have a current brochure, or if your brochure is more than a couple of pages long, develop a one-page fact

sheet that states your organization's mission, goals, accomplishments, funding sources, and services offered. If you are promoting a particular type of housing – rental units for farmworkers, self-help houses for buyers, etc. – prepare a fact sheet describing the need and local circumstances, how the program has worked in other communities, and how your program will help your community. If you are staging a groundbreaking event, prepare a fact sheet describing the development's costs, funding sources, and population served. Make fact sheets easy to read and attractive. Put them on your letterhead.

If your organization does not have letterhead stationery, create a header format for your stationery with the organization's name, address, phone, and fax numbers. Add your web address and e-mail address if you have them. Then use your letterhead consistently for all your public relations work.

If your organization has a logo, it should appear on every printed piece of communication, including your letterhead, brochures, press releases, faxes, and business cards. A consistent look, even if done with simple tools, will give the impression that you are established in the community and have invested in more than just a temporary stay. The creation of a logo does not necessitate hiring an artist; directors of local college art programs can be invited to have their students submit designs. Often a volunteer with your organization has some art experience from which you can benefit. Both logos and slogans are easy ways to “brand” your organization.

Branding is a way to establish your organization's identity in the community. When people think about your organization, you want them to think about your mission – what you are trying to do – and to think about your successes. . . . The less time and energy you have to spend explaining [who you are], the more time you can devote to your real work.” (Baker 2001)

For example, Proyecto Azteca, which was founded by the United Farm Workers (UFW), uses the UFW eagle on its stationery and all its documents. The Housing Assistance Council's logo combining houses with trees communicates the image of rural homes and community.

Handy background materials for your public relations files might include:

- △ your organization's brochures and newsletters;
- △ photographs of the executive director or prominent board members;
- △ information about your projects, including photographs of completed houses;
- △ information about regulatory or legislative issues including copies of statements or speeches from staff members;
- △ a calendar of the year's important events;
- △ the latest list of your publications available to the public; and
- △ a list of community resources.

Have ready to distribute (for information, not to enable reporters to contact them):

- △ a list of board members (include their jobs and titles); and
- △ a list of staff members (list by function).

If you have a website, create a web page with this information, preferably in web text format or PDF documents, which will always look the way you designed them to look, unlike documents in Word or other formats, which may change depending on the software available on a user's computer.

Make A Plan.

An effective communications strategy . . . is easily integrated into daily operations. (Stein 2001)

After you have prepared background materials and have made contact with media personnel in your community, choose one PR task that will have you working with media and personnel with whom you feel comfortable. It would be good to start with something basic such as press releases, so that you can cement press relationships while learning from experience. It also helps if the first project is something you can evaluate regularly and for which you can record comments.

Move on to focusing on your annual reports, newsletters, and news magazines if you produce them. Experiment with basing some articles on previous press releases. Many of the written materials you have assembled (see "Prepare written background materials," above) will serve as the basis for content for your annual report, strategic planning, and organizational evaluations.

Once you feel comfortable with these routines, you can start planning an event. Create a *flyer*, which can serve as the fact sheet for the event. *Press releases, media advisories, PSAs, and media interviews* will follow. Ideally an event will have at least three months of preparation.

Do not assume that your community already knows what you are doing – gossip and rumors are good at spreading the wrong news, or spreading the news in a destructive way. Be proactive by telling others what you want them to know about you and ignore malicious information if it is given out.

Keep Learning.

Ask questions. Seek help and advice. Read. Critique press releases and flyers you receive from other organizations (in your own office, not publicly!). Make notes.

Every press release and every event is a new start, and a new learning opportunity. You will be able to fine-tune your press releases and public events based on the media personnel involved,

current community issues, and new media outlets. But even after you have everything working smoothly, something will change. Adapt and learn.

THE BASIC TOOLS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK

The best PR opportunities are free. No large expenditures are needed for the PR tools that will be the backbone of your work.

Press Release

The number one tool of PR professionals for more than forty years has been, and continues to be, the press release. It's the standard method of communicating your newsworthy announcement to relevant media, and it can result in free publicity you could never afford to buy. (Lee 2002, 3)

All journalists appreciate a press release presented in standard format, which quickly draws attention to the one point you wish to communicate. Even if you feel that your community is too small or your acquaintance with a reporter too personal to observe the formality of a press release, it is advisable to send one.

Some outlets like *The Washington Post* receive up to 3,000 or more press releases a week, and they diligently peruse each and every one when properly submitted. (Lee 2002, 3)

News (press) releases may be faxed, mailed, or sent via e-mail. Refer to notes on dealing with e-mail included in "The Impact of New Technology" section below.

Take the time to create a basic boilerplate format that you will follow for all of your press releases. Use the format suggested below. This will eliminate much duplicated effort in the future.

Format

Over the years, a standard format has developed for press releases. By sticking to that format, you can make sure you are including all the information a reporter needs to know. (See the sample in Appendix A.) The structure of a headline followed by a brief paragraph stating the news makes it easy for an editor to scan your release (Lee 2002).

- ⊞ *Length.* One page is preferable, but it is better to have two pages using standard type and margins than to squeeze a release into a single page by using narrow margins and a small font. Advice about single- or double-spacing varies, but if you use single spacing, do put two lines between paragraphs. Put the press release on your letterhead.
- ⊞ *Top of page.* At the top of the first page, put "Press Release" (or "News Release") in a large font. Then put contact information, then a boldface, catchy, direct headline. You can add a sub-headline if it is relevant information.

A headline that grabs attention is one that focuses on conditions, not your organization. For example, if part of the housing that your organization is providing involves new indoor plumbing, figure out how many gallons of water one woman without water has carried over the years.

- △ *Body.* First comes the dateline – the place where the story originates and the date, “Marianna, Ark., June 13 – .”

The first paragraph or “lead” is equivalent to the lead paragraph in a newspaper story. Tell the who, what, where, when, why, and how in 35 words or less, preferably in one sentence, but two sentences are okay.

The first sentence is the most important. Without being misleading or omitting important information, try to portray your news with words that will make the reader want to read on. The first priority should be clarity of communication – do not get wild or fancy, and use clear language. Your first sentence will set the tone and determine your release’s interest to the general public.

The second paragraph should contain more information about the news in two to three sentences. This would be a good place to expand on the particular event or instance that precipitated your story.

The second or third paragraph should contain a quote, with name and title, from an important person involved in the project such as your executive director, president of the board, or a local notable person.

Any further paragraphs should give more details and background. If the news media (newspapers, especially) are short of space or are using your piece as a filler on an already crowded page, it is the paragraphs toward the end of your release that will be cut. Think of the paragraphs in terms of diminishing importance to the story, ones that would not be missed if they were left out.

The final paragraph (which should be the same on every press release you send out) should be the one-paragraph description of your organization mentioned on page 13.

- △ *Bottom of page.* End with one of the two traditional press release conclusions: “-30-“ or “###.” If your press release runs more than one page, put “– more –“ at the end of each page except the last. At the top of page 2 and beyond, put the page number and a keyword that represents the content of the release, “Page 2/Self-help, Marianna.” On the final page use one of the traditional ends.

- △ *Key items to check.* Is the lead interesting? What impression will the reader be left with? Are concepts explained? Is the writing descriptive? Are the paragraphs a digestible length? Is the release free of grammatical, spelling, or other errors? Is it free of sexist or racist language?

Content

If done prudently, press releases can help with general communications needs that challenge your work.

In Hillsboro, Ore., Linda Netherton, co-executive director of the Housing Development Corporation, had the challenge of operating programs for migrant farmworkers in an essentially suburban community. Linda realized there was widespread misunderstanding about her work; consequently, she used press releases to express HDC's point of view on issues that surfaced in the local newspapers.

Sharon Walden in Welch, W.Va. used news releases to announce newly obtained funding. Sharon concluded that, because she could get news coverage relatively easily, it was a priority to get such stories into print in order to encourage more funding.

News Article

Should I also submit a news article?

Ideally a reporter or editor will write an article based on your press release. You may wish to write articles yourself, however, to submit to smaller newspapers that have limited resources. A well-written article can be published with minimal editing. Formatting your news first as a press release will aid the writing of your article. Having done so will be helpful if you ever want to expand your article into a column for your newsletter or a magazine.

Renee Wilburn of Lee County CDC in Arkansas learned that if she wrote only an article without including a basic press release, a reporter or editor might miss the main point she was trying to communicate.

The opportunity may arise for you to write an article about your housing for a magazine produced by another nonprofit or a for-profit enterprise. Take advantage of all such opportunities. Any chance to tell your story will help your cause and the cause of affordable housing, no matter where the article is published.

The occasion of having your story presented in a trade magazine or journal of a respected nonprofit organization may inspire other opportunities. When the Housing Assistance Council's magazine, *Rural Voices*, covered the topic of smart growth, one of the feature articles was written by staff of the Housing Development Corporation in Hillsboro, Ore., based on the smart growth issues it had confronted. Because this brought a high degree of national focus to her organization, co-executive director Linda Netherton planned to use the article as the foundation of an op-ed piece. "The idea is to make hay with something that has already been done," declared Linda. She also decided to mail copies of the *Rural Voices* article to all Oregon legislators since smart growth is a major concern statewide.

Media Advisory

A media advisory tells press outlets about an event in advance so reporters can plan to be there and editors can plan for a story. Do not assume that the media will pick up on news of your event by word-of-mouth or general knowledge. Think of the advisory as being a simple fact sheet that will communicate all of the essential information, much like an invitation.

It is very important to follow the standard format for a media advisory. Use, in bold, the following headings for your information.

- △ What (event)
- △ Where (place)
- △ Who (speakers, organization)
- △ When (time)

Beneath each heading should be a brief summary giving only the facts. The format should not be a narrative.

The advisory should be on your organization's letterhead with the words "Media Advisory" prominently displayed near the top. The media advisory may be distributed via e-mail or fax. It should be sent out well before the event.

Include contact information – for example, "Jane Doe, 123-456-7890, jdoe@communityorg.org." End with one of the traditional ways to end a press release or advisory: "-30-" or "###." An advisory should never be more than one page. (See the sample in Appendix A.)

