

2024



MEDIA RELATIONS TOOLKIT

FOR HEALTH
DEPARTMENTS



ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Welcome to our comprehensive media relations toolkit, tailored to help health departments craft effective communication strategies and navigate the landscape of media engagement. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) recommends integrating media relations strategies into operational frameworks because this kind of engagement is crucial for fostering meaningful connections with communities. Our toolkit equips agencies with the necessary resources to expand their outreach and enhance their value perception among the public, media, policymakers, funders, and stakeholders.

This guide serves as a foundational resource for establishing robust media relations practices and guiding health departments through the process of cultivating a resilient public image. It breaks down the journey into manageable pieces, offering a step by step roadmap for successful media engagement and strategic planning. Continuously updated to reflect the latest insights and trends in media relations, our toolkit ensures health departments stay ahead in effectively communicating their messages to their audiences.

INTRODUCTION TO MEDIA RELATIONS



What Is Media Relations?

Media relations refers to the strategic management of communication between an organization and the people responsible for producing the news and features in the media—like editors, journalists, bloggers, influencers, and more.

- The objective of this exchange is to promote a positive image of an organization and convey key messages without necessarily paying for it through advertising.
- Successful media relations builds credibility, shapes public perception, and fosters mutually beneficial interactions between an organization and the media.

How Does It Differ From Branding?

While branding focuses on an organization's visual identity, media relations is all about managing impressions and perceptions. It takes things further by actively involving the media to reach audiences across different channels.

While the primary goal of media relations is to cultivate and bolster your organization's positive image, a well-crafted media relations strategy can achieve many other objectives. Here are some key functions of media relations:

- Understand and respond to audience perceptions of your brand.
- Proactively implement strategies to enhance your brand image.
- Cultivate and maintain positive relationships with stakeholders, such as journalists and the government.
- Manage your online presence and the overall perception of your organization.
- Promote your organization across diverse media channels.
- Mitigate the impact of a crisis on your organization's reputation.

1. PR.co. "Media Relations: everything you need to know." Available at <https://www.pr.co/media-relations#:~:text=Media%20relations%20refers%20to%20the>. Accessed February 26, 2024.

TYPES OF MEDIA: PESO MODEL

Paid Media:

Channels that require money to distribute your content or ads.

Example: Social ads and paid media partnerships.

Pros: Guarantees an expanded reach of campaigns and creates opportunity to scale successful strategies, and social media analytics have allowed for greater targeting and engagement strategies.

Cons: Paid media can be seen as less authentic or trustworthy, and there's a higher cost associated with this type of media.

Earned Media:

Channels that require relationships with (media) contacts who have established an audience.

Example: Media relations or word of mouth.

Pros: Likely already a large portion of your media efforts focus, cost-effective, and credible.

Cons: No guarantee of media placement and doesn't work as a dynamic media strategy on its own.

Shared Media:

Amplifies content through an audience you've built.

Example: Organic social media, review platforms, and forums.

Pros: Increases reach compared to traditional earned media, increases engagement—meeting audiences "where they are," is cost effective, and there are greater data analytics on media efforts.

Cons: Utilizing shared media channels can be difficult in a saturated market, information can be more easily modified when it is open to the public (leading to misinformation), and posts are subject to algorithm changes.

Owned Media:

Inbound channels which your company completely owns, and where an audience finds your content.

Example: Your newsroom, content marketing, thought leadership platforms, podcasts, and brand journalism.

Pros: Greater control over content, data ownership, and brand authority.

Cons: Limited reach, limited discoverability, and resource intensive.

1. PR.co. "Media Relations: everything you need to know." Available at <https://www.pr.co/media-relations#:~:text=Media%20relations%20refers%20to%20the>. Accessed February 26, 2024.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA RELATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

