Engaging the Media for Positive Messages about Veterans and Veterans Initiatives

Daniel Warvi

Colorado Jail Diversion and Trauma Recovery Program
“Tell Your Story”

• Once our indiv. programs were launched and running, we moved from a program for Public Health to affecting Public Policy (like it or not...).

• Public Policy is about the FUTURE.

• If we don’t “Tell Our Story” there is no future for our programs, or others like it.
Why don’t we talk to the Media?

• For Veterans, our military training and experience discouraged interaction with the Media.

• Media is widely perceived to be anti-Military and anti-Veteran (whether it’s true or not.)

• The Media wants the dirt when vets do bad things, but will not cover the good things.

• The Media is Stupid (Walter Reed = VHA).
The Reality

• Most local media outlets want to do positive stories about the media - but they believe their only source is the VA.

• The VA and Legacy Veteran Service Organizations are stuck in the past in terms of Media Relations and Marketing.

• Without any other source, the Media relies on larger outlets for “information.”
The Solution Seems Obvious, Doesn’t it?

• Grant sites will need to develop a media plan, nurture relationships with local (and national) news media, and “Tell their story.”

• They will also need to answer the questions (dumb and otherwise) the Media will ask when a negative situation with veterans occurs.
The Eightfold Path

• Source: *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*

• The Eighth Step: Tell Your Story

• The goal is to get the public to see the value of the program.
Important Steps

• Apply the “Grandma Test”
• Gauge your Audience(s)
• Consider what Medium to Use
• Give Your Story a Logical, Narrative Flow
Danger Zones

• Compulsive Qualifying
• Showing off ALL of your work
• Spinning a Mystery Yarn
• Inflating the Style
How TV Stations Work

• For this presentation, we’re only focusing on Local News Affiliate Stations (NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX, CW).

• Independent Stations MAY be more interested in Local Stories but beware...

• Drop the idea that the News Media have any political bias.
What that Slide Means

• Assignment Editors see hundreds, if not thousands of story requests.

• Executive Producers decide what makes each newscast, with News Director direct approval of certain stories.

• Indv. Reporters CAN pitch stories, but it has to move up the “chain of command.”

• Reporters = Baseball Players at Bat.
Ways to get your story on the news

- Individual Reporters
- Community Relations
- Special Projects
Individual Reporters

• Focused on doing a story that has a *single* compelling character or narrative (one idea per story).

• Will tend to be assigned to one area of expertise (Education, Crime, Military, etc.).

• Assignment will usually have nothing to do with area of personal expertise.
Community Relations

• Focused on Stories, Awards, and Off-Air projects that promote the station brand with the community.

• Choose Public Service Announcements (PSA) for Air.

• ALWAYS looking for an issue they can claim ownership in the Community.
Special Projects

• Investigative Teams - tend to be long-term, in-depth projects with negative connotations.

• Long-format News Shows - focus on one subject, usually one hour and broadcast on weekends.

• Significant Events - Election Coverage, Political Debate, Parade/Community Event.
Action Plan

- Find the Reporter that seems to match the story you want to tell and contact them.
- Find the Community Relations Branch and tell them about Vet-related events (Veteran Stand-down) Ask for their participation!
- (DANGER!) Contact the station about doing a special long-format story about your program.
Danger Zones 2

• Have your media plan DONE AND IN HAND before contacting the media.

• You speak for your part of the project, not the entire project, the agency that runs it, etc.

• PROTECT YOUR CLIENTS. PROTECT YOUR CLIENTS. PROTECT YOUR CLIENTS.

• Be prepared to fight with the Reporter and walk away from the story if necessary.
Example

9News coverage of CoSprings VTC

Example Two

Blue Star Families PSA

• http://youtu.be/V5X_rAOy7ZY
After The Story Airs....

- Always answer the calls from the reporter afterwards.
- Call that reporter when you have expert knowledge that affects a news item.
- Bad news does NOT get better with age..if your clients screw up big, be prepared to answer the media quickly.
The End Result

• Media outlet(s) feel they have a reliable source on an important community issue

• If a station can claim ownership of a particular issue, it helps their ratings (and their bottom line!)

• Programs have a media outlet they can go to for positive stories, a way to stop negative stories, and develop a positive image with the community
Questions

• C’mon...that was drinking from the Fire Hose....