Be sure that the advisory goes to all news organizations in your area; do not second-guess which media will give you coverage. This is not the time to alienate one news organization in favor of another. If appropriate, include any news services that cover your community.

Camera

Digital cameras facilitate the transmission of photographs electronically as attachments to e-mail messages. This is especially helpful to the media and is by far the fastest way of getting photographs to the press. Note standard format preferences and that the quality must be high for the photo to be published.

Offer photos to your media contacts, perhaps especially to those who did not attend an event. A reporter can write an article based on a press release and an interview, sounding as if s/he attended the event and using a photo you provided.

According to Sharon Walden of Welch, W. Va., you should always have your camera ready, and use it often. Sharon believed that the representative of a foundation lifted a five-year limit on the length of a current grant because she spontaneously used her camera. Sharon took a photograph of the representative during his visit to her organization and then used it to write a

follow-up media story. Sharon made sure that a copy of the newspaper article and photograph were sent to the foundation.

Flyer

A flyer can be used effectively for a message that needs to be communicated quickly and only once. Post your flyers in public places such as shop windows, schools, church bulletin boards, or other community locations. Use discretion about posting them; always get permission from the proper authority at a shop, school, or church. Check city ordinances about posting or passing out flyers. After the information becomes dated, return to the same places and take the flyers down.

Make your flyer colorful. Make it unique. Be creative. Use a graphic that makes the public want to read the flyer. You may want to use your logo instead of having to search for a graphic.

Use colors carefully; watch your budget to help you decide how much to use color. Black text on colored paper can be much less expensive than a design that requires color printing; even if you already have a color printer, using it is more expensive than printing in plain black ink. Usually the decision of whether to use black and white or color is based on how many flyers you need to make. Using black and white will get you many more copies for your money than using colored print.

Brief Points on Flyers

- △ Make the headline snappy.
 - △ It is all right to leave a lot of white (blank) space on your flyer.
 - △ Choose all words carefully; all should be straight to the point.
- (Duncan 2001)

AS THE OCCASION ARISES

Special occasions will employ the written materials you have previously prepared. Use the following tools at your discretion.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor can be a surprisingly easy way to get your message out. This is a public relations tool that is well-suited to a smaller community, since the chances of your letter getting into print are much greater than in large city newspapers. Many local newspapers print every letter they get.

Letters to the editor have a wide readership. Especially in smaller communities, they reflect current community opinions and usually serve to identify community leaders. A letter to the editor is an immediate connection to the people in the community who follow important issues; as such it carries the same importance as meeting people face to face. Pay attention to the tone of your writing. Do not create enemies; err on the side of fairness and open-mindedness.

If getting your letter published seems tough, some easy guidelines will help your letter rise to the top:

- ⊞ Make your letter timely, well-written, and well-reasoned.
- ⊞ Be concise and follow the length limit the paper states.

Generally the length should be restricted to 100-200 words. It is worth a call to the “letters-to-the-editor” department to find out the length restrictions for your letter, how to address it, and other formatting or topical constraints. Include a cover letter and your business card.

- ⊞ Make the first sentence catchy and strong.
- ⊞ When responding to a recent article, state the title, date, and section or author of the article to which you are responding and your position. Do not attack the author or the editors.
- ⊞ Offer expert information about something that has already been said.
- ⊞ Be persuasive. This is not the place to water down your argument.
- ⊞ Include your address and phone number so the paper can verify authorship or ask you to approve edits. Anonymous letters are usually not printed.
- ⊞ Check spelling and grammar.

⊞ Type the letter if possible, on letterhead if it is an official letter from your organization.

Your organization may consider coordinating a letter-writing campaign about a very hot topic. Ten letters from ten individuals are often more effective than one letter signed by ten individuals. The writers should vary their points and provide personal perspectives, and they should not identify themselves as members of your organization.

Do not write a letter to the editor if you do not have a point to make. Stating public thanks in a letter to the editor aids public relations; however, letters are read with more attention if they include provocative perspectives. “Being provocative does not necessarily mean being confrontational or outrageous. It can also mean finding the part of our work or issue that provokes people to shake their heads and take note” (Center for Community Change 1997, 22).

The need for affordable housing may be severe in your community; however, this in itself is no longer provocative news. “The fact that tax subsidies for mostly well-off homeowners are several times more costly than direct federal aid for low-income families, for example, is very provocative and needs to penetrate into people’s thinking about government assistance programs” (Center for Community Change 1997, 23).

A letter to the editor takes on validity when it is a response to a recent story in the same newspaper, magazine, etc., if submitted shortly after the original story appeared in print. Again, be careful not to overdo this; use creativity and imagination to follow up a story that generates a lot of interest and tie the story to your housing issues, if pertinent. Learn to react in this way to all community news. The possibilities are endless for helping the public put a context to a particular story – not manipulating how they respond but rather providing them with more background information or educating them about a response from the point of view of someone working hard to help solve the community’s housing needs.

If you are writing on behalf of your organization, its board of directors, or staff, first get the permission of the people you state you are representing (National Migrant Resource Program 1995). Avoid establishing a personal reputation as someone who is going against the grain of opinion within an organization and using a letter to the editor to express a gripe.

Check and double-check any factual material you present. A letter to the editor establishes your credibility in the community, not just with the media. One of your primary goals in public relations work is establishing yourself as a reliable source. Do not guess or manufacture information.

Do not overdo writing letters to the editor, as this is a sure way of guaranteeing that your opinions will not be listened to. Choose your battles carefully. If something has been controversial in your community, an educated opinion will be valued if it is presented without malice.

Op-Ed Piece

The term “op-ed” comes from the literal description of where this type of article is placed in the newspaper – opposite the editorial page. Op-ed pieces may be most effective when they mention by name the people in your community who are most likely to read them: politicians and officials. For local newspapers, it is best if the op-ed addresses a community-wide timely concern, such as an upcoming vote or the release of a new housing study, or if it points to a change in housing legislation. It is important for the writer of an op-ed to be on top of the news.

Competition for op-ed pieces comes from syndicated columns; as a local community “expert,” you have a head start in providing an article that will appeal to local readers.

Most op-eds do not get into print because they are too dull (Center for Community Change 1997, 49). Be sure your piece is lively, and even provocative, to hold the reader’s attention. To help assure that it is printed, attempt to have your article “signed” by a local community or business leader who is on your board of directors or a local politician. This is not the place to gain name recognition for yourself! Think of someone who is well respected in your community; your cause will gain instant recognition if it is fully supported by a well-known “voice,” especially if such an endorsement is unexpected or unusual. Give the reader an immediate reason to want to read your article.

Include a brief biography of the author that emphasizes the person’s expertise. Mention awards received and books written. Include a cover note explaining the timeliness of the piece and why local readers would be interested in it.

The op-ed should follow many of the same guidelines as a letter to the editor. You should call the editor of the opinion page to discuss the piece before writing it, to determine interest, length, and timeline. Op-ed pieces allow more words (700 words – about three pages, double-spaced) than letters to the editor. If your idea is accepted, you are usually given the opportunity to do some editing before it is printed. In a smaller newspaper, your piece may be edited for you.

Your local newspaper is likely to have a separate editor for the op-ed page only if the paper has a circulation of 40,000 or more; otherwise, it might be best to submit your piece to several people at the same newspaper to assure success in getting it printed. It might be just as effective if a reporter decides to make it into a news item (Zeck 1991a). If you have had no response within one or two weeks after submitting it, call to find out if it will be used (Center for Community Change 1997).

If the timing in a public debate or crisis is just right, it might be worth investing money to purchase space in a print medium to assure that the op-ed is published. The piece can then be referred to very effectively, especially if it has persuaded community leaders to make significant positive changes.

Technical Points

The following tips will help your op-ed piece to be taken seriously.

- △ Suggest a catchy headline.
- △ The first sentence should humanize the story – make it personal and engaging.
- △ Relate the first sentence to the point of your op-ed.
- △ Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
- △ If possible, include some statistics to add credibility and perspective.
- △ Avoid technical terms.
- △ Cover one or two points.
- △ As always, check spelling and grammar.

“Op-eds have an afterlife. . . . They also serve to get your name out there so people know where to call for information” (Zeck and Reynolds 1991a, 11). There are several versions of an op-ed’s afterlife; it can be used as a basis for other media tools, such as talk shows, Public Service Announcements, press releases, letters to the editor, and guest editorials or editorials.

Karl E. Bren, a housing consultant with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, wrote an op-ed piece for the Virginia Forum in 1987 that later was printed in almost all of Virginia’s major newspapers, some adding photos. (The Virginia Forum is an educational organization providing experts’ opinions on major public issues to the media.) At this time the public was ill-informed of the severe need for affordable housing in Virginia; this one op-ed piece was a very effective tool in raising awareness of the low-income housing issue in the state (Zeck and Reynolds 1991b).

An op-ed requires a serious investment of your time and energy. Therefore it is a tool probably best reserved for very special use.

Public Service Announcements

Radio and television stations use free Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to fulfill their obligation to “serve in the public interest”; federal law requires each station to broadcast a certain number of PSAs. In order to qualify, your organization must be a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.

First contact your local radio or TV station and speak with the public service director. Find out what the station requires from you, the timing it prefers (it might prefer a certain length in order to have a better chance for being aired), and the deadlines for submission. Usually you need to make your own tape for the station to use, so it is best to submit the exact text of your PSA for approval before you exert the effort of making a tape.

Because everything depends on timing in radio and TV, PSAs must conform to set time limits. They are usually 15, 20, or 30 seconds long. According to the League of Women Voters’ *Guide to Getting Good Media*, 30 seconds, or 80 words, are aired often but stations use 15- or 20-

second PSAs as well (LWV 1994). The overall timing must include an ending sentence (three to five seconds long) stating your organization's name, address or phone number, and any other information that the station requires you to include.

You must be conscious of the station's deadlines relative to your event or your own deadline. PSAs should be submitted well in advance. For example, a PSA announcing an event should be submitted at least one to two months before the event. Include your press kit. It is also important to specify the "kill date" – the exact date when your announcement should be taken off the air. Do not assume that the station will figure this out on its own. (See sample PSAs in Appendix A.)