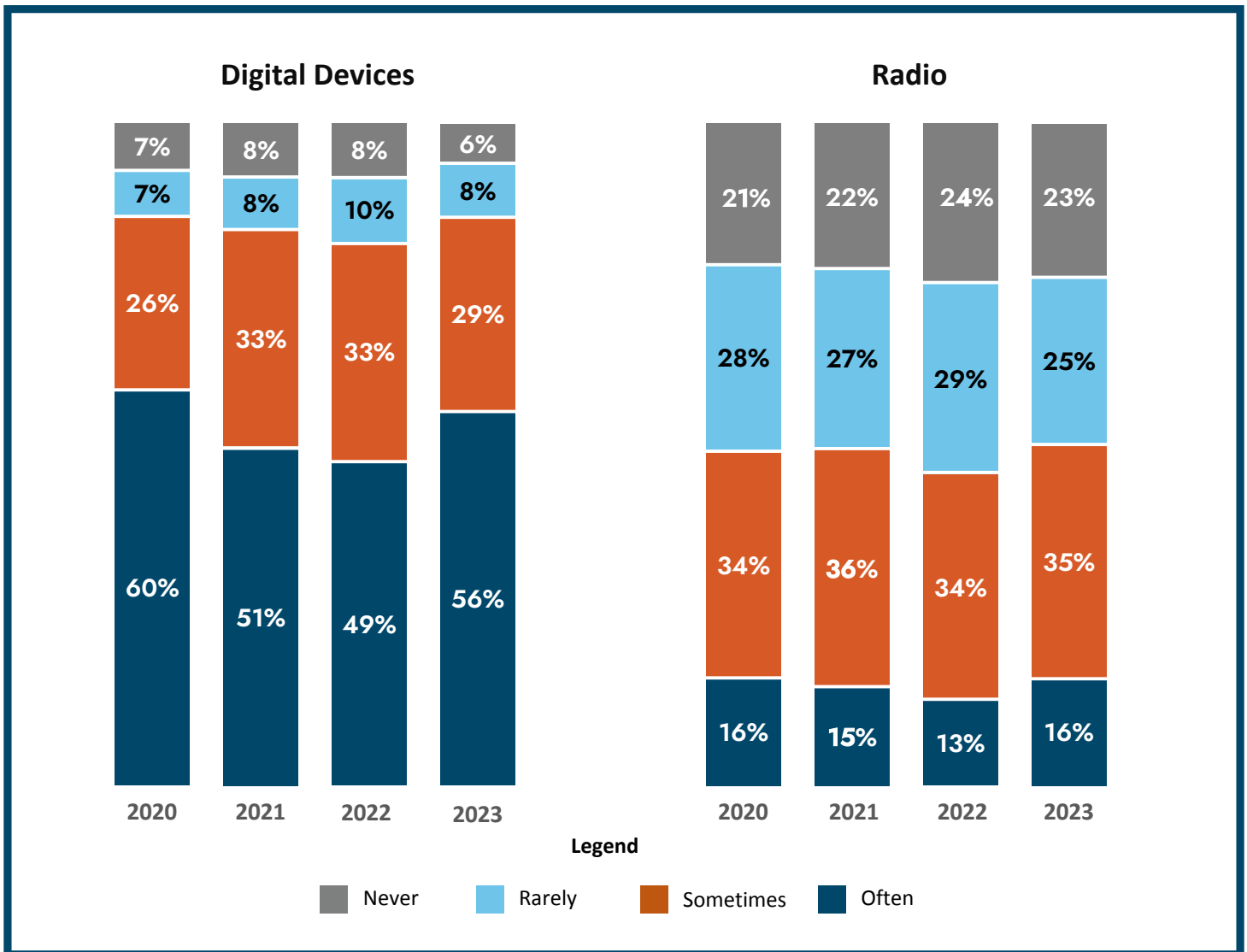
Media relations is a vital tool for health departments, enabling you to raise awareness, educate the public, and promote healthy behaviors. Through strategic engagement with media channels, health departments can wield significant influence on public health outcomes. Here are some key ways media relations is utilized in public health:



AMERICAN NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS

In media relations, it's not just about delivering news. You'll also focus on public awareness campaigns, behavior change communications, and other evergreen content. However, a significant aspect of your strategy involves engaging in state and national news conversations and responding to crises quickly. Understanding today's consumer media habits is crucial. As shown in the graphs below, digital consumption is on the rise, while legacy news platforms are declining. Therefore, when crafting your media relations strategy, prioritize digital channels and don't waste effort on platforms or news strategies that won't reach your audience.

