Grassroots Fundraising Journal

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How to Use the Media;
Grassroots Fundraising: Back to Basics;
Readers Write.

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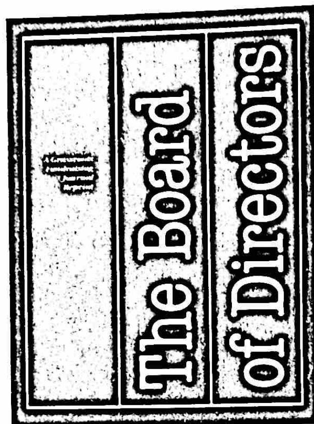

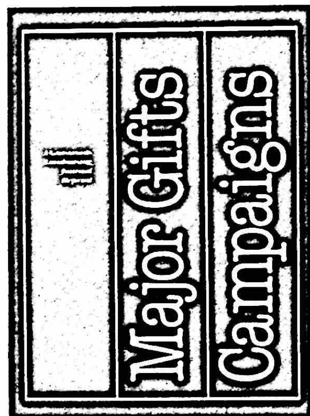

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How To Use The Media

by Rochelle Lefkowitz and Bob Schaeffer

When did your organization last appear on page one or on the evening news? Did your recent demonstration draw hundreds of marchers and no reporters? Is your group making news you can't get covered? Low budgets mean that community organizations generally can't afford to hire full-time press secretaries. The consequence, of course, is that the person saddled with media work for most citizen groups usually has many other duties—and often little support or training for the job.

Press work for activists frequently means slapping together a quick response to a crisis and cranking out smudged copies at midnight on a broken down mimeo machine. These releases can be found the next day—lining the wastebaskets of newsrooms.

Meanwhile, the people we're fighting—the power companies, landlords, banks and other corporate powers—pump seemingly unlimited money into high powered PR campaigns. Their full-time PR departments ply reporters with champagne and propaganda. They send them off with glossy, five-color brochures, full of photos worth a thousand words each, and slick prose that often appears in the next day's edition.

Most of us will never be able to buy a week of a PR firm's time, let alone feed reporters more than coffee and donuts. But there are ways we can get the media to carry our message to the audience we want to reach.

No Lou Grants

Too often our press strategies are based on misconceptions about the way the media operates. Unfortunately, Lou Grant is as much like the average editor as Marcus Welby is like the average doctor. Media is a business. Newspapers, radio and TV exist to make money. That means they run more ads than stories. Only 12 minutes of news—that's fewer than a dozen stories—make up a half hour TV news show. News takes less than five minutes of the average radio broadcast hour. And most newspapers, other than major dailies like *The New York Times,* are 60 percent ads. The 40 percent news copy also includes sports, comics, TV listings and obituaries.

Since few of us can afford to be adversaries, we must compete with the 200 press releases that cross the news desk of the average media outlet each day. Given those odds, how can we hope to get a camera crew to an anti-nuke rally, or expose an inner-city arson ring? On a given day, how can we get coverage of the need for shelters for battered women, or a new, non-profit energy audit project?

The media will only run a story if it fits into the available space and meets their definition of news. Unless your group includes an Ayatollah or a Kennedy, you must speak the media's language and meet their requirements if you want a shot at the evening news or even a shot in your local weekly.

For TV, "newsworthiness" involves having a visual component for your story. People sitting behind a table lecturing the camera are referred to in the trade as "talking heads." Such stories will be scrapped for more visually exciting events. For radio, you need good sound, preferably what are called "actualities," live, on-the-spot voices and background noise. Newspapers have their own conventions too. No daily runs a ten page position paper—except as a paid advertisement.

None of these formats requires years of journalism school to master. To learn the rules, spend a week analyzing your local media. Read your hometown paper. Listen to the all-news radio station in your town. Tune in to the weekend public affairs show and the noon-time call-in hour. Watch the TV evening news. Pay attention to how stories are covered. Then, rework your stories to fit these standard formats. You'll find that many of your group's activities and issues could make the morning paper or the evening news if you cast them properly.

Make It Easy

The goal of most of our organizations is to publicize an issue—and recruit new members and supporters. The goal of the media is to fill the news holes between paid ads with interesting material with as little effort as possible.

Most media outlets aren't crawling with budding Woodwards and Bernsteins. In our experience, many reporters are lazy, stupid and vain. Before the reporters among you call your lawyers, we mean that most reporters are human beings who have more stories to cover than time to do a perfect job. So the lazy folks choose the neatly typed, one page press release with the snappy quotes that can run with a few minor changes. The ten-page, smeared position paper gets discarded, without so much as a glance through its well-documented case.

Even the newest member in your group knows more about your issue than all but the most seasoned reporter. But even the most novice journalist is sure he or she's about to win a Pulitzer—or in the case of TV reporters, an Emmy. You have to convince editors and reporters to choose your story from the pile by making their work easier and meeting their needs.