Obstacles

Consider the following points when determining if PSAs fit with your PR needs.

- ⊞ You need access to your own equipment if making your own tape.
- ⊞ There is usually much competition among nonprofits doing PSAs.
- ⊞ Each station has its own limits on what it broadcasts (e.g., nothing it considers to be controversial).
- ⊞ You have no control over when PSAs are broadcast. They are often aired at times when there is little demand for paid advertising, such as in the middle of the night.
- ⊞ PSAs must be submitted far in advance.

Because of all of these hardships, it would be most effective to use PSAs to reinforce messages distributed to other media, and to use them only for specific events for which you need broad coverage.

Paid Advertisement

If no other PR tool is reaching your target audience, paying for publicity may solve the problem. Nonprofit organizations no longer avoid paying for public relations. Government agencies are also adopting techniques commonly used by for-profit businesses. The need to use paid advertising may reflect the relative importance of your communicating with the public. If paying for PR is what works best for your organization and community, then you should congratulate yourself on putting your money to good use.

You may have experienced sitting through slides shown on movie theater screens while waiting for the previews to start; these slides sometimes feature community programs. One rural housing organization in Florida thought of sharing the cost of producing such slides by taking up a local utility's offer to help with advertising expenses. The organization believed this was a good way to reach prospective clients who did not read the local newspaper. In addition, a connection with a well known business in the community could enhance the reputation of the organization.

Public Speaking

Add the name of your organization's spokesperson to speakers' bureaus for community organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and church groups. Pursue other methods for getting invited to speak (e.g., at coalition meetings or conferences). Follow the general advice given under "Interviews" in this guide. Be actively involved in your community in a positive, supportive way with issues that relate to your area of expertise. Be aware that how you present yourself in public is a 24-hour job and has an impact on your organization's public image within the community.

The importance of public speaking was illustrated when the director of a local soup kitchen in rural Arizona was asked to speak about the soup kitchen at a Rotary Club luncheon meeting. It happened that a reporter from the local newspaper was at the luncheon, and so was the newly appointed chairperson for that year's United Way fundraising campaign. As a result, not only did the soup kitchen become the subject of a lengthy feature in the local newspaper, but the slogan coined in the director's speech became the United Way campaign topic and the soup kitchen was chosen to be the major recipient of the local United Way's general undesignated donations.

Slide Presentation

New computer software makes producing a slide presentation relatively simple. If you have the software (and hardware) to make slide presentations, they can present your information in an interesting way. For example, the use of statistics becomes more effective when visually presented (in more than a fleeting glimpse) and not just heard in the course of a speech. In several currently popular software programs, one strongly worded sentence can be transformed into several slides phrase-by-phrase with the impact of a moving picture, where the words appear to fly onto the screen. A slide presentation can also become the basis for a video.

Video

A video is an excellent tool if you have the funds to produce one. It will probably enjoy greater use if it is more than just a PR piece about your group; build a video around a training, a tour of housing, or a grand opening. A video can include clips of an important speech given by an expert in the housing field, thereby increasing the speech's audience. Be sure to let the speaker know in advance that you will be doing this; some speakers may require royalties for the use of their speeches. Clips of several of your occasions can make for good publicity for your organization as well as serve as a documentary of what your organization has achieved; this is an excellent fundraising tool.

As founding director of Stop Abusive Family Environments, Inc., located in Welch, W.Va., Sharon Walden knew that her active role in the small community made her PR work easy. Yet she did not hesitate to hire the Appalachian nonprofit Appalshop to create a 15-minute documentary of her organization. "PR is one of the greatest resources nonprofits have," stated Sharon. She felt that paying to have a video produced was cost-effective.

You might be fortunate enough to have a filmmaker or news program offer to make a video about your organization. Filmmaker Hector Galen was creating a video series on Hispanic issues and featured Proyecto Azteca, small, rural nonprofit housing development organization working in colonias in Texas, in a 60-minute video. “Forgotten Americans” was shown on national public TV and Proyecto Azteca used it widely in public relations work.

You may be able to produce your own video at very low cost. Local cable TV companies are sometimes required to provide nonprofit organizations with video cameras and training on the use of the equipment as part of their licensing agreements (this depends on a specific location’s license agreement).

Videos can be used with great effect to present community issues that might be beneficial to your organization in its advocacy work.

Citizens in towns across America have long struggled to find ways to discover and articulate a common vision for their communities. Our high-speed, hyper-individualized, Internet- and TV-dependent culture only complicates this struggle, making it difficult to invigorate the community spirit of the American town.

A community video project uses the power and excitement of video to encourage residents to convene publicly to discuss the issues and opportunities facing their community and to consider choices regarding their future. (Orton 2001)

Cable TV

Some cable stations will display alternating slides announcing community events. This occurs more commonly in locations outside a major metropolitan area. Likewise, it may be easier to arrange to be interviewed on a small cable TV station than on a TV station in a metropolitan area.

Interview

Do not be afraid to initiate opportunities for interviews. For broadcast media, contact program managers, directors, general managers of the stations, producers, or news directors. The media appreciate people who approach them to be interviewed who can help the public understand a complicated issue; representatives from rural housing organizations can unravel the complications of their business by making themselves available for media interviews. Stress the local connection. Try to connect your issue to current events in your community. Set up a meeting and bring your press kit. In your “pitch,” state why your story is news and who in the community is involved.

If the media has come to you, feel free to ask a journalist what the story will be about, how the reporter got your name, or why s/he is calling. Who else has the reporter talked to? What does s/he need? What is the deadline? This way you will be more relaxed and will let the reporter

know that you are aware of her/his needs. Determine the questions you are willing to answer and avoid quick responses that could be used to misrepresent you and your organization.

Convey a key message, which should be four or five main points (no more than one sentence each). Repeat them to keep the interview on track.

Sharon Walden of West Virginia has been interviewed frequently by the host of a local 30-minute radio program. He told her to call him any time she wanted to be on the air. Even with this friendly encouragement, Sharon has been very careful about how the interviews were handled. Before the show she has always given the interviewer a list of questions to ask and told him to stick to just those questions.

Learn all you can about the interviewer, including his/her style, before your interview. Listen to or observe one of the reporter's previous interviews. Remain positive, honest, and move the conversation away from accusations as quickly and effectively as you can.

Interview Tips

Most of the following suggestions will apply to interviews conducted by print media; some refer to broadcast interviews.

- ⊞ If your name is hard to pronounce, be sure the interviewer knows the correct pronunciation before the program begins.
- ⊞ Develop a list of arguments and counter arguments regarding your issues, and practice using them with friends. Learn to speak simply.
- ⊞ Before the interview begins, ask what the first question will be, and be prepared to use it to make your main point. What you are saving to say at the end of an interview may never be used because of lack of time.
- ⊞ Practice having sound bites ready. Remember that news segments drawn from your interview are only two or three minutes long. Avoid language that is too technical or that requires a long explanation. This may seem hard to do with housing issues, so practice is essential.
- ⊞ Remember that everything you say, even in casual conversation with the reporter before the interview begins, may be used. It is very easy for a reporter to forget that you wanted to keep something off the record.
- ⊞ Keep focusing on the ideas you want to convey. Self-aggrandizement, even on behalf of your organization, is easily recognized and turns people off. Your organization's reputation should speak for itself.

- ⊞ Keep your energy level up and be polite and positive. Avoid any negative comments about your community or personalities, even though some people may be difficult to work with.
- ⊞ Do not let yourself be hurried. Do not answer “yes” or “no” questions. Do not feel the need to fill in “dead air space” – the interviewer has that responsibility.
- ⊞ Do not try to think like a reporter – the best style is to talk in a way that is interesting to someone like yourself.
- ⊞ Think before you speak. Refer to studies or statistics. Mention your organization’s name frequently.
- ⊞ Use notes. For radio interviews conducted by telephone, you can be seated at a desk where notes that contain statistics can be spread out.
- ⊞ Keep in mind that you know more about the subject than many of the listeners/viewers. (National Migrant Resource Program 1995)

After the interview, review for yourself how things went. If the interview was not broadcast live, phone the reporter afterwards with any clarifications of points that you feel were left unclear. Reporters will appreciate your thoroughness, especially since this will give them an opportunity to ask anything that they omitted during the interview (National Association of Manufacturers 1998, Berkeley Media Studies Group 1995).

Additional Notes Regarding TV Interviews

If you have initiated the contact with a TV station, you may need to persist over a few months to get your story covered. It all depends on what else makes the news on a given day. Days following holidays are notoriously slow news days and might be promising for nonprofit organizations to get their stories aired. Sunday night news programs are another good time. Contact the assignment editor for the station on the previous Friday – weekend news crews are at work on Saturdays and Sundays.

The most important thing is to know your subject well, and to know about the show that you hope to be seen on (McCarren 2002).

For TV, the magic ingredients are a worthy story, a guest willing to go “live,” and a compelling “live” location.

During the interview wear comfortable clothing; avoid anything that causes a reflection, such as glasses (ask beforehand what to do and if glasses will be a problem) (Laszlo and Associates 2001).

Talk Radio

Talk radio is another PR tool well suited for smaller communities. Here fame is not as important as the use of personality to enable people to connect with an issue; there is interest in hearing from “the common man or woman.”

Twenty percent of radio stations have talk shows or public affairs programs (talk shows are a cheap format to produce). Talk shows are unique – not exactly lecturing, and not “news.” They provide a perfect setup to spread information to combat “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) attitudes or educate the public about low-income housing. “[Talk radio] works as a forum in which issues can be legitimized as part of the public policy agenda” (Aufderheide 1990, 7).

The typical audience member for radio (and TV) talk shows, or call-in shows, tends to be more involved in community affairs and is more likely to be an active voter (Aufderheide 1990). General advice would be the same as for any public speaking – avoid controversy, be truthful, and be sincere. You are also representing the cause related to the mission of your organization. You cannot afford to turn anyone away from involvement with your issue.

Each state typically has one “gateway radio station” or news network. Sometimes a gateway station can serve from 50 to 100 subscriber stations; if a talk show is distributed statewide, it increases your opportunities for public recognition in dozens of markets (a great benefit if you need support from your legislative representatives) (Aufderheide 1990).

