

Media Relations for Community-Based Organizations

by Marco A. Davis
Senior Leadership
Development Specialist

In today's society, the media play an increasingly integral role in communities. Newspapers, radio, and television are very common forms of communicating information and activities and of providing ideas and opinions to the public, that is, members of one or more communities. Garnering media coverage has also become popular as an inexpensive means of disseminating information, a sort of "free advertising" for items of importance to a community.

Most Hispanic community-based organizations (CBOs) recognize the value and benefit of using and working with the media, but many do not do so formally. This is often due to a perceived lack of expertise, time, or resources. Many people who are not familiar with the media believe that working with them requires a sophisticated operation, with large amounts of staff and time devoted to developing media and public relations.



Developing a media strategy and procedures is a fairly straightforward task, and does not necessarily require a huge invest-

ment of time or resources. Moreover, the positive results yielded in exchange for the time and effort invested are invariably more than worthwhile for the organization. This issue of the *NCLR Leadership Bulletin* outlines some of the points to consider, and steps involved, in developing a media strategy, and addresses ways to incorporate the media into a planned issue campaign or event.

Benefits of Media Coverage

There are three main benefits achieved through increased media coverage for a Hispanic community-based organization: **visibility**, **credibility**, and **influence**.

Visibility

Through the media, an organization gains **visibility** with many audiences. An organization which is often quoted or referred to in print, radio, or television can become well-known to community residents. In the case of Hispanic CBOs, Latinos who reside in the area but may not be familiar with the CBO will come to know of it, yielding many positive results. Community members may turn to the organization for services and assistance, or volunteer there, or refer their friends and relatives to it.

The general public will become aware of the organization as well, and therefore non-Latinos, or people residing in other areas will get to know the organization, increasing its visibility with many more people. Finally, key people such as potential funders, elected officials, and others will become familiar with the agency, thus increasing the organization's likelihood of interacting with these persons in the future. Funders, policy makers, and many other types of people are hesitant to work with an organization that they have never heard of. People are more willing to support an organization that they have read about, or have been told of by friends or colleagues, lending the organization some credibility.

Credibility

An organization gains **credibility** through the media by being represented as a legitimate, established institution. By becoming well-known for its work, an organization can be viewed by a community as a valuable resource. An organization with an established track record of effectiveness and success in its work will draw support from the community. Likewise, it will be seen by influential people as a trustworthy entity, one which is well-respected by its constituents, clients, and members. Increasing credibility through the media serves the media strategy

itself, because the media will look to a credible organization for information and opinions about a community issue. The organization can come to be seen as an authentic voice on the experiences, ideas, and perspectives of the community.

Influence

An organization increases its ability to **influence** different aspects of community life by being a visible and credible organization. When an organization is viewed as a credible institution, one that is well-known and respected, its work is appreciated more, and its voice is listened to. A visible and credible organization has a greater ability to make an impact in the community. The organization can speak on behalf of community members in advocating for change, and it will be taken more seriously. If the organization opposes something in the community, the public, the media, and notable figures will all take notice. By being regarded as visible and credible, an organization is seen as having widespread support from the community for its endeavors.

Increased visibility can lead to increased credibility, which can lead to increased influence. One caution: not all media coverage is positive. Although there is a saying that "there is no such thing as bad publicity as long as they spell the name right," this does not hold true for Hispanic community-based organizations. A negative media image can damage an organization's ability to advocate for improvements in the Latino community, or to be taken seriously in a discussion of the issues and concerns of Latinos. In fact, being viewed negatively can damage an organization's credibility completely, hurting its chances of raising money, thereby threatening its very existence.

Developing a Media Strategy

Hispanic community-based organizations can develop strong media relations and achieve higher effectiveness in their communities by establishing a sound media strategy which everyone in the organization understands clearly. When a few key decisions have been made, everyone in the organization can know what actions to take with regard to the media. Staff can sometimes get carried away by the idea of being seen on television or quoted in the newspaper. These activities can be good, as long as they do not detract from the work of the organization. A well-thought-out media strategy shapes the role the media will play for the organization.

