

Building good media contacts

• Learn about your local media

Pay attention to local newspapers, bloggers, websites, television and radio stations. Are there are reporters, talk show hosts, editorial writers or newscasters whose stories indicate an interest in arts education? You want to target your communications to the right people. A reporter can sense immediately if you have never read their publication or watched their program and may not see you as a credible source of news.²

• **Write letters-to-the-editor.** A local school board decision, event or a news article about arts or education may provide a great opportunity to write a letter to the editor that sheds more light on this issue.

• **Compliment the media.** When you come across a good arts education story, drop a note to the reporter.

• **Make follow up calls.** Once you have sent a release, call to follow up. Be prepared with a few talking points to sell your event or story to each reporter, including the names of all elected officials that will be attending or that are quoted. Keep it simple and do not overwhelm them with too much information. Consider practicing your “pitch” with a colleague before making your first call. Reporters are inundated with releases. Offer to re-send the press release, if yours got lost in the shuffle. ³

• **Thank the media.** When a reporter does a story, always follow up with a thank you note. If they got details wrong, provide correct information .

Be a valuable resource to the media:

- Get back to them quickly.
- Ask them what their deadline for the story is and what the story will cover.
- Offer to connect them with other sources. Use your good contacts in the community to help them expand and shape stories.
- Speak in sound bites.
- It’s okay to say, “I don’t know.” You can always refer them to your website or send them an e-mail later. Making up facts or guessing makes you an unreliable source.⁴

² National Institute of Justice, December 5, 2007, “Engaging the Media,” Retrieved November 12, 2010 from: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/courts/restorative-justice/marketing-media/engagingmedia.htm>

³Advocacy to Control TB Internationally, 2008, “10 Ways of Engaging the Media”, Retrieved December 7, 2010 from: http://www.action.org/site/get_involved/10_ways_of_engaging_the_media/

⁴ Hahn, Jennifer, Gould Media, Rules of Engagement with Reporters, March 2010.