

# PEC Media Training Manual

## Understanding Your Audience

The first step in any effort to educate the public is knowing and understanding your audience. If the audience you are communicating to is unclear, it is difficult to know what they will consider newsworthy or how to capture their attention.

In a perfect world, time and resources would not matter, and the scope of your outreach could be unlimited.

Psychology affects everyone, whether they know it or not, but in order to be effective in your outreach, choices have to be made about the types of people your messages will appeal to most.

The following tips will help you evaluate your potential audience:

- **Determine your desired outcome before identifying an audience.** You may choose an audience based on who is likely to be most interested in your issue. Or you may decide that the audience you want is those people who are most likely to change their behavior as a result of knowing more about your issue. Knowing your desired outcome will help you to choose an audience that can help your efforts to be successful.
- **Understand the media's role.** Logically, you might assume that your audience is the group of people with whom you are speaking to directly. The media, however, don't quite fit this category. The actual reporters, producers and editors you are pitching with the message will help to deliver your messages to your audience.
- **Identify different needs of different audiences.** For your local outreach it is important to determine the specific audiences most interested in your topic or issue. It is likely these individuals will have had at least a little bit of personal experience with your issue. For example, if you are an expert on depression and aging, think about reaching adults (baby boomers) with aging parents.

Knowing where your audience gets their news will help you to be more successful. Once you have determined who your audience is, the next step is to consider how your audience gathers their information. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism:

- The vast majority of Americans – 95 percent – consider themselves regular consumers of some kind of news media
- Of those, 36 percent say they get their news from four or more different kinds of outlets including network news, local news, local and national daily newspapers, local news weeklies, cable television, radio, the internet and magazines.

Next, think about how your local community consumes its media. This will help you narrow down the type of media outreach that will be most supportive of your goals. For example:

- Do people in your community drive to work? If so, a local drive-time news or talk radio program might be a good place for your stories.
- Do people in your community travel 45 minutes or more to work? If so, they are not likely to be home in time to watch the early evening local news broadcasts.
- Does your local paper feature special sections? If so, tailor your pitch to meet the deadlines of sections that are most applicable, like health, business or lifestyle.
- Is there a local community-specific blog or social media group that people go online to keep up with happenings or news? This could be an ideal outlet to plug an event or share information.

Finally, think beyond traditional media outlets. Consider the types of information and the materials related to your story. General practitioners' offices, fitness clubs, business conventions and other grassroots outreach techniques are great ways to supplement your media outreach efforts.



## What's the Hook?

Now is an exciting time to bring mental health ideas to the media. They have been more and more inclined to talk about mental health in recent years, bringing discussions about mental illness, stress and overall well-being to the front pages. For example, an increase in school and workplace shootings around the United States in recent years has put a spotlight on mental health prompting the White House to lead a National Dialogue on Mental Health. Additionally, research on behavioral health and the connection between the mind and body has raised public awareness levels and media interest on the psychological and emotional aspects of chronic illnesses.

But it is also a challenging time to place feature stories and non-breaking news items. Due to a decline in print subscriptions and an increase in the public's access to "free news" from online sources and blogs, traditional publications are forced to provide more room for advertisers and less room for news. The news "hole" – the space available to tell a story – is small and shrinking fast, increasing the intensity of the competition for coverage. The following tips will help you ensure that your pitch has the newsworthy qualities to make the first cut on the assignment desk

### YOUR STORY IS NEWSWORTHY IF:

- It's new – something that no one has ever heard before.
- It's timely – yesterday's news is old news.
- It involves a public figure, a celebrity or a well-known organization.
- It's unusual, ironic or in a conflict with the norm.
- It centers on an event or happening.
- It affects a large number of people (e.g. health, environment, policy).

Incorporating common angles that national and local media include in stories related to both mental and physical health can help your story get placed. Typically, these health-related stories feature:

- Details related to new studies, reports, findings, discoveries or trends.
- Patient profiles.
- How-to tips and helpful hints.
- The business of health care.
- A tie-in to the government such as new regulations and legislation. A relevant example is the mental health parity law.

Thinking locally, it is important that the national message be relevant to audiences in your community.

- Localize national data. Reports, studies and findings are often the catapult to newsworthiness. Make sure your pitch hits home by finding relevant statistics from your community or state agencies to help put the finding in context for the local readers, viewers or listeners.
- Package your information neatly. Pitching the full story to a reporter as a series of tips for a healthy mind and body or as a segment special to your local broadcast affiliate can help your story get placed. Think visually too! What photos or videos can help tell the story? News is now a multimedia project—giving suggestions on visuals or audio can help the reporter tell a more complete story.
- Plan ahead for perennial holiday and seasonal stories. Be creative and link the message to the season for long-term pitching success.
- Government touches everyone. Finding a way to connect your story to your local government is might help garner coverage in your local media. Is your state legislature considering new insurance legislation that deals with mental health issues?