Media Objectives

The first step to take in developing a media strategy, before contacting any branches of the media, is to decide on organizational media objectives. The organization must decide and communicate clearly what it hopes to achieve through interaction with the media. The media objectives must be determined and prioritized, that is, which objective is primary, and which objectives must follow the main objective.

One possible objective is to educate the public — whether readers/viewers, policy makers, or the media itself — about the Latino community and its issues, and to shape the story. This serves to insure that debates around issues are based on facts and the truth. It also serves to bring attention to problems in the hopes of having them addressed.

Another possible media objective is to develop organizational visibility and credibility. With this goal in mind, activities involving the media

would emphasize getting the name of the organization listed or shown in the media. They would also emphasize having the organization's statement or the spokesperson's stated opinions quoted, so that people relate the issue, the community, and the stance to the organization.

A third possible objective may be bringing about specific change in the community or the organization. A group may decide that its activities involving media will all be geared toward improving conditions, or attracting more funding for programs and services.

A fourth possible objective is to improve the public image of the constituents. For example, an objective may be to break stereotypes about Latinos in a community, so media-related activities will consciously try to present positive images of Latinos and their activities.

It is important to outline objectives that everyone in the organization understands, so that they can make effective decisions when dealing with the media. A specific community change objective may be the primary short-term objective, for example, and organizational visibility a long-term objective which comes second to achieving the community change.

Organizational Ground Rules

An important part of a media strategy is a set of media ground rules — a clearly-defined process for working with the media.

One rule is to have a designated spokesperson. This should be the primary person who speaks to the media. This will help to avoid inadvertently giving different statements to the media, and will focus media relations through one person. In

building relationships with media people, it helps if they know whom to ask for or refer to for comments.

A follow-up rule is to decide whether to have backup spokespeople, and who they will be. These persons should be available if they have expertise on a particular subject, or if the primary spokesperson is unavailable, but the primary spokesperson should always be the first contact for media.

When possible, assign at least one person other than the spokesperson to be responsible for media activities. This person can assist the spokesperson with media calls, preparing materials, and planning meetings.

One ground rule an organization may follow is to view media relations as a long-term goal, regardless of the immediate objective. The National Council of La Raza, for example, has an established ground rule that providing accurate information pertaining to the story is more vital than having NCLR be the source. If a staff person knows that another organization has more information about an issue than NCLR, the staff person should refer the

NCLR MEDIA OBJECTIVES

1. **Shape the story** — Ensure that the story is accurate and fair. If possible, have story advance NCLR policy/technical assistance goals.
2. **NCLR visibility** — Have NCLR staff or materials quoted or visible in the story.

Note: Objective 1 *always* supercedes Objective 2.

media person to that organization, rather than providing incomplete or possibly inaccurate information.

Working with the media is an ongoing process. Specific media activities such as distributing public statements and news releases and/or having news conferences are most effective when they are part of a larger media relations campaign. Reporters and journalists are far more inclined to attend a news conference or read a release which is put out by an organization they know. They are more inclined to call a spokesperson for comments or reactions if they have spoken with that person before, and have had a positive interaction. One of the mistakes an organization can make is to expect that because they call a news conference, the media will automatically show up. Unless the issue is extremely important or well-known to the public, there must usually be a relationship between the organization and the media to ensure that the press will be responsive.

Media Activities

Once a strategy has been developed, an organization should assess its capacity to carry out media activities. Some media activities require little effort and time; at the other extreme, a large, aggressive campaign requires several people, and significant time and resources. An organization should decide how many staff can work on media relations, and how much time and resources can be dedicated to media work. Based on the level of capacity, media activities should be determined. Some examples of media activities follow.

Media Lists

One of the first and most basic activities to undertake for media relations is the development of a media or press list. The media list is developed so that when a statement is released, or a meeting called, all of

the media can be notified in a timely manner. This increases the likelihood of gaining coverage. A list, once generated, can be used with great ease on countless occasions, although it should be updated regularly.

