

Getting Your Message On the Air



44 E. Mifflin Street, Suite 900. Madison, WI 53703
608.255.2600 . 800.236.1922 (toll free)
www.wi-broadcasters.org

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To Wisconsin Non-Profit Organizations

Radio and television stations across Wisconsin contribute millions of dollars to their communities through fund-raising efforts and donations of air-time for Public Service Announcements every year. Support for local community events and service clubs is an integral part of every local over-the-air broadcaster's service to their communities.

The competition for money and for volunteers has greatly increased in the last few years. We know that you are aware of this and of the need to make your organization known to as large an audience as possible.

Each station receives hundreds of calls and letters asking, "How do we get an announcement on the air?" or "How can we appear on a program?" The purpose of this Guide is to show you the best way to prepare your requests so that you increase your chances for getting on air.

Michelle Vetterkind, CAE
President & CEO
Wisconsin Broadcasters Association
44 E Mifflin Street, Suite 900
Madison, WI 53703
Ph: 608.255.2600 or 1.800.236.1922
Email: mvetterkind@wi-broadcasters.org

WHAT IS A PSA?

A PSA is a Public Service Announcement. Public service announcements are often used to help viewers/listeners become familiar with social issues, or to help promote events and agendas of non-profit organizations. It promotes events and services of non-profit organizations and groups that serve the community. PSA's run from 10 to 60 seconds in length.

This is your opportunity to let viewers or listeners know what's important about your group in your own words. Concentrate on a single idea or event. Don't try to say everything in one PSA. You can send others in the future.

To have the greatest impact, your PSAs should go to all the stations at the same time. The more a message is aired, the more likely it is to be remembered.

There are two kinds of PSAs. One is created by you from your copy. On TV, an announcer reads the copy while the information about your organization or event is seen on the TV screen. On radio the on-air personality reads your copy. The other kind of PSA is produced by production professionals for a fee, and you provide it to the TV or radio station.

If your organization is new or not well known, send a cover letter with background information that includes your non-profit status with your PSA.

Most stations will not air PSAs that are controversial or mention a personality from another station. Commercial sponsors or products are not accepted.

Each commercial television and radio station in Wisconsin is committed to air many PSAs throughout the broadcast day. It is one of their contributions to the community.

HOW TO GET YOUR PSA COPY ON AIR

Many PSAs are sent to stations daily. The easier you make it for a station, the better the chance you will get your message on the air. Don't send a 1 or 2 page news release that gives detailed information about your organization or event. This format will seldom be edited to a PSA. Your copy should be simple and to the point, highlighting the essentials (who, what, where, why, when). If there is a telephone number to call for more information, include it at the end of the copy.

Many PSAs are never used because they don't get to the stations in enough time to produce and edit them. Four weeks before the event is preferred.

When submitting a PSA include:

- Organization name, address and phone number
- Name of publicity contact and phone number
- **Start and stop dates for PSA to air**
- Length in seconds. Time the copy, reading at a normal speed. Copy that is too long will not be used.
- Type and double space to allow for easy reading and editing.
- If a name or word is difficult to pronounce, include the phonetic spelling.

When do these PSAs air? Policies differ. For instance, the week between Christmas and New Years is usually the slowest "sales" week of the year. That's when many stations need all kinds of promos and PSAs to fill the unsold inventory. Some stations will air your PSA only once while others will air it several times. Some stations will choose not to air it.

There is a great deal of competition for these spots. If your PSA is not selected, don't be discouraged. Keep sending them. Eventually yours may be chosen.

SAMPLE COPY FOR YOUR PSA

HAVEN HOUSE
123 Packer Lane
Green Bay, WI
(555) 123-4567

CONTACT: John Doe
Foster Care Coordinator
(555) 123-4568

START: Immediately

STOP: June 1, 2011

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT :30 seconds

Haven House provides temporary shelter and services to Green Bay's dependent and neglected children. To make it in today's world, these troubled and abused youngsters need love, caring and direction. Foster parents can give these kids the chance they deserve. Learn how you can make a difference in a child's life.

Become a foster parent. Training sessions begin June 2. For more information, call Haven House at (555) 123-4567.