Make sure your group's release gets plucked from the pile by making it look like a typical news story and by

Media dos and don'ts

1. **ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH.** It's often easy to stretch, shade or sidestep the truth. But resist the temptation—you're only a good source as long as you're reliable. Know your facts and check details before you talk to reporters or issue a release. If you don't know something, admit it, don't fudge. Then, find out and phone in the facts.
2. **BE ACCESSIBLE.** Reporters have deadlines. Return their calls promptly. Offer your home phone number. And volunteer story leads.
3. **KNOW THE RULES.** Get to know the conventions, requirements, and deadlines of your local outlets. Make sure you understand terms like "off the record" and "not for attribution." If you don't recognize these phrases, ask a friendly reporter.
4. **BE AGGRESSIVE.** This is no time to be polite. Don't sit by your phone—call in your group's response to important events. Issue timely releases: a late story is no story. And contact reporters to point out inaccuracies—or to praise a job well done.
5. **THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK.** The media have their agenda. Be sure yours is equally well-defined. Before you mail a press release or call reporters, have a plan. You can't stop the presses. Plot your campaign carefully, assess your options and make sure your media strategy reflects your group's priorities and resources.
6. **DON'T CRY WOLF.** We've said it before, but it's worth repeating. Don't exaggerate—and that means don't create a crisis or inflate a victory.
7. **DON'T ASSUME REPORTERS UNDERSTAND YOUR ISSUE.** Even if your group was just in the news, there's no guarantee the reporter will even remember your name. Never count on reporters to know your history, agenda or point of view—not even the ones who cover your issue regularly. Always say what you represent.
8. **DON'T JUST CRITICIZE.** Everyone adores praise. Let reporters—and their bosses—know when you liked a story. Then, watch what happens next time you call.
9. **DON'T LET THE MEDIA INTIMIDATE YOU.** It's easy to panic at bright lights and cameras. But don't let the press push you around.
10. **DON'T GIVE UP.** Reporters get nearly 200 press releases a day. Even the slickest PR firm sends many releases that end up in the trashbasket. A plane crash can always preempt the press conference you planned for weeks. Don't despair if you don't get coverage. Ask reporters for pointers. Then, try again—and again.

highlighting the elements that will most appeal to them. It's the surest route to the print or broadcast spot you want.

Like any other work your organization takes on, good press work demands you learn the rules. You wouldn't organize a tenant union or plan a sit in at the power plant without knowing your goals, your group's resources, planning tactics and alternative strategies. Make sure you do the same for your press work. To land that front page story your organization must mesh its media strategy with its overall political goals.

Before you pick up the phone to call in a story, set your goal, and decide on an audience. Then, and only then, are you ready to learn to use the tools of the trade.

Communicating With Journalists: The Tools of the Trade

LISTS: For all your press work, you'll need to contact the media quickly and efficiently. Whether you're mailing a news release or calling a reporter with a fast-breaking story, you'll need an up-to-date media list.

Here's how to start a master list. Type onto index cards the basic data about each media outlet you want to reach for your most comprehensive press efforts. Include the following for each listing: the name of the outlet, the address and phone number, its deadlines, any mechanical requirements, the names of the assignment editor or news director, and any individual reporters, columnists or feature writers you might want to contact. Be sure to include wire services that feed stories to several outlets.

Much of this information may be found in reference books, such as *Editor & Publisher Yearbook,* to be found in your local library.

Remember, media people change jobs even more often than activists. Update your list every three or four months. An intern or volunteer can easily do this well in advance of your mailing. You're much more likely to have the correct names and zip codes if you do list maintenance at leisure instead of frantically typing envelopes at 2:00 A.M.

Once you increase your media work, you'll probably find that one media list just isn't enough. Many groups have several, divided by personnel category or type of outlet, for targeted mailings or calls. Among the most useful will be lists of editorial writers, public affairs directors and talk show producers, as well as weeklies, campus media and monthly publications.

Type your regular media list onto envelopes (or onto Xerox label masters) so you'll always be ready for an emergency mailing. For quick reactions, type on one page the names and phone numbers of outlets you contact most frequently. Keep that right by your telephone. Include the names of day and evening staff if they differ.

NEWS RELEASES: If you're like most groups, you'll mostly use your lists to distribute news releases. News releases are the cornerstone of press work. They are frequently your organization's first and most regular contact with the

media.

In our experience, most groups do news releases poorly. The best way to get your story into print or on the air is to understand what makes good releases and learn how to produce them.

A news release tells a story—before or after the fact. It's most often written to go directly into print or on the air. Hundreds of releases cross the average news desk each day. To be used, yours must grab the attention of the first reader: the editor or reporter.

Make your news release stand out from the sea of black on white by using colored paper, an attractive logo or colored ink in your letter head. Then, reproduce it clearly so your message may be read.

Once an editor or reporter scans your release it's most likely to be used if it requires little editing. If you follow these rules, you stand a good chance of getting your story reproduced.

First, read the newspaper and listen to the radio or TV. Use actual stories as your guide. Make sure your release is news, the kind of thing the media outlets you are aiming at usually cover. Then make sure your release looks like news.

Stick to journalistic conventions. Write short, declarative sentences in the third person. Use action verbs when possible. Try to think like a journalist. Keep to the facts. Don't be flowery, rhetorical or dramatic. Use quotes for all subjective material, value judgments, allegations or conclusions.

Never save the juicy stuff for last. Build your story like a reporter—inverted pyramid style. Include the five W's—who, what, when, where, why—near the beginning. Both print and broadcast editors cut from the bottom.

For the best results, type your news release double spaced on one side of a page with 1½ inch margins. Edit it to no more than two pages for even the most exciting, complex story. Anything longer is a prime candidate for the trashbasket. If there is crucial background material, attach it to the release or add a note telling reporters where it is available. Put the release date on the top left of the first sheet. Include the name of a person to contact. Add a home phone number if the person is often not at the office. If you don't have a letterhead, type your organization's name, address and phone number on top—and get a letterhead printed soon.

