

Section 4: Media/Publicity/Recognition

Learning Objectives: Gain a basic understanding of how to publicize your community-based mitigation programs and activities, as well as reward and recognize volunteer and partner participation.

Section 4.A: Publicizing Your Program and Activities

Media and public relations are an art that can take a professional years to master. However, these simple starter tips can help you navigate successfully in the communications realm. The benefit of this session can be enhanced by the participation of an expert in public relations. If possible, ask a local public relations practitioner to help teach this session. Possible sources of assistance include the public information officer from the city or another local, regional, or state agency; staff members from a local or nearby public relations or advertising agency; or public relations staff members from local corporations or institutions (school district, major companies, universities, etc.).

It is important to acknowledge that the media can be an invaluable partner if used proactively. By orchestrating events and including the media at the initial stages, you can help keep mitigation on the public agenda and help citizens embrace mitigation as a public value.

Some CBOs/FBOs may view the media in a negative light, based on past experiences or stereotype notions of who the media is. For example, work to form relationships with the media before a disaster strikes. Share the positive impacts of mitigation efforts, and let the media help you further the long-term strategic objective of building disaster-resistant communities. Or better yet, invite a member of the media to participate on a committee.

1. Developing a publicity plan (note: these are starter tips only)

Brainstorm publicity; address the following:



- What would we like to publicize?
- Where would we like to see our efforts reported and recognized?
- What do we want publicity to do for us? What are our long-term goals for publicity? (Example – Inform people of events, support recruitment, increase community awareness of mitigation, etc.)
- What types of media will work best for what we want to achieve? (Example – Radio works well for immediate news; magazines convey ideas in-depth; newspapers reach a big audience on a timely basis; etc.)
- Should we do our own publicity, or should we seek help? If we need help, where can we get it?
- Do we need training? If so, where can we get it?
- Who will take responsibility for this activity? Do we need a committee?

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- Who should serve as our media spokesperson? Who will be the backup spokesperson?
- What do we need to know about crisis communications? (Example: What will we tell the media if a volunteer gets hurt while working on a mitigation project?)
- Do we need to establish guidelines for what we say and how we interact with the media?
- How to organize/write a publicity plan (see Resource Guide)
- Do we know anyone who can help formulate a plan?



2. Creating a media list

The best way to build a media list is to start with a good list that someone else has developed and used successfully. If possible, obtain a well-used, well-maintained media list from a local public relations expert.

With the publicity goals in mind, develop a list of relevant media, or review the media list provided and select the appropriate contacts.

Whether working with a donated list or developing your own, media to consider include the following:

- Newspapers (daily, weekly, shoppers, etc.)
- Local and regional magazines
- Radio stations
- Television stations (network, cable, closed-circuit systems)
- Web sites
- Newsletters and bulletins, both print and email (published by neighborhood associations, CBOs, FBOs, local businesses, local associations, schools, etc.)
- Community calendars and other calendars of events
- Columns and special features (getting the home improvement editor to run a feature on disaster-proofing your home, 10 things everyone can do to make their homes more disaster-resistant, etc.)
- Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)
- List serves

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A good media list is more than a list – it indicates a number of important facts about each media source. These facts include:

- Contact name, address, phone, fax, and email
- Preferences – How do they want their news – by fax, in the mail, via email? If electronic, do they need a certain file type? What types of information are they interested in? Do they have any other requirements?
- Deadlines – If you want it to run, when do you have to get it to them?
- Supporting graphics – Do they like photographs and illustrations? If so, what formats do they accept or require?

3. Getting the news out

Discuss the sample news release. Draft the first paragraph of a news release using the fact set and sample. Review formats for news and feature stories (refer to the Resource Guide for other formats).



Fact Set for Potential Mitigation Activity for Students to Use in Writing Practice News Releases:

Who: Local Emergency Management Personnel and the Boy and Girl Scouts and their leaders

What: Clearing vegetation around 10 elderly person's homes to mitigate against fire damage and loss

When: Saturday, June 10, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Where: Volunteers to meet at Firehouse #11, 2020 Dunbar Street

Why: Brush and debris clearing helps to create a safe zone around a person's home in the event of fire.

Clearing dead brush and grass helps to eliminate the fuel for spreading fire.