THE PRE-PRODUCED PSA

Increasingly, organizations have their PSAs professionally produced by local stations or video production companies. It is an investment worth considering because it gives you a better chance that a station will accept your PSA for airing. You might ask a Public Service Director at a station if they can do it and what the cost might be.

A PSA can be produced in several ways. You can use a series of slides, video shots on location or an effective spokesperson. Perhaps you have a clever idea they you would like to try. All can get your message across. The producer will supply the special effects, work with you on the script and music and arrange for the off-camera voice, if needed. The production company creates a “master” tape/CD/mp3 of your PSA. They make copies for you to distribute to stations.

Most TV stations accept videos on DVD or a downloadable digital file.

Most Radio stations accept PSAs that are on CD, DAT, or are converted to an mp3 format (call the station first to find out).

Although a 30 or 60 second PSA gives you more time to deliver your message, consider sending a shorter version. Often a 10, 15, or 20 second PSA can fit into an available time slot when a longer one will not. Or you may want to send a 30 second PSA as well as a 10 second cut of the same PSA.

Remember, your PSA doesn't need to be elaborate to be effective. It will be judged on content and technical quality.

Don't use your home video equipment to produce a PSA. It will look amateurish and not meet broadcast standards.

MORE ON PRE-PRODUCED VIDEOS

When the tape/CD/mp3 is ready, make sure the label on the box identifies the name of the organization and lists each cut and length in the order that they appear on the tape/CD/mp3. Your cover letter should include:

Organization name, address and phone number

Name of publicity contact and phone number

Start and stop dates for PSA to air

Information about your organization or event

Statement of your non-profit status

A copy of the script

If your PSA is promoting a dated event, make sure that stations receive your tape/CD/mp3 at least one month in advance. You will be contacted if there are technical problems with your tape/CD.

Most stations will not return tapes/CDs after they have aired. If you want to submit your PSA again a year later, necessary changes and new copies can be made by the production company for a fee.

Most stations have **community bulletin boards** that announce events happening in the community. To list your event, simply send the name of the event, time, location and date plus a phone number for more information to “Community Bulletin Board” at the stations’ addresses at least 4 weeks in advance of the event.

Most stations also have a community events calendar on their website that you can post your event on.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

One of the most effective ways to get your message across to a wide audience is to have a member or members of your group appear on a talk program. Generally these programs are not shown in prime time. However, you will be seen or heard, regardless of the hour, by many hundreds of viewers and listeners. More importantly, your audience will have learned about a problem, concern or event that should receive public attention.

TO GET THE PRODUCER'S ATTENTION

Here are some ideas:

- Watch or listen to the program. This will make you familiar with the format of the show and the style of the host.
- Write to the producer on your organization letterhead. A typed letter is easier to read.
- Include a short summary of your organization's history and aims.
- What is new, innovative or special that people should know about?
- Will viewers or listeners learn something that can be helpful to them?
- Does it interest a wide audience?

Send the following material if available:

- Names of guests who can be interviewed. Include their titles and how to reach them.

- Suggested list of questions for the host.
- Copies of any newspaper articles, brochures, etc. about your organization or the subject.
- Telephone number and/or address to appear during the program.
- Television is a visual medium. Any videotapes, photos, objects, free brochures, will add interest to the program. Let the producer know you have them, but don't send them unless requested.

In your cover letter to the producer include, "I will call you in a few days and then do a follow-up."

Producers receive many letters and calls daily. It's not always easy to remember every contact. So when you make your follow-up call, give your name, title, organization and the reason you're calling.

If you are offered voice mail, make certain that you slowly repeat your name and phone number at the end of your message.

E-mail can also be a good alternative. However, make sure you are as specific as possible in the e-mail.

Finally, always remember that a producer's "no" doesn't mean "never". Ask if and when you may try again and what you could do differently next time.

YOU'VE BEEN BOOKED FOR A PROGRAM

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Almost everyone feels somewhat nervous and apprehensive before appearing on television or being interviewed on radio. Relax. It's almost never noticed by the viewers/listeners. They don't expect a performer, so enjoy yourself. You're the expert!

- The highest ranking member of your organization may not necessarily be your most articulate or lively spokesperson. If possible, send someone who speaks easily and well before groups.
- Be prepared to discuss your organization in general terms, even though you may represent only one area of its total program.
- The interview will be more effective if you decide ahead of time the most important things you want to say and how to say them in the clearest way.
- If you will be using terms that may not be readily understood outside your field, be sure to explain them in everyday language.
- Don't overuse statistics. A human interest story will be remembered long after percentages are forgotten.