It is necessary to “pitch” yourself in order to be considered as a guest. Send your press kit or media advisory and later follow up with a phone call. Be open to a variety of possible formats – panel discussions, debates, or interviews. Arguments make for good listening. Contact producers of shows directly, but only with a brief message – send more details in a fax or e-mail, and hook onto a timely issue (this is an “angle”). Do not mind rejection; establish a good relationship.

Radio (and TV) producers often browse newspaper stories for people and organizations to interview. Station managers have been known to peruse government directories and university staff listings for ideas on who to invite. Minority talk shows are always looking for minority nonprofit groups to feature. Talk show hosts are usually eager to give out contact information for the organization involved in a talk show.

Talk radio is a potential source of publicity and recruitment for organizations, as well as a way to legitimize the issues they address. . . . Radio offers more time to expose your point of view on an issue than any other medium. (Aufderheide 1990, 4)

Remarks

Although the list of public relations tools seems long, it really is not in terms of time and energy. Most of the work will be in the one-time preparation. The same details are easily retooled into PSAs, interviews, flyers, and community announcements. The important thing is

to be thorough in your coverage, at least one time. You can then get some feedback from your community and determine which tools were worth the effort. You may be surprised at the results – sometimes the simplest ideas will be the most effective.

EVENTS

General Advice

When deciding what type of event to hold to attract the media, start with what you are actually doing – do not create an extraordinary circumstance that will give a false impression of your organization. For example, if you are planning an event to celebrate the completion of a housing project, use it to further a positive image of your organization in local newspapers. Inviting the media can double or triple the effectiveness of your event. If you find you do not have time to plan special media events, invite the media to smaller events you were going to hold anyway, like a homebuyer counseling graduation ceremony.

Plan your event early and think it through carefully. If you need a representative who speaks Spanish, for example, find one. If a local reporter tells you s/he has a hard time getting a photographer to come to your events, make sure you take pictures and deliver copies to the reporter the same day or the next day.

Decide ahead of time how much staff time will be required, and from whom: will you need volunteers? Determine a budget (assess all costs, including rentals and equipment). Are there conflicts with other community events at the same time or same day? Consider whether the event will be of interest in relation to a national news story. (National Migrant Resource Program 1995)

Find a location that will provide a good setting for use in photographs or for TV. For example, an event at a building site is more visually interesting than one in a school auditorium. Select a time in the middle of the day – between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. is best – so reporters have enough time before their late afternoon deadlines to put their stories together for the evening news or the next morning's paper. Make sure that good people to interview are identified and available at your event.

To draw people to your event, hold it in a centrally located place that is easy to get to, or a place where there is already a lot of traffic, so people do not have to go out of their way to find it. Tell journalists of parking availability. If it is to be outside, avoid noisy or windy areas. Make sure there is an electrical hook-up. Whatever it is, make it memorable enough so that it can be referred to the next time your organization makes the news.

Be careful if you intend to start a periodically scheduled event before you have adequate feedback and assessment of its value in your community. It is better to start small, put on one event that is really exciting, and then assess its impact and whether it could be repeated.

Ideas For Events

The event you plan should be a direct result of the determined needs of your organization – will it be a fundraiser, a community open house, a training session, or a seasonal celebration?

Try to choose something that reflects your organization's uniqueness so that it helps identify to the community who you are.

The decision of what kind of event to do first is very important. It is your grand opening in the community. It needs to reflect your style and what works in the community already, and it needs to be a substantial addition to what is already there – a true complement, not something that will give anyone a reason to avoid your organization in the future.

Stage a visually interesting story. Auditory interest is less important, as photographs or video are more likely to be used than sound clips. If you are using visually appealing props, such as balloons or banners, holding activities such as live concerts or dancing, or serving refreshments, mention them in your media advisories and news releases. A newspaper may decide to send along a photographer with a reporter if there is an interesting visual component to your event; sometimes only the photograph with a caption will make it into print.

Never discount the attraction of events that would appeal to children in a small community. Adults usually accompany the children, and family-oriented activities are always popular.

Do not make every event you do a fundraiser. It is wiser to seek to educate the public than to be perceived as another open hand awaiting a handout.

Possible events for housing organizations include ribbon cuttings, groundbreaking, grand openings, completions of projects or a benchmark number of houses completed, house blessings, and open houses. Others might be a workshop or training, a conference, or a tour of your houses.

Count as PR events such gatherings as county fairs, citywide parades, and grand openings of local soup kitchens or other community institutions that might be connected to affordable housing issues. If your organization participates in a public event, use the same steps in preparing for it, including contacting the media if appropriate, as for an event that your organization is sponsoring. Another interesting event would be a celebration of a local special day. Use your own best judgment about how your involvement will be perceived; adapt your ideas to your community and be true to the image of your organization. Sometimes a very imaginative and original idea might be just what is needed to capture the attention of the local media; however, sometimes a conservative community may be turned off by an event that is too unusual.

Take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. For instance, an unusual combination of circumstances created a perfect PR event for Homes for Hillsborough in Ruskin, Fla. A \$20,000 matching grant enabled the group to construct a playground in a housing development in Ruskin. This had long been one of the organization's unachieved dreams. The group worked hard to match the funds by holding a fish fry, a barbeque, and a golf tournament. After hearing of the project, KaBoom, a national nonprofit located in Chicago, donated the playground's design. Spurred on by all the enthusiasm, Homes for Hillsborough set aside a \$20,000 corner lot for the playground. This left only one obstacle: the construction of the playground. The agency selected Join Hands Day, a national day of service

held every June, as the day when volunteers would come together to do the work. In one day, Homes for Hillsborough achieved not only a dream but also an opportunity for statewide recognition.

Having more than one circumstance for a visual story might be necessary. For example, the Martinsburg, W.Va. office of the Telamon Corporation needed a public relations event that could accomplish several priorities: inform potential clients of its new role as a community action agency, increase its reputation in Martinsburg, and garner support in the region for its farmworker housing. The agency used a popular local tradition – a pig roast – at which a popular state officeholder was to make a speech. The agency felt that the speech plus the attendance of several local politicians would help assure live coverage.

Timeline

The following is a summary list of important, yet frequently neglected, tasks.

Before the Event

- ⊞ Prepare *press packets*. These should be distributed in folders with pockets containing background materials including your business card and any of your publications relevant to the event. Include items from the written materials you have already prepared. Be sure the packet includes the name of a designated contact person and his/her phone number, then be sure that person is at that number during the “news is hot” time. If a formal speech or testimony is involved, include a typed copy of the speech.
- ⊞ Send out a *media advisory* (by fax or e-mail or both) between one and two weeks before the event. After a few days, phone everyone you sent it to. Ask if they have received it and if they have any questions or would like any additional information. Do not expect them to commit to attending, and do not be surprised if they ask you to resend the media advisory. Journalists and editors plan their schedule only a few days ahead. Continue phoning all media, even on the day of your event if you have not reached them sooner.
- ⊞ Submit *announcements* of your event to community calendars (see details below).
- ⊞ *Walk through the location* in advance. Be prepared for bad weather. Practice what to say and know who will say what. Decide on a single message and make sure everyone who might talk to the media knows what the message is. At a ribbon-cutting for a seniors complex, for example, the executive director, board chair, and communications staff should talk about the importance of affordable, low-maintenance units for a population that is growing older, without digressing into complaining about how difficult it was to find financing, or wondering aloud what the organization will do next.

The Day of the Event

- ⊞ Station one staffer (usually the communications person) at the registration desk or main entrance to greet press people, assure that they sign a media sign-in sheet, and hand them packets as they arrive. (Most journalists will tell you ahead of time if they are planning to do a story.)
- ⊞ Introduce each speaker to the audience.
- ⊞ Arrange one-on-one interviews as the need arises.
(LWV 1994)

After the Event

- ⊞ Follow up after the event with every reporter who attended; see if they need further information.
- ⊞ Also follow up with media representatives who did not attend. Re-fax or e-mail them your media advisory about the event, then phone to ask whether photos or additional information would be useful. If they do not respond, mail a press packet. Do not worry if they did not cover the event. They may cover your next event, or even contact you on a slow news day.
- ⊞ Be sure to gather all media clippings for your files and evaluate the press coverage you have had.
(Brazeal 1999; Berkeley Media Studies Group 1995)

Evaluate the Results

Make two lists to aid in your evaluation of the event's effectiveness: one for the things that worked well (do not forget to include the accidental happy coincidences), and one for the disappointments (such as "it rained" or "heat wave that day"). If you do not record these details, you will quickly forget. If anything made a deep impression on you after the event, it will help plan for the next one.

Did you achieve your goals? Did things go smoothly? Was your spokesperson prepared? Did the media's questions indicate a need for changes in your fact sheets? What would you do differently next time? Write it down so you remember.

In the future, a note about the heat wave might jog your memory (or someone else's) to provide for seating in the shade. On the other hand, a happy incident, such as the attendance of a popular office-holder up for re-election who supports your program, might give you ideas for future events. Take all positive results as inspiration for the next time, no matter what they are.

Clip any newspaper articles, make notes about radio, television or other media coverage, and keep a file. Put your press releases and background materials in accessible, dated files.

The media files you have built, including clippings about your organization from the print media and information about events you have organized, will save you working from scratch to provide content for your annual report. Public relations is one of the important commitments your organization should fulfill and is intrinsic to your mission; include it in your annual report's list of accomplishments!

Press Conference

Press conferences are widely over-used. "Press conferences should be organized only as a final resort" (Bonk and Sparks 1991, 70).

In a small rural community a press conference is attended by the media only if it relates to a fast-breaking news story for which time is of the essence, when you need to contact a number of media contacts in a short timeframe, or when the story is newsworthy enough that it would attract media from outside the community. It can be difficult to make a press conference lively and visual.

Technical Points

The following hints will facilitate the success of your press conference.