Lead off with a snappy title that captures the reader's attention in ten words or less. Write as if it is going to be the headline in a newspaper; if it's good, it will be. Then, draw the reader into your story with a strong lead sentence. Try to use a colorful, active verb.

Spend at least a third of your writing time on the headline and the lead. That's a lot of time. But many editors and reporters scan only the headline and the first sentence to decide what releases to reject. Audiences behave in the same way. Most people decide what to read, watch or listen to based on the first few words.

Next, cram your best information into the remainder of the first paragraph. Include a pitchy quote as soon as possible. Use the next few paragraphs to tell the rest of the story.

Newspapers are moving toward one sentence paragraphs, which broadcasters already use. Write, re-write and edit again to toss out all but the essentials.

If your release runs onto a second page, signal the reader by using the word "more" at the bottom of the first page. At the top of the second page, type a phrase that identifies your group and story. This is needed because staples often come undone in newsrooms.

Finish by telling interested reporters how to get more information. The end of your release is the place to indicate where the full position paper or statistics are available.

By all means toot your own horn. Spend a short final paragraph promoting your issue or describing your group's history.

Let the reporter know the story is over by using the symbol "#" or "-30-". Then give the release to someone else in your group to proofread. Keep several copies to use when the phone starts to ring, and put several in your files to monitor your coverage.

EDITORIALS AND COLUMNS: Writing a news release isn't the only way to get your story covered. The editorial page and the facing "op ed" page of most papers also offer opportunities for you to get into print.

Editorial writers often are looking for interesting topics to help fill their assigned space. Suggest your issue by sending a brief cover letter with a few pages of backup material. Then wait a few days and telephone. Ask to speak to the person who writes editorials.

The pay off from a favorable reaction can be tremendous. Opinion leaders study editorials carefully. The support of the local paper can give your position legitimacy and clout.

Many columnists are also open to suggestions. Their signed stories, which may express opinions, appear on a fixed schedule across from the editorial page or in other standard locations. By regularly reading the columns, it's easy to figure out which writer is most likely to be receptive to your cause. Again, a brief letter followed up by a phone call is the best approach.

If you disagree with an editorial or column, your group may be able to respond with an "op ed" piece. Though under no legal obligation, many papers have opened their editorial pages to well written oppposing viewpoints. To gain access, call the person responsible for the editorial page and explain what you'd like to write. Then, submit a draft about the same length as the piece to which you are responding. The paper always retains control over content and placement. But a fairminded editor will often let you tell your side of the story if you don't overreact.

Don't overlook the letters-to-the-editor column. It's a

perfect place to respond to criticism or to elaborate on a news story. Follow the rules for press releases in drafting your letter: be topical, lively, factual, and concise. Many small papers will run virtually every letter they receive. Surveys show letters are among the most heavily read parts of the paper.

Finally, many outlets run regular "Community Calendar" columns which list upcoming events. Find out the deadlines, which may be several months in advance.

Strategy Is the Key to an Effective Campaign

The techniques we have reviewed so far are the building blocks of effective media work. If you apply them carefully you'll be on the road to improved coverage. But mastering the nuts and bolts alone is not enough. To succeed, your media campaign must reflect a well-crafted strategy.

Too often, groups issue a news release or hold a press conference before they think through what they want to accomplish. And the results of the last minute press conference or poorly distributed release make for even more cynicism about the use of media. When it comes to a successful campaign, like all other aspects of political work, two key questions must be answered: What's your *goal,* who is your *audience*?

Your media efforts can have a variety of purposes. Perhaps you simply want to let the public know your group exists. Maybe you want to direct attention to a particular problem in your community. Or you may want to do several of these things simultaneously. But you do have to be clear on exactly what you want to accomplish. The first step then is to set priorities.

Once you set your goals, you're ready to decide who you want to reach. Your first thought may be to try to get your message out to the general public. But, more often you really need to reach only one or more specific groups. In that case, a rifle-shot rather than a shotgun approach may be best.

Why waste effort courting the major TV stations if you can reach your target group directly through a specialized newspaper or radio station?

Think about your intended audience in terms of such demographics as age, sex, geography and lifestyle. Then, choose the mix of media outlets that will reach them. For example, a secretary may never tune in to a noon TV talk show. And chances are, a senior citizen won't hear your public service announcement on Top 40 radio.

Developing a Plan

A good media campaign shouldn't happen in isolation. It must be integrated into your local organizational and political strategy.

There are usually several ways to achieve your goals and reach your target audiences. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. For instance, a press release that your daily paper runs may reach many people. But the coverage may not be in-depth. Radio talk shows, on the other hand, give you more exposure. Yet they reach fewer people and leave you vulnerable to an unfriendly host or caller. And afterwards, there's no clipping for your files.

Compare the likely pay-offs from all available media channels before you make a choice.

A successful plan must also take into account your group's strengths and weaknesses. To choose the best approach for you, ask yourself:

- What are your resources?
- What are the obstacles to your success?
- Does the media campaign reinforce the rest of your group's agenda?
- Are you really reaching your target audience?

You can reasonably expect your media strategy to be effective only if you address issues like these. The planning process need not take forever. But you need to think before you act. Time spent brainstorming and analyzing options with others in your group should result in less work during the heat of the campaign—as well as in more coverage.