For TV

- Don't wear glossy fabrics, fine lines or busy patterns. Avoid wearing very shiny jewelry.
- The makeup you wear for daytime is all you need for TV.

For Radio

- Be comfortable – no one but the station staff will see you.
- Remember to speak directly into the microphone, not to the host.
- Feel free to bring notes you can refer to with the most important points you want the audience to hear.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Use your natural speaking voice.
- Don't look at the cameras or monitors. Look only at the interviewer or the person speaking.
- Speak into the microphone.
- The host of the program is addressed by first name.
- Answer questions fully, but don't make your answer a monologue.
- If the interviewer appears to be searching for a question, don't hesitate to jump in with a statement, information, etc.
- If you're seated with another guest, you may want to turn to him/her on occasion with a comment or question.
- If you've forgotten to make a specific point and your time is running out, just interject, "Perhaps the most important service viewers/listeners should know about is. . ." or something similar.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Don't be concerned if you think that you've forgotten to mention certain facts. It's not possible to say it all within a limited time frame. What is important is that you've brought your organization to the attention of thousands of Wisconsin listeners.

HOW TO GET NEWS COVERAGE

Here are some ways to try for news coverage:

- Two weeks in advance, send a typed Press Release that is short and to the point to the Assignment Editor. The information that gets the most attention of the Assignment Editor is one that isn't about just your organization, but about the stations viewers or listeners. Your information is the story...your organization is the expert voice.
- The information should answer the 5 W's. . . Who? What? When? Where? Why? Add the basic details. Include the name as well as daytime, evening and weekend telephone numbers of a contact person. If needed, you can attach a second page with background information.
- Organized and well-planned material is more likely to be noticed and considered for coverage.
- Your material is generally filed with other news events that will occur that day.
- A day or two in advance of the event call the Assignment Editor to make sure your News Advisory was received. If not, be prepared to give all the details.
- Most stations will not object to your call. Consider phoning *after*, not before their newscasts. Midmorning or early afternoon is the best time.
- Remember that television is visual. News needs pictures to show while the story is being told. Be prepared to present your event in as interesting a way as possible. For example, the subject is education. An event built around the parents and their kids has more impact than two spokespersons sitting at a conference table talking about the problem.

- Radio needs brief and interesting “sound bites”. Think of something for an interview that captures the essence and excitement of your story.
- When the station’s news crew arrives, give them a copy of your Press Release and help identify those who are being taped. Sometimes the news crew will want to make a short “on the spot” interview with a key person. Choose someone who is well informed and able to speak in a clear, concise manner.

Following the above format does not guarantee coverage, but it will head you in the right direction. News Departments make decisions about what will be covered on a daily basis. Their final selections depend on many considerations. For example, they may plan to cover an event, but a fast breaking important story will take priority. Each station has a limited amount of on-air news time. Your request may be one of many. So, don’t be too disappointed if a crew doesn’t show up. Try again for another event.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jennifer Doe
Public Relations
123 456-7899 (day)
123 456-9877 (night/weekend)

TO: Assignment Editor and News Producer

PRESS RELEASE

YOUTH MOTION DANCES FOR KIDS DRUG PREVENTION PROGRAM

WHO: YOUTH MOTION GROUP

WHAT: Benefit Performance

WHEN: Tuesday, September 19, 7:30 PM

WHERE: Packer Community Center
123 Touchdown Lane
Green Bay, WI 54321

WHY: Proceeds to benefit the No Drugs Youth Education Program which is under the direction of the Green Bay Council for Drug Prevention.

DETAILS: YOUTH MOTION GROUP is a modern dance ensemble, founded in 1980, whose members are from 10 to 17 years of age. The performers are multi-racial and live in neighborhoods throughout the city. Treasure Valley Dance Magazine calls them “unusually talented and disciplined.” They have performed at schools, churches, synagogues and senior citizen centers in Green Bay. John Boyer, the director of YOUTH MOTION, says, “Our dancers are concerned about kids on drugs and want to help bring the No Drugs Youth Education Program to as many young people as possible.