

Working with the Media

What Is Media Relations?

Media relations is more than getting an interview in your local newspaper or with your TV, radio, or cable station. Media relations is about external communication to the masses to increase awareness of PTA or PTA's activities. There are two aspects to media relations: knowing what is news worthy about what you're doing; and building and leveraging the relationships within media.

Identifying news worthy items among your activities

Consider asking yourself these questions to identify whether your activities are news worthy:

1. Is there timeliness to what you're doing?
2. Is there something prominent in your activity or event?
3. Are you making a statement on a hot issue or topic?
4. Are you calling for action on a local issue?
5. Is there a large human element to your cause?

If you answered yes to at least three of these questions, you may have a story that is news worthy. For example, a general meeting may be listed in the community calendar section or on a community bulletin board, but it will not be considered news. However, if your PTA is addressing an issue of vital interest to the community, such as education funding or curriculum changes, a media outlet may send a reporter or ask for an interview.

Look for Photo Opportunities

Ask your local newspaper to send a photographer, or send photographs to your local paper immediately after the event. Include photo captions that describe what is happening and identify participants. Be sure your photos show action and activity instead of people simply smiling and shaking hands.

Building relationships with media and leverage those relationships

You can increase your visibility with media by knowing what types of stories will interest different media representatives. Before contacting the media, determine what they consider newsworthy

and how they present a story. Keep in mind that reporters and other representatives are like everybody else; they're people. They are always looking for good stories and contacts at the grassroots level and welcome phone calls. However, it is to your benefit to catch them at the right time. Mid-mornings are the best time to call them or email them to introduce yourself, offer yourself as a contact on education and family articles, and find out if it's ok for you to send them information on what you're doing as a PTA leader.

Similar to building relationships with members of Congress, you need to continue to nourish the relationship even when there isn't news to share.

- Invite reporters to lunch for a background briefing on important PTA issues.
- Welcome reporters to a PTA meeting or program.
- Create an e-mail list of reporters and send monthly or bimonthly items of note.

In the end, they are looking for a resource; someone they can count on, who is reliable, credible, can respond quickly and is trust worthy. Once you have exhibited these traits, the media will trust you and take the news you provide them about your PTA seriously. This how and when you leverage the relationship you have built.

Your Toolbox

Take a few moments to develop a file of basic PTA resources. This will help organize the many activities you will undertake.

Get to Know PTA

Know PTA's goals, programs, public policies, and activities on the local, state, and national levels. Take a few moments to familiarize yourself with National PTA resources, such as Our Children, PTA Takes Action Updates, PTA Parent, and www.pta.org.

Determine Who Your Spokesperson Is

Create a list of PTA leaders who can speak for the organization. Make sure that you have the names and telephone numbers of PTA officers. Keep information on your PTA and its activities close at hand.

Develop a Media List

Include reporters' and editors' names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. This information can be obtained from media directories at your local library, or by calling local TV and radio stations and newspapers to find out the appropriate staff member to receive PTA information. Know media deadlines and the reporters who are interested in parent involvement and education news. This is where your carefully crafted media list comes into play.



Communicate with PTA PR Contacts

Work closely with your state and council PR chairs. Contact them to find out how they can help you, and get on their mailing lists for PR materials, press releases, and other information.

If you bombard the media with letters and press releases about stories that aren't news, editors may begin to ignore all communications from your PTA.

Press Releases

All PTAs should send out press releases. How well a press release is written is almost as important as the information it contains. In general, the most important information comes first, with less important details in later paragraphs.

Tips for an Effective Press Release

- Deliver key information quickly: who, what, where, when, why and how should be found in the release.
- Keep it short. Use action words and simple sentences with common language.
- Type your release double-spaced, leaving at least a one-inch margin on all sides.
- Report the facts, not opinions. Avoid editorializing and using adjectives such as “outstanding” or “interesting” when describing programs, events, etc.

- Don't use titles like Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss. Refer to women by their own names.
- On second mention, refer to both men and women by their last names only.
- Verify your facts. Your credibility depends on the accuracy of the information.
- Check —and then double check—spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Additional Media Relations Tools

Media is only one part of a successful PR campaign. There are a variety of communication tools to bring attention to your PTA and to garner support for your programs and activities.

Special Features/Letters to the Editor

- Write about your PTA's public policy positions, and submit it as a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, inviting readers to join PTA.
- Send a press release to local media, as well as school and community newspapers, announcing the start of your membership drive and community-wide event. In addition to providing details on the event, outline your PTA's programs, activities and goals planned for the year.

Broadcast Media

- Prepare your own TV and radio spots about your PTA, if feasible. Many local high schools and colleges can help you with production.
- Ask prominent local business and civic leaders to record radio public service announcements (PSAs) supporting parent involvement and PTA, or submit announcer-read scripts (see samples on next page).
- Ask TV and radio station program directors to identify any upcoming interviews or “talk show” themes where PTA input or participation would be appropriate.
- Submit announcements about upcoming PTA events and meetings to community bulletin boards found on local TV and radio stations, and on internet bulletins and community websites.
- Cable TV offers opportunities for promoting local groups, programs, and services.

Call your local cable company for more information on public access programming and how you can use it for your PTA. Many stations will give up to 30 minutes each month to community service groups.

Sample PSAs—

Each is a 30-second announcer-read radio script.

Health and Safety Message

Everyone is concerned about the health and safety of children, and your local PTA does something about it. That’s because people like you step up to make it happen. It’s not just about helping your child be healthy and safe at school. It’s about helping all children.

Become a part of something that works. Visit www.pta.org or call your local PTA at _____.

Funding for Education Message

Your child’s school has seen its share of budget cuts, but your PTA does something about it. Not only at your school, but at the national level, too. PTA is working to increase funding for public education for all children. That’s because people like you step up to make it happen.

Not just at your school, but for all children. Become a part of something that works. Visit www.pta.org or call your local PTA at _____.



Your Internal Contacts

Your communication with parents at your school and members of PTA is equally as important as working with members of the media. Good internal communication is often based on word of mouth as well as easy-to-read handouts, such as fliers or newsletters. Successful internal communications efforts will help keep PTA members informed and involved.

Communications Resources

State PR Chair

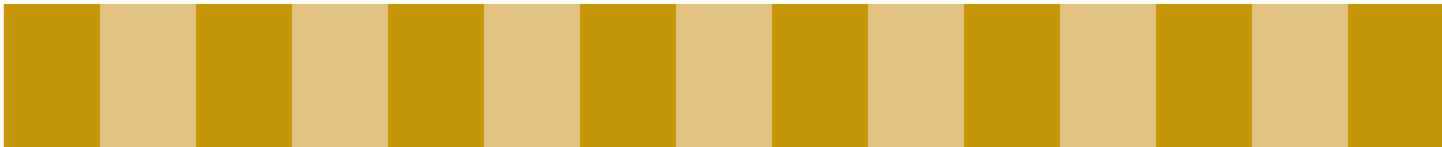
He or she can provide valuable insights on handling issues specific to your area or state. Ask about media training opportunities to be held at the state PTA convention or other state resources.

National PTA Headquarters

Call the media relations department for help in the planning process: (800) 307-4PTA (4782).

National PTA Website

You'll find press releases, articles, information, and news on parenting, education, health, and safety issues at www.pta.org.



PTA National Headquarters
541 N Fairbanks Court, Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60611-3396
Toll-Free: (800) 307-4PTA (4782)
Fax: (312) 670-6783

PTA.org

PTA Office of Public Policy
1400 L Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005-9998
Phone: (202) 289-6790
Fax: (202) 289-6791