- ⊞ Choose your site carefully – use hotels or public buildings near media offices. The room should not be too large – if attendance is poor, the room might look empty.
- ⊞ Pick the time carefully: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are best.
- ⊞ Supplies should include a podium, speaker system, microphone stand, backdrop (blue if possible) (or even better, provide an informative backdrop such as a poster with a big headline, or a photograph that supports the reason for the press conference), chairs (arranged theater-style with large center aisle), easels if needed, electrical outlets for things like TV lights or laptops for PowerPoint presentations, a table (for media sign-ins and to display materials from your organization), and water for the speakers.
- ⊞ Send written announcements by fax, mail, e-mail, or hand delivery to editors, assignment desks, reporters, every related organization that produces a community calendar, and representatives of other organizations that support housing causes and work sympathetically with your organization.
- ⊞ Make sure that the room is open at least 30 minutes before the event so that arriving press may enter the room.

How to Announce Your Event

Large city governments typically have something called a “daybook,” which is a listing of all community events. It is a resource used by chambers of commerce, the tourism industry, the news media, and more. Smaller communities may have nothing quite that formal; however, local newspapers, free weekly newspapers, chamber of commerce pamphlets, and local motels and hotels usually have some sort of list of current events. This list is usually restricted to events open to the public: fundraisers, grand openings, demonstrations, and the like. Nonprofits are usually listed in community calendars free of charge.

Use of church bulletins is most effective when advertising an upcoming event or when tied in with a particular theme for that week. Use of a church bulletin can be a very good way to attract urgently needed volunteers, allowing church members to become more active in community causes. Keep notices very brief, as space in the bulletins is normally at a premium.

Remarks

Stay flexible. Realize that an event will take a lot of your time and energy, so do not schedule more than one major event during the same month. Remember anything that can go wrong, will, especially if it is weather related.

As much as possible, make it a fun event for you to produce as well as for the audience. Sometimes a simple idea that has been perked up with fun details can become a memorable and happy event. You want the event to draw the community to you in a way that will start many pleasant relationships – more volunteers for your organization and more people voting for issues that will have positive effects for you.

THE IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

It is no secret that the Internet is redefining marketing. As expressed by Michael O'Toole as part of an online panel discussion, "the Internet has the potential to erase the artifice of marketing that we have all lived with since the industrial revolution" (O'Toole 2002). It is strongly recommended that your organization become conversant with the Internet, even if at this time you do not have Internet access.

Website

The creation of a website need not be a time-consuming part of your PR work. Usually a website reproduces PR items already in existence and disseminates them to a much wider audience. When considering whether the expense of computer technology to create digital slide presentations is worth the effort, do not forget that such presentations may be used on your website.

Three of the six organizations used as case studies in this guide had Internet sites in 2002 and reported that they were of great benefit (see Appendix C). The other three said that having websites would greatly enhance their PR work. Proyecto Azteca wanted its own website to educate the public about colonias. Lee County Community Development Corporation in Arkansas already had web pages as part of the websites of two of its funders; having its own website would allow it to share local information with legislators. HDC in Oregon hoped to have a website where it could make information available about smart growth, a state focus that affected the organization's work. It would use the website to recruit volunteers and perhaps have certain pages linked to specific interest groups, such as churches. From previous experience, Linda Netherton of HDC believed it would not take much time to maintain and update the website "even with all the bells and whistles."

Appendix B contains more information about the creation of websites, including a listing of free services.

E-mail and the Media

Electronic mail has been accepted as a legitimate distribution method for corporate, government, and nonprofit communications (Lee 2002). Its advantages are obvious: e-mail arrives instantaneously, saves time, and is easier than faxing. That makes it an excellent choice for sending news releases, media alerts, and other communications to the media. It is wise to find out from each reporter or editor whether this is his/her preferred method of communication, since some reporters still do not like it.

Do not expect to receive a response – not getting one does not mean that your message was not read or taken seriously.

Be sure to include the e-mail address in the contact person's information and also the URL (Internet address) for your organization's website, if you have one. Do include the complete

address, using the “http://www” prefix so that e-mail programs can automatically turn the Internet address into a “hyperlink” (enabling the viewer to go directly to your website).

Use the subject line of the e-mail message to describe your news; be specific and make it interesting. Editors use the subject line as the first opportunity to hit the delete button. As Terry Lee, founder and CEO of PressReleaseDC stated, whereas regular paper messages “push” the reader to follow up, an email message has to “pull” the reader “to the phone, a website, your web-based press kit, a video conference or video-release or, lastly, an event” (Lee 2002, 23). E-mail press releases must work a little harder.

Be careful that the relative speed and ease of using e-mail rather than faxing or regular mail may set a trap; be especially careful not to send spam news releases that do not select their recipients thoughtfully or that do not have legitimate newsworthy items – you may be establishing a precedent for ending up in the e-mail wastebasket. Avoid using mass mailings of e-mail press releases.

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APPENDIX A: TEMPLATES

The following samples of PR tools are meant to serve as templates to follow when creating your own. The samples have been provided by rural nonprofit housing organizations. In some cases, HAC has created a template using generic rural housing information. In all instances, the source of the template is noted.

Feel free to copy the formats as they are or modify them according to the guidelines in the text of the report.

Press Release

For Immediate Release

April 9, 2002

Contact: Julie Cabañas

800-722-4822 ext. 610

PROGRAM OFFERS HELP WITH HOME REPAIRS

The City of Woodlake has received a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to help residents rehabilitate their homes.

Assistance is provided to low-income homeowners at no interest or payments until the property is sold, vacated or transferred. These deferred loan funds can be used to cover such repairs as roof, foundation, plumbing, electrical, structural, heating and air conditioning, windows and handicap modifications.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for local residents to have needed repairs made to their homes,” states Woodlake City Manager, Bill Lewis.

Low-income homeowners may receive more information and the qualifications requirements by calling Julie Cabañas at Self-Help Enterprises: 800-722-4822 ext. 610. Se habla Español.

Self-Help Enterprises is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the living conditions of San Joaquin Valley residents. SHE is an Equal Opportunity agency.

Web site: <http://www.SelfHelpEnterprises.org>

#

(Self Help Enterprises 2002)

Photo Release Template

[Use your organization's letterhead]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

[insert contact name]

[insert organization name]

[insert local phone number]

[insert e-mail address]

[PHOTO GOES HERE]

Sample text:

Community members join forces with [insert local program name] on [insert day and date] at [insert location] to help generate awareness of local housing needs, as part of a national effort in honor of National Homeownership Month.

###

Op-Ed Cover Letter Template

[Use your organization's letterhead]

[DATE]

[NAME]

[NAME OF PUBLICATION]

[ADDRESS]

[CITY, STATE ZIP]

Dear *[NAME]*:

Enclosed please find an Op-Ed piece the *[LOCAL PROGRAM NAME]* has developed in response to the startling lack of affordable housing in our community. Every year, more than *[XX]* families in *[TOWN]* or *[COUNTY]* spend more than 50 percent of their earnings on housing. The average wait for affordable housing is *[GIVE LOCAL STATISTICS]*; meanwhile *[XX]* families including children face fear and uncertainty as they wind their way through the public housing system. These families need our help obtaining safe, permanent homes – something every family needs.

With your support, together we have the opportunity to turn lives of uncertainty into lives filled with hope. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me. I can be reached directly at *(XXX) XXX-XXXX*. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Program Director
Local Program Name

PSA Samples

[Use your organization's letterhead]

:15

THE HARDWORKING FAMILIES OF RIVERVIEW NEED YOUR HELP IN BUILDING THEIR NEW COMMUNITY CENTER IN RIVERVIEW PARK. VOLUNTEER ON SATURDAY, JUNE 9TH, AND HELP BUILD A NEW LIFE FOR THE COMMUNITY. CALL _____ FOR MORE INFORMATION.

:20

FOR SOME KIDS, CHILDHOOD MEANS SOCCER GAMES AND FAMILY PICNICS. FOR OTHERS, IT MEANS LIVING IN A HOMELESS SHELTER. YOU CAN HELP THEM BY BEING A POWERFUL VOICE IN THEIR LIVES. VOLUNTEER AS AN AFTER-SCHOOL TUTOR AND EMPOWER THE LIVES OF THE LESS FORTUNATE CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY. CALL _____.

:30

MORE THAN ____ (NUMBER) FAMILIES IN _____ (COUNTY/TOWN) OFTEN SPEND YEARS LOST IN THE SYSTEM IN SEARCH OF A SAFE, PERMANENT HOME. THEY NEED SOMEONE TO TAKE THE TIME TO FIGURE OUT WHAT'S BEST FOR THEM. SOMEONE TO BE A POWERFUL VOICE IN THEIR LIVES. VOLUNTEER AS A MENTOR IN FAIRVIEW'S HOMEBUYER EDUCATION CLASSES AND HELP FAMILIES ACQUIRE WHAT EVERY FAMILY DESERVES: A SAFE, PERMANENT HOME. CALL _____.

Media Advisory Template

[Use your organization's letterhead]

MEDIA ADVISORY

Contact: *[insert name]*
[insert phone number]
[insert e-mail address]

TITLE Subtitle (optional)

What: *[insert information]*

Where: *[insert information]*

Who: *[insert information]*

When *[insert information]*

[insert paragraph describing your organization]

###

MEDIA ADVISORY

Contact: Leslie R. Strauss
202-842-8600, ext. 141
leslie@ruralhome.org

NATIONAL HOUSING LEADERS TO TOUR LOCAL SITES Housing Assistance Council Board Will View “Self-Help” Homes

What/

Where: At the invitation of local organizations, the board of directors of the Housing Assistance Council, a national housing organization, will tour low-income housing in Milwaukee and Delavan on Friday, May 18. HAC’s board will visit homes produced using the “self-help” method. Low-income home buyers help construct their own homes in order to keep costs affordable. The tour will include completed homes and others under construction.

Who: **Residents** will be available for photographs and interviews in both Milwaukee and Delavan. **Representatives of housing organizations** at the national, state, and local levels will be available on the bus, at the sites, and at lunch. These include the Housing Assistance Council and its local hosts: Fannie Mae, South Community Organization, Southeastern Wisconsin Housing Corporation, UMOS, and the Wisconsin Association of Self-Help Executive Directors. Several of these speakers are **bilingual in English and Spanish**.

