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# Public Relations Handbook

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## Guidelines & Tools For Effective Public Relations

*Media Relations  
Community Outreach  
Events & Marketing  
Crisis Communications*

# Public Relations Handbook



The Association of Washington Public Hospital Districts has set out to create a tool that will be useful in the ongoing efforts of public hospital districts to inform the public about the valuable role they play in assuring the health of their communities.

Our intention is to provide a Handbook with step-by-step advice and worksheets for coordinating and conducting public relations, media relations, events, community outreach and crisis communication campaigns and projects.

As new information becomes available, we will update this Handbook to ensure hospital administrators and public relations staff members have accurate, up-to-date information for handling public relations.

-- Jeff Mero, Executive Director



Association of  
Washington Public  
Hospital Districts  
Keeping Quality Care Local

# Public Relations Handbook for Public District Hospitals

This Public Relations Handbook is intended to help employees in public hospital districts prepare and perform effective public relations, media relations, crisis communications, and community outreach programs. The handbook provides guidelines and tips for how to draft a public relations plan, respond effectively to media inquiries, garner positive publicity, create a newsletter, plan special events, enhance or build a Web site, and much more.

Many people who perform public relations roles in hospitals have little or no formal training in the field. To make this handbook as useful as possible, topics are discussed “from the ground up.” It provides step-by-step approaches that can be followed successfully by the beginner. Even seasoned professionals will find the handbook’s tips and reminders a useful reference.

The Association of Washington Public Hospital Districts hopes this handbook will be a useful tool throughout your ongoing public relations efforts. The Association encourages you to add materials to the Handbook that are particularly helpful to you. In addition, the Association will send periodic updates when appropriate.

The complete text of this handbook is available on the AWPHD web site at [www.awphd.org](http://www.awphd.org) under the Publications & Resources section.

Harris & Smith Public Affairs prepared this handbook for the Association of Washington Public Hospital Districts and its members. Address questions or comments to Alisha Holdener at (206) 343-0250 or [alisha@harrisandsmith.com](mailto:alisha@harrisandsmith.com).



Association of  
Washington Public  
Hospital Districts  
Keeping Quality Care Local

# Table of Contents

## Public Relations

- Overview
- Your Public Relations Plan
- Measures of Success

## Media Relations

- How to Get the Best Results
- Understanding Reporters' Objectives
- What Makes a Good News Story
- Who's Who in the Media: Titles & Responsibilities
- What's Different About Working with TV or Radio
- Media Opportunities
- Publicity Tools
- Writing for Publication
- Making Contact
- What to Ask When a Reporter Calls
- Press Conferences
- Why Create & Maintain a Media List
- Clippings & Reprints

## Crisis Communications

- Overview
- Getting Started
- Go Time
- Talking Point Tips

## Community Outreach

- Newsletters
- Special Events
- Organizing a Speakers Bureau
- Speech Writing
- Branded Merchandise: Tools or Trash?
- Direct Mail
- Effective Ways to Use Volunteer Help
- Web Sites

## Worksheets

- PR Planning
- Sample Pitch Scripts
- Questions to Ask When a Reporter Calls
- Media & Reporter Contact Information
- Crisis Communications Response
- Identifying Spokespeople
- Crisis Scenarios for Practice Sessions
- Crisis Assessment
- Crisis Communications Call Tracking
- Newsletter Survey
- Special Events Checklist
- Event Cost Analysis
- Identifying Speakers
- Special Web Site Features



## Public Relations

### Overview

Public relations is the function of communicating effectively with key hospital district audiences, including media, local residents, employees, physicians, board members, community leaders, government officials, and others interested in the hospital. A public relations program consists of strategies and tactics that help communicate key messages; respond to positive or negative events affecting the hospital; garner publicity for new programs, services or staff; and create goodwill and recognition for the hospital within the community.

Well-executed public relations will:

- Increase visibility for the hospital, employees, programs and services
- Position the hospital as a health care leader and authority within the community or region
- Expand awareness of the hospital's entire range of programs and services
- Enhance the hospital's image
- Aid in recruitment and retention of employees
- Support efforts to raise funds for new programs and services or assist with the passage of levies and bonds
- Act as a foundation when negative news about the hospital occurs
- Boost employee morale

Throughout the planning and execution of a public relations program, remember that consistency and repetition are critical to your overall success. Don't make the mistake of thinking your public relations efforts are completed when you get that front-page article or you finish the newest brochure. Successful public relations is ongoing.

Public relations is a general term that may include many other "relations" with different audiences, strategies and tactics. For example, **Employee relations** is a function of public relations that includes responding to employee concerns and informing and motivating staff. Some tactics used for employee relations may include new employee education, employee award programs and recognitions, new-hire press releases and newsletters to name a few.

Another "relations" – **Community relations** – is the function of actively planning and participating with and within a community for the benefit of the community and the hospital. Tactics within this category include community events, volunteer activities and co-sponsorship opportunities with other community organizations. Community relations may also include fundraising and development activities.

**Government relations** is a function of relating to government officials and agencies about issues that impact the hospital and its audiences. Hill climb events in Olympia, letter writing campaigns, and op-ed placements in the newspaper are often part of government relations.

Finally, **Media relations**, often considered synonymous with public relations, is the function of working with the media to communicate news. Media relations can be *active* – seeking positive publicity for a newsworthy topic at the hospital – or *reactive* – responding to a news inquiry about a positive or negative story of interest to the media and its readers or viewers.

The strategies and tactics involved with **marketing** and **advertising** may also complement your overall public relations efforts. Advertising for hospitals can be effective for new services and products. It may also be part of an overall branding strategy that includes public relations and marketing. Ads may identify key visual attributes about the hospital and make a connection with the community. Marketing materials are particularly effective in education and awareness efforts. Brochures may be used to inform patients about particular services or programs.

It's important to remember that public relations, marketing and advertising are not the same. Key to any public relations program is the *relationship between the public and your institution*. While tactics you deploy may cost money, true public relations results are earned, not bought. Marketing and advertising is closer to the Burger King philosophy – Have It Your Way. You pay to deliver your message exactly as you want it. You create the text, select the images, determine the location, date and time – you control the message and its delivery.

You'll have less control of the message with public relations, but the outcomes can be more credible and effective. People know when they're viewing an advertisement or marketing material. That affects the credibility of the message. However, a news article is filtered by the media, and thereby gains more credibility. The credibility is further increased when a third-party source praises and endorses your hospital through the news story. For example, a quote from a recent patient praising your surgery services will be far more credible than saying the same thing without attribution in your hospital brochure. You are effectively getting a third-party endorsement from every article generated from your public relations efforts.

## **Your Public Relations Plan**

Every hospital should have a current public relations plan that outlines goals and desired outcomes for a period of three to five years. Once a general PR plan is in place, periodic planning and updating is critical. The plan and its updates will not only help guide employees responsible for public relations work, but will result in an effective tool to communicate with the board and other staff. While public relations tactics may be performed by a small group of people, hospital

leadership and employees need to understand the value and importance of public relations and their role in making a program successful. Following are the key elements of an effective PR plan:

### **Goals**

Public relations goals help direct the strategies and tactics you will use in your future public relations endeavors. The goals you identify should clearly support your hospital mission statement. While a mission statement may include what the hospital wants to accomplish, a public relations goal should be focused on what you want the public to think and know about your hospital. What words do you hope people will use to describe your hospital? Quality health care. Community leader. Dependable service. Friendly staff. Safe environment. You may want to be all of these things and more, but for the purpose of your public relations plan focus on one or two key goals that can be achieved through improved communication with key audiences.

#### *Examples*

- General Washington Hospital is a community leader committed to providing high quality health care for the people of Carter, Key and Kangley counties.
- Highland Valley Medical Center provides superior primary care services in a comfortable, safe environment for people in the Highland Valley region.
- Ivy River Hospital, with its friendly, helpful physicians and nurses, is the most dependable health care service provider in the state.

### **Objectives**

Objectives help determine specific outcomes from your public relations efforts. Objectives should be clear and concise, and include timing.

#### *Examples*

- Increase awareness of the technology and medical advances used at the hospital within Evergreen County over the next six months.
- Build the reputation of the hospital in the next three to four years as a cornerstone of the community that provides health care services, jobs and community leadership.
- Encourage renewed interest in specialty hospital services such as childbirth classes over the next two years.

### **Target Audiences**

Detail the groups of people that are important to inform or influence, and why.

#### *Examples*

- Patients: They purchase health care services and generate revenue for the hospital.
- Physicians: They use hospital facilities and generate revenue for the hospital. They control where patients go for care: your hospital or outside of the community.

- **Media:** They write both positive and negative stories about the hospital, its staff and services. They have considerable influence and access to all of the hospital's target audiences.

*Other audiences to consider may include employees, board members, community leaders, local government officials, state legislators, vendors and suppliers.*

### **Tactics**

It's easy for busy hospital professionals to think about tactics first, but it is critical to have a solid strategy in place. Only pursue the tactics that will help achieve your goals. Even if a tactic is inexpensive, if it doesn't meet your goals, why invest the time and effort? Here are some "best uses" for specific tactics.

- **Brochure/Collateral** – To inform patients and community members about programs and services provided at the hospital. Promotional use only. May be provided to media for background, but not to be used instead of effective media tools, such as press releases or fact sheets.
- **Direct mail** – To help create awareness for programs or services with target audiences. Message is controlled.

**Letters** – Good for personal or business communication. Adjustable length (1-2 pages).

**Postcards** – Good for event invitations or welcome cards. Inexpensive postage.

**Direct mail packages** – Good for inclusion in new neighbor welcome packages or community coupon envelopes. Consider including brochures or inserts. Costs are typically part of an advertising or sponsorship package. Production of materials likely not included.

**Specialty mailings** – Good for awareness efforts, such as a child safety campaign sponsored by the hospital. Mailing may include a magnet with safety tips and local emergency contact information.

### **Distribution Methods**

How you distribute materials is often as important as what you send. It is a good idea to know which methods your target audiences, especially reporters, prefer.

**Mail** – Good to use when timing is less sensitive (one to three days). Good for newsletter mailings, new neighbor welcome packets, media kits, and other materials that are difficult to fax or e-mail. Mail can also be certified to verify receipt or insured to avoid loss.

**Fax** – Good for timely communication (faster than mail). Good for press releases, event reminders, and some forms of newsletters (such as weekly news notices). Less effective for documents with images or graphics.

**E-mail** – Good for timely and direct communication with an individual. Good for press releases, media reminders, media personnel questions, and pitch letters. Access to e-mail and electronic document size can be limitations.

**Face-to-face meetings** – Best way to make a personal connection. Allows for detailed explanation of a point-of-view or complicated subject. Best way to demonstrate excitement, concern, tolerance, empathy, etc.

**Phone conference call** – Allows for personal contact when face-to-face is not possible. Good for back-and-forth communication. Inexpensive method for communicating with large groups in different locations (cities/states).

**Web site** – Web pages allow interested parties to pull information thereby facilitating distribution. Directing people to a web site may be done through mailings, publicity or other notices.

- **Newsletter** – To regularly update a variety of target audiences about the happenings at the hospital. Good way to establish and maintain community support for the hospital and services.
- **Public service announcement (PSA)** – To create awareness of a problem or issue through radio or television. More competition for PSA placement than in the past. No control over placement or timing.
- **Press release** – To distribute straightforward news to the media. Essential to communication with the media.
- **Press kit** – To provide extensive information about a topic. May precede an event or new program launch.
- **Press conference** – To disseminate time sensitive and critical news to multiple media contacts at once. Should be rarely used.
- **Special event** – To make a personal connection with target audiences in a positive environment. Good way to recognize people for good work or launch new programs or facilities.
- **Speaking engagement** – To reach a target audience, establish the speaker as an expert and build credibility for the speaker and the hospital.
- **Video** – To communicate messages with emotion through visuals. Good for town meetings, new employee education, fundraising projects, special events, etc.
- **Web site** – To provide 24-hour access to information about the hospital. May include health information or links to health information depending on site design. Good for general information about the hospital, its services and staff.