Write It Down

Once you've thought through your situation carefully, put your plan in writing. An idea that seems good in theory may not hold together when you put the words on paper. Always consult a calendar to be sure your media schedule takes into account events like holidays, vacations and other activities of your group and its allies.

Start your written plan by working backwards from the day of your event. Be sure to note all external constraints. There's nothing more frustrating than missing a key media outlet because you overlooked a deadline. A written plan will help you avoid such setbacks.

Writing it all out helps cut the risk of forgetting key details. It also gives you an overview of all the tasks you need to accomplish before you actually set your plan in motion.

A written schedule like the "Planning Calendar" (opposite) may seem too formal for you. But it will help keep you on top of what must be done each day. Writing it down serves as a visible prod to force you to stick to your timetable.

In addition to your calendar, keep a written record of all your contacts with the media during your campaign to help you remember who promised you what coverage. It will also remind you of your commitments to make follow-up phone calls or send background information.

Expecting the Unexpected

No matter how well you stay on schedule, unexpected events will occur. While you're planning your event, you

PLANNING CALENDAR

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
May 3	**May 4**	**May 5**	**May 6**	**May 7**	**May 8**	**May 9**
			Assess goals and audience.	Brainstorm media strategy for event.	Write and revise plan.	
May 10	**May 11**	**May 12**	**May 13**	**May 14**	**May 15**	**May 16**
	Update media list with recent changes.	Write/mail calendar listing to papers & PSA to radio/ TV.	Write Release No. 1 (Announce Event).	Mail Release No. 1 to weeklies.	Contact talk-show producers to set up interviews.	**PSA Deadline** (Two weeks in advance of event).
May 17	**May 18**	**May 19**	**May 20**	**May 21**	**May 22**	**May 23**
	Weekly Paper Deadline Write Release No. 2 (Announce Speakers).	Mail Release No. 2 to weeklies. Check on PSA play schedule.	Mail Release No. 1 to dailies and electronics.	**Weekly Papers Published** Mail notice of news coverage.	**Weekly Paper Deadline** (early due to holiday).	
May 24	**May 25**	**May 26**	**May 27**	**May 28**	**May 29**	**May 30**
	Memorial Day Holiday	Phone reminder for news conference. Set up feature stories and interviews.	**Pre-Event News Conference** Coordinate coverage. Distribute Release No. 2.	**Weekly Papers Published** Monitor news conference coverage.	Prepare event press packet. Call to remind assignment editors.	**EVENT** Pass out press packet. Arrange interviews.
May 31	**June 1**	**June 2**	**June 3**	**June 4**	**June 5**	**June 6**
Monitor news coverage. Write/mail follow-up release.	**Weekly Paper Deadline** Thank you notes and calls for good stories.	Send letters-to-editor to correct errors and expand coverage.		**Weekly Papers Published.**		

may be called on to respond to some related but unforeseen event.

Whatever happens, stay calm. If there's no time to write and deliver a news release, take a few minutes to get your thoughts together. Many reporters will take brief statements over the phone. Be sure to rehearse so you make your key points most effectively. Then, call the key news outlets. Try to speak to the reporter you've dealt with before, or to the news editor if your regular contact is unavailable.

Always Evaluate

Too often, time pressures leave you few opportunities to think about how effective your actions have been. But the way you appear in the media is a major way others learn about your group and judge its actions. So make sure your timetable has some way to measure your effectiveness.

If your goal is recruiting members, include benchmarks to assess your progress—like 25 new members in a two months period. That way you'll be prepared to redirect your campaign midstream if necessary.

To evaluate your media campaign, monitor your coverage. Did it deliver the message you wanted—or were there consistent patterns in the coverage that differed from your goals? Always think about what you might change to avoid similar problems in the future. And don't forget to get copies of stories about your group or issue to members—and funders. Then, put copies of the clips into your press packet for your next media campaign.

Ask people outside your organization to evaluate your publicity, too. Have they gotten the image you meant them to have of your members and their activities? Look back at your goals and benchmarks to see where you fell short. And learn from your mistakes.

No one has all the answers about effective media work. But if you follow these hints, you'll be on the right track.

Electronic Media

Many of the tools for dealing with newspapers also apply to the electronic media. The basic rules are similar.

A few adjustments must be made to cope with the special nature of broadcasting, however. Access to the airwaves is tough. Time allotted to news and public affairs is brief. A typical five minute radio news show will include only five to seven stories. The evening TV news will cover no more than a dozen items since so much time is devoted to sports, weather and other features. Understanding the needs of broadcasters can pay off by increasing your ability to reach the majority of the public that now depends primarily on the electronic media for their daily news.

Radio, for example, is based on the spoken, not the written, word. Radio news editors like short stories that lead into "actualities," such as a tape of a speech or the sounds of a demonstration. Many radio stations target relatively narrow audiences. An item that is not of broad public concern may be perfect for the unique constituency served by a Third World, youth, or community-oriented station.

Television, on the other hand, reaches a diverse audience via a visual medium. General interest stories that feature action, charts or scenic backgrounds are more likely to hold the attention of viewers (and editors) than simple "talking heads."

Plan your events to meet the needs of all electronic journalists by providing good microphone placement, forceful clear speakers and a lively visual component. Statements in news releases aimed specifically at radio and TV should be written less formally, typed triple-spaced and read out loud for word flow. Try to keep them brief; the typical broadcast story runs only about 30 seconds.

Editorials and Op-Eds

Commercial radio and TV outlets use editorials to state the opinions of station management. Just as with newspapers, you can call or visit to suggest that your topic be covered. Always provide fact sheets and offer to do whatever additional research may be necessary.