When: Friday, May 18, 2001, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. To join the tour for the entire day, meet HAC’s chartered bus at the Residence Inn, 101 West Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, before 9:00 a.m.
Delavan, 10-11:45 a.m., Whispering Pines (from Highway 11, turn left on Turtle Creek Drive and go two blocks to Spruce Street)
Delavan, 12:00-1:00 p.m., lunch at Lake Lawn Lodge
Milwaukee, 2:15-3:30 p.m., 720 West Scott Street, 1304 South 17th Street, 2503 West National Ave.

A national nonprofit corporation headquartered in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1971, the Housing Assistance Council helps local organizations build affordable homes in rural America by providing below-market financing, technical assistance, research, training, and information services. HAC’s programs focus on local solutions, empowerment of the poor, reduced dependency, and self-help strategies. HAC is an equal opportunity lender.

###

Community Calendar Template

(Use your organization's letterhead)

FOR RELEASE: *[Month, Day, Year]*

CONTACT:

[insert contact name]

[insert organization name]

[insert local phone number]

[insert e-mail address]

[insert name of event]

Community Calendar Release

[Insert information about event, no more than three to four sentences. Lead sentence should include the event name, event time and date, and where it takes place. Subsequent sentences can give a few details, including how community members can participate. Last sentence should include any event contact information.]

###

(National CASA Association 2002)

Media Contact Card/Database Entry

[Include: all print media in your area; college, university and community newspapers, church bulletins, etc.; state/local specialty publications/magazines that feature housing issues; television and radio stations with news and current-event talk shows; organizations that might publicize your information in their own publication/newsletter]

[Select one of the following titles for your information listing]

Issue Reporter:

Assignment Editor:

Managing Editor:

After-hours Newsroom Staff:

News Director: (Early Edition/morning News Shows Producers)

News Director: (Late Edition/afternoon or Evening News Shows Producers)

Talk Show Host:

Daily News Editor:

Weekend News Editor:

Publisher:

Key Photographers:

Local Wire Service Bureau:

Work Phone:

Home Phone:

E-mail:

Fax:

Street Address:

Post Office Box:

Deadline:

Best Way to Contact: *[E-mail, Phone, Fax, Etc.]*

Best Times to Reach:

Issues Covered:

Advance Notice Time:

Did this Person Initiate Contact?

Did this Contact Result in Story Being Printed/covered?

List of Publicity Opportunities:

Record of Dates Contacted:

Comments:

[When including radio and TV stations, include a listing of all pertinent information such as Public Service Announcement preferences (timing, format, etc.), reporter deadlines, and names of specific reporters related to your issue (National Migrant Resource Program 1995). Note how each contact prefers to receive announcements from you – by fax, phone, or e-mail.]

Media File Card Sample

Name:	The Rio Bueno Weekly (Community Paper) 200 Main Street El Paso, TX 79994
Phone:	915.555.4567
Fax:	915.555.4455
Contact:	Linda Rodriguez, Metro Editor
Area of Interest/Beat:	Health/Education
Publicity Opportunity:	Community Calendar Letters to the Editor
Deadlines:	Announcements for Community Calendar column follow the standard format; submit no later than Tuesday, at 3 p.m. for publication in the weekend's paper.
Notes:	(Re: August 17, 1995 phone conversation with Linda Rodriguez.) Rodriguez is interested. Suggests we contact her two weeks prior to our National Breast Cancer Awareness Month 5K walk; will probably send reporter and a photographer to cover the event.
Date Entered:	August 17, 1995

(National Migrant Resource Program 1995)

Fact Sheet Sample #1

**COMMUNITY ACTION COMMISSION
OF FAYETTE COUNTY
324 E. Court Street
Washington Court House, OH 43160
(740) 335-7282/ (740) 335-6802 (fax)**

MISSION STATEMENT:

To develop and implement programs to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged people in Fayette County. The development of affordable housing is a specific purpose in Community Action Commission (CAC) of Fayette County's Constitution. CAC is a private, nonprofit corporation governed by a 15-member board of directors of public officials, private organizations and residents.

PROGRAMS:

Among CAC's programs are homeownership, home repair services for the elderly, Head Start, home weatherization, emergency services, a countywide transportation system, pediatric clinic, prenatal clinic and visiting nurse services. CAC also oversees 16 transitional housing units, three apartment complexes, two homeless shelters and single-room-occupancy housing for the homeless.

HOMEOWNERSHIP:

Homeownership is CAC's fastest growing program. More than 109 homes for ownership by low-income families have been built since the program began in 1993, an additional 15 homes are under construction and land for 65 lots for future development has been purchased.

The program began as scattered sites with construction in several locations. A private developer, Darrell Krupul, helped CAC build its first subdivision, Logtown, in 1996. A second subdivision, Village Green in Bloomingburg, nears completion. Plans for Arbor Village in Washington Court House are underway.

Self-Help Housing Program: This USDA program has provided more than \$1.6 million in technical assistance grants to help build 11 homes in the past eight years. About \$650,000 in Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Program (SHOP) grants, distributed through the Housing Assistance Council, was used to purchase 75 lots for construction. Client Equity averages \$10,000 per household.

Other Funding Sources: Local lenders using interest rate buy-down and subsidies have helped CAC complete 22 single-family, new construction homes. The Office of Housing and Community Partnerships provided additional assistance, through the Ohio Housing Trust Fund, using "sweat equity" to help maintain affordability.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

CAC owns Glennview Apartments (56 units), Woodsvie Square (40 units), Fayette Inn (17 apartments), Summer Tree Terrace (24 apartments). More than 3,500 children have been enrolled in Head Start since 1966. More than 100 seniors have benefitted from the home repair program since 1977 and more than 157 low-income families have a place to call home each year through CAC housing programs.

(Enterprise Foundation 2002)



EVERGLADES COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

“Affordable Housing for Working Families”

Post Office Box 343529

Homestead, FL 33034

Telephone (305) 242-2142 Facsimile (305) 242-2143

**EVERGLADES FARMWORKER VILLAGE
FACT SHEET**

- Owner:** Everglades Community Association, Inc., a 501(c)(3) corporation founded in 1982
- Management:** Same
- Contact:** Mr. Steven C. Kirk, President and CEO
- Board of Directors:** 21-members including 1/3rd low-income tenants
- Total Site Area:** Everglades Farmworker Villages encompasses 108 acres; integrating Metro Dade Farm Labor total site is 120 acres +/-
- The ‘Village’:** Everglades Farmworker Village is not simply a rental housing ‘project’ but a planned, affordable housing community; average income \$14,000/annum; 90% of tenants < 50% AMI

Residential

Phase I and 2: Phase I completed 1997; Phase 2 completed April 2002.

- △ 4 5-bedroom single-family homes
- △ 51 4-bedroom single-family homes
- △ 30 4-bedroom townhomes
- △ 45 2-bedroom townhomes
- △ 226 3-bedroom duplex apartments
- △ 26 2-bedroom duplex apartments

382 subtotal

Phase 3: To Begin Construction September 2002.

- △ 8 4-bedroom townhomes
- △ 12 2-bedroom townhomes
- △ 4 3-bedroom duplexes

24 subtotal

Fact Sheet Sample #2 (continued)

Metro Dade Farm Labor

Original Construction 1982; Acquisition/Rehabilitation
2001

△	4	5-bedroom single-family homes
△	28	4-bedroom single-family homes
△	32	3 -bedroom single-family homes
△	2	2-bedroom single-family homes
	66	subtotal

Casa Cesar Chavez:

△	144	beds for single, unaccompanied workers
	144	beds

Facilities:

- ◆ Leasing and Property Management Offices
- ◆ Community Center
- ◆ *Cinco de Mayo Park*
10-acre park to be leased to MiamiDade County Parks and Recreation
- ◆ *Everglades Village Health Center*
CHI-operated community health center
- ◆ *Everglades I Child Care Center*
leased and operated by Redland Christian Migrant Association
- ◆ *Everglades II Migrant Head Start*
leased and operated by Redland Christian Migrant Association
- ◆ *Fernando Pro, Jr. Child Development Center*
under construction; child care center
- ◆ *Neighborhood Retail & Service Center*
under construction; cafe, convenience store, credit union, computer lab and social service space

Funding Sources:

In excess of \$50,000,000 from the following sources.

- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. HUD
- U.S. Health and Human Services
- FEMA
- Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta
- We Will Rebuild Foundation
- Miami-Dade County OCED
- \$40,000 FY2000 CDBG
- \$40,000 FY2001 CDBG
- \$40,000 FY2002 CDBG

Oti Kaga, Inc.

WOIHANBLE GLOKUPI - "BRINGING HOME THE DREAM"

Oti Kaga, Inc. has a demonstrated track record of low-income housing development on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation. Our programs include development of both single-family and multifamily housing; loan-packaging services for Rural Development programs, a loan program; and housing counseling services. Oti Kaga, Inc. views housing development and homeownership as a fundamental approach to improving economic conditions on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation.

The reasons are clear. The family poverty rate for the reservation is 40.9%, compared to 11.6% statewide and 10.0% nationally. Median family incomes for the reservation are \$15,797, compared to \$27,602 statewide and \$35,225 nationally. Per capita incomes for the reservation are \$6,405, compared to \$10,661 statewide, and \$14,420 nationally. The homeownership rate for Cheyenne River is 51.6%, compared to 66.1% statewide, and 64.2% nationally. These statistics demonstrate the extreme poverty faced by residents of the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation.

PROGRAMS THAT RESPOND TO THE COMMUNITY

Oti Kaga, Inc. concentrates on two main goals to accomplish its mission. First, the Low-income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. This program is used for both single-family, lease/purchase, and multi-family rental housing. Second, the Increasing Access to Rural Development's Housing Programs project. This project provides loan/grant packaging service for Rural Development (RD) Section 502 Homeownership Loans & 504 Housing Renovation Loan/Grants. Programs in support of these activities include the Homeownership Assistance Program (HAP) loan fund, and housing counseling services.