Chart 2: News Consumption Across Platforms
 % of U.S. adults who get news from Digital Devices and Radio



1. Pew Research Center. "News Platform Fact Sheet." Available at www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/news-platform-fact-sheet. Accessed February 26, 2024.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: HOW TO DEVELOP A MEDIA RELATIONS STRATEGY



Know Your Audience

Understand who you're trying to reach, their needs, and their media consumption habits.

- *Understanding your audience helps you tailor messages, find the best media outlets, and customize pitches for specific contacts.*



Define Goals

Clearly outline what you aim to achieve with your media relations efforts.

- *Do you want to increase awareness, change perceptions, drive action, or influence policy?*



Craft Key Messages

Develop concise, consistent, and credible messages to communicate to your audience.



Choose Tactics

Select the most suitable methods and resources to execute your strategy effectively.

- *Examples include press releases, media kits, media advisories, pitch emails, press conferences, media interviews, op-eds, podcasts, webinars, social media, and influencer marketing.*



Build Relationships

Establish trust and mutual benefit with media professionals to enhance your credibility.

- *Establishing trust and rapport with media professionals is crucial for effective story-sharing. This involves researching their backgrounds and interests, tailoring pitches, providing valuable information, being responsive, and showing appreciation for coverage.*



Evaluate and Adjust

Measure results, analyze impact, and make improvements based on feedback and data.

- *Evaluate and refine your media relations strategy using tools like media monitoring, analysis, web and social media analytics, and surveys and interviews.*

1. LinkedIn. "What are the key elements of a successful media relations strategy that supports your media pitching efforts?" Available at www.linkedin.com/advice/1/what-key-elements-successful-media-relations-strategy. Accessed February 26, 2024.

FOSTERING STRONG MEDIA RELATIONS: TIMELESS STRATEGIES FOR ADAPTABLE COMMUNICATIONS

In media relations, adaptability is key. While you may have a plan in place, the dynamic nature of the news cycle and organizational needs requires flexibility. Below are some timeless resources and approaches your health department should cultivate, continually refine, and customize to address current demands.

Media Contact List:

A detailed list of media contacts, including journalists, reporters, editors, and producers from local newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, online news outlets, and relevant industry publications.

Key Messages and Talking Points:

Important elements that you want to communicate on important health issues, initiatives, or programs, providing health department spokespeople with consistent and clear messaging to convey during media interviews or press conferences.

Sample Press Materials:

Examples of press materials, such as press kits, fact sheets, or backgrounders, that provide journalists with additional information and resources to support their coverage of health department initiatives or events.

Press Release Templates:

Standardized templates for drafting press releases on various topics, such as health initiatives, program updates, public health alerts, or event announcements, that ensure consistency in communication.

Media Training Resources:

Tools to prepare your agency for interacting with the media, including tips for spokespersons, mock interview scenarios, and techniques for effectively communicating key messages and handling difficult questions from journalists.

Media Pitch Guidelines:

Guidelines and best practices for crafting compelling media pitches to present story ideas or expert commentary on current health topics to journalists and media outlets.

Crisis Communication Plan:

A comprehensive strategy outlining protocols and procedures for communicating with the media during public health emergencies, crises, or sensitive situations, ensuring timely and accurate dissemination of information.

CHECKLIST: PITCHING TO REPORTERS



-  **Know Your Audience:**
Research the reporter's beat and previous work to tailor your pitch to their interests and coverage areas.
-  **Craft a Compelling Angle:**
Develop a unique and newsworthy angle that grabs the reporter's attention and offers a fresh perspective on your story.
-  **Keep It Concise:**
Keep your pitch brief and to the point, highlighting the most important details and why they matter to their audience.
-  **Personalize Your Pitch:**
Address the reporter by name and demonstrate that you've taken the time to understand their work and how your story aligns with their interests.
-  **Offer Exclusives or Embargoes:**
Provide incentives, such as exclusive access to information or embargoed content, to entice the reporter to cover your story.
-  **Provide Supporting Resources:**
Include relevant data, quotes, visuals, or multimedia assets to enhance your pitch and make it easier for the reporter to cover your story.
-  **Follow Up Strategically:**
Follow up with the reporter after sending your initial pitch but avoid being overly persistent or pushy.
-  **Be Responsive and Available:**
Be responsive to inquiries from reporters, and make yourself available for interviews or additional information, as needed.
-  **Build Relationships:**
Focus on building long-term relationships with reporters based on mutual respect and trust, rather than just seeking coverage for one story.
-  **Thank Each Reporter and Follow Up:**
Express gratitude for the reporter's time and consideration, and follow up with a thank you email after they've covered your story.