### **Budgets**

Public relations budgets may come to you in a variety of ways. It may be pre-determined and passed down from the overall hospital budget. It may include general guidelines but is open to the tactics decided upon. It may be non-existent, in which case the tactics will need to rely on investments in staff time, instead of materials. All of these factors will determine where budgeting fits into the overall public relations planning. Regardless of where budgeting fits into the plan, consider the following:

- **Nothing is free.** Whether you're using staff resources or spending money for press release stationery, everything costs money. Consider all of the direct and indirect costs. Even a press release, one of the least expensive tactics, has a price tag: the time spent writing and editing the release, the paper it is printed on and the postage its mailed with at a minimum.

- Don't underestimate time investments. Every public relations activity has time investments and opportunity costs. And don't just consider the time investments for the PR staff. Administrative oversight and involvement, interview source preparation and even volunteer efforts all play into the opportunity costs of public relations. When planning and prioritizing projects, consider all necessary staff time and what else they would be doing with their time if not promoting the hospital.
- Shop around. When producing brochures or printed materials, be sure to get more than one estimate. Printing shops with more capacity at certain times may discount their rates.
- Evaluate options. Another way to save money when producing materials is to consider design options. For example, two-color brochures are far less expensive than their four-color counterparts. Specialty work, such as die-cuts for holding business cards or layered stair-steps for handouts, are nice features, but may carry a hefty price tag. Designers and printers can be allies in determining options. Just be sure to have your budget in mind.
- Be prepared for the unexpected opportunities. Reserve 10 to 15 percent of the overall public relations budget for unexpected activities. There may be some great opportunities to do events, community outreach activities or other projects that you didn't anticipate.
- Be mindful of outsourcing. Outsourcing, whether it is design, public relations, event planning, advertising or any number of other things, can have its advantages and disadvantages. Outside organizations are usually experts in their field. You should get quality work, while giving you more time for other projects. However, you'll still need to participate and "agent-sit" to make sure the work is progressing to your satisfaction. Of course, there is always the money aspect, which is sometimes hard to come by in today's hospital budgets. Shop around for quality and costs, get references from previous clients, review work samples and know the costs up front – including hourly rates, mark-up percentages and miscellaneous charges. Set a clear budget and insist on adhering to it.

*See the worksheet section for more help with PR Planning.*

## Measures of Success

The effectiveness of a public relations program can be difficult to measure, but is paramount in proving the value of public relations to the hospital and its programs. When using any number of public relations tracking methods, there are three things to keep in mind:

- 1) Public relations results are subjective. A single mention of the hospital in a lengthy front-page article in a major daily newspaper may be perceived more favorably and provide more exposure than an 800-word article about a new program at the hospital in a small weekly paper – or vice versa depending on the community, the paper's reputation, its relevance to target audiences, etc.
- 2) Outputs and outcomes are two different types of public relations results. *Outputs* are usually short-term results, such as favorable press coverage or exposure of a particular message to a target audience. How did the hospital benefit from the front-page article? *Outcomes* are longer-lasting affects on target audiences. Who read it? How did they react? Outcomes determine whether the target audiences actually received, understood, retained and reacted to the messages directed at them. Both are important measurements, but outcomes are a stronger determination of effectiveness.
- 3) Be wary of comparing public relations effectiveness to advertising effectiveness. The two forms of communication are not the same. Advertising messages can be **controlled**. Public relations messages usually **cannot be controlled**. This doesn't mean ignore results tracking suggestions, like ad equivalency ratings. Simply keep this in perspective.

### Indicators of Successful Public Relations

- Returned messages – The true test of public relations effectiveness is *receiving your own messages back from target audiences*. You know you're on track when comment cards, newspaper quotes and market research results resonate your message.
- Clippings – Clippings help you track news coverage and attention. From there you'll need to consider if it's positive or not. To keep track of media coverage have volunteers search local papers and encourage staff to watch the news and listen to the radio. Inform staff and volunteers to notify the PR contact of any mentions or articles about the hospital. If a reporter contacts you for information, make sure you ask when the article is likely to run and follow up. If you have money to spend, consider employing a clipping service. They use "professional readers" to look for key words about the hospital, services or even competitive organizations. Clipping services usually charge a monthly and a per clip fee.
- Research – It's a good idea to conduct surveys and/or focus groups before beginning a public relations campaign if possible. Conduct the same survey following a period of time after the campaign (6-9 months). Be sure to include both quantitative and qualitative questions about attitudes, beliefs and opinions about the hospital, its services and staff.

- Direct public relations – This encourages your audience to respond to a free brochure, a complimentary consultation or a free item. Make sure to capture contact information from people who reply. More traffic to the response mechanism – a telephone number, fax number or e-mail – can be a good sign of effective public relations. Just remember the item must be desirable to readers and the media must see it as a value-added service, otherwise it won't be mentioned in the article or newscast.
- Program enrollment and/or event turnout – Track the number of people who enroll in new programs or attend events. Compare those weekly or monthly numbers to the timing of an article or radio news program.
- Intuition and gut feelings – Trust your intuition and gut feelings when evaluating the effectiveness of public relations campaigns and tactics. Don't be too quick to throw in the towel. It takes time to develop solid relationships. However, if something doesn't seem to be working, you may want to re-evaluate your objectives and tactics.
- Agency methods – Some agencies use circulation statistics, ad equivalency ratings, and coverage analysis systems to prove the effectiveness of a public relations campaign. While the final results from these methods are exciting and impressive (if things are going well), most hospital PR staff simply don't have the time to do this in-house.

## Media Relations

### How to Get the Best Results

You'll get the best results in your media relations efforts by being responsive, honest, helpful, organized and articulate in good times and in bad. Sometimes you'll develop your strongest relationships with reporters during times of major controversy and crisis. When you're developing a story idea or responding to a media inquiry, make sure you understand the message you wish to communicate. Clearly articulate that message and why it is important. From there, get your message validated by a third party. Suggest other people for the reporter to interview. Your story and message will be more credible if a third party is saying good things about the hospital or how you're handling a particular situation. When you are dealing with a negative story, make sure to get enough information or explanation out the first time, so there's not a second and third story. Don't wait around and hope it will go away. If you know a reporter is going to get a story, call him or her ahead of time for a heads up, even if you know the story is not favorable. You'll score points with your local reporters if you're up front and honest.

### Understanding Reporters' Objectives

While it may feel this way at times, reporters don't set out to attack you or the hospital. They have a responsibility to their readers and viewers to cover newsworthy information. Like it or not, the hospital is central to the news in a community, yet the fact that you are doing the "job you are paid for" is not news. If you understand how journalists think and what they're looking for in a story, it will be easier to build relationships and manage internal expectations.

- **Reporters have a responsibility to cover the news and present multiple views.** Expect reporters to talk with people who don't like you or your programs. They're not doing it to be mean or malicious. They simply have a duty to report both sides. Suggest people who share your view and will validate your side as other potential interview sources for the reporter.
- **Reporters will dig for dirt.** When evaluating story ideas, do your own digging. Ask potential interview subjects questions reporters might ask. How did you get involved? How is this funded? What other things are you involved in? Even with positive stories reporters will be on the lookout for conflicts of interest or other controversial angles.
- **Reporters need to tell interesting, controversial and colorful stories** Look for ways to help color a story with explanation, sound bites or other elements such as graphics and photos. Find interesting people whose stories illustrate your messages.
- **Reporters want the scoop.** They're always on the lookout for stories that their peers don't have. Just remember to avoid playing favorites. Do not withhold information or refuse to call a particular reporter back because you don't like him or her.

## What Makes a Good News Story

Defining what makes a good news story is a subjective process. What you may deem as an important or relevant story may not attract the media's attention. So how do you get journalists interested in covering your issue/event/story? Any good news or feature story will have some or all of the following elements.

- **“New” news** – A good news story is fresh and new. New services, treatments, equipment, staff, and facilities are all newsworthy because they are new to the community.
- **Timeliness** – If something is happening now, yesterday or tomorrow, it's more likely to grab attention. If your story doesn't have an immediate time element, try tagging on to other events with timeliness. For example, you want to promote the good work of the resident oncologist, but there's nothing “new” about him. Pitch a story about what he's been doing for cancer patients in the community for the last five years during National Cancer Awareness Month in April. Pay attention to local and national news to help with your PR efforts.
- **People** –The best stories are told through and about people. While research, treatments, equipment, programs, facilities and services are all things you want to promote, people will make it happen. Use anecdotes and stories from patients and family members to volunteers and staff to get better results. Every time you are developing a story, ask yourself, “How does this improve, alter or affect the lives of people in our community?” Keep a list of people with good personal stories to tell.
- **Controversy** – Most stories in the paper today invoke some sort of controversy. The cliché that there are two sides to every story is quite relevant in evaluating newsworthiness. One word of caution when suggesting a story idea: be prepared for a reporter to ask who is opposed to your topic or idea.
- **Involvement and Scope** – Story ideas that impact a large group of people, especially local people, rank higher on the newsworthiness scale.
- **Weird or Interesting** – Those things that make you say, “HmMMM, that's different” are always on the list. The trick is finding those stories in the first place. Let your staff know you're always on the lookout for interesting and different stories around the hospital.
- **First or Most** – Anything that can be identified as the first of its kind usually makes news. Also, the biggest, best, tallest, smallest, and most unique will likely strike a chord.

## Who's Who in the Media: Titles & Responsibilities

### Newsroom

Most weekly and small daily papers have small staffs. They may have a single editor, a publisher and one or two reporters. It's still important to know the functions in a newsroom, so you may understand an individual's roles and responsibilities.

- **Publisher** – Oversees production of the paper and ensures financial viability of the paper. May sell advertising space.

*Special Note:* While most publishers are not usually part of the newsroom staff, some smaller papers have an editor/publisher position. Unless this is the case, publishers are seldom, if ever, responsible for editorial content. It's rarely a good idea to approach publishers with story ideas. It's bad editorial etiquette. Not only will the publisher be put out by the "favor," but also the editor will resent the breach in protocol.

- **Managing Editor** – Oversees all editorial activities of publications.
- **Editor** – Helps reporters prepare written text that is accurate, appealing and effective for publication. Makes decisions regarding what to print and what is relevant to the community.
- **City Editor** – Usually in charge of local news and staff assignments. Assigns reporters to cover stories within the community, and receive information about stories via telephone, wire, radio, television, press releases, reporters or their own initiative. Interested in breaking coverage, enterprise stories and investigative projects. Makes sure local news is important and useful for readers.
- **Features Editor** – Contributes to and produces front page stories and projects. Produces weekly and special sections on topics such as the arts, entertainment, popular culture, food, home and gardening, religion, and technology.
- **Editorial Page Editor** – Manages, assigns and inspires editorial writers. Makes decisions about what to print according to what the pressing issues of the day are. Understands and defends the public's right to know. Makes sure commentary stays within the boundaries of the philosophy of the paper.

*Special Note:* Small papers may only have one person to fill many of the editor roles.

- **Editorial Writers** – Produce editorial opinion and commentary. Interested in broad public policy and state and regional issues. Reach their own conclusions but ultimately write as the voice of the publisher on some topics. Form their opinions through daily staff sessions, weekly editorial board visits from policy makers, and independent research.
- **Reporters** – Gather information and write articles. Research and verify information from meetings, conferences, court hearings, artistic performances, sporting events and press

statements. Conduct interviews, in person or by telephone, with individuals involved in news events. Translate complex issues into concise, informative articles. Research and write articles assigned by editors or find stories on their own initiative. Organize material into factual or analytical reports.

*Special Note:* Some reporters may cover a “beat” such as health care, police or technology; or write a regular column. Get to know beat reporters and columnists and keep tabs on the types of topics they like to write about. When you’ve got a story in line with their interests, you’ll have a much higher rate of publicity success.

### **TV or Radio Station**

Broadcast stations are structured differently than print newsrooms.