In the near future, we will continue our development efforts by:

- 1. Completing construction of our office building.** Adequate office space is critical to optimum staff productivity. Staff of seven is currently occupying approximately 360 square feet. The new office will be 2,360 square feet and is designed with future growth of the organization in mind.
- 2. Complete construction of Falcon Apartments.** This 16-unit multi-family town-house project, currently under construction, is scheduled for rent-up in early December 2001, and will serve families with children. Project development costs of \$1.48M.
- 3. Blackhawk Apartments.** This 15-unit multi-family town-house project has secured all necessary financing, will in all likelihood begin construction in early October 2001, and will also serve families with children. Project development costs of \$1.2M.
- 4. Development of Buffalo Lodges.** This 26-unit, single-family, detached, lease purchase project will provide homeownership opportunity to very low-income families.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ★ Tipi Tokaheya - Four-unit renovation project (\$250,000+)
- ★ Elk View Homes - 10-unit, single-family, detached, lease-purchase project (\$992,000+)

Fact Sheet Sample #3 (continued)

- ★ South Main Apartments - 20-unit multi-family housing project (\$1.25M)
- ★ Loan/Grant Packaging - Over \$871,151+ for seventeen (17) Sec. 502 loans and \$151,890+ for thirty-seven (37) Sec. 504 loan/grants, totaling \$1,023,041.
- ★ HAP Loans - Loans totaling \$278,302 for down-payment and closing cost assistance.
- ★ Certified Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) 2000.
- ★ Total Development and Operating Capital of over \$6.6M since October 1995.

ACCOMPLISHING THE OTI KAGA, INC. MISSION

The mission of Oti Kaga, Inc. is to improve housing conditions for the residents of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, and Native American people in general, with emphasis being placed on decent, safe and affordable housing development for those with low and very-low income.

We have formed a variety of partnerships to accomplish our mission, and we would like to give special recognition to the following organizations that have helped us in the past

❖ Housing Assistance Council	Washington DC
❖ Northwest Area Foundation	St. Paul MN
❖ Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe	Eagle Butte SD
❖ Enterprise Foundation	Columbia MD
❖ Enterprise Social Investment Corporation	Columbia MD
❖ Fannie Mae Foundation	Washington DC
❖ C. S. Mott Foundation	San Francisco CA
❖ Center for Community Change	Washington DC
❖ Mercy Housing Loan Fund	Denver CO
❖ Low-Income Housing Fund	San Francisco CA
❖ USDA Rural Development	Washington DC
❖ South Dakota Housing Development Authority	Pierre SD
❖ Department of Housing & Urban Development	Denver CO
❖ Federal Homes Loan Bank of Des Moines	Des Moines IA
❖ State Bank of Eagle Butte	Eagle Butte SD
❖ Wells Fargo Bank	Pierre SD

Oti Kaga, Inc. Board of Directors

Libby Traversie, President
Verna Meeter, Vice-President
Melissa Traversie, Secretary/Treasurer
Eva Gilbert
Ella Meeter
Juanita Phillips
Bill Picotte
Randolph Runs After
Bernard Uses Knife

Staff

Bill Picotte, Executive Director
Tricia Murphy, Office Manager
Linda Pesicka, Development Officer
Verzella LaPlante, Project Manager
Jennifer Carter, Housing Technician
Katie Kost, Accounting Assistant
Dylan Torres, Maintenance Man
Kenny Eagle Chasing, Security Guard

Last Updated: October 5, 2001

For more information, contact: Oti Kaga, Inc.
Bill Picotte, Executive Director Box 751, Eagle Butte, SD 57625

Phone: 605.964.4663
Fax: 605.964.4664
Email: billp@rapidnet.com

APPENDIX B: WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Creating a Website

Consider creating a website for your organization if you do not already have one. This can be done easily; it is possible to create a website even if you have little technological expertise. Various sources have compiled the necessary components and lead you through the entire process at no cost. Refer to the list of “Free Resources” below.

Free Resources

Here are some resources that are available on the internet, all free as of fall 2004.

- ⊞ *Free website creation:*
 - < <http://www.geocities.com>>
 - < <http://www.ourchurch.com>>
 - < <http://www.enterprisefoundation.org/resources>>
 - < <http://www.webspawner.com/create.html>>
 - < <http://www.tripod.lycos.com/>>
 - Plus many more.

- ⊞ *Free web hosting:*
 - < <http://www.netfirms.com/tourchart>>

- ⊞ *Free domain registration:*
 - < <http://www.netfirms.com/tourchart>>

- ⊞ *Free web design information:*
 - < <http://www.onenw.org/toolkit/webdesign>>

- ⊞ *Free search engine:*
 - < <http://www.atomz.com>>
 - < <http://www.picosearch.com>>
 - < <http://swish-e.org>>
 - < <http://google.com/services/free.html>>
 - < <http://geocities.yahoo.com>>

- ⊞ *To register your website yourself instead of paying to have it done:*
 - < <http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/>>
 - < http://www.webcrawler.com/info/add_url> (“submit site”)
 - < <http://www.altavista.com/sites/search/addurl>> (“submit site”)
 - < <http://hotbot.lycos.com/addurl.asp>> (“submit site”)
 - < <http://www.bcentral.com/products/free.asp>>

- ⏏ *Free online donations:*
 < <http://www.eTapestry.com> > (Free for small nonprofits)
 < <http://www.Networkforgood.org> >
 (You can use their website to enable donations to your organization if you do not have your own website.)
- ⏏ *Free e-mail:*
 < <http://mail.lycos.com> >
- ⏏ *Free clip art:*
 < <http://www.clipart.com> >
 < <http://geocities.yahoo.com> >
- ⏏ *Sign up to find volunteers to design or develop your website:*
 < <http://www.webconscious.org> >
- ⏏ *Free online survey service:*
 < <http://www.zoomerang.com> >
- ⏏ *Free distribution of a newsletter via e-mail:*
 < <http://www.topica.com> >
- ⏏ *Free conversion from text to PDF:*
 < <http://www.apache.com> >
- ⏏ *Free downloads:*
 < <http://www.download.com> >

Special note: Be sure to read carefully through all service agreements before signing up for free services; some include termination fees that you must pay if you stop using their service within a certain time period.

- ⏏ *General resources for website development:*
 < <http://www.techsoup.org> >
 < <http://www.benton.org> >
 < <http://www.compasspoint.org> >
 < <http://www.nonprofitmatrix.com> >
 < <http://www.Actknowledgeworks.net/ephil> >
 < <http://www.dotorgmedia.org> >
 < <http://www.webmonkey.com> >
 < <http://www.digital-web.com> >
 < <http://www.designsbymark.com> >
 < <http://www.compumentor.org> >
 < <http://www.makingthenetwork.org/toolbox> >



General Website Maintenance:

- < <http://www.net-ads.com/tools/maintain.html> >
- < <http://www.NetMechanic.com> >
- < <http://www.bcentral.com/products/free.asp> >
- < <http://www.webspawner.com> >



Resources for Accessibility

- < <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/508/508home.html> > lists Section 508 accessibility guidelines.
- < <http://www.macromedia.com/accessibility> > offers training for web accessibility.
- < <http://www.usablenet.com> > gives you a free evaluation of the accessibility of your website.
- < <http://www.adobe.com> > converts PDF files into text files.

(Stein 2002)

APPENDIX C: CASE STUDIES

The six case studies presented here display a variety of public relations scenarios. When their staff were interviewed for this guide in 2002, some of these organizations had met with phenomenal circumstances enabling the organizations to augment their housing efforts. Others continued to have tough battles with “Not In My Back Yard” (NIMBY) attitudes. Some were part of larger parent organizations; others were small and independent. Some had the support of their communities; others faced bureaucracies of all sorts, or regional circumstances that all but turned away their efforts before they could even get started. They were located in Arkansas, Massachusetts, Oregon, Texas, and West Virginia. Staff sizes ranged from four to 70 people. Populations of towns represented ranged from 6,000 to 70,000.

Each organization was making headway – persevering in the battles of public relations work. Each had to be prepared to benefit from a good wind when it blew.

Telamon Corporation, Martinsburg, W. Va. Office

The Telamon Corporation is a large multi-state nonprofit that has been in existence since 1965, yet its office in Martinsburg, W.Va. had an ongoing struggle to establish its identity in the local community.

Being one branch of a corporation was a disadvantage in reference to the community of Martinsburg; public relations efforts such as Telamon’s website and printed PR material advertised the Martinsburg office but could not address the local issues unique to Martinsburg, which included a severe lack of housing for migrant workers plus Martinsburg’s unmet needs for substance abuse treatment and children’s services. This condition led to the local Telamon office taking on the function of a Community Action Agency (CAA).

The time to accomplish its many new tasks was in short supply for the staff; as an added challenge, the local office served a large geographic area – the entire eastern panhandle of West Virginia – that included counties that were healthy and growing and others where residents were struggling to survive. A rural community one hour west of Washington, D.C., Martinsburg was becoming a bedroom community for the Washington metropolitan area. However, the abject poverty of Appalachia was right on its doorstep.

The community of Martinsburg did not support the Telamon office’s programs; the community generally had a negative attitude toward migrant farmworkers. The local media was fairly unresponsive. There was a high rate of turnover of press staff at the local TV and radio stations, making it difficult to establish long-term relationships with the press. Even though Telamon was expanding, there was little hope that the Martinsburg office would acquire a full-time public relations staff person. The office realized the need to tell its local story and to get the word out to prospective applicants, not only for its housing programs but also in regard to the other basic social services it provided as a CAA.

The Martinsburg office had used word of mouth as the most effective method in 90 percent of its recruitment. Other PR efforts focused on ads marketing its housing and the creation of a homebuyers’ guide. Flyers were distributed describing the various programs it offered, and the

staff realized the need to create fact sheets and a brochure. When this guide was prepared, they were about to launch their first appeal for funds. A video and billboards were also in the planning stages. In addition, staff hoped to start a speakers' bureau.

The Martinsburg staff felt that with the limited resources available for their PR work, the best plan would be to stage an event and invite well-liked politicians in order to attract the media. There was a chance of collaborating on public relations for the event with the local homeless coalition.

