

WHAT DO REPORTERS WANT?

- **Reporters want pitches that are on their beat, short and to the point**

Identify all the potential news outlets in your area, from the biggest TV, print and radio outfits, to local shoppers and local bloggers.

Identify the reporters, talk-show programs and bloggers in your area who most often focus on human service-oriented stories – and familiarize yourself with their work.

Find their business email addresses, as well as their organization's general news email address, and the managing editor's or news director's email address.

Try to keep press releases as short as possible – that's more likely to be read. Who, What, Where and When are all very short. The "Why" deserves three sentences at most. Be sure to make contact information easy to find.

For events, be sure to send your press release to the general news email at least a week beforehand, and follow up with a short reminder release the day

before. AVOID day-of press releases. Few organizations will be able to react to that. It's OK to call to confirm the email got through: politely ask whether the organization will send someone, but don't try to pin them down on it.

For more in-depth stories, reach out to individual journalists, via email, with specific story pitches. You are already familiar their work, remember, so mention stories or points they made that you liked.

Also look for recent stories that may be close in kind to the one you want to pitch – reporters like to hear new angles, but be aware that if your story is too similar to one done recently, they will take a pass.

DON'T ask or pressure reporters to meet with you just to familiarize them with your organization – they usually do not have time for this.

Once you establish a relationship, you can enhance your personal value with occasional tips or information on stories which have nothing to do with the DSP agenda but which you are knowledgeable on.

- **Reporters like a story that has a clear narrative element**

An event like “recognition week” is not likely to get much attention in and of itself, even with huge attendance. But link it to a narrative to occur that week or just before – “Mayor Smith To Spend Two Days as Caregiver in Group Home ” -- and you can get somewhere. Invite a reporter or local talk-show host to join the mayor in discovering just what it is that DSPs do. Now you’ve got a personal narrative to pitch.

The event can serve as a “one-stop-shop” for interview subjects for a story that is not about the event itself.

For event stories, efforts like the yellow ribbon campaign can be effective in at least getting a news photographer or even TV camera onto the scene. PR types sometimes to refer to these as “shiny objects.”

- **Television, radio, print, and web reporters all have different needs. Try to attend to them separately.**

TV reporters want video and audio without a bunch of other reporters in the shot. Radio reporters want to get as close to the interview subject as possible – which conflicts with TV needs. Print reporters like to work on their own, and take some time, without doubling up with their broadcast colleagues.

At a podium event try to set aside time when your speakers can be available for individual interviews. Often the various reporters will overcome their competitiveness and agree to joint interviews, particularly with “stars”. Such one-on-one interviews are always better – for the reporter, and for you – than are shots or sound from a podium speech. And DON'T HOVER or INTERRUPT (unless an egregious error is being uttered) when one of your people is being interviewed – that makes them and the reporter nervous.

- **Reporters appreciate help finding interview subjects who are representative of the story, and who are FUN to write about.**

If you want to pitch a story about disabled people moving out of large institutions in response to new federal guidelines, find and get permissions for

interviews (and photos or video) with someone in that situation, as well as the most articulate or charismatic caregiver you have who is helping with the transition. But don't try to control the story or prepackage the entire effort. When the reporter goes off and finds other sources, so be it.

- **Reporters want to report on something new – something no one has ever reported on before. Ask yourself, what are the trends?**

Is there something going on in your field that is transformative in some way? A new therapy that allows for reduced medication? Everyone knows about the “Smart Home” trend, but not about such technologies that specifically assist the disabled. How do such technologies affect working conditions for DSPs?

- **Reporters like honesty, hate spin**

Reporters expect to be spun by politicians, but outside that arena they really appreciate straight shooters who aren't relentlessly “on message.” You do need to get your message across – say, “Medicaid Support for DSPs Saves Money, Strengthens

Communities”. That’s fine, provide the information that supports that line, and the people who illustrate it.

But don’t oversell your story with constant reference to how great or important it is. The reporter wants to decide that for herself.

If you’ve identified a particular outlet you want to start with, DON’T HINT that you plan to give it to another news outlet if your first target doesn’t bite (exception: an incredibly hot scoop). At the same time, it is AOK to pitch a story to multiple news outlets at once, especially event-driven stories.

Don’t be afraid to address difficult issues, like pay scales, when the reporter asks. Go off-record, or “on background” if need be – almost all reporters will respect such requests, especially when it provides them with facts they can research through other means.

And be open to their questions, even when they do not seem relevant to the story that you want to tell. Reporters often can identify a potential story you had not even thought of: as long as it brings visibility to your work or agenda, that’s good!

- **Be persistent, but not a pest**

If a story you think is just awesome fails to get attention, that may have nothing to do with its intrinsic value. Find new ways to pitch it – BUT ONLY AFTER SOME TIME HAS PASSED, at least a couple of months. If you find that you just are not getting traction with the reporters you have targeted, then start sending pitches to their managing editors or news directors.