- **News Director** – Ultimately responsible for hiring staff and directing editorial content. May or may not be involved in the day-to-day operations of the newsroom.
- **Assistant News Director** – Similar responsibilities to news director, usually more hands-on in the day-to-day operations of a newsroom.
- **Managing Editor** – Oversees assignment desk staff. May be responsible for long range and special projects planning.
- **Assignment Manager & Assignment Editors** – Responsible for making sure news stories of the day are covered properly. Assigns reporters and photographers to stories. Fields phone calls from viewers. Reads all press releases and newspapers. Monitors police scanners.
- **Executive Producer** – Oversees the content of the newscast and sets the editorial tone for the newsroom. Supervises show producers and may determine which reporters are assigned stories.
- **Producer** – Arranges order of stories in newscasts, writes teases and headlines, and may write some shorter stories in newscast. Also referred to as line producer.
- **Reporter** – Researches, sets up and covers a story. Also writes and presents story and may oversee editing process.
- **Anchor** – Presents stories on camera. Follows direction and flow from producers. May be involved in gathering story information. Some anchors cover specific topics, such as weekly health or technology segments.
- **Photographer** – Videotapes interviews and captures footage for stories. May or may not work with a reporter. Some photographers are responsible for editing stories.
- **Editor** – Edits national stories and some shorter local stories for newscast.

## What’s Different About Working With TV or Radio

A story that works for print reporters may not translate well to broadcast formats; conversely some visually-centric feature stories may not work well for print. Each medium has it’s own needs and concerns. That doesn’t mean you can’t pitch the same story topic to print, TV and radio. Just consider how you can tailor the pitch to meet each medium’s needs.

<b>Print</b>	<b>TV</b>	<b>Radio</b>
Length of story determined by column inches or words	Length of story can be from 15 seconds up to, but usually no more than, 90 seconds	Length of story usually 30 to 60 seconds
Readers can re-read something that doesn’t make sense	Viewers only have one opportunity to see story	Listeners only have one opportunity to hear story
Interviews can be done in person or over the phone	Interviews included in story must be done in person	Interviews can be done in person or over the phone
Stories explained through words, photographs and graphics	Stories explained through visuals, especially action and live interviews	Stories explained through words and sounds
Reporters cover special beats (healthcare, technology, aviation) or write for categories (business, features, sports); may also cover general assignment	Most reporters cover general assignment or news of the day	Reporters may have beats, but most are general assignment
Deadlines may be daily, weekly or monthly depending on production schedule and number of staff reporters	Deadlines usually day of	Deadlines usually day or hour of

## Media Opportunities

The ways in which a hospital can get coverage or exposure for a particular story or topic are numerous. It’s important to know which opportunities will best serve a particular topic.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Process/Responsibilities</b>	<b>Possible Tools</b>
<b>News or feature stories</b>	To inform, entertain and communicate newsworthy information to audiences.	PR person may suggest story idea (“pitch”). PR person provides interview sources and background information. Reporter interviews sources and writes/films/records story.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press release</li> <li>• Pitch letter</li> <li>• Pitch call</li> <li>• Media kit</li> <li>• Fact sheet</li> <li>• Backgrounder</li> <li>• Bio</li> </ul>
<b>Community or business calendar items</b>	To inform audiences about events available for attendance. Must be open to the public or available for registration.	PR person sends press release about event or item to calendar editor two to four weeks before event. Expect from one sentence to two paragraphs in length.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press release</li> <li>• Media advisory</li> </ul>

<b>Item</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Process/Responsibilities</b>	<b>Possible Tools</b>
<b>News briefs</b>	To communicate less significant, yet newsworthy information, such as recent awards, staff additions and promotions, and new equipment depending on the size, scope and cost.	PR person sends a press release. Media organization uses release and any background material to write or air a small announcement. Unless there are questions, reporters are unlikely to conduct interviews for small news briefs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press release</li> <li>• Media advisory</li> </ul>
<b>Editorials</b>	To persuade readers about an issue or controversy.	Editorial writers/editors consider timely topics of controversy. PR people may suggest topics to the editorial board. Editorial boards may also request a presentation. This is an opportunity to demonstrate the hospital's view on a topic. Be prepared to defend the hospital's position, as well as understand the opposition's viewpoint.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pitch letter</li> <li>• Pitch call</li> <li>• Backgrounder</li> <li>• Media kit</li> <li>• Talking points for people presenting to editorial board</li> </ul>
<b>Op-eds or bylined articles</b>	To communicate an opinion or position or to inform using an expert author. Allows for more control of the message.	PR person suggests topic to editorial page editor or section editor. PR person and author (administrator, doctor, expert) draft article. Editor may accept or reject and edit if necessary. Accepted article will run with author name and possibly photo.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pitch letter</li> <li>• Pitch call</li> <li>• Draft article</li> <li>• Article outline</li> </ul>
<b>Letters to the editor</b>	To respond to an article that appeared in the paper. To voice a similar or dissimilar view. To inform editorial staff of a necessary correction.	PR person drafts letter in response to an article that appeared in the paper. Editor selects which letters to publish. Letters are typically 50-300 words in length. Refer to the publication for exact requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft letter (expect it to be published as is)</li> <li>• Pitch call</li> </ul>
<b>Public service announcements (PSAs)</b>	To communicate cause- or issue-related information to audiences. Only TV and radio stations provide this community service. Do not expect or request PSA coverage from newspapers. PSAs are free to non-profits.	Vary depending on media organization. PR person may write script or provide tape/film. Reporter may read script or develop PSA from background information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PSA script</li> <li>• Pitch letter</li> <li>• Pitch call</li> </ul>
<b>Guest appearances</b>	To discuss a topic of interest in a talk show setting on TV or radio.	PR person writes a letter to the show's producer (not the host) at least one month before desired date. Producer will book guest or reject the suggestion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pitch letter</li> <li>• Pitch call</li> <li>• Press release</li> <li>• Bio</li> <li>• Talking points</li> </ul>

## Publicity Tools

Even the smallest newsrooms receive volumes of phone calls, faxes and e-mails each day from numerous sources all wanting the same thing...coverage! Your job is to get through the mass of information to interest reporters in your story. How you write and prepare your publicity tools will determine your ultimate success.

### Writing Basics

Most public relations efforts require effective written materials. Here are some guidelines to ensure clear, concise writing that will deliver results.

- Remember your audience. Who will read your writing? What interests them?
- Keep it simple and straightforward. Most publications write for the eighth grade level. Sophisticated, complex writing has a place in journals and some trade publications, but most mainstream publications do not prefer it.
- Translate jargon into understandable English.
- Eliminate acronyms whenever possible.
- Pay attention to grammar, especially subject-verb agreement, tense agreement and parallelism.
- Don't *-ize*. Use *use*, not *utilize*; *finish* or *make final*, not *finalize*; *set priorities*, not *prioritize*.
- Avoid adding *up* to a verb, such as *head up the committee* or *face up to the crisis*.
- Do not overuse *that* as a conjunction. Consider the following: Doctors admitted ~~that~~ they discharged the patient. The statement ~~that~~ the administrator made is accurate. Or re-write the sentence from "The stethoscope that he wore was cold." to "The doctor's stethoscope was cold."
- Change passive voice to the active voice. Instead of "it is understood," use "I understand"; "we require," not "it is required."
- Vary the length of sentences and paragraphs to improve readability.
- Avoid redundancies such as *10 a.m. this morning*, *very unique*, *end result*, *consensus of opinion*, *more universal* and *mutual cooperation*.
- Avoid wordiness. Instead of "at the present time" use "now." Instead of "despite the fact that" use "although."

### **Books Worth Buying**

The Associated Press Stylebook is a must-own reference book for anyone who writes material for the media. The AP Stylebook is the journalist's bible to spelling, grammar and style. It is essential that your media material be written in AP style. The books are available in most bookstores or can be ordered online. The Associated Press Stylebook can be accessed online at [www.apstylebook.com](http://www.apstylebook.com) for an annual subscription.

Another helpful reference book for media writing is *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style* by Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald.

- Avoid clichés in writing and interviews. Clichés are unoriginal, trite and overused. Purchase a dictionary of clichés to ensure you’re not using them.
- Write and edit all material for Associated Press style using an updated AP Stylebook or online reference guide.

### **Press Releases**

A press release is your first and best chance for communicating why your story is worth the media’s attention. It’s also the one tool most reporters will ask for directly.

Press releases are important because reporters use them throughout the entire story development process. At first glance, a press release quickly tells a story in a way most familiar to reporters. It should answer the question, “What makes this newsworthy?” From there, reporters use press releases to locate interview sources, find interesting facts and figures, use quotes from hard-to-reach individuals or when under deadline pressures, and check for accuracy and spelling. All of these uses mean the accuracy of a press release must be a paramount consideration.

In addition to previous writing tips, consider the following when crafting a release.

- Remember your audience for a press release is the reporter. Show how this topic is newsworthy and of interest to the reporter’s audience – readers or viewers.
- Keep it simple and as short as possible.
- Make “just the facts” your press release mantra. Answer who, what, where, when, why and how in each release.
- Write in the inverted pyramid style. Put the most important and interesting news at the top, followed by supporting details in later paragraphs.
- Use simple, straightforward sentence structure.
- When appropriate, use quotes to share an opinion or praise.

### **News Distribution Pointers**

- Send releases about events open to the public at least two weeks in advance.
- Send releases about events for reporters only (such as press conferences) at least 48 hours in advance, when possible.
- For breaking news, notify reporters as soon as possible.
- Always try to address a release to a specific editor or reporter. When in doubt, send it to the city editor for newspapers, the editor for community papers, the assignment editor for TV stations and the news director for radio stations.
- Many reporters these days prefer e-mail. If you send materials via e-mail, include the information in the text of the e-mail message. Do not send attachments, unless specifically requested. Also, make sure to put a catchy headline in the subject line of your e-mail to get attention.
- Fax and “snail mail” are less effective ways to communicate timely information with reporters, but both have their uses. Some reporters prefer fax for all communications. Media kits should be mailed due to length and content. If something is very timely, use an overnight delivery or courier service.

- Except in quotations, avoid adverbs, adjectives, and qualifiers – such as “very” – that do not add to the story.
- Identify your organization and what it does at the end of each release. This one or two paragraph description, called a boilerplate, should be standard for all releases and many other external communications. Be sure to include a web site address, if available.
- Use an 8½ x 11 piece of paper– letterhead if you have it.
- Use only one side and double space paragraphs.
- Include a contact name and all possible phone numbers for a reporter to get more information. If the release is for an event, be sure to have on-site contact information, such as a cell phone number, listed on the release.
- Edit for Associated Press style.
- Double check for errors and make sure your information is accurate. If anything is missing, reporters may disregard it entirely.
- To avoid missed opportunities, have someone unaware of your topic read the release. Ask what questions remain unanswered and edit appropriately.

### **Pitch Letters**

A pitch letter may serve as a “cover letter” for your press release or an initial letter to spark interest in a story idea. The letter should emphasize why the story idea is of interest to a publication’s or station’s target audiences. Describe the controversy, challenge or freshness of your material. The pitch letter should never exceed a single page. Remember, assignment editors and reporters already have a lot of reading material. If you address your letter to an individual, make sure the person’s name, gender and title are correct.

### **Media Kits**

Media kits include all of the necessary information to interest and inform a reporter about a story idea. The media kit is intended to save reporters time in gathering background information. A good media kit may include:

- **press releases**– short documents addressing who, what, when, where, why and how of a potential story. Include a press release with the media kit, even if you’ve already sent the release to the reporter.
- **fact sheets**– one-page documents with general information about an organization. A hospital fact sheet may include an overview of the hospital, its history and services, as well as the mission statement and key staff.

- **backgrounders** – one- to two-page documents about a particular topic or issue. May include research information, statistics, examples or interviews. Use backgrounders to explain how something works or why it is important.
- **questions and answers (Q&A)** – documents identifying key questions followed by well-crafted answers. These documents help guide reporters and prepare them for interviews. A good Q&A will answer the basics, as well as add two or three interesting questions the reporter, who is less familiar with the topic, may not think to ask.
- **pamphlets or brochures** – printed materials intended to promote the hospital or its services. Reporters may reference these materials for background information, but usually consider these materials too promotional for direct publication or media use.
- **biographies** – descriptive resumes of key people involved. Bios vary in length from a single paragraph to a full page. Do not exceed one page. Describe major accomplishments, work history, awards and recognitions
- **speech scripts** – written scripts of delivered or upcoming presentations. Use when media kit is part of a public appearance.
- **photographs** – sharp black-and-white glossy prints or electronic files (.tif or .jpg). Be sure to ask how the media outlet prefers to receive photos. Always include captions on paper or adhesive labels. (Do not write directly on the photo as it distorts the image.) Identify names of people in photos with up to five people. Photos of more than five people can be described as a group.
- copies of **previous media coverage** – clippings or reprints about the hospital or the same topic may be appropriate. Consider the advantages and disadvantages first. If a competing publication already ran the story two weeks ago, why would this reporter want to cover old news? Clippings from trade journals or magazines are good to share with newspapers and vice versa.