- Provide a local perspective on a national issue. You are the expert, so don't let your local media forget that. Any time the national media picks up on a mental health issue, let your local media know that you can comment on it. Write a letter to the editor or an op-ed that illustrates the local message inherent in the breaking news story.

## Tips for Building Your Media List

- Read the key publications in your state regularly, or watch the appropriate news shows. Take note of who is writing or covering relevant topics on health, behavior and psychology. Add these names to your media list. Check a news outlet's website for contact information or call the newsroom and ask for his/her contact details (don't forget e-mail addresses as well as phone numbers). If you have trouble getting appropriate contact details, call the Practice Public Relations office and we can look them up in our database. Being familiar with who is writing what has another benefit: When you pitch reporters with your story you can refer to similar topics they have covered, or provide praise for their interest and coverage in a related area. This shows you are familiar with how they work and what they might be interested in.
- If you have multiple names for a particular publication (e.g. several health reporters, a features editor, business reporter, lifestyle editor) on your list and are unsure who is the most appropriate reporter/producer/assignment editor call the switchboard or general number and ask for the newsroom. Very briefly explain the gist of your story and ask for the most relevant reporter.
- When reporters call you, add them to your media list. If possible, ask their permission to do this. Ask what their beat covers and what stories they are most likely to be interested in.
- Many reporters and writers are using social media profiles to publicize their work, find new sources, and discover new story ideas. Using the search on Twitter or Facebook should provide you with their profile page. Following them on Twitter or Facebook, in particular, let's you quickly respond when they post new articles or and help build a relationship. Not every reporter wants to be approached via social media with story ideas. It's important to read what they post and get a feel for their style.
- Also important are local business and employer publications, websites and blogs. The readership is often smaller but the writers and editors are often in need of more content and have a more focused audience.

## Social Media

Most media outlets are now using social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to connect with their audience and readers. Some use it to push out and broadcast links to their stories and articles. Others encourage their reporters and editors to use these sites to connect with readers and find new sources, stories and feedback. But with social media you are not restricted to following just media. You may find yourself connecting with all kinds of people interested in mental health and psychology. When you use social media, you can potentially distribute information right to the eyes that need to read it.

You can use social media in many different ways. While the tools are a little different, they accomplish the same purpose as sending an email or publishing to your website – getting information out to an audience.

### CONTACTING THE MEDIA

Regardless of your experience, the idea of calling or emailing a reporter may make you a little nervous or maybe even a little uncomfortable. Suggesting a story to the media (often times called "pitching"), can be unnerving. Sometimes, making a media pitch can be the start to building a relationship with a reporter. Here are a few things to keep in mind before you make that first call:

- Reporters need you! Reporters are only as good as their sources. The minute you agree to talk to reporters, you become a new resource for information that they can rely on in the future.
- You are an expert from the field. Reporters are likely to take you seriously as someone who has lived the story.
- You may not be used to pitching, but they are. It is likely that your call is one of 10, 20 or 100 calls that reporter has received in a single day. While your pitch needs to stand out, your uninvited call is not the first that reporter has received.



- Share tips or how-to information about how to manage stress, depression, anxiety etc.
- Post new research findings.
- Share survey information from APA e.g. the Stress in America™ survey.
- Share information and news headlines that reaffirm the value of psychology.
- Anything you publish online or distribute to media can also be posted using social media networks.

You may want to use your own profile to follow any relevant media outlets or reporters and editors. Using Twitter, specifically, you can create lists of relevant media outlets, writers or business contacts. You can contact them directly by posting on a wall or sending a Twitter message. If you don't have a Twitter profile or a Facebook page, you should coordinate with your PEC coordinator or SPTA, which may have a social media presence.

## Tips for Pitching a Story

Once you've had the chance to determine the best outlet and reporter for your story, and you've prepared yourself to make that first call, it's time for the pitch. Here are some tips for success:

- Start with what seems like the easiest reporter on your list. If you have early success, it might energize you for the harder pitches later on.
- When choosing an editor/producer at a radio or TV outlet that you haven't worked with before, start with someone toward the bottom of the list, an associate producer, for example. These lower-level associates can often do the pitching to the higher ups for you but you have to prop them up.
- Do as much of the legwork as possible, making it easier for reporters and editors to decide to take on the story. Help find a "real person" to put a face on the story (but not a client or patient). Provide concise, readable background information. Suggest ideas for visuals, videos or graphics that could be part of the story.
- Don't use jargon. Not everyone has psychology training. Explain information in an easy-to-understand way so that the reporter doesn't need to translate the technical language.
- When pitching via email, use your subject line like a headline—tell the reporter exactly what's in the email and what the opportunity is. Keep it as short as possible, but note that subject lines such as "Story idea" or "News release" are not compelling. Avoid cutesy subject lines that they scream "junk mail."
- Customize each pitch to the outlet or reporter. The same story can be suggested in different ways when you know enough about the outlet and the writer. Think about what you can offer that is unique or special and what type of coverage the outlet has offered previously. Keep your email message brief. Tell them right away, in the first sentence, what the story is about and why it's important to the readers. If you have a press release to share, either paste the URL for the website where it is published, or copy and paste the release text into the body of the email. Do not send unsolicited attachments. They're often not opened or are stripped from the message. Some reporters are inclined to automatically filter messages with attachments to the trash.
- Think about visuals, audio and interactive opportunities beforehand. Suggest potential photographs. Television stories absolutely must have good visuals. Radio stories need sound bites and sometimes background sound. More outlets have been hosting online chats, question and answer sessions and dialogues. Offer to be a part of audience engagement opportunities.
- Strike the right tone. Write talking points before you call. Rehearse them once or twice so you don't "um" and "aw" between points, but be careful not to sound over-rehearsed and slick.
- Be prepared to spin the pitch with a different angle. A reporter/producer may already be working on a piece or might have a different idea about how to use your information. Remaining flexible is key.