Because the airwaves are publicly controlled, federal law requires stations to broadcast reactions to editorials by "responsible spokesmen with opposing points of view." (This provision is currently under attack in a Congressional bill to deregulate radio and television.) To respond, contact the Editorial Director and ask for rebuttal time. Remember to find out technical requirements such as maximum reading length, availability of studios for taping and broadcast schedules.

Prepare your best public speaker with a lively, carefully honed text. Then rehearse until the words come naturally.

You need not stay glued to your TV or radio to hear editorials that require your response. Most stations will send transcripts to interested groups. Call or write to get on the mailing list.

Some outlets also offer "Access" spots that allow groups to offer opinions on current issues. Public Affairs Directors will tell you the policies for local stations.

Public Service Announcements

Public service announcements are the equivalent of advertising for low-budget organizations. They can be used to publicize your group, promote your events and sometimes even to sell your services. Best of all, PSAs are free. The only disadvantage is that you cannot determine how often and when your spot will be broadcast.

To improve your chances for airplay, find out each station's requirements well in advance by calling the Public Service Director. Be sure to check on submission deadlines

(frequently two weeks or more before air date), broadcast length (20, 30 and 60 seconds are most common), and content restrictions.

Composing an effective PSA is hard work. All the basic information (Who, What, When and Where) must be crammed into one brief paragraph. That means writing, reading aloud, and revising until the sound is right.

Get the listener's attention right away with a provocative question or a bold statement. Then describe your group, publication or event in vivid, informal language. Since there isn't time to go into all the details, touch only on one or two persuasive points. Finally give your address or phone number. Then repeat the information so it can be written down or committed to memory.

Some journalistic conventions apply to PSAs. Use your letterhead. Always include a contact name and phone number. Indicate when the PSA is to be used and its reading length. Type your message in capital letters, double or triple-spaced for easy reading. Make sure you send a legible reproduction. (Remember to keep a copy for your group's files.) Use the symbol "-30-" or "-#-" to indicate the end of your spot.

For television use, find out if the station will run a slide or picture of your choice while your PSA is read. Again, contact the Public Service Director to determine technical requirements.

Before you mail or deliver your PSA, make sure your timing is accurate. A useful rule of thumb is two and a half words per second. That means a 20 second announcement can include no more than 50 words; 75 words is the limit for a half minute spot. Each digit in a phone number or address counts as a spoken word.

Address your announcements to the Public Service Director by name so your PSA won't get lost in the incoming mail. A personal note or even an advance phone call explaining why your spot should run may help. Call or visit a week or so after your submission to check on the status. It's harder to reject a request for time in person.

If no one you know heard your PSA, you can go back to the station and check its log book to see when it was aired.

Talk Shows

Interview programs are always in need of articulate guests.

Your media survey should list all area outlets for live and taped talk-format broadcasts. When you have an issue or event that would benefit from this type of exposure, send a letter to program producers offering to supply a guest. If you don't hear in ten days, call. Be ready to explain why the show's audience would be interested in your speaker.

Once you land an appearance, make sure you learn all the details of time, place and format. Don't automatically accept every opportunity. Sometimes a debate with a particularly effective opponent or an interview by a hostile "talk-master" can be worse than no coverage.

Next find an appropriate spokesperson. Remember that voice quality, speaking style and appearance (for TV) are as important as knowledge of your issues. Prepare your speaker by composing a brief outline of the main points that should be covered. It's easy to get sidetracked. Also try some role-playing so the prospective guest is prepared to handle tough situations. It will also help smooth your way to send the show host background literature, biographical sketches and sample questions.

If the program allows phone-ins, notify your staff and supporters so they can participate. Nothing makes a guest more at ease than handling a few easy calls from friends.

Some shows are recorded well in advance, so be sure the station tells you the date and time it will be on the air. When the program is broadcast, tape it so your spokesperson can get feedback. Many communities have organizations that lend out video-taping equipment at modest cost. Sound tape recorders, of course, are easy to obtain.

Follow up every appearance by writing to thank the producer and host for their help. Simple courtesy may pay off in future invitations.

Cable TV

Increasingly both rural and metropolitan areas are being wired for cable television. Subscribers receive many more channels than they could with conventional antennas. Current government regulations require every cable system to include at least one channel for locally produced shows.

If there's cable in your area, contact the system manager to determine how you can get access. In many cases, local groups can teach you how to design programs, use station equipment and promote your show. It's also possible to air videotapes produced by national groups with which you are associated.

With cable you can totally control your message, but the audience may be limited. Before you start, make sure the likely payoff is large enough to justify your investment. ■

Rochelle Lefkowitz *is a publicist with Fenton Communications, an issue-oriented public relations firm, in New York City.* **Bob Schaeffer** *consults for progressive organizations and candidates through Public Policy Communications in Belmont, Massachusetts. Together, they teach a workshop on "Giving the Media Your Message" for groups around the country.*

Grassroots Fundraising: Back to Basics

by Kathy King

"But where should we begin?" When we focus on the specifics of fundraising strategies, we often lose sight of this very basic question. The purpose of this article is to step back from specifics and remind ourselves of the basic steps involved in any grassroots fundraising planning.