According to Telamon's Deputy State Director, Cheryl Walkley, a full-time PR person would enable the Martinsburg office to create the print materials it needed without having to rely on Telamon's home office; it could then deal with marketing the two sides of its identity and build local media relationships. With someone devoting full time to public relations, it could do more events, including annual fundraising drives; prepare materials for foundations; market its homeownership program; and produce its own annual report.

Cheryl admitted that the challenges facing her public relations work were great. She was not discouraged, however; referring to Telamon's ongoing uphill battle with local NIMBY attitudes, Cheryl hoped to "wear them down" by persisting.

Rural Development, Inc., Turners Falls, Mass.

Like apple pie, homeownership sells the American way of life to politicians and citizens alike. But in rural Massachusetts, preserving open spaces is a more appetizing issue.

Rural Development Incorporated (RDI) is located in Franklin County, the most rural county in Massachusetts; RDI's office is located in Turners Falls, which has a population of 4,441. The biggest nearby town is Greenfield with a population of 18,168 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

According to Anne Perkins, homeownership program director for RDI, it cost more to build a house in Massachusetts than anywhere else in the nation. New England's anti-development sentiment made it almost impossible for developers to build housing. Consequently, many builders went elsewhere. Only 40 percent of the statewide housing need was being met, resulting in a severe housing shortage in every part of Massachusetts. Added to the lack of housing was the prevalence of substandard units among the existing housing stock. People trying to utilize Section 8 vouchers often found that there were no rental units available to them because the quality of available housing did not meet Section 8's standards.

Because the local attitude for open space and against development was even more discouraging than NIMBYism alone, low-key public relations was an ongoing task for RDI. Its parent organization, the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, also did advocacy work regarding affordable housing.

RDI did not have its own website but had a web page on the website of one of its sponsors, the Rugg Lumber Company; the page included a link to RDI's email address. Interviews of RDI's staff by the local TV and radio stations resulted in some contacts. Occasionally the media would contact RDI from as far away as Springfield (40 miles away) as a follow-up to previous

press events, as when a TV reporter contacted the organization needing a story and happening to be in the area. RDI organized two or three events each year involving major political figures such as the governor and the U.S. Representative from the district. These events were covered by the print media as well as the TV and radio.

In terms of local community involvement, RDI organized and sponsored the community's first-time homebuyer workshops for all residents. It also worked with staff and students at a nearby technical school who did construction work on one RDI house each school year.

When RDI looked for clients, staff wrote articles for local newsletters, sent publicity to area churches and businesses, put up posters in target communities, and otherwise relied on word of mouth. They also placed brochures in the local USDA Rural Development office, Housing Authority offices, and community college. In addition, the carpentry crew always had a supply of brochures to hand out to people who stopped at the construction site.

RDI focused on getting cooperation directly from the various communities and building on local high regard. Its public relations work started with direct involvement in the community of Turners Falls.

Lee County Community Development Corporation, Marianna, Ark.

The Lee County CDC (LCCDC) in Marianna, Ark. (population 5,181) was established in 1996 and serves two counties with a total population of approximately 21,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). LCCDC is part of the Delta Compact, a community-building initiative funded by USDA and HAC. Established in 1996, the Delta Compact has over 30 organizational and institutional members and concentrates on the severe housing needs in the Lower Mississippi Delta region, which includes Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

Lee County is listed among the 20 poorest counties in the nation. According to Renee Wilburn, LCCDC's executive director, the average median income in the region is \$16,000; according to LCCDC, 75 percent of the population live below the poverty line.

In her community economic development role, Renee focused on the creation of a computer technology center housed at her agency. Renee received the Points of Light Foundation Award for July 25, 2001; the award led to PR opportunities that focused on LCCDC's volunteer and computer training programs. A Rockefeller Initiative Grant paid for three computers in the center. Many local residents obtained computers over the next few years; however, they used them primarily for tasks that did not involve the internet. An obstacle to wider use of the internet in the area was the need for a telephone dial-up service; many households did not have telephone lines.

Renee was the community liaison and organizer for the Marianna mayor's office before LCCDC was started; she came to her LCCDC position well-acquainted with the importance of public relations work. She stayed in touch with her organization's reputation in the community but did not stop at Marianna's city line in her media relations; the three TV stations that served Marianna were located in Little Rock and Jonesboro, Ark., and Memphis, Tenn. Two of the

three covered LCCDC's events such as groundbreakings. Media coverage, especially by the TV stations, helped to attract prospective clients, enabling the CDC to avoid paying for advertising.

Renee did her own public relations work along with Toya Logan, the organization's Community Outreach Program Coordinator. Because sometimes neither of them was available as a press contact, another staff person was trained to deal with the media. Ms. Wilburn believed that two people are needed to handle contact with the press; in her case, this meant two out of a total staff of seven.

One of Marianna's two local radio stations featured the CDC on a weekend program called "Community Work," which aired positive stories about the community. Sometimes the local TV and radio stations called LCCDC asking for stories.

Renee wanted to increase her participation in community affairs; having a separate website for her CDC would allow her to provide information about issues.

Proyecto Azteca, San Juan, Texas

Proyecto Azteca is a small, rural nonprofit housing development organization located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. It was created in 1991 by the United Farm Workers (UFW) and Texas Rural Legal Aid. Proyecto Azteca's mission is to build decent, affordable housing for colonia residents in Hidalgo County, especially farmworkers.

As it happens, the office of Proyecto Azteca is next door to the United Farm Workers office and on a main highway, so the organization has good visibility without having to do anything special. Besides relying on word of mouth, Proyecto Azteca got TV coverage easily when national political figures were in the area. This was the case when then HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo came by to present the organization with a sizeable check. In addition, its executive director, David Arizmendi, who has received fellowships from both the Rockefeller and Fannie Mae Foundations, was often requested as a speaker around the country.

All of this was advantageous for the seven staff members working in the San Juan office; often they felt there was no energy left for PR work. Proyecto Azteca never had to advertise to get clients as there were more than 2,000 families on their waiting list. They actually turned down invitations to have booths at community events. The staff did submit news releases to announce new funds and events such as blessings of several newly constructed houses. There usually was good community response to a human interest story. Proyecto Azteca's most serious need has always been financial stability.

Staff also eagerly did advocacy work when requested. Even with its good fortune, Proyecto Azteca felt motivated to do more public relations in order to educate American citizens about colonias. Staff wanted the organization to have its own website to accomplish this goal; any other PR tools that would save time and energy would also be welcomed.

Housing Development Corporation, Hillsboro, Ore.

The location of the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) is a housing developer's nightmare; although the local population and workforce are rural in nature, the organization is located near Portland, Ore., a city known for its interest in smart growth control. As a result, its public relations work has needed to involve a crafty strategy. Augmenting the financial resources of the small nonprofit organization would be an added benefit.

Linda Netherton, co-executive director of HDC, decided to pool PR resources with two other CDCs in the county. The group collaborated on an image-marketing plan. It started with a group assessment of the work done by each of the three agencies. It was beneficial to pool the data from the three separate agencies; the result was the stronger impact of more impressive statistics, benefitting all three organizations.

Collaboration over four months produced a common design for collective stationery and templates for various PR items, all sharing a common image. The focus throughout was on telling the story common to all three organizations, of how the CDCs differed from private developers; a simple and straightforward approach was agreed upon.

The result was a marketing folder, brochure, and stationery that were used for the first time at a meeting of the county housing advisory committee that made important decisions regarding HOME funds. The meeting's outcome definitely made the project worth doing; the county changed the way it handled HOME funds in a way that benefitted affordable housing programs. At the end of the meeting, one decisionmaker said that because the explanations of the issue were so simple and straightforward, he was finally able to understand what the CDCs did.

Because of her past experience as development director for Mercy Corps International, Linda knew the importance of PR work; she also sensed that CDCs often do not make use of PR tools easily available at no cost.

HDC used the local cable TV station heavily; it worked with other organizations in the community to create an informational video on homelessness and housing. HDC staff hoped to do more with the local radio stations, including broadcasts in Spanish.

HDC applied for a capacity building grant from a foundation in order to hire someone to work in resource development, a position that would include doing PR work. This person would write press releases and make sure that HDC was represented at all community meetings.

More than anything else, Linda was poised to create a website for HDC; when she was interviewed for this guide, the organization had registered a domain name and was in touch with a designer. Because of her previous PR work, Linda knew that funding institutions used websites to research organizations they considered funding. Linda also realized the strong potential for online donations and was eager to implement such a tool for HDC.

Stop Abusive Family Environments, Inc., Welch, W.Va.

Stop Abusive Family Environments (SAFE) began as a badly needed domestic violence shelter in the early 1980s with a budget of \$44,000 and two employees. By 1996 the organization was building affordable housing and managing its own construction company; the budget had grown to \$250,000. In 2002 SAFE's budget was \$4.4 million.

Sharon Walden, founder and executive director of SAFE, was the daughter of a coal miner when Welch was a company town; she appreciated the friendly atmosphere of a town where residents could walk to all needed services, which were provided by the coal company. As an adult, Sharon felt strongly motivated to do all she could for the survival of Welch despite its sharp drop in population when local mining operations ceased. Her goals expanded to providing economic opportunities for the whole community. By 2002 SAFE's staff included a full-time business coordinator who helped 15 micro-enterprises in the community.

Welch had no movie theater; there was not even one laundromat in all of McDowell County. Sharon determined that a new townhouse subdivision under construction by SAFE would have a community center with a laundromat, thrift store, office space, child care center, and computer lab.

In keeping with her desire to work with the resources available in the town of Welch, Sharon paid a local woman to work part-time to create SAFE's website at <http://wvsafe.fatcow.com/safe.html>. The site was based on a slide presentation the woman had done for Sharon.

Sharon did most of her own public relations work, but various other staff did the PR for their own programs. Sharon was so focused on showing her appreciation of the news media that she sent them gifts such as flowers or candy at least once a year.

But as Sharon told everyone, she did not do public relations work for the local people; she did it for the funders.

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This guide is aimed at organizations – small or not so small, private, public, or nonprofit – that are working to increase the stock of affordable housing in the rural United States. There seems to be never enough time to do much public relations work, and funding is rarely available to hire PR staff. Therefore this guide focuses on PR techniques that are effective but require little time or resources.

ISBN 1-58064-132-6