## Writing for Publication

Always remember, whatever material you provide to a reporter or media organization is fair game. Anything you send may show up in print exactly as is. This is why accuracy is so important. While most of the publicity tools mentioned above are for reporters and editors to use in preparing stories, some media opportunities are more direct. Letters to the editor and guest articles are prepared by public relations people and run close to, if not exactly, as sent. Editors have the right to edit for style or length as appropriate. Tips for writing for publication follow:

### **Letters to the Editor**

- Include your full name, home address and daytime and evening phone numbers. Newspapers verify authorship of letters before publication.
- Keep it short and snappy.
- Don't exceed the length required by the publication, usually 50-300 words.
- Relate to current news or controversy. Newspapers like to use letters to encourage diverse opinions.
- Be creative. Catchy, humorous, even sarcastic letters can be more effective than dry, straightforward opinions.
- Make it timely. If you're writing in response to a recent event or something published, do it quickly. The first letters turned in on a subject have a better chance of being printed.
- Most newspapers generally won't run letters already published in other newspapers.

### **Guest Material: Op-Eds, Bylined Articles or Freelance Submissions**

- Find out if the publication accepts guest material.
- Request author guidelines. This will include detailed information about word length, style, tone, exclusivity, etc.
- *A note on exclusivity.* don't ever assume you can publish the same material in more than one publication. Make sure the paper or magazine does not assume copyright on your material if you hope to use the article for promotional purposes once published.

## **Making Contact**

### **Pitches**

- Pitching is when you contact a reporter or editor by phone to suggest a story idea or material for publication. This is a good method to use when you're testing a story idea or looking for feedback before putting a lot of effort into producing materials.
- A good pitch is less than 60 seconds and will explain why the story is interesting, fresh and newsworthy.
- When it comes to pitching, practice is key. Right down your script or outline the key points you want to hit. Then say your pitch out loud. If it helps, role-play your pitch with a co-worker. Your pitch will be more convincing and persuasive if you practice first.
- Anytime you call a reporter your first question should always be, "Do you have a minute?" or "Is this a good time? I have a story idea to suggest." Be considerate of their time and they will pay more attention to your pitch.

- Feel free to leave a pitch on voicemail, but don't think your job is over. You'll need to follow up in a day or two. Don't quit until you have a direct communication with the reporter or editor.

*For samples of pitch scripts, see the worksheet section.*

### **Follow Up**

- Follow up is essential, but don't overdo it. One or two phone calls a week or a single email or fax follow up is appropriate. More than that may put you in the pest category. Use your best judgment, though. If you're following up with new information, the same follow up rules need not apply.
- Reporters are often away from their desks so be prepared to leave a voice mail. Your message should clearly state why you are calling (what's the news), what you want the reporter to do with this information, and how to contact you for more details.
- Be prepared for coverage and its consequences. One thing reporters and editors hate is getting a tip on a good story only to find out nobody wants to talk about it. Before you tell the media about your story, do your homework and be prepared to handle the coverage.
- Don't get discouraged if the media doesn't pick up your story. Breaking news or major events will take priority over your coverage. If an editor or reporter says no once, that doesn't mean they'll say no to everything in the future.

### **What To Ask When a Reporter Calls**

Not every conversation with a reporter will originate from a pitch you've given or a press release you've sent. Sometimes reporters will call out of the blue about a positive or negative story they are pursuing. Regardless of which it is, you need to ask the reporter some basic questions before conducting or lining up an interview.

- What is your story about?
- What/who brought this topic to your attention?
- Who do you want to talk with from the hospital?
- May I give him/her some idea of the questions you might be asking?
- How long will the interview take?
- When is your deadline?
- Who have you already talked with about this story?
- Who else are you going to talk with?
- When do you think the story might run?
- May we provide you with some background information about this topic?

*See the worksheet section for a sample survey to use when a reporter calls.*

## Press Conferences

Rarely, if ever, will most public hospital districts need to call a press conference. This form of communicating with the media should be reserved for highly unique cases. If a crisis or significant event is attracting a lot of reporters from far and wide (this means more than just your local media), you may want to consider holding a press conference. When in doubt, don't do it.

### Reasons to Consider a Press Conference

- There is a crisis situation and local and regional media want immediate answers.
- It is critical that all of the media hear the exact same message at the same time.
- Multiple sources must present newsworthy information at the same time and place.
- Multiple calls from several reporters are coming in about a specific situation.

Just be careful when naming an event a press conference. If you call them too often and the news doesn't require it, you'll suffer from "boy who cried wolf" syndrome. The next time a press conference is called – necessarily or not – no one will show.

### Press Conference Details

If you must conduct a press conference, here are some details to consider.

- Announce the press conference. If possible, send a media advisory or press release about the press conference at least 48 hours in advance.
- Think about deadlines. Mornings are often best – between 9 and 11 a.m. – because morning meetings are over and reporters have time to cover assignments. If you want your news to air live on the evening news, schedule the press conference between 4 and 6 p.m. This is only for extremely newsworthy events. If it's not breaking news, no one will show.
- Think about attendance. Keep your news in perspective. If two local papers are sending a reporter each, you don't need materials for 50. However, if the news is drawing attention from every outlet throughout the state, prepare for 50 reporters or more.
- Prepare the location. Make sure the location has plenty of electric outlets for television equipment and laptop computers. If you have a speaker, provide a podium for microphones and stands. Add visual interest by holding the news conference at a site with relevance to the story. If appropriate, reserve parking for the media and notify them of the reserved spaces.

#### **Hospital Events that May Require a Press Conference**

- Crisis
  - Natural disaster
  - Tragic or unexpected death
  - Shooting (school, police)
- Significant employee news
  - Administrator retiring
  - Employee accused of crime
  - Layoffs or firings

#### **Hospital Events Suited for Press Availability Session**

- New wing or facility tour
- New equipment or technology
- New procedure or treatment
- New physician or employee
- Special events, i.e. first baby of the year or multiple births
- Community education

### **Other Media Events in Lieu of a “Press Conference”**

There are other options to achieve the benefits of a press conference. A “press availability” session allows you to direct the media to a location to provide information about a story, while giving them flexibility with time and personal attention. It’s unlikely all of the media interested in attending a press availability session will show up at the same time. A press availability session should include a block of time that reporters can interview various sources and get background information. While you may have suggestions for things to do or view, a press availability session should not have a structured agenda.

### **Why Create & Maintain a Media List**

Second only to having newsworthy information is developing solid working relationships with reporters. A media list will help you get started. Some of the loudest complaints from the news media are about public relations professionals not knowing enough about the publication/station or the reporter. Any time you send a press release or call a reporter make sure you’ve read the paper, watched the news segment, or listened to the station first. Doing your homework is a must. Media organizations make it easier to do research than ever before. Most publications and stations have web sites with a tremendous amount of background information. Those that don’t have media kits with all the information you’ll need. Simply request a media kit from the news organization’s advertising department.

Gather detailed information about reporters and media organizations. Store the information electronically. Be sure to update the information as you go along. Reporters change beats, get promoted and move around to other media organizations frequently. You’ll discover these things through follow up calls and returned e-mails. At a minimum go through the entire list annually to verify its accuracy.

### **Database Programs**

There are several electronic database programs that can be used for storing media data. Two common ones are Microsoft Access or FileMaker Pro. Both are solid, relational database programs, which can be customized to meet all of your media needs. At a more basic level, Microsoft Excel can be used; however Excel is a spreadsheet that does not provide relational functions (i.e. more than one reporter linked to a single organization). Microsoft Outlook can be effective too. Again, you lose relational database qualities with Outlook, but it does have advantages for frequent e-mail users. Outlook also allows for some customization.

### **Information to Collect**

Detailed information on the following topics will prove useful in your media relations efforts.

**Organization:** Name of paper or TV/radio station

**Address:** of main office or alternate locations. Mailing address most commonly used. If mailing address is P.O. Box, physical address may be needed for overnight shipments or in-person visits.

**Phone:** of front desk or newsroom. Collect direct lines for reporters whenever possible.

**Fax number**

**Web site address**

**Audience:** demographics of readers or viewers, i.e. *targets readers 50+ years old.*

**Geography:** coverage area of readers or viewers. May be cities, counties or regions.

**Type:** Newspaper, Magazine, TV, Radio, Internet only, Newsletter, etc.

**Circulation:** number provided by media based on readership/viewership research

**Frequency:** of new material. Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, Annually, Hourly, etc.

**Parent:** Parent company/owner of paper or station, i.e. Gannett, Hearst, etc.

**Overview:** Size of paper, lead time, days of publication if not daily, deadlines, etc.

**Reporters:** For each reporter, collect the following information:

**Title:** Editor, Health Care Reporter, etc.

**Address and direct phone** (if different)

**E-mail address**

**Interests:** topics or areas of focus. May be an official beat or a personal interest.

**Preferences:** such as, *prefers e-mail or never call on Tuesdays.*

*See the Media & Reporter Contact Information form in the worksheet section for assistance.*

### **Clippings & Reprints**

Not everyone in your target audience will see or read the news coverage when it first comes out. By creating a clipping and using it in your outreach efforts, you will maximize your news coverage and further benefit from the third party recognition. Here are some ways to use clippings.

- Give as handouts to employees, volunteers, board members, new patients, etc.
- Frame originals and hang on the lobby or department wall.
- Include copies on counters or tables in the lobby for as long as the article is timely.
- Send to government officials with a cover letter about why they should be interested. Don't forget to include a "call to action" in the letter.
- Include in media kits.
- Include in new neighbor welcome packets.
- Send copies with hospital speakers to outside events or meetings.

### **How to Make Clippings**

- Copy the article and the headline in its entirety. If you don't like a certain paragraph or a quote, you cannot omit the text in the clipping.
- Copy the masthead of the paper and shrink or enlarge it to fit across the top of the clipping. (The masthead is located on the front page of the publication and in the opinion section of the newspaper or inside cover of the magazine.)
- Copy the date of the article and include it under the masthead.
- Whenever possible, make the clipping portrait-style (not landscape). This way, if it is used in a media kit, it will face upright in the folder and be easier to read.
- Use copy machine features, such as "Generation Copy" or "Background Erase" to improve the quality of clipping copies. On simpler copy machines, reduce the darkness of a copy to eliminate spotty backgrounds.
- Always try to reduce a clipping to an 8½ x 11 piece of paper. Reducing the size of the text may help, but be sure it is still legible. If this is not possible, consider using legal size paper or two letter size pages.
- When it is necessary to use more than one page, keep as much of the article together as possible. Make sure any splitting of the article does not diminish readability or continuity.
- Once finished, read the article from the clipping to make sure none of the copy was accidentally omitted.
- Keep the original to make clear copies if more are needed in the future.

#### **Permission Granted**

- Some publications may require reprint permission before using a clipping.
- Often permission is based on use. Permission is granted more often for informative purposes, i.e. media kits, handouts at community events. Permission for advertising or highly promotional purposes is less likely to be granted.
- When granted, a phrase such as "Reprinted with permission from XYZ Newspaper" is appropriate.
- Some magazines may require reprints to be purchased.

### **Locating Your Coverage**

- Ask volunteers and employees to keep a lookout for media coverage and to notify you about any coverage.
- Search the Internet regularly, especially search engines that specialize in news, such as Northern Light.
- If there's money available, consider a press clipping service. They are listed in the yellow pages under News Service. You can specify a region, types of publications, and topics of interest. List the hospital name and any potential spokespeople as key words.
- If you know a publication already ran an article but you don't have a copy, follow up with the publication librarian or a reporter. There may be a minimal charge for the back order.