Information to include are addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers, and, if appropriate, the e-mail addresses of media outlets. The list should include the appropriate person to direct information to. In newspapers, there may be a reporter who has the Latino community as a "beat." If there is no specific person, the city editor or assignment editor may suffice. Staff should try to confirm in advance who the appropriate contact person would be. In television and radio, there may likewise be reporters assigned to your community; if not, the news director should be contacted. Nonprofit organizations are generally able to advertise events such as fundraisers and meetings for free. In these cases, there is usually a "daybook" editor to contact. It is important to note that radio stations and some television stations allow organizations free air time for public service announcements (PSAs).

The list should include mainstream as well as Hispanic media. Do not overlook community newspapers published in English or Spanish. Remember the audience the organization is trying to reach. If the issue or campaign is a lengthy one, an organization may consider contacting magazines and other periodicals to secure coverage and exposure.

Press Calls

Notifying the media via mail or fax of an event **must** be followed up by phone calls. A round of calls made to reporters and editors after notice has been sent in writing serves

to remind people of past or ongoing issues or activities, and alerts them to upcoming events. Media advisories or statements are generally sent

mation about the organization, the spokespeople, and any other relevant information, such as demographic data on the community served. An-

SIX TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

1. Know the media ground rules. Be sure to state, before beginning a conversation, whether your comments will be on the record, off the record, or on background.
2. Know the audience. Be aware of the journalist's level of understanding of your issue, and the audience's familiarity with the issue.
3. Keep it short and simple. Remember that most quotes, written or heard, are very brief soundbites. Also, be careful not to use too much technical jargon, or obscure terms used by people in your field.
4. Know the organization and community. A spokesperson should know the organization's mission, all of its activities, and staff expertise. It is helpful to know about the population size and location, and the community's main issues or conditions.
5. Be respectful, be polite, and be helpful. Never let hostile questions elicit hostile or angry responses. If relevant, offer background or supplemental material. Always respect reporters' deadlines. If you say you will call back, do so.
6. Be accurate. Never mislead the reporter; when necessary, say, "I don't know." Offer to get the information and call back. Never guess the position of the organization if you are not sure.

out a week to ten days before an event. Media calls should be made during the week prior to the event, and even the day before the event. Although it is useful to be persistent in trying to gain media coverage, one should exercise discretion so as not to annoy the media person, since this could reflect badly on your organization. When a contact is made through a media call, any questions the media person might have can be answered. This does, however, take more time than simply mailing, faxing, and/or e-mailing a release or advisory.

Media Packets

A basic activity for an organization to have is a general media packet. This should include general infor-

other item to include is clippings about the organization from previous media coverage. For events, the media packet should include material relating to the event — a general statement from the organization about the issue, information about speakers if there will be any, and background information about the issue and organization.

Sending out media packets to people and organizations on the media list can be useful when addressing an issue that requires some detailed or background information. Sending out media packets generally yields greater results, though, when one already has a relationship established with the media representatives.

Meetings with Media Representatives

Since one of the key aspects to media relations is cultivating relationships, an organization may wish to schedule meetings with a group of media representatives or the editorial board of a local newspaper. At these meetings, media people can become familiar with the organization, its activities, and its spokespeople. Also, the organization can become familiar with the way the newspaper or the journalist works — the types of issues they cover, their positions, their deadlines, and how they interact with local groups.

Editorials

An easy and inexpensive way to focus attention on an issue is to write and submit editorials or Letters to the Editor to newspapers, radio stations, and some local television stations. If the editorial or letter is used, the organization gains visibility, and the issue helps to inform the public about key issues. The organization is able to state its opinion on an issue freely, without having to spend a great deal of money to be heard. Remember, it is believed that the Letters to the Editor section is the second most-read section of a newspaper.

News Advisories

There are essentially three types of written materials that an organization can distribute to a media list: the news advisory, the news release, and the news or press statement. A news advisory is a brief (one page preferably) document advising the media of an upcoming event, whether it is a news conference, an activity, or the release of a report. The advisory tells the media the basics needed to cover the story. It includes Who, What, When, Where, Why, and Con-

tact Persons, usually all at the top of the document. If a report is being released or the results of a study are being reported, a brief summary of the conclusions may be included. The news advisory is generally released to the media list one week to ten days prior to a significant event, and it should be followed up by media calls.

