Developed by NC SNAC
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Soft Drinks and School-Age Children

Working with the Media

The media can expand the reach of your efforts, reinforce your messages throughout the community and increase public support for a healthful school nutrition environment. You don't have to be a media expert to work effectively with the media, but you do need to know the basics. Check with your supervisor to make sure you have the authority to speak with the media.

Print Media

Newspapers: Newspapers are usually published daily or weekly. Read your local newspaper and look for lifestyle, fitness, food, medical, health, science and consumer articles. Stories about beverage choices in schools would fit into one of these topic areas. Take note of the reporter's name that appears as a byline on the article. This gives you a specific name or person to contact. You could also call the paper's city desk or news desk and ask for the names of the editors responsible for the topics noted above. You can also find editors and reporters listed in the masthead on the editorial page on the paper's website.

Newsletters: Many organizations and professional associations publish newsletters with information of interest to their members. If you think your story would appeal to an organization's members, contact the organization to see if they are interested in running your story.

Print Media Pieces

Feature Articles: A feature article gives special attention to an issue you want to spotlight. It can have a news or human interest angle. It generally focuses on real people, events or activities related to the issue. A publication's staff or a paid freelance writer usually writes feature articles. Some smaller publications however, may take a feature story you provide and run it with minor or major rewriting. They might even just take the idea and write their own story.

To pique an editor's interest, the piece should be both local and timely. Use pictures, anecdotes, examples and quotes. Quotes from national or local authorities can be very effective in making your case. Use some of the statistics found in this kit to tell your story about soft drinks.

Op-Ed Articles: Op-ed pieces run opposite the newspaper's editorial page (hence the name "op-ed") and are clearly labeled as opinion pieces. You might urge a community or school leader to submit one - or you can draft an article for a leader to submit.

Letters to the Editor: Letters to the editor are usually written in response to a recent news story, a community event or a current issue. Members of the public can agree or disagree with what they've read or express opinions about current events. Sometimes the letters inform other readers about community services, issues or concerns - or appeal to them to join a campaign or support a cause.

Your letter to the editor must be timely. Send it immediately after an article appears to which you want to respond or when a related issue is in the news. For example, you can write a short letter in response to any news or feature article about school children, education, health, diet or physical activity. Present the essential facts immediately in the first paragraph of the letter and use a simple, straightforward style. Because most papers now verify letters, be sure to provide contact information. Send your letter and call the editorial page editor to follow up a few days later. Expect three weeks between the date you send your letter and the date the paper decides

whether or not to print it. You also may be able to submit your letter by Email, so check the publication's website or call the office.

Broadcast Media

Television: For television, think action and color! Programming opportunities include community calendar announcements, public service announcements, daily news reports (consumer, medical, health), weekly public affairs segments and talk shows. Many opportunities exist through cable access stations. And, many of these offer programming in other languages. To get more information you can call, write or Email a station's public service director and ask for a local programming schedule and personnel guide. If your district has television programming, use it. It is a great way to get students involved. Watch the station you are targeting to get a general feel for the approach and tone of the programs. When you are ready, let the local station know that you - or a school spokesperson - are available to be a guest on talk shows. Also, get students involved through their school television system where available. Include messages to students as part of morning announcements.

Radio: Radio usually targets specific local audiences. It can be much more accessible and less intimidating than newspapers or television. There are message opportunities in public service announcements, community calendars, public affairs shows, daily news reports, talk and call-in shows and specialty segments on subjects such as health and fitness.

Getting Media Attention

Develop media contacts to get your message out and coordinate media coverage with your school district's media relations staff as much as possible. They may already have relationships with reporters. Once you have established a relationship, it is easy to give your contact a quick call and alert him or her to an upcoming story or event. Be sure to coordinate media contacts so that reporters are not getting repeat calls from different members of your team. Establishing media relationships will take time. Don't be discouraged if you don't succeed in getting your story covered the first time you try. And don't be shy about trying again.

The Pitch: When you want to sell something to the media, you pitch it. Some reporters get 50 pitch letters and news releases a day. You need to make yours stand out. Here are some tips:

- Start off by saying you are offering a story idea. Make the purpose clear at the beginning.
- Summarize the idea in one paragraph before going into details. If you can do it in one sentence, that's even better.
- Explain why this story is newsworthy, timely or unusual.
- Explain why the editor's particular audience would be interested in the story.
- Explain what impact you expect the story to have.

Press Release: A press release is an announcement of an event, performance or other news or publicity item. It answers five questions: Who, What, When, Where and Why. You have only a few seconds to arouse a reporter's interest. Make the first sentence an attention grabber. When you are preparing a press release, remember:

- The press release isn't the whole story. It just gets the media interested in the story.
- Make it no more than two pages -- single-sided, double-spaced.
- Always put a date on the release.
- Give a contact name and phone number where they can get more information.
- Use an interesting headline to get their attention. Reporters get thousands of pieces of paper labeled "Press Release" and the trick is to get yours to stand out in the crowd.
- Fax, mail or Email the press release, and follow up with a phone call within a few days.

Adapted from the USDA **Changing the Scene** kit
www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/changing.html