

APRIL 2009

# SPEAK TO THE PEOPLE

## Use the Media

### Why is media outreach important?

The effective use of media is essential in reaching out to members and the broader community. The various forms of media offer powerful tools for shaping public opinion about education and education workers, keeping our issues in the public eye, and gaining support for our positions.

### Look for openings...

We are more effective when people see and hear our messages frequently and in a variety of ways. A strong media strategy must incorporate a wide range of options and tools, including:

- media releases;
- interviews;
- news conferences;
- letters to the editor;
- op-ed columns;
- phone-in and talk shows;
- newsletters put out by your Labour Council or community groups;
- electronic communications, including websites, email distribution lists, YouTube and social networking tools;
- community bulletin boards;
- advertising.

### Getting media attention

#### • **Make it newsworthy:**

There is a lot of competition for media attention and you have to earn coverage. Ask yourself honestly if your story deserves to get covered. If the answer is yes, find an interesting angle. Build in human interest or personal stories, tie the story to an action or event, ensure there are strong visual images, use the words or visits of prominent people as a draw. Be creative to get an edge.

#### • **Know your message:**

Whether you are issuing a press release, holding a news conference, or phoning in to a talk show, be clear about what you want to communicate and stick to your message. Keep the message short and straightforward. Highlight a few key points. Know who your audience is and craft your message so it will reach them.

#### • **Packaging matters:**

Your chances of getting coverage improve if you make it easy for the media to understand and use your story. Provide background information to bring the reporter up to speed. Offer photographs or visuals. Newspapers will often use material that comes ready-made, such as a letter, op-ed piece or news release. And it is essential that your work is presented in a professional manner that shows you care how it's done.

#### • **Treat media people with respect:**

They can be your friend or your foe and how you work with them will play a big role in determining which it is. Be someone they can count on to be honest, helpful and reliable. Be aware of their deadlines.

# SPEAK TO THE PEOPLE

## Use the Media

### 10 tips for dealing with journalists\*

1. Respect their deadlines. Return their calls.
2. Be polite. Never lose your temper.
3. Try to be helpful. If you don't know the answer, say so, but offer to find out.
4. Always tell the truth. Don't lie or be evasive.
5. Don't say "no comment." It is often interpreted as "it's true, but I just can't admit it." Say why you are not in a position to respond.
6. Stick to your area of responsibility. Don't speak on behalf of others.
7. Anticipate reporters' needs. Prepare and update fact sheets and talking points constantly.
8. Don't create a vacuum. Journalists have to report and, if you don't feed them, someone else will.
9. Treat reporters like human beings.
10. Avoid coming across as "thin skinned" or overly sensitive about negative stories. Keep your perspective.

\*From *Encountering the Media: Media Strategies and Techniques*.  
Barry McLoughlin.

### Developing an effective media strategy

Wanting media coverage is no guarantee that you will get it — or get the kind of coverage you desire! It takes thought, time and effort to create a media strategy that works. In developing your strategy, consider the following:

#### • Think like a reporter:

Assess the newsworthiness of your story. Is there a follow-up story? What about background? Is there an angle?

#### • Don't wait for a crisis:

Maintain a regular presence in the media. While good crisis communication is essential, it is important to build your profile on an ongoing basis and to include positive stories and comments.

#### • Piggyback on other stories or events:

Find a "hook". Use key dates such as the beginning of school and Education Week, or stories about school-community involvement or personal achievement as openings. Comment on education stories such as school closures, budget issues, or EQAO test results. Address other community issues and link the issue to public education or students where appropriate.

#### • Expand your horizons:

Don't develop tunnel vision. National newspaper or television and radio coverage are not the only, or even the best, ways to get a message out. Community-based options are not only more accessible and less crowded, they also cost less and make it easier to target a specific audience.

#### • Do your homework:

Develop and maintain a database of local media outlets that includes names, contact information, and publication/broadcast deadlines. Develop an ongoing, friendly and helpful relationship with the media people covering your stories. Don't be afraid to call these people directly about a story, but don't be a nuisance.

### Resources:

- Canadian Labour Congress. *Campaign Organizing in Your Community: A Handbook*. Ottawa: 1991
- OSSTF. *OSSTF Public Relations Resource Binder*. Toronto: August 2003.
- OSSTF. *A handbook for communications and excellence in education*, November 1998.
- McLoughlin Multimedia Publishers LTD *Encountering the Media: Media Strategies and Techniques*. Barry McLoughlin.