A helpful way to think about raising money is to put it into a community organizing context. See fundraising as working on an issue. If your group were to organize tenants to fight against slumlords' neglect of an apartment complex, or rural townspeople and farmers to stop prime agricultural land from being turned into expensive condominiums, you would go through certain steps to plan your campaign. These steps apply to planning a grassroots fundraising program. You start with research, make up different kinds of plans, take appropriate actions, evaluate, do more research, make more plans, and incorporate all of this into your overall strategy.

In addition, community organizers always seek to involve members of the group and volunteer leaders in all aspects of organizing. Similar levels of involvement should be sought for fundraising activities.

FIVE STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING

1. *Research: look within your own town or city for money*

A. Local business and corporations

Find out who gives to local boys clubs, sports events, cultural events, hospitals, etc. These businesses and corporations are the ones to start with. Then find out from members, volunteers, staff what businesses they patronize. Who is their doctor/dentist? What gas stations do they go to? Where do they shop for bread or bargains? If your organization is located in a neighborhood, check out your business neighbors.

Also, find out what major corporations are located in your community.

Take this information, and make a plan to approach all the businesses and corporations you can. Ask them for appropriate gifts, in-kind donations, raffle prizes, and so forth. Don't leave out the local phone company or utility company, even if you are often in opposite camps.

B. United Way

Find out who they give to, what their requirements are, and who is in charge. Ask about "donor option plans"—in some communities people giving to United Way may direct their gift to a non-United Way charity. Even though United Way has many restrictions, and generally does not fund social change, they are worth talking to, and knowing about.

C. Local churches

Many churches have social justice or peace and hunger subcommittees which would like a speaker and more information about your group. Often these committees have small amounts of money to give to groups like yours. Also, meet with the priest or minister and let him/her know what you are doing and how it might contribute to the church. He/she can help you apply for national church grants, when available, or advocate on your behalf to other churches in town.

D. Chamber of Commerce

Contact the Chamber of Commerce to make sure your organization is listed as a "safe" (that is fiscally responsible) organization to give to. Often local people call the Chamber of Commerce to find out what the reputation of an organization is before making their decision to support it.

Also, the Chamber of Commerce usually has a list of members—businesses in the community. Some of these businesses even take out ads in the Chamber of Commerce booklet. This will aid in your research, and these businesses should be asked for donations.

E. Interview key people in town

Every city has its share of movers and shakers. First, you need to know who they are, and second, they need to know who you are, and what you are doing. In your town, the person with the most influence might be the fire chief or sheriff, or the mayor or head of the city council. Make sure they know your group. Even if they disagree with your goals, they will respect your outreach.

The second type of movers and shakers are prominent citizens active in philanthropy. As you seek large donations from individuals, your potential donors may ask these prominent people what they know of your group. Make sure the leading philanthropists know of you and what you stand for.

2. *Incorporate fundraising into your day-to-day work*

A. Make your income and expenses public information.
Print your budget, and your list of donors in your newsletter, and have a financial report at your office available to anyone who wants to see it. (Don't worry about being swamped with requests—people generally figure if you are willing to be public, you have nothing to hide.)

B. Be sure that fundraising planning and implementation is the responsibility of a volunteer committee and is not solely done by paid staff.

C. Make a fundraising plan and follow it.
Evaluate it regularly, and re-do it every year. Make sure the whole organization is involved in the planning, and wants to work toward the stated goals.

3. *Take Positive Action*

A. Attend others groups' events and meetings.
Offer to work in collaboration on events with groups that share your philosophy. Check out their fundraising events, how they do publicity, what their attendance is like. You don't have to start from scratch. Learn from what others are doing, and allow other groups to learn from you.

B. Work with the media.
If you want your issues or programs covered by the media, you need to have a working relationship with TV, radio and newspaper people. *(Editor's note: see accompanying article on media.)*

4. *Spend time and money on fundraising*

A. Allocate money to spend on direct mail, annual reports, newsletters and stationery.
Allow enough money for the publications to look nice and to be readable. They don't need to look slick and expensive, but they do need to be professional. For many people and businesses, your materials will be the only communication they have with your group.

B. Spend money on travel.
Meet with funding sources outside your area. The marketing principle that applies here is that people give to people after personal contact.

C. Attend regional and national conferences.
Find out what others are doing, and seek to apply it in your area.

D. Get the training you need.
Send paid staff and volunteers to workshops on fundraising, management, budgeting, organizational development, and so on. Anything you don't know, you can learn. Make use of consultants in your field to do on-site training with your board, staff and volunteers.

5. *Evaluate*

A. Set goals for each fundraising strategy.
See which ones are met and which are not met. Figure out why in either case. It is as important to know why something succeeded as why it failed, so you can plan for these same success elements next time.

B. Make sure your events and programs are attracting people from all parts of your community.
For example, plan events that are fun for all age groups, and that are geared to the community in which you work. Make sure your events are affordable to people with varying levels of income.

C. Try new strategies and new angles.
Also repeat things that work.

D. Build on victories.
Set goals that are reasonable, so that people do not feel they have failed when they didn't reach a certain goal when the goal was too high. Reward workers with parties, thank you notes and praise for the jobs they did. From the person who hand carries something to the printer because the mail is too slow to the person who caught a typo which would have rendered a sentence meaningless, to the person who asked a corporation for $2000 and got it, there must be praise and recognition, and a sense of accomplishment.