# Crisis Communications

## Overview

A crisis is a newsworthy event that has occurred or will occur in the near future. The crisis, in which the hospital may be directly or indirectly involved, will have some emergent element and a potential for adverse publicity. The hospital will be expected to respond publicly.

Every hospital at one time or another will experience some kind of crisis that requires a communications response. How you and your hospital fare is in large part due to the planning and practice you put in ahead of time.

In general, hospitals should be concerned with two types of crisis situations: 1) events that undermine the hospital, its reputation and the ability to continue operations, and 2) events that the hospital is responding to, but is not responsible for, such as earthquakes, fires, floods, community emergencies, or public health epidemics. Either way, the situation is highly newsworthy and the media will report on it with or without your input. Use this opportunity to communicate your side of the story and provide insight. Whether it's your reputation on the line or not, a crisis situation should be viewed as a media opportunity.

## Getting Started

**Prepare a crisis communications checklist.** Crisis communications plans are only useful if they're easy to follow during an actual crisis. While you may want to put a good amount of effort toward scenario development and crisis response practice, the actual plan you pull out at "go time" should be short and simple. A one-page checklist will be more useful than a 100-page manual. Localize your checklist and use it as a worksheet during crisis practice sessions. *See the Crisis Communications Response form in the worksheet section.*

**Consider potential crises.** Put some thought into the situations that have the largest potential for occurring in your hospital or community, but be careful not to rule out scenarios based on character judgments. Accusations of fraud and indiscretion often occur in the most unlikely cases.

**Establish a team.** Pull together a team of four to eight hospital employees, such as administrators, board members, department managers, physicians, nurses and others to share responsibilities.

### Potential Crises

- Medical errors
- Unexpected deaths
- Equipment or product problems (tainted blood supply, product recall)
- Facility closure
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Labor turmoil
- Firings or layoffs
- Employee crime (embezzlement, theft)
- Sexual harassment
- Lawsuits
- Adverse jury awards
- Accidents

**Identify potential spokespeople.** Consider whom among the team members and others outside of the team would be good spokespeople for the hospital. Select people who are articulate and knowledgeable. Doing your homework about potential spokespeople ahead of time will make this tactic easier when the crisis occurs. *See the worksheet section for help identifying spokespeople.*

**Train the team.** Make sure team members can fulfill multiple roles during a crisis. Some may be spokespeople; while others may field incoming calls from citizens. Still others may need to write a press release and official hospital position statement with a 15-minute deadline. Be sure to practice all roles with every member of the team. You never know when someone will be on vacation or out sick and unable to fulfill his or her intended role.

**Share contact information with team members.** Make sure you have contact information (including home and mobile phone numbers or HAM radio signs) for every member of your crisis team. Also, be sure to have media contact names and phone numbers readily available. Share all of this information with team members.

**Understand and communicate your media policies.** Make sure all employees and physicians understand the hospital's media policies. Examples of media policy questions follow.

Who may speak with the media on behalf of the hospital? Identify key spokespeople for ongoing topics and communicate to the staff about who those people are. Make sure all employees know how to direct media inquiries to the proper communications staff or administrators. Employees shouldn't just say, "I can't talk with you" and then hang up. Provide staff members with a script and list of potential spokespeople. A script may be something like, "While I'm not an official hospital spokesperson, I would be happy to direct you to someone who can help. I can transfer you now. If you're on an immediate deadline and Rachel doesn't answer the phone, call me back and I'll locate someone else to help you."

Can the media talk with victims or family members in the hospital? The *Guide for Cooperation* booklet specifically identifies that reporters and photographers will seek hospital permission before entering patient care areas. While members of the news media and the medical community have agreed to the guide, it's important to review this policy with employees and volunteers. Also, you may need to remind members of the media about the *Guide to Cooperation*. Contact the Association of Washington Public Hospital Districts to request an extra copy for your local media.

For more information, the American Hospital Association publishes a booklet called *Guidelines for Releasing Information on the Condition of Patients*. To order the booklet (catalog no.166851), call 800-AHA-2626 or visit [www.ahaonlinestore.org](http://www.ahaonlinestore.org).

**Prepare for redundant systems.** Many times when crises happen the phone lines may be down or overrun with traffic. Make sure you have a back up plan in case phones are unavailable. If you do not rely on dial-up connections to the Internet, email may be a good option. HAM radios are also good.

**Practice, practice, practice.** Once you've tailored your crisis communications checklist or plan, run a drill to see if you are prepared and identify any holes. Practice is absolutely essential to a smooth and effective communications response. While you may want to schedule the drill to accommodate busy schedules, make sure your scenario is a surprise. A good practice session will include an element of surprise, a short timeline for response, a hands-on response session, and an evaluation period. *See the crisis scenarios in the worksheet section for practice sessions.*

## Go Time

**Complete your checklist.** The more information you have about the event the better off you'll be. Find out what's already happened and anticipate what may occur next. Get information from whomever you can, but make sure to authenticate your sources before sharing information with the media. *See the Crisis Assessment form in the worksheet section.*

**Prepare communications materials.** Once you've collected the necessary information, immediately prepare your press release, backgrounders and fact sheets. Even if the media hasn't caught wind of the crisis yet, prepare your materials with the information you've collected. You'll be thankful to have the material ready when the story breaks.

**Equip the briefing room.** Depending on your location and what level of crisis has occurred, you may have more than just the local media knocking on your door. Prepare a conference room for regular briefings and equip the room. Consider a podium, microphone, and outlets for lights, computers, and other media equipment. Have a fax available for press use. Have media kits, press releases, fact sheets, and backgrounders available for more information. Simple refreshments, like coffee and water, are a nice gesture, but not a requirement.

### Tips During a Crisis

- Stay in control and don't panic.
- Be honest and straightforward.
- Never lie or mislead the media.
- Don't speculate.
- Tell reporters what you know and when you don't know something. It's OK if you don't have all the answers, but follow up when you have more information.
- Make sure someone is answering phones and taking down call back information. The caller should not comment on the crisis. Use this time to get information about the situation.  
*See the Call Tracking form in the worksheet section.*
- If you do talk with a reporter, find out what he or she knows about the situation. The media can be a valuable source of information.
- Hold regular press briefings.

**Ensure two-way communication.** Set up a town meeting or provide an information line to help you get feedback. It's important for you to assess how your audiences perceive your messages. This will help you make any adjustments if necessary.

### **Talking Point Tips**

When you're in the midst of a crisis, simple and concise talking points will help get you through the tough times. Think about the questions a reporter might ask and list them. Answer each question with the following in mind.

- Is this answer straightforward and honest?
- Have I answered the question? If not, have I described why I can't answer the question or have I re-directed the question and provided an appropriate answer?
- Have I answered the question in the fewest words possible?
- Is my answer clear and concise? Would a twelve-year-old understand what I've said?
- Do any of my answers require extensive explanation?
- Can I use an analogy or example to explain the situation better?
- Have I maintained a consistent message?
- Are there any contradictions in my statements?
- Have I accepted responsibility appropriately or needlessly?
- Do my answers reflect the appropriate amount of sincerity and concern?

## Community Outreach

### Newsletters

A newsletter is one of the most effective ways to reach a variety of people, especially internal audiences such as employees. As with any public relations tactic, consider your target audience and objectives first. Your objectives may be one or a combination of informing, entertaining, building morale, recruiting, or fundraising.

#### Evaluate Your Current Newsletter(s)

- 1) Does the current newsletter still meet the objectives and goals it was intended to fulfill?  
Review the content and focus of past issues. Make sure the articles and information have met the needs of your readers. If not, make a note of what type of information is not appropriate for future issues and communicate with department heads and other newsletter contributors why the information is not right for the specific publication.
- 2) Does the content target the desired audience? One-size-fits all is not the best approach for hospital newsletters. Information you share with employees may not always be in line with your key messages for patients and community members. In many cases you can tell similar stories with a different tone and style to reach the appropriate audience.
- 3) Is the distribution method reaching the desired audience? If your audience is technology savvy, an e-mail newsletter or a link to an online newsletter may be a better way to go. If you're communicating with affiliated doctors and their staff, a fax newsletter may be preferred. While the most traditional method is still paper, e-mail, fax and web site newsletters are rapidly gaining acceptance – and in many cases are preferred.
- 4) Are people reading the newsletter and do they value the information? Start asking people who get the newsletter what they like and what other information they would like included. Consider including a formal reader survey in the next issue to get feedback. Ask about preferred distribution, story content, and overall effectiveness/usefulness to the reader.  
*See the worksheet section for a sample newsletter survey.*

#### Starting from Scratch

In the case of a new newsletter, identifying your goals and objectives is essential. Without a documented plan, a newsletter can quickly and easily become a dumping ground for tidbits and information a variety of departments want to talk about. Make sure the contributions from others align with the newsletter's goals and objectives.

- **Content** – A common mistake newsletter editors make is attempting to meet everyone's needs with one publication. Don't do it. People don't have time to wade through things that don't interest them. Write only about what interests the target audience for each newsletter.

- **Format** – The most traditional newsletter format is still an 8 ½ x 14 paper version. It may be a single page or many more. Before you decide on a printed version, consider if your audience would benefit from and prefer a different approach. Printing and mailing costs can needlessly consume a good deal of newsletter budgets.
- **Design** – Decide on a “look” and maintain it so the newsletter will be recognizable to its readers. A good design template can dramatically enhance the readability of your newsletter and save you money with distribution. If you’re planning to mail the newsletter, consider a self-mailer to save on postage and extra envelope expenses. A good design will also use photos and graphics to break up text and quote call-outs to highlight strong quotes. And color, if used right, can make a big difference. A word of caution though, if you’re going to pay for 2-color or 4-color production, just be sure to use it effectively. Consider using a designer or someone with experience to maximize the use of color.

**“Quote call-outs help highlight strong quotes and summarize articles.”**  
– AWP/HD Handbook
- **Frequency** – Evaluate how much information you have to share and how often your audience wants new information from you. Once you set a schedule – quarterly, monthly, or something more ambitious – stick to it. You’ll lose credibility with your audience quickly if you repeatedly get behind.
- **Length** – A newsletter doesn’t need to be packed with long articles to be effective. In fact, newsletters with shorter stories are more often and more thoroughly read. In general, people are inundated with reading material. The average person barely has enough time to read the newspaper. Add magazines, mail, junk mail, books, reading material for work (like this Handbook), your newsletter and the newsletters of a half-dozen other organizations, and you quickly see how people’s reading time gets rapidly consumed. Include information with each story about how to get more information about the story.
- **Headlines** – Even if your newsletter articles are short, well written, and informative, readers may still skip over the articles. Grab their attention with strong, catchy headlines. Use complete sentences and action verbs to summarize the article and interest the reader. This is not a time for sensationalism. Leave that to the tabloids.
- **Time & Effort** – Professionals estimate it takes non-professional writers about seven hours to write, proofread and revise content for each page of an 8 ½ x 14 inch newsletter. With this kind of time commitment, it’s a good idea to share newsletter responsibilities. Your best writer should oversee editorial content and maintain a consistent tone and style. Other staffers may help with design, production coordination, distribution, research, or a variety of other duties.

