**Quick Tips on Pitching News Media**

Getting journalists interested in the stories you have to tell may be easier than you may think. While there are things outside of your control – a tiny newspaper staff, conflicting news items or general journalist apathy – you do control the most critical tool in garnering press attention: the telephone.

This pitching guide is intended to convey some basic steps to make sure that your program, and its role in the larger movement to strengthen the post-secondary education of foster youth, makes headlines.

**Be aware of news hooks**. You have been given a sheet describing some newsworthy events over the course of the year. Build your outreach strategies around the news hooks you can foresee, be opportunistic about the ones that may pop-up organically and create newsworthy moments of your own.

Opportunistic news hooks arise when there is heightened media interest in an issue either directly or tangentially aligned with your media outreach goals. For example, new policy about higher education on the federal or state level offers an easy opportunity to offer your program to localize the story.

You can also create news hooks by inviting press to activities your program engages in regularly, or by creating stand-alone press events.

**Use other communication professionals for free**. You will likely have the best stories on campus. Get in tight with your campus’ public relations department. Also, look for opportunities to team up with policy makers, non-profits and service providers who are likely to communicate operations on their own.

**Show up on reporters’ radars**. You want to become a trusted source for reporters. One way to do this is to submit online comments regularly to web stories written about issue areas close to your own. Reporters commonly read through comments. If they see you saying interesting things enough, they may just end up seeking you out.

Another way to get a reporter’s attention is to follow them on Twitter and engage them on the stories they write. This way they may end up following you and use you as a news source.

**Pitching.** Once you have found a news hook and evaluated the value of bringing in other entities to do your media outreach, you are just about ready to start pitching.

The next step will be deciding on the story you want to tell and taking the following steps:

1. Write a short (200 -250 word) email that can be sent to journalists.
2. If it is a more involved initiative you can develop a press release. This becomes more important when you bring in partners.
3. Create a media list. The top priority should be local reporters who cover child welfare, education and other related issues. You should include the college newspaper, newsletters that reach specific communities you are interested in and blogs. It is often better to start with the smaller less important outlets first, so that you can get your strongest, most honed pitch to the journalists that matter most.
4. Pick up the phone and start calling reporters. A good trick is to read the last story that reporter wrote and mention it when talking. Don’t worry if the first call is awkward – they almost always are. As you continue to make calls your pitch will become stronger. Try and make these calls in long blocks of time. Reporters will often ask you to send them an email with more information; even if they don’t you will. You may have the impulse to do this immediately. Don’t. It is inefficient. Instead take notes on your media list and include tidbits from the conversation in your follow up emails.
5. Follow up emails. You will have already written your short pitch email. Start sending these out to all the reporters you have spoken to or left a message for.
6. If your outreach is based around an event, remember to call to remind reporters either the day before or the day of. You have to be persistent.