CONCLUSION

Obviously you can't implement each and every one of these steps all at once. The goals are diversity and involvement, and if you achieve those you will be several steps down the road of success in fundraising. ■

Kathy King *has been a community organizer and fundraiser for social justice issues for more than nine years. During that time she worked as the Director of Development at the Northern Rockies Action Group (NRAG) in Helena, Montana and the Finance Director of Oakland Community Organizations in Oakland, California. She is currently the Director of the Agape Foundation, a foundation in San Francisco which supports projects that promote non-violent social change. She is also a trainer, traveling throughout the country working with rural and urban groups on grassroots fundraising strategies and techniques.*

*R*EADERS *W*RITE

(Editor's note: With this issue we introduce a new column which presents fundraising ideas sent to us by readers of the Journal.)

Dear Editor:

My husband and I have been long time patrons of the arts. We have attended fund raising events for numerous causes at the rate of approximately one to two per month. We believe in the crucial necessity of private funding for the arts in this country.

We have recently become disgruntled. Our feelings result from the fact that many benefit events suffer from the evil of poor planning. The following are the most common examples:

1. Insufficient seating. This is the greeting with which many patrons are met. (We had the recent experience of actually walking out on an arts benefit for which we had contributed a pricey amount to find ourselves with no seating and no provisions made to get us seats!)
2. Late dining. Often patrons are not treated to their dinners until after the auctions, presentations, or "pitches" of the evening. This makes for lots of alcohol consumption and low blood sugar. By the time the late dinner is served, patrons are nearly asleep from either or both of these reasons respectively.
3. "Sloppy" management. Patrons are special people to the arts and deserve to be treated with respect. How tired we grow of the lavish, cattle show-like galas where we are herded about. There is no sense of personalization, just mass marketing. A much better idea would be numerous small dinners at supporters' homes (much like the Night of the Joffrey staged here in Los Angeles on June 30, 1985 at 58 supporters' homes. Average dinner party size was 30.)

I hope my suggestions will not fall on deaf ears. I would certainly look forward to attending events which were more carefully planned and executed.

Very truly yours,
Dr. Rosalyn M. Laudati

Kidnapping the Pastor

by Joan L. Huegel of Erie, Pennsylvania

"Local Church Youth Group Involved in Kidnapping?" read the headline of a short item in the newspaper. People were relieved to read these young people were up to doing good: a planned, staged kidnapping done as a successful fundraising event.

If you're looking for a profitable and fun way to raise money, staging your own (legal) kidnapping may be the answer. In this "kidnapping" you put one or more people, one at a time, in a "cage", holding them there for "ransom."

Your "victims" should be well known and respected people with a good sense of humor who will cheerfully go along with your plans. For a church fundraiser, the pastor and his wife are good choices, or a church council member, a deacon, the associate pastor, etc. (For other groups, choose a city council member, TV personality, local music celebrity—the list is endless.)

An afternoon is a good length for this event. For best results, plan on about four hours. But since one hour is the best length of time for "holding" one person in their "cage," your total length of time will depend on how many victims you've found.

Decide where and when to hold the event. Outdoors is best, so you'll want to pick a time of the year when you can count on good weather. It could be held on your church property such as the parking lot, or a church campground, or in connection with another church event, such as the church picnic, or bazaar. Whichever you feel would attract the most people.

Get the best looking "cage" you can find. Chances are you'll have to construct it yourself, so try to make one that is creatively built and looks gruesome. If you're lucky enough to have a storage place, it could be used in the future for a similar project.

Borrow a big fish bowl or other suitable container to hold the money you'll collect at the cage site.

Now you're ready to let people know what you're up to. Publicize the event to the entire congregation. Get an announcement well in advance in the church bulletin that the Youth Group will be holding Pastor Jones, or whoever, hostage on the church parking lot on June 14th, and will gladly accept any contribution toward their release. If your church has a newsletter, ask the editor to announce the event there. And all members of your group should spread the word.

At the appointed time, have your big fish bowl next to the cage, and the fun begins. Everyone will be amused at seeing the pastor or other prominent person in the cage, and will gladly put a donation in the fish bowl. When the hour is up, release your hostage, and put the next one in.

This is a good way to raise some money and have fun doing it. ■

Community Theatre on a Grand Scale

by Bob Loeffelbein of Charleston, Washington

The small town of Moscow, Idaho is home of the University of Idaho and just across the state border from Pullman, home of Washington State University. Moscow promotes two community-wide celebrations annually that have drawn hundreds of people and do very well in raising money. They are activities that any group could put on.

They are a Mardi Gras and a Renaissance Fair. The Mardi Gras has a novel gimmick to its parade—all the floats are made entirely of paper and must be propelled by pushing or pulling. It simplifies everything, and puts a premium on ingenuity. It also provides a natural "hook" for publicity pictures and text.

In 1984, the Seventh Annual Mardi

Gras brought 10,000 visitors to town throughout the celebration weekend in February. The event begins with Sunriser's breakfast from 7 to 11 a.m. at Moscow's community center. That's followed by the most unusual parade in the U.S., featuring some rather unique entries, like the award-winning Palouse Noseflute and Kazoo Marching Band, the Shopping Cart Corp Drill Team and the University of Idaho Law School Briefcase Corps Drill Team, along with all those paper floats. Most of the floats to date have been the work of UI art and architecture students.