Cost: Elbow grease and time

4. Gaining attention for your news

There are a number of ways to increase media interest in your organization's news. Brainstorm ways to make news attractive and attention-getting. Examples include:



- Asking a prominent local official or community leader (mayor, fire chief, police chief, city council member, Chamber of Commerce president, CBO/FBO leaders, etc.) to endorse the mitigation program and provide quotes for media coverage
- Piggybacking your activities and news with other, better-known community programs or events
- Combining forces with other organizations to issue joint news releases on similar activity.
- Meeting with the media prior to the event to give them background information
- Inviting the media to your meeting

NEWS RELEASE TEMPLATE

Contact:
(Name)
(Title)
(Phone Number)

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Date)

Headline Explaining What News Release Is About

CITY, State—Begin with a short and concise lead sentence that explains generally what the story is about and draws the readers into the story. Complete the first paragraph by describing the who, what, when and where of the story.

The middle paragraphs continue with details to further describe the essentials of the story and support the lead paragraph. In these paragraphs, the writer can quote credible authorities that represent key parties in the issue.

The middle paragraphs should also include the significance of the story to the readers, as well as any positive features about the event being described. Use as much space as necessary, but only include main points.

The final paragraph should be the least important because editors will often chop off the bottom of a story to make room in the publication. This paragraph should summarize any key facts or issues and clarify any additional information.

At the bottom, the organization can include a statement, called a “motherhood” statement that explains who the organization is and what it does. This should be the same on all news releases by the organization and is similar to a mission statement. Finally, be sure to include a “Call to Action.” For example, add a sentence that says: “For more information about how to get involved, please call _____.”

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Example of An Actual News Release

Disaster Resistant

Community Corporation, Inc.

1111 W. 1st Street - Evansville, Indiana 47708
Telephone: 812/555-5555 Fax: 812/555-5556
E-Mail: jdoe@isp.com

News Release

To: News Director
From: Johan Doernbecker, Exec. Director

Pilot Project to help STRAP HOT WATER HEATERS

Evansville, Indiana.....A pilot project, to help residents of 2 neighborhoods strap their hot water heaters, is being done by the Disaster Resistant Community Corp. (DRC) along with Community Based/Faith Based Organizations (CBO/FBO) and the neighborhood's Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT).

Materials for strapping the hot water heaters will be provided to residents FREE of charge. Installation help will be provided by the CERT and CBO/FBO members to residents who need someone to do the actual work.

Residents in the Lorraine Park area bounded by Weinbach Ave., Washington Ave., Boeke Rd. and Covert Ave. will have a meeting on Tuesday, July 23, at 6:30 p.m. at St. Marks Lutheran Church, 2300 Washington Ave. to learn about the pilot program and sign up for the FREE materials. Residents in the Willemette area bounded by Highway 41, Diamond Ave., Weinbach Ave. and Morgan Ave. will have a meeting on Thursday, August 8, at 6:30 p.m. at the Baptist Church, 12345 Spangler Ave. to learn about the pilot program and sign up for the FREE materials.

Those residents needing installation help may sign up at the meeting for a specific time to have the work done by the CERT and CBO/FBO members. There is no charge for this service. The project will be done in the Lorraine Park and Willemette neighborhoods, on Saturday, August 17, 2002 from 8:00 a. m. to 12 noon.

Strapping the hot water heater will keep it from falling over and causing a gas leak and possible fire; as well as providing 30 gallons of fresh water if water lines are damaged in an earthquake.

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Section 4.B: Recognizing Volunteers and Partners

It's very important to recognize everyone who supports your program. There are many ways to say thanks that cost little or nothing, and they all are appreciated. Recognition and thanks should be a continuous activity – it's crucial to building and sustaining momentum.

Brainstorm ways to recognize volunteers and partners. Recognition will vary depending on personalities and preferences. Possibilities include:

- An annual volunteer and partner banquet or other special event
- A picnic or other special conclusion to a volunteer activity
- Distribution of small donated gifts such as ball caps
- Formal recognition, such as plaques and certificates
- Special awards for service “above and beyond”
- Recognition from a prominent local official or community leader
- Recognition from local, state, and Federal agencies
- Handwritten thank you notes
- Email thank you notes
- A note to the volunteer's supervisor, thanking him/her for allowing the volunteer to participate
- Who else can you use to say thanks?