- **Copyright** – Keep the copyright law in mind when putting together your newsletter. If you plan to reprint articles from other publications, you'll need to get permission from the publication and the author. A note on copyright: ideas and facts cannot be copyrighted; only the way those ideas and facts are presented or written can be copyrighted.
- **Production** – You may be able to reproduce your paper newsletter on your office copy machine or you may want to use a print shop. Do your homework before selecting a printer. Get several estimates from both local and regional companies. Many printers can both print and distribute a paper newsletter, so location of the printer is not critical. Don't assume a printer that has given you great rates in the past will do the same for your newsletter. Ask to see samples of previous work that a new printer has produced. The paper stock you select, the ink selections and the length will all affect printing costs. A low estimate might sound like a good deal, but it might not work out so well if the quality is poor.
- **Distribution** – Distribution of the newsletter is determined mostly by the design and type. Consider the following.
  1. **Self-mailer** – This option is a paper form that doesn't require an extra envelope. It can be pre-printed with a mailing panel and postage permit number. If sent via bulk mail, you can save as much as 50 percent on postage. A designer, printer and mailing house are particularly helpful in producing and distributing this type of newsletter.
  2. **Bill insert** – This option allows you to include the newsletter with patient bill mailings. Make sure the produced newsletter will fit into the bill's envelope. This may help save on envelope costs and perhaps postage.
  3. **Online** – Whether you have a printed newsletter or an online-only newsletter, post the newsletter content on the hospital web site to maximize exposure. If you have an online-only newsletter, you must use some other method, such as e-mail or publicity, to notify readers of new issues of the newsletter.
  4. **E-mail** – This option can be very economical for in-house distribution, especially if you already maintain an e-mail list. A few tips to keep in mind:
    - a. Keep it short – no longer than four screens.
    - b. Write succinctly.
    - c. Consider HTML-enhanced content versus well-formatted plain text. HTML newsletters are nice to look at, but may bog down people's computers.
    - d. Format for readability. Set margins at 65 characters.
    - e. Make a test run before you send it out to make sure it's formatted properly.
    - f. Send the newsletter to your recipients using the blind carbon copy (BCC) option to keep the list confidential.
    - g. Keep your e-mailing list current.

## Special Events

Special events can be one of the most useful public relations tactics for reaching many people at once on a personal level. People who commit their time – and in some cases money – to your event are more invested in your success. Events are frequently used for fundraising, education and health awareness. The most successful events incorporate creativity and careful planning with the following:

- 1) value or benefit to the attendee
- 2) interesting topic, cause or theme
- 3) convenient date, time, and location
- 4) dynamic speaker or master of ceremony
- 5) appropriate notification and follow up

### Objective

Before planning any event, consider why you are having it. Events can build awareness for a program or service, help raise money, honor someone for a job well done, boost employee morale, and much more. Understanding the objective will play an important role in your event planning efforts.

### Event Type

Select an event type and theme that compliments your objective. If your goal is to educate community residents about new equipment or technology in the hospital, an open house may be the best opportunity. If you're interested in raising money, perhaps a luncheon or dinner engagement with a must-see speaker is more your speed.

### Theme

If you use a theme with your event, be sure it's done tastefully and fits with the professional or casual nature of the event. Your theme should complement the objective. Keep your audience in mind, too. If it's too corny or not fun enough, you may lose interest from potential attendees.

### Date/Time

Always keep your target audience in mind. If you're attempting to get moms for a new childcare program, late evenings or early mornings may be a challenge. If you're interested in reaching business professionals, early mornings, the lunch hour or after 5 p.m. are typical meeting times.

Do your homework if you have the flexibility to select a date and time. Pick three or four dates that would work. Then ask a variety of people in the community if they know of any other

### **Hospital-Related Events**

- Award and recognition ceremonies/banquets
- Community outings – picnics, child safety fairs
- Educational seminars/ classes for patients, employees, providers
- Fundraisers – runs or walks, golf tournaments, receptions, concerts
- General meetings – volunteers, committees, board members
- Hospital or new equipment tours/open houses
- Cause-related events – blood drives, bone marrow registrations
- Medical or hospital business tradeshows/ conventions

conflicting events. Look in the newspaper or other community calendars. Don't consider another event a conflict, unless your target audience would attend it instead of yours.

If one of your primary objectives is to get media attention, consider their challenges. Weekends are typically not good, especially Sundays, because news staffs are small or not working at all. If you're hoping for TV, avoid the broadcast hours of 5, 7 and 11 p.m. Try to schedule events in the late mornings/early afternoons. Just remember most media won't cover an event, unless there is a newsworthy or human-interest angle involved.

**Venue/Location**

In many cases, events you conduct will be held at the hospital. Be sure the room or area you select will accommodate the estimated attendees, and will not disturb regular hospital operations.

**Speaker**

Any speaker you select should have some connection to the topic or theme of the event. Your speaker may be a leader, expert or authority on the topic; an individual benefiting from services or funds raised; or someone who can provide insight through humor or inspiration. Select a speaker that will achieve the desired objective. If the goal is to inform, a leader or expert may be the ticket. If the goal is to persuade or raise money, a more inspirational speaker may be a better way to go.

If you are doing a forum or a longer event, you may need to choose several speakers and a moderator. Determine if you're looking for contrasting opinions or like minds. And when putting together a panel, make sure you're up front with potential speakers about who else may speak.

If you've already selected a date, be sure your speaker is available and committed to the hours needed. If the date is flexible, ask the speaker for his or her availability.

**Notification**

There are plenty of ways to notify guests about an upcoming event. The most common is by sending invitations. Invitations may be mailed, emailed, faxed or a combination of the three depending on the type of event. You may also notify guests of an event through publicity. Posters

<p><b>Location Considerations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Is it easy to find/get to?</li><li>➤ What is the rental cost?</li><li>➤ Is it handicap accessible?</li><li>➤ Is adequate parking available?</li><li>➤ Is audio/visual equipment available? (microphone, sound system, projector, screen)?</li><li>➤ Are technicians available to assist with set up?</li><li>➤ May the room be re-configured depending on the size of the audience?</li><li>➤ Is space available for childcare?</li><li>➤ Must catering be selected from a pre-approved list?</li><li>➤ Are smaller rooms available for breakout sessions?</li><li>➤ How are the room acoustics?</li><li>➤ What are the time constraints?</li><li>➤ Are you charged extra if the event goes over the estimated time?</li><li>➤ Is there another event before or after yours?</li></ul>
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in the hospital and within the community, notices in the newspaper or community newsletters, and word of mouth are a few ways to encourage attendance/registration. Generally, it is best to use several methods at once since this increases the likelihood that people will get the information.

For large mailings, you may consider using a local printing company or mailing house. They may be able to help reduce postage costs. If you have expertise on staff for handling bulk postage or using permits, it's a good idea to keep mailings in-house. Use volunteers to coordinate stuffing and labeling envelopes.

As for developing a list of invitees, the hospital may be the best source of data. You may have a small group of specific people to invite, in which case you probably already have the list or have easy access to it. If you're doing a more general interest event, you may need to notify the entire community. If you choose to do a mailing, seek a variety of sources for a good list. Some lists, including those from mailing houses, associations or other organizations, may come with a hefty price tag. Whenever purchasing a list, make sure to ask for a sample of the data first. Most reputable organizations will send a sample to demonstrate the quality of the data and fields available.

- Mailing List Sources**
- Existing hospital data from other outreach efforts
  - Fundraising or donor lists
  - Mailing house, especially if special lists or carrier routes are needed
  - Chamber of Commerce for business members/organizations
  - Other community organization lists (event co-sponsors)
  - Association member lists

**Invitations**

Invitations can be produced several ways depending on your budget, audience and the software/skill level of your group.

- Produce in-house a simple, post card or one-page flyer. Post cards can be printed on card stock; two to a page. Use Microsoft Word, Publisher or other software to design.
- Produce in-house a more complex, bi- or tri-folded flyer. Consider heavier and colored paper to increase professionalism. Use Microsoft Publisher, Adobe PageMaker or other software to design.
- Purchase pre-made plain invitations. Many paper stores offer professional pre-printed invitations in postcards, plain paper, and envelopes. Select supplies that will represent your theme. For example, if it's a casual fun community picnic, use invitations with

- Invites: At a Minimum**
- Type of function and name
  - Date, time, day of the week
  - Location and address/phone
  - Speakers/hosts
  - Sponsors/event organizers
  - Cost, donation or free
- If Space Available**
- RSVP request
  - Purpose or desired outcome of the function
  - Directions and map
  - Logo, picture or graphic
  - Speaker bio
  - Agenda
  - Background information about sponsors

watermelons or flowers. If it's a professional awards banquet, plain cream invitations or materials with the certificate or ribbon look and feel may be more appropriate.

- Use a graphic designer and printing company. The designer may create a logo for the event or add an element of style to match the theme. A common look and feel may be used throughout all materials for the event, such as signage, nametags, place markers, awards, invitations, etc.

### **Attendance**

Estimating attendance can be quite difficult. With some events you can expect more than 90 percent of your invitees to show up; while other times you'll be lucky if you get 50 percent. A good way to estimate attendance is to include an RSVP request on invitations. About 5 to 10 percent of people who RSVP won't make it at the last minute. Likewise, about 2 to 3 percent of invitees who didn't RSVP may show up unexpectedly.

### **Catering**

Your catering needs will depend on the time of the event, the formality and the location. Unless you have a favorite caterer, it's always a good idea to ask for recommendations from other people who have held recent events. Punctuality, appearance and professionalism are just as important as good food when looking for a caterer.

Before talking with a caterer, consider answers to the following.

- What should be served: breakfast, lunch, dinner or hors d'oeuvres?
- Which would be better: buffet or sit down? Consider both expense and location/setting.
- How much money is in the budget for food or catering? Can we do it without a caterer?
- Will guests eat before, during or after the program?

### **Day-of Details**

The best thing you can do to be prepared for the big event day is to write up a play-by-play agenda. You may wish to include a script for introductions, thank you comments, and other acknowledgements. Another helpful tool for the day of and throughout your planning is an event checklist. This is a to-do list that will remind you of activities and details to complete along the way. A sample checklist is included in the worksheet section. You may wish to use it or create your own.

*See the Special Events Checklist and the Event Cost Analysis in the worksheet section for more help with event planning.*

## Organizing a Speakers Bureau

A speakers bureau will help track opportunities and speakers that may present on behalf of the hospital. Typically, a speakers bureau is used for matching outside speaking opportunities with inside, hospital-based speakers. However, you may also use a speakers bureau to keep track of good speakers for hospital-hosted events, as well.

First, create a list of potential speakers that may present on behalf of the hospital. Consider hospital leadership, employees, physicians, community leaders, and patients. Keep detailed information on each speaker, such as:

- topics he/she speaks on
- past presentations
- speaking ability
- quality of presentations
- general availability
- cost, if speaker requires payment
- contact information (phone, e-mail, address)

*See the Identifying Speakers form in the worksheet section for assistance.*

Second, create a list of speaking opportunities both inside and outside of the community. Include detailed information about the opportunity and the organization. Chambers of commerce, civic organizations such as Rotary, local clubs and associations, and community or senior centers are good places to look within the community. The Internet is a great place to get ideas for opportunities outside of the area. Even speaking engagements far away from your community can be good opportunities. The notoriety of having a local physician present with a panel of experts in a bigger city or even a national convention can be a big deal for your hospital. These opportunities help build a strong reputation for the local medical community.

<b>Speaking Opportunity List</b>	
➤	Organization
➤	Speaking Opportunity
➤	Date/Time
➤	Deadline for Materials
➤	Fees
➤	Speaker Requirements

Third, match opportunities with potential speakers. Once you find a good match, call the speaker coordinator of the event or organization. Provide details about why your speaker would be good for the opportunity. If there is some interest, offer to send more detailed information about the speaker. Send a bio and speech outline or complete presentation, if available. Follow up two or three days after receipt of the material to encourage a booking.

You may also consider pitching a speaker for general consideration. Send a bio, speech outline and cover letter suggesting the speaker for any upcoming events. Include information on a variety of topics he or she may speak on. Be sure to include information about availability and past presentations.

## Speech Writing

Whether you're preparing a speech for yourself or someone else, the following tips will help you write an effective speech.

- Identify the audience and research their concerns.
- Discover the purpose of the meeting and tie into it.
- Find out if there will be other speeches, and find out what they are about, if possible.
- Determine a single message you want the audience to take away from the speech.
- Select a theme that you can use to communicate your points. This may be a phrase or word you use multiple times, or a concept, like personal responsibility or leadership. The theme should support the speech's main message.
- Use quotes, statistics, anecdotes, humor, little known facts, expert opinions, latest developments and examples to add color to the presentation. A word of caution: if jokes aren't your style, don't force it.
- Use visual aids, such as a PowerPoint presentation, overview or video.
- Be brief. Studies show today's audiences have a 1000-second attention span. That's little more than 16 minutes.
- Write in conversational language. A speech is a public discussion, not a legal document.
- Once written, read the speech aloud for clarity and coherence. A speech is not an essay. It can't be re-read if misunderstood.
- Write up common questions and answers, so the speaker will be prepared.
- Leave the audience with something to think about or act upon.