Entertainment throughout the day and evening is provided by various organizations and commercial businesses. At the community center, the Old Time Fiddlers, University Dance Theater, American Festival Ballet Junior Company, and WSU Dance Company performers alternate with community belly dancers and other acts. The Kenworthy Theater presented an afternoon of rock and roll music this year, the Hotel Moscow advertised dixieland, jazz, folk and Irish music, Friendship Square in downtown Moscow featured variety entertainment, and the University Faculty Women held a fashion show at Cavanaugh's Motel. The Wine Company of Moscow featured 700 kinds of wine, champagne and unusual beers from around the world. One More Time featured a photo booth, complete with vintage clothing for use and sale. Almost every business in town got into the act with some sort of gimmick or specialty.

The evening highlight has traditionally been the Beaux Arts Ball at the Rathskeller Inn, with proceeds supporting University of Idaho art galleries, which, of course, are also open for visitors during the day-long celebration. As the name implies, the ball is a costume bash and imagination, befitting such an innovative community celebration, has a chance to run wild.

The Renaissance Fair is also unusual in that three stages in one of the city parks are kept filled with entertainment day and night for the entire weekend in May—one stage for dance and drama, one for music groups, and the third for novelty shows, like puppets or juggling. Virtually every talent in town is tapped for these events—dance studios, school groups, etc. More than 25 musical groups and over 100 artists and crafts artisans joined the town's populace for last year's Ninth Annual Renaissance Fair. During the day the Maypole dance and chess game using people as chess pieces were held. In the evening, a public dance, sponsored by the Palouse Folklore Society, included demonstrations from three different folkloric dance groups, including English and Irish country dancing, American square dancing, and also featuring a swing band. At another location, an Alaskan trio with a repertoire ranging from troubadour ballads of the Renaissance to lively Irish reels, held sway.

In East City Park, the fair weekend always starts with a parade led by Fair King and Queen. Then, for two days, 11 a.m. to dusk, performers fill three stages with music, dance and drama groups with presentations for both adults and children. Wandering through the crowd are also performing jesters and jugglers.

Concurrently, earthball games and the Maypole dance are held in the park, while the University of Idaho chess club members recreate classic chess games on the park's basketball courts, using live people in costume as the chess pieces—showing the game as it was played by Renaissance French kings. Other specialty presentations include surprises like the Canine Critters four-footed square dancers, and Rocky Joe Miller, the deaf puppeteer.

While all this is going on, 100 artists and artisans work their crafts in booths ringing the greensward. Food booths also feature edibles ranging from pizza and nachos to buffalo burgers and "huckleberry hooch." ■

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*In the August, 1985 **Journal** article called "Major Donor Prospecting," Kim Klein said, "Someone should write a song with 'I Don't Know Anyone With Money' as the chorus." Margaret Becker, a consultant in non-profit management and fundraising, has done just that.*

Sung to the tune of "Side by Side":
(Scene: board member stands and faces the rest of the group, singing.)

I don't know anybody with money!
Maybe you think I'm being funny.
But it's perfectly true
There's nothin' I can do,
Fellow Board members.

No one ever told me the truth here
'Bout Board members raising money this year
I'm just a volunteer
Can't you see my fear?
Fellow Board members.

Refrain: Let the staff do it!
Let the staff volunteer
As long as we love the program
Maybe the money'll appear.

When they've all had their flops and quit trying
We'll cut the budget and buyin'
And our programs will cease
With me still at peace,
Fellow Board members.

—*Margie Becker*

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Arthur Andersen Offers New Edition of Tax Guide on Charitable Giving

A new edition of a tax guide that charitable organizations, tax advisors and others can use to evaluate the tax implications of charitable donations, is available from Arthur Andersen & Co.

Tax Economics of Charitable Giving, now in a revised, ninth edition, outlines the more important methods of making charitable gifts by individuals, although many of these methods apply to corporations. Although it emphasizes the income tax implications of charitable giving, it also considers estate and gift taxes.

First introduced a little more than 25 years ago, the publication in earlier editions has had a distribution of more than half a million copies.

The publication:
- defines what a charitable contribution is and is not.
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- clarifies substantiation requirements.
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- defines and qualifies the charitable remainder unitrust.
- does the same for the pooled income fund.
- explains the tax consequences of lifetime deferred giving.
- describes various kinds of charitable lead trusts.
- identifies charitable bequests, and
- comments on private foundations.

The publication provides numerous examples to illustrate the various points that are made. It is based on U.S. tax laws in effect May 31, 1985.

"**Tax Economics** may be used by charitable and other tax-exempt organizations as a reference guide, a training tool and a marketing aid," says Marshall Gerber, an expert in tax law. "Not-for-profit groups can use it in their fund-raising efforts through selective distribution to financial advisors of potential contributors. It can also be used by directors, trustees and officers of foundations, alumni associations and other organizations whose responsibilities require a knowledge of the tax consequences of charitable gifts."

The publication is available at $10 each, for 50 copies or less; 51 to 100 copies are $5 each, and 101 or more copies are $3 each. Add 15 percent to the total price to cover packaging and postage. Mail order and check (payable to Arthur Andersen & Co.) to: Ms. Carole Kucharski; Arthur Andersen & Co.; Marketing Group—24th Floor; 69 West Washington Street; Chicago, Illinois 60602. ■

Inventory Reduction Sale

From now through December only, the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* is offering the following back issues at the incredible low price of *3 for $6*. Due to an overstock of some issues, the *Journal* can make this amazing offer while supplies last. The issues available are:

Volume One: Number Two (April 1982): The Lisbon Area Community Organization (case study of a small business endeavor); Fundraising Events: Part One: Planning; Use of a Fiscal Agent.

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