News Releases

The news release is a brief report about an event or activity, which helps to lay the foundation for a news story. The release should briefly and accurately describe the general issue, the major details of the event or activity, and the relevant contact information. A news release is written on organization letterhead or special paper with a "news release" heading, and states the date when the information may be used. The most common statements about timing the release are "for immediate release," or "embargoed until...[date and time]," meaning that the information may not be reported until a certain date and time. The release can be sent out ahead of this date and time so that the media may cover the event and report on it the day it occurs.

The format of a news release is similar to an advisory in that it gives the important facts, but it is written in a more journalistic style, so as to help form the basis of the reporter's story. The title of the release may be a suggested title for a story, and the opening sentence should be a strong "lead" sentence, also possibly to be used as a story opening. The opening paragraph should include Who, What, When, Where, and Why, and the body should include some quotes by the organization's spokesperson for use in a story. The release is always double-spaced, and at the bottom of the page, if it continues, it must say "more." The end of the release should have "--30--" or "###."

A news release may be accompanied by background material, so that the media person may be familiar with the information before the actual event.

Press Statements

A press or news statement is a statement by the organization's spokesperson or designated members addressing a particular issue or event. The statement should be written clearly, succinctly, and simply, so that it can be quoted directly. Its format is similar to a news release, but it should include only the official statement, not general background information. At the end of the statement, a brief paragraph describing the organization and its mission is useful. The news statement may be used at a news conference, or distributed in reaction to an event, or to a policy which has been proposed.

News Conferences

One of the most labor-intensive, most effective, and most ambitious media activities is the news conference. If an organization has the staff, time, and resources, a news conference is an effective way of calling attention to breaking news on an organization, activity, or issue. A news conference should be scheduled sometime in the earlier part of the day, preferably in the morning, to meet afternoon media deadlines. It should take place in an accessible and appropriate location, both for media to attend and for a community presence. Having elected officials, celebrities, or community leaders speak at a news conference increases the likelihood of coverage. The news conference should be announced at least a week in advance, with an advisory, and follow-up calls should be placed. Press packets and news statements or releases should be available at the conference, as well as a sign-in sheet

MEDIA GROUND RULES

On the Record - Everything you say can be quoted.

Example: "Raúl Yzaguirre, President of NCLR, said today, 'We believe Proposition 187 will be harmful to the Latino community.'"

Off the Record - Nothing you say can be quoted, or even referred to.

Example: "Officials from NCLR declined to comment."

On Background, or for

Attribution - You cannot be quoted directly, and your name cannot be used, but the information you use can be referred to.

Example: "A major Hispanic leader referred to Proposition 187 as harmful."

for the media, in order to update the media list. The news conference should not last more than an hour, including time for questions and answers.

Interviews

When possible, an organization's spokesperson should be available for interviews with the media. To be effective in interviews, the spokesperson should develop certain skills. The spokesperson should be able to articulate a position or opinion clearly, briefly, and simply. The response to an interviewer's question should seem natural, and be understandable. The spokesperson should also be able to use real examples, such as an individual case relating to the impact of a policy, but should also have facts or references available if needed to back up a statement. For radio and television interviews, the person should speak clearly and slowly, and appear and/or sound relaxed. Nervousness can hurt an otherwise strong interview.

Continued on Page 7

Contact: Margot Cordova
(602) 417-1404

Lisa Navarrete
(202) 785-1670

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 24, 1996

NCLR PRAISES NFL SUPPORT OF ESPIRITU EDUCATION CENTER

Phoenix, AZ — The National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the nation's largest Hispanic constituency-based organization, applauded the National Football League (NFL) for selecting ESPIRITU, a Community Development Corporation (CDC) serving Arizona's Latino community, as the site for its NFL Youth Education Town (YET) Center in Phoenix. At a news conference today in Phoenix, site of the 1996 Super Bowl, Commissioner Paul Tagliabue announced that the NFL has given ESPIRITU a \$1 million grant to complete construction of the site.