## Branded Merchandise: Tools or Trash?

While most vendors who provide promotional items would argue otherwise, branded merchandise can fall into either category: tools or trash. What you select and how you use branded merchandise in your community and public relations efforts will make all the difference.

**Consider value.** Don't purchase promotional items simply to have an event give-away. If the intended recipient does not value the item, it will be trashed or placed on the top of someone's bookshelf to collect dust. That's a waste of your marketing dollars, as well as your time. A good way to judge value is to think about whether your intended recipients will use the item regularly. If the answer is yes, you're on the right track. But don't forget to be creative too. Think about how many branded pens and pencils you have in your own desk, and whether or not those items are effectively marketing to you.

**Evaluate appropriateness.** Theme-based promotional items are catchy and appropriate for education and awareness campaigns. Safety magnets displaying emergency numbers (hospital

emergency, poison control, etc.) are great give-aways for new moms or baby-sitter programs. Promotional stickers about a bike safety campaign might be perfect for adhering to the helmets of kids who complete a safety class. Another safety idea is giving hospital-branded mini flashlights to trick-or-treaters.

**Leverage other people's money.** It's often easier to get co-sponsorship dollars for branded merchandise than other public relations efforts because you agree to use the organization's logo or name on the item. Just be cautious of creating "logo soup." If you get too many logos on one item, you will lose your visibility.

**Think about costs.** For some hospitals, this is the number one priority. Branded merchandise is not inexpensive. If it is, the merchandise will probably reflect that. If you can't put the appropriate money behind promotional items or leverage costs with co-sponsors, it's probably a better idea to do without.

**Do it yourself.** There are creative ways to do inexpensive give-aways and promotions. For example, put a hospital sticker on trial-sizes of sunscreen and hand out at an upcoming educational session about preventing skin cancer.

**Determine quantity.** As with most materials you produce in quantity, the larger the order the less expensive the price per item will be. And while ordering 5,000 pens may reduce the price per pen to \$1 a piece instead of \$2.50, consider if you'll ever use that many pens. It's not a deal unless the items will be put to good use in your marketing efforts and valued by recipients.

**Some Promotional Items**

- Buttons
- Calendars
- Cups
- Flashlights
- Golf balls
- Hats & visors
- Key chains
- Magnets
- Massagers
- Mint tins
- Pens
- Shirts & sweatshirts

## **Direct Mail**

Direct mail has its place in a comprehensive public relations program. Direct mail is particularly effective for event notification and new service announcements; however, the opportunities for hospitals to use direct mail are numerous. A few ideas for using direct mail follow.

- Fundraising
- Directing people to a web site
- Notifying someone of an upcoming event or program
- Introducing a new physician or specialist to the community
- Building awareness for a new program, service or procedure offered at the hospital
- Soliciting feedback or educating voters about a proposed bond or levy

- Issuing an annual report or annual summary letter about last year's progress
- Conducting a survey
- Distributing newsletters, clippings or brochures
- Announcing awards, accomplishments and milestones

### **The Piece**

Your direct mail piece may be a simple letter on hospital stationery, a designed postcard, a brochure or even an e-mail. The form your direct mail (e-mail) takes will determine the associated costs. For complicated issues, a letter or brochure may provide the room you'll need to explain the main points. For event notices, a simple postcard may be a better choice for quickly notifying people to "save the date." A postcard is best for a familiar event that requires only basic "when and where" information.

### **Lists**

Lists with contact information likely abound throughout the hospital. The volunteer coordinator may have a list of people who've volunteered in the past. The Foundation may have contact information for past donors. The long-term care facility may have addresses for family members in and outside of the community. Department managers and hospital leaders may have a contact list of community leaders in their computer or a Rolodex of key contacts. And even the admissions department will have contact information. Be sure if you use former patient contact information in your marketing efforts that you've asked for their permission to send them information. Privacy policy issues will direct just how you use contact information. Evaluate all of the contact information you currently have access to within the hospital.

Another option to consider is external contact information. The Chamber of Commerce may allow you to use their membership mailing list. Likewise, the library may have mailing information for use. If groups are unwilling to share their lists, provide mailers and money for them to conduct the mailing themselves. A mailing house is also a good source for mailing addresses. They can help

### **Case Study**

#### **Educational interventions boost participation in cervical screening**

A study of Chinese-American women suggests that direct mailing of culturally and linguistically appropriate educational materials and home visits by outreach workers can increase participation in cervical cancer screening within this population. The findings appear in the May 1, 2002 issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Vicky Taylor, M.D., M.P.H., of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, and her colleagues randomly assigned 402 Chinese-American women in Seattle and Vancouver into three groups. None of the women had received Pap testing in the previous 2 years or intended to have a Pap test in the next 2 years. One group received educational materials through home visits by Chinese outreach workers who also provided assistance with appointment scheduling and other details, one group received the materials through direct mail intervention, and one group received no intervention. Educational materials included videos, motivational pamphlets, and fact sheets in both Chinese and English.

After 6 months, 39% of the women in the outreach group reported having undergone Pap testing, compared with 25% of the women in the direct mail group and 15% of the women in the no-intervention group. The authors conclude that culturally and linguistically suitable outreach and direct mail interventions were effective in changing cervical cancer screening behavior among Chinese women in North America.

you purchase a mailing list to target a specific zip code or even mail carrier route. You may or may not get residents' names for the mailing. Mailing houses can also help coordinate the distribution of a mailing, saving you time printing addresses and stuffing envelopes. When you use a mailing house for distribution, be prepared to send a check for the postage before the mailing goes out. This is required by the postal service and is not unique to a specific mail house.

### **Bulk Mailings**

Bulk mailings can save money if done right, but there are detailed and sometimes complicated instructions for how to process a bulk mailing. If you're going to do this in-house, work with the local post office to make sure you have up-to-date instructions. Mail carriers *will* refuse your bulk mailings if they are not done to the exact regulations.

## **Effective Ways to Use Volunteer Help**

Volunteers have a variety of skills that may be very useful in your public relations efforts. Consider adding skills questions to your volunteer applications that may identify these individuals. A volunteer with the appropriate skills may perform all of the following tasks.

- Update media database regularly. Call media organizations to update contact information. Research reporter's preferences and news beats.
- Create media clippings. With proper instructions, volunteers can do an excellent job photocopying and assembling clippings for media kits and handouts.
- Coordinate mailings for marketing efforts. This may include making copies, assembling media kits, and stuffing envelopes.
- Coordinate event planning. They can research locations, create and mail invitations, select a caterer and coordinate details, copy meeting materials, handle registration, and print nametags among other things.
- Help build a speakers bureau by researching opportunities and logistics.
- Carry messages to legislators in Olympia. Personal stories often carry more weight than requests from administrators.
- Local high school or community college students with talents in web site design or newsletter writing may be able to help out for school credit.

## Web Sites

A web site can be an effective communication tool; however, it is important to understand its uses. Having a web site just to have a web site can be an expensive endeavor. Once you've got a web site, be sure to tell people about it. Print the web site address (URL) on your business cards and stationery. Write a newsletter article about the new site or updates to the site. Issue a press release if there is significant news about the web site to share. Give the web address in newsletter stories if more information about the story can be found on your site.

A national survey conducted by Harris Interactive in 2002 found that 75 percent of all adults online (47 percent of all adults) use the Internet to look for healthcare information. So consider similar percentages of your community residents are seeking health care information online. Can you provide a starting point for their research? Perhaps a medical panel can review web sites and provide links to "approved sources" for health care information online.

As for web site content, consider what information is important for your hospital and community to share, and whether or not a web site can help facilitate that communication. Key to an effective web site is posting information and resources important to the hospital and the community – and keeping the information up-to-date. Here are some general items to consider.

- General Hospital Description
- Vision or Mission Statement
- Overview of Services/Programs
- Technology/Equipment Descriptions
- Foundation Information
- Fundraising Efforts
- History of the Hospital or Programs
- Employment Information: Job Openings, Benefits, How to Apply
- Calendar of Events
- Health Information: Include Disclaimers or Copyright Notices
- Links to Sources for Health Information: Include Disclaimers
- Contact Information: Hospital Address, Phone, Fax, E-mail
- Clinics, Home Health or Other Location Contact Information
- Staff Directory: Consider Profiles and Photos
- Physician Directory: Consider Profiles, Credentials, Specialties, Contact Information and Photos
- Commissioners or Board Members: Consider Profiles and Photos
- Information about the Community or Links to Other Community Sites
- Hospital Awards or Certifications
- Newsletters
- Press Releases, Media Relations Materials & Press Contacts
- Financial Reports
- Maps & Directions
- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers
- Patient Information: Patient Admission Information, Rights & Responsibilities, Billing Information

### **Helpful Reminders**

- Update the site regularly, especially with new calendar items and hospital news.
- Avoid using underline unless it is a live link to another page, web site, or e-mail address.
- Check all of your links to make sure they're live. If a link sends you to "Page Not Found," you most likely have a "dead link."
- It's great to add a "Last Modified" date to your site, but only if you intend to update regularly. A "Last Modified" date more than six months old sends a bad message to web visitors.
- Avoid posting "Coming Soon" or "Under Construction" unless the material will be posted within 2 to 3 months at the most.
- Get help from unlikely places. If you don't have a web expert on staff, look to the local high school, community college, and senior or community centers for help.
- Check – then double check – the spelling of all text and links.
- Have fun with your site!

*See worksheet section for special web site features used by public hospital districts.*

# PR Planning Worksheet

## Goal

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## Objectives

1) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Target Audiences

Target: \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Target: \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Target: \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Target: \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

Target: \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

## Tactics

_____	When? _____	Helps Objective _____
_____	When? _____	Helps Objective _____
_____	When? _____	Helps Objective _____
_____	When? _____	Helps Objective _____
_____	When? _____	Helps Objective _____

## Budget

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## Measures of Success

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## Sample Pitch Scripts

### Story Suggestion Pitch

PR: Hi, this is Susie with XYZ Hospital. Do you have a minute? I want to suggest a story idea.

Reporter: Go ahead, but I'm really busy.

PR: I understand. I thought as the health reporter you would be interested in a story about alternative maternity services. I saw your piece last month on prenatal and neonatal care at ABC Regional Hospital. I thought this would be a good follow up story.

Reporter: Sounds good so far. What have you got?

PR: Well, more and more women are looking for alternatives in their birthing experience – from water births to non-interventional births. At XYZ Hospital, we've listened to our patients and the community. In June, we'll be the first rural hospital in the Tri-County area to offer these alternative maternity services to new moms.

Reporter: OK, can you send me a press release?

PR: Yes, I'll send a release and some background information about the new services. I thought you might also be interested in talking with some of our new moms who will be the first to access these services. Would there be a good time to set up those interviews?

Reporter: I'm busy this week. Let me look at your material and I'll get back to you.

PR: That's fine. I'll mail you the press kit today and e-mail the release this afternoon if that's OK.

Reporter: Actually, I prefer fax to e-mail.

PR: Fax it is then. I'll follow up with you next week to see if I can help set up interviews with our new moms, the physician or the new nurse midwife.

Reporter: Thanks.

### Voicemail Pitch

Hi, this is Susie with XYZ Hospital. I wanted to suggest a follow up story to your article last month on prenatal and neonatal care at ABC Regional. More and more women today are looking for alternatives in their birthing experience. In June, we'll be offering new maternity services including water births and non-interventional births. We'll be the first rural hospital in the Tri-County area to offer these services. As the largest provider of maternity care in the area, we had a responsibility to offer our local moms the alternatives they've requested. I'd like to invite you out to visit our new birthing suite for alternative methods and perhaps talk with our nurse midwife or an expectant mom. You can reach me at 555-1234. I'll check with you in the next few days to see if you are interested in more info. Thanks and take care.