## The Interview

Before the interview take time to prepare.

- When you first talk with the reporter, find out the basic idea of the story, the reporter's deadline, if the interview will be recorded for audio (even newspaper are publishing audio on their websites now.), and who else might be interviewed. Get as much information as you can before you agree to the interview, knowing that a reporter may not tell you everything.
- Learn about the media outlet you are working with. Familiarize yourself with their work, read articles the reporter has written before and know the outlet's audience.
- The reporter expects you to be the expert, so do your research and speak to colleagues if necessary. Do a literature search on PsychNet or Google Scholar.
- Write down three points you MUST get across. It's important to keep focus on the overarching story of psychology. Remember, your purpose is to inform the public on the values of psychology. Keep referring to those three points throughout the interview.
- Practice. Answer the questions out loud. Recruit a college, friend or family member to help you prepare by asking you questions and critiquing your answers. Remember to incorporate the talking points into your answers.

A few points to keep in mind during the interview.

- Don't be afraid of silence.
- Do not go off on tangents. Stick to your key talking points.
- Be wary of offering personal opinions. It's hard to take anything you say back and there is no such thing as "off the record."
- Correct mistakes. If the reporter misstates a fact, correct it politely and immediately.
- No matter how well informed your interviewer, remember that you are the expert.
- Identify yourself as a psychologist and use the Dr. title. If the reporter asks for your title during or after the interview, say "psychologist." Even if you are the CEO or director of a center or program, the most important title is that of psychologist. While it's ideal that media reports identify doctorate-level psychologists as Dr., many have style guidelines that will not do this. (Only medical doctors receive the title.) It's OK to request the use of doctor, and it's OK to ask why they may not use it, but avoid being pushy or demanding about the title's use if it's not part of their guidelines.

## After the Interview

After an interview there are important things you must do.

- Follow up with the reporter. This is a great way to build relationships with the media. Send any relevant links or research that may help clarify confusing points. You can also direct the reporter to more resources, such as articles on the Help Center or apa.org. It's OK to send a note of thanks for the interview opportunity, but avoid any gifts that could look like you are trying to influence the writer or the story. Do not expect to get the opportunity to review your story before it is published. Reporters may send you facts from the story to verify or a quote to confirm, but in most cases, they will not agree to let you see the piece before publication or broadcast. If you are concerned about how you will be portrayed, do your best to be prepared, stick to your talking points, and don't give anyone the chance to misquote you or take you out of context.
- Contact your SPTA. It is good to keep your SPTA in the loop regarding your interviews and media coverage. It may compile coverage from members and share articles via social media.
- If the article is published, read it. Note how the reporter used the information you provided to build the story. This can also be a learning opportunity because you can see what information translates well into a story and what information doesn't. If you note an error, contact the writer to request a correction.



- If the story did not get published when you expected, contact the reporter and find out why. Stories often get killed if breaking news takes precedence. Or sometimes the story may be shelved to be published or aired at a later time. Offer to continue being a source for any future stories.
- Add the reporter's contact information and any notes from the interview onto your own media list or database. Use this information the next time you want to suggest a story.
- Enter your media coverage into the PEC database (see instructions below). APA tracks all PEC media coverage for our annual PEC report.

## Using the APA Public Education Campaign Database

It is important to log all media and event activities in APA's PEC database. We use the information you enter into the database form to create the PEC Report, so it is key that you enter your information through this tracking mechanism in order for us to be sure we capture all the great work you are doing in your state, province or territory. You can see a copy of the 2012 PEC Report [here](#).

After you complete a media interview and the story has been published/aired, it is time to log your media activity.

- Go to <http://apacustomout.apa.org/practicepec/login.aspx>.  
Note: This will not open in Google Chrome, but will open in Internet Explorer.
- Log in using your username and password. Your username is your first initial and your last name. Your password is your zip code. For example, if John Smith lived in Washington, DC his login would be jsmith 20002. If for whatever reason you have a problem logging in, contact [Practice Public Relations](#).
- Once you are logged in, click **Media** at the bottom of the page.
- Fill in all sections with as much detail as possible. In the additional information section at the bottom, please include a link to the media coverage, if possible.
- If you have items that do not "fit" in the form or if you have photos, please [email them](#).