"We are very pleased that the NFL has chosen ESPIRITU as the first YET Center to serve a predominantly Hispanic population. On behalf of the Latino community and millions of Hispanic football fans, we look forward to working with the NFL in the future on the vital issues which concern us both, most importantly, the need to improve educational opportunities for children from minority and low-income families," stated Raul Yzaguirre, NCLR President. ESPIRITU provides community economic development, leadership training, crime prevention, and neighborhood beautification programs as well as an array of educational programs which serve children from pre-school through high school. In addition to housing the Esperanza Montessori Pre-School and the Esperanza Academy, the YET Center will allow for expansion of ESPIRITU's educational efforts to eventually serve up to 76,000 students a year.

"We are proud of whatever role we might have played in helping ESPIRITU gain this recognition," continued Yzaguirre. "Organizations like ESPIRITU are what we are all about — helping people help themselves. The NFL has

--more--



Continued from Page 5

The spokesperson should practice several times before giving an interview. For all interviews, particularly on radio or television, the spokesperson should remember to state the name of the organization often, so that it becomes recognizable. Lastly, the overall goal is to get the message across, so the spokesperson must be able to stay focused while answering different questions.

An Hispanic community-based organization can increase its effectiveness in various ways by cultivating good media relations. It can increase its visibility and credibility in the community and at-large, possibly leading to an increase in clients, members, and allies. It can also increase its influence on community issues, advocating for more positive changes. And the organization can become a stronger candidate for funding, which will enable it to deliver more services to the community. Seen in this light, the development of a media component in an organization, no matter how overworked and understaffed, is a wise investment. ♦

PROMOTE

YOUR

SUCCESS!

The NCLR Hispanic Leadership Bulletin is expanding to include submissions from NCLR Leadership Subgrantees, NCLR Affiliates, and Leadership Network members. We would like to include articles submitted by organizations that are carrying out leadership development activities in their communities.

- ❖ Innovative programs - using unique approaches, or serving special populations.
- ❖ Personal success stories from program groups or individual participants.
- ❖ Tips, pointers, and lessons learned for others involved in leadership development.
- ❖ Other topics and issues relevant to leadership development in the Latino community.

NCLR Announces..... Its Improved Publications Department

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) has improved its publications fulfillment department. As of February 1995, all NCLR publications orders has been fulfilled by the NCLR Distribution Center. Since NCLR now has a higher volume of requests, the Distribution Center was created to handle large orders, as well as increase the efficiency of response to publication requests. If you wish to order, please call (301) 604-7983 or write to P.O. Box 291, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0291.

Ways of ordering publications: ❖ Phone orders ❖ Pre-paid orders ❖ Purchase orders

Modes of payment: ❖ Check or Money Order. Please make checks/money orders payable to the National Council of La Raza. If you need additional information or have any questions on publications or the billing process, call the NCLR Distribution Center at (301) 604-7983. **Please note that there is a minimum charge of \$5.00 plus shipping and handling per order.**

QUANTITY	NAME OF PUBLICATION	DATE	PRICE
	Untapped Potential: A Look at Hispanic Women in the U.S. (R21)	December 1995	\$ 10.00
	Racing Toward Big Brother: Computer verification, ID Cards, and Immigration Control State of Hispanic America 1995. (M43)	August 1995	\$ 15.00
	Using Data, Assessing Needs: A Guide for Community Members of HIV Prevention Community Planning Groups (Q33)	April 1995	\$ 12.00
	NCLR Publications Guide (Publications Update 1995)	1980 - 1994	FREE

Total Order: \$ _____

Join the NCLR Leadership Network

The *Leadership Bulletin* and other resources for leadership development programs serving Hispanics are sent free to members of the NCLR Leadership Network. Membership is free; members provide information on their leadership efforts and agree to share information with NCLR and other network members.

To join the network, or for more information about the Leadership Initiative, contact:

Alvin R. Cruz

Director of Leadership Development

Marco A. Davis

Senior Leadership Development Specialist

Adriana Gonzalez

Program Associate

Ivette Hill Sutton

Administrative Assistant

National Council of La Raza

1111 19th Street, N.W., Suite 1000

Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel: (202) 785-1670 Fax: (202) 776-1792