### Pitch for Publication

Hi, this is Bill with XYZ Hospital. I'd like to suggest an article for publication. Dr. John Jones, our local obstetrician, has written an article about the advantages and disadvantages of alternative birthing options, such as water births and non-interventional births. Jones is a local expert and has delivered thousands of Tri-County babies. His article gives expectant moms sound advice about traditional and alternative birthing options. This is good timing because XYZ Hospital has just started offering alternative birthing options. In addition to this article, Dr. Jones is teaching a new class at the hospital for expectant mothers called "Choices: Exploring Birthing Options for Mom and Baby." Are you interested in the article?

## Questions to Ask When a Reporter Calls

Reporter's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  Spelling verified. Call back #: \_\_\_\_\_

News Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your story about? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What/who brought this topic to your attention? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Who do you want to talk with from the hospital? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

May I give him/her some idea of the questions you might be asking? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How long will the interview take? \_\_\_\_\_

When is your deadline? \_\_\_\_\_

Who have you already talked with about this story? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Who else are you going to talk with? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When do you think the story might run? \_\_\_\_\_

May we provide you with some background information about this topic?  Yes

How should I send that over?  E-mail  Fax  Courier  Mail  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Information sent: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Media & Reporter Contact Information

## Organization

Media Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Web site: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Address: \_\_\_\_\_ P.O. Box: \_\_\_\_\_

City, ST ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Main Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Newsroom Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Demographics/Audience: \_\_\_\_\_

Geography/Coverage area: \_\_\_\_\_

Type:  Newspaper  Magazine  TV  Radio  Internet only  Newsletter  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Circulation: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Frequency:  Daily  Weekly  Monthly  Quarterly  Annually, Hourly, etc.

Overview: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Reporters:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  Spelling verified. Pronounced: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Beat/Interests: \_\_\_\_\_

Direct Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Address (if different): \_\_\_\_\_

Preferences: \_\_\_\_\_

Deadlines: \_\_\_\_\_

Past Articles Written:

<u>Headline</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

# Crisis Communications Response

Develop key messages and/or talking points. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

1) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Select spokespeople. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Review talking points with spokespeople. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Determine external interview sources. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Patient/Family Member: \_\_\_\_\_  Willing to interview?

Patient/Family Member: \_\_\_\_\_  Willing to interview?

Community Leader: \_\_\_\_\_  Willing to interview?

Other: \_\_\_\_\_  Willing to interview?

Follow up on unanswered questions. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Assign someone to track incoming calls. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Write press release and supporting materials. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Distribute information to the media. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Set up press briefings. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Unanswered Questions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Respond to unanswered questions. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Return calls from call tracking form. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

## After the Crisis

Evaluate your response success. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Update your crisis communications plan. Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

## Identifying Spokespeople

Spokesperson Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #s (direct, mobile, pager)/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Topics he/she could address: \_\_\_\_\_

Last Media Training: \_\_\_\_\_ Speaking Ability: \_\_\_\_\_

Why good spokesperson? \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expertise            | <input type="checkbox"/> Credibility/trust          | <input type="checkbox"/> Authority/position in the community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unbiased             | <input type="checkbox"/> Represents others          | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge/information on this topic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leader               | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to reward/penalize | <input type="checkbox"/> Influences money or access to money |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to influence | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                      | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                               |

Spokesperson Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #s (direct, mobile, pager)/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Topics he/she could address: \_\_\_\_\_

Last Media Training: \_\_\_\_\_ Speaking Ability: \_\_\_\_\_

Why good spokesperson? \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expertise            | <input type="checkbox"/> Credibility/trust          | <input type="checkbox"/> Authority/position in the community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unbiased             | <input type="checkbox"/> Represents others          | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge/information on this topic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leader               | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to reward/penalize | <input type="checkbox"/> Influences money or access to money |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to influence | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                      | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                               |

## **Crisis Scenarios for Practice Sessions**

### **Scenario A**

A DSHS survey team has transmitted a draft report stating that it found several serious problems with the hospital's infection control program. A patient has recently died unexpectedly from severe sepsis following a routine appendectomy. A hospital employee has told the local newspaper about the survey report and linked the sepsis to failures of the hospital's infection control procedures. The newspaper has called and asked for a copy of the draft survey and details of the patient's treatment and death.

### **Scenario B**

A bus carrying a high school basketball team has skidded off an icy bridge and plummeted 30 feet into a creek. Most of the students have survived with relatively minor injuries. A few have been stabilized by your hospital and transported to trauma centers. Three have died. Calls are coming from school officials, parents, friends and the media to get information about the identities and condition of people involved in the accident.

### **Scenario C**

After several tries, voters have approved a bond issue to fund needed infrastructure repairs and a new emergency room for your hospital. Most people in the community believe the need for the new emergency room was the factor that pushed the bond issue over the top. Now construction has begun and the contractor has found major structural problems with the existing building and the cost to fix them will require the entire amount of the bond proceeds approved by voters. This will mean no funds will remain for a new emergency room. Your administrator will inform the board of this situation in an open meeting later today.

### **Scenario D**

A popular physician has decided to close her practice. She is moving to another state where she can practice at a local hospital that has more modern equipment and a better trained staff. She has told the local newspaper about her reasons for leaving and a reporter is calling for the hospital's reaction.

# Crisis Assessment

What is the situation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What caused it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Where did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How does this impact the hospital? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Has this happened before? What situations could be revisited? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who from the hospital is affected? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who from the community is affected? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are there any injuries or casualties? \_\_\_\_\_

Casualty: Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  Next of Kin notified  
Time of Death: \_\_\_\_\_ Cause of Death: \_\_\_\_\_

Casualty: Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  Next of Kin notified  
Time of Death: \_\_\_\_\_ Cause of Death: \_\_\_\_\_

Injury: Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  Next of Kin notified  
Condition: \_\_\_\_\_ Next Steps: \_\_\_\_\_

Injury: Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  Next of Kin notified  
Condition: \_\_\_\_\_ Next Steps: \_\_\_\_\_



# Newsletter Survey

What best describes your reading behavior of the newsletter?

- a) Read it cover to cover.
- b) Will read a few full articles. Skim remainder of newsletter.
- c) Skim entire newsletter. Occasionally will read a full article.
- d) Read headlines and photo captions.
- e) Don't read it at all.

Rate the newsletter in the following categories. Use Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor.

Focus of newsletter	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Content	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Readability	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Interesting articles	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Writing	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Photos/graphics	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Design	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor

From where do you get news about the hospital? Check all that apply.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> This Newsletter         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Newsletter: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper               | <input type="checkbox"/> Television              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community/Senior Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Library                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Co-workers              | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbors               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional/civic club | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____            |

Which is your primary source of information? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you like best about the newsletter? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What do you like least about the newsletter? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What type of stories or information would you like to see more of?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patient success stories             | <input type="checkbox"/> Upcoming events             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New products, services and programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Employee/physician profiles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budget issues/financial             | <input type="checkbox"/> Awards                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health advice/information           | <input type="checkbox"/> Disease management          |

# Special Events Checklist

Event: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Event Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose/Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteers/Staff: \_\_\_\_\_

Co-Sponsors: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated Attendance: \_\_\_\_\_ Audience: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Notification**

Invitations:  Designed \_\_\_\_\_  Printed/produced \_\_\_\_\_  Distributed \_\_\_\_\_

Flyers:  Designed \_\_\_\_\_  Printed/produced \_\_\_\_\_  Distributed \_\_\_\_\_

Media:  Event advisory drafted \_\_\_\_\_  Distributed to media \_\_\_\_\_  Followed up \_\_\_\_\_

Advertising:  Schedule \_\_\_\_\_  Ad art or text sent \_\_\_\_\_

## **Speakers**

Confirmed speaker \_\_\_\_\_  Bio received: \_\_\_\_\_  Presentation reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

Accommodations:  Hotel: \_\_\_\_\_  Airline: \_\_\_\_\_ Arrival Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Speaker needs:  Podium  Projector  Screen  Computer  TV  VCR  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Handouts: \_\_\_\_\_  Speaker will bring  Hospital will produce

## **Facilities/Food**

Set up tables/chairs  Set up registration

Catering: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Date confirmed: \_\_\_\_\_

Menu: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Materials**

Agenda  Phone list with mobile and after hours numbers for key contacts

Nametags  Collateral/Handouts (Fact sheets, news clippings, brochures)

Sign-in sheet and pens  Payment system (credit card machine, cash box)

Signage to location  Give-aways  Certificates/awards

## **Supplies**

ballpoint pens, pencils, permanent markers  tape  rubber bands

extension cord and surge protector  scissors  stapler and staples

## **Notes**

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# Event Cost Analysis

Event Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Registration (attendance x fee)		
Sponsorship dollars		
<b>Sub-Total</b>		
<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Facility rental		
Tables/chairs rental		
Food/Catering		
Invitations: design		
Invitations: printing		
Invitations: distribution		
Mailing list		
Advertisement design/production		
Advertising placement/airtime		
Public relations: (wire service, postage)		
Give-aways		
Collateral: copies or printing expenses		
Speaker(s)		
Airfare		
Lodging		
<b>Sub-Total</b>		
<b>Total</b>		

## Identifying Speakers

**Speaker Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Potential Topics: \_\_\_\_\_

Past Presentations: \_\_\_\_\_

Speaking Style: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Speaker Preferences:**

Audiences: \_\_\_\_\_

Venues/Locations: \_\_\_\_\_

Requirements: (AV, podium, stipend, etc): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Availability: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Speaker Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Potential Topics: \_\_\_\_\_

Past Presentations: \_\_\_\_\_

Speaking Style: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Speaker Preferences:**

Audiences: \_\_\_\_\_

Venues/Locations: \_\_\_\_\_

Requirements: (AV, podium, stipend, etc): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Availability: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Special Web Site Features

One of the most important things to remember when developing and designing a new web page is to pay attention to your community and determine which web features might be most useful to your community members and partners. Here are some examples of creative web page features from other AWPHD member hospital web sites. This is not intended to be an exclusive list of all the good features of member sites. Check out other member sites for design and content ideas.

- **Advocacy:** Olympic Medical Center ([www.olympicmedical.org](http://www.olympicmedical.org)) and Cascade Valley Hospital & Clinics ([www.cascadevalley.com](http://www.cascadevalley.com)) are two organizations that include advocacy and legislative information on their sites. Including contact information for local and state government officials and information about health issues affecting the hospital and the community adds value and makes it easy to encourage advocacy for levies or budget issues.
- **Babies:** Several hospitals post baby pictures and announcements for a period of time. The key here is to ensure you'll have the resources to update the site regularly. Also, be sure to tell parents about the site, so out-of-town relatives and friends can enjoy the feature. Check out fellow hospital district member web sites for good examples.
- **Electronic Cards:** Valley Medical Center ([www.valleymed.org](http://www.valleymed.org)) has an electronic form for visitors to send Get Well greetings to patients and Affiliated Health Services ([www.affiliatedhealth.org](http://www.affiliatedhealth.org)) has Cheer Cards, which are electronic greeting cards. Both are excellent ways for community residents to use the web site effectively and deliver positive greetings to patients.
- **Publicity:** Lincoln Hospital ([www.lincolnhospital.org](http://www.lincolnhospital.org)) has maximized its press coverage by including the text of articles about the hospital from two local papers on its web site. Another option is to link from the hospital site to the specific article on the newspaper's web site, if the paper posts and archives articles.
- **Recipes:** Kittitas Valley Community Hospital ([www.kvch.com](http://www.kvch.com)) includes healthy food recipes on its web site. This can be a particularly effective tool for community outreach and public relations programs. Most important to the effectiveness is to add new recipes, update information regularly, and make it fun.
- **Search Engines:** While several hospitals have internal search engines (you can search by keywords within the hospital's site), Skyline Hospital ([www.skylinehospital.com](http://www.skylinehospital.com)) has made searching on the World Wide Web an easy task by adding the Google search engine to its home page. Both methods are effective ways to help visitors search for health information quickly.
- **Virtual Tours:** Affiliated Health Services ([www.affiliatedhealth.org](http://www.affiliatedhealth.org)) offers virtual web tours of several hospital features. This is a very advanced web site feature and should only be considered with a significant budget or considerable volunteer or pro bono help from a Web professional or video producer.