1. PR.co. "Media Relations: everything you need to know." www.pr.co/media-relations#:~:text=Media%20relations%20refers%20to%20the. Accessed February 26, 2024.

CHECKLIST: CRAFTING A STRONG PRESS RELEASE



Compelling Headline:

Capture attention with a concise, data-driven headline that summarizes your main point in 10-20 words, catering to reader interests.



Structured Format:

Organize your release with a clear date, location, and the famous 5 W's: who, what, where, when, and why. Use bullet points for key findings and provide detailed context in subsequent paragraphs.



Factual Writing Style:

Stick to simple, accurate information, avoiding excessive adjectives. Show, don't tell, to maintain credibility.



Boilerplate:

Include a brief summary of your organization for context.



Media Kit:

Provide downloadable assets like photos, videos, and data visualizations to supplement the story.



Quotes:

Add a human touch with quotes from key stakeholders.



Other Coverage:

Link to news articles to enhance credibility.



Contact Info:

Ensure clear links to contact details and spokespeople for follow up.



SEO and Analytics:

Encourage backlinks for SEO and include UTM codes for tracking and measuring performance.



1. PR_co. "Media Relations: everything you need to know." www.pr.co/media-relations#:~:text=Media%20relations%20refers%20to%20the. Accessed February 26, 2024.

CHECKLIST: PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

These guidelines apply whether you're preparing for an interview or getting a spokesperson ready. They're essential for any live, Zoom, written, or radio interview.



Review Background Information

Ahead of any planned interview, review the outlet and your interviewer, including their style, their depth of understanding of your topic, and previous segments or stories for reference.

Be aware of the news of the day and how it may affect or relate to your topic. Note any specific community concerns that may come up.



Rehearse

When possible, secure the actual questions that you will be asked during the interview or draft those most likely to be asked. Map out your key messages and try to incorporate them into your answers. Then, practice with your team, a friend, or a family member. You can even record yourself on video or audio as a practice run.



Stay Positive

Regardless of the questions you are asked, state your answers in a positive way. If a question starts with a negative assertion, find a way to rephrase your answer so that it doesn't agree with the question but is also not defensive.



Explain How Your Expertise and Topic Relate to the Audience

Remember to connect your topic and point of view to the interests and concerns of the outlet's target audience, not just the interviewer.

This is critical in public health where possible, relate your remarks to your community needs and concerns, including social determinants of health such as language, education levels, safety, or environmental concerns, etc.



Hit Your Key Messages

Gracefully transition from questions to the key messages that you're there to convey. Try not to sound redundant find a few different ways to state your thoughts.



WHAT NOT TO DO IN AN INTERVIEW!



Don't Speculate

- Refrain from making concrete statements when it comes to things you are not 100% sure of or that may change in the future.
- If you don't know something, just say so.
- Leaning on crisis communications models, it's imperative to be transparent about a given situation and focus on:
 - What is known.
 - What is unknown.
 - How you're trying to get answers.
 - Practical steps people can take to protect themselves and their families.



Don't Say No Comment

- Unlike in the movies, never say, "No comment," unless you want to be perceived negatively or seem guilty of something. If you can't answer a certain question, be polite and explain why.



Don't Lose Your Cool

- During interviews, you could get a question that feels uncomfortable, provocative, or perhaps even hostile. Keep your composure and remain positive. Arguing or calling a reporter out on being biased will never result in positive coverage.



Don't Answer Hypothetical Questions

- This is especially true for phone interviews that are meant to be published in print or online.
- Remember that the questions don't always make it onto the page when the interview is published just the answers.
- In this case, hypothetical answers can be misinterpreted or taken out of context, exposing you or your organization to unnecessary criticism.



Tips and Tricks to Guide an Interview:



Hooking

Purposely use phrases that **hook a reporter's or host's curiosity** and tee up the next question you want to answer.

- E.g., “The group that’s contracting HIV at the highest rates right now may not be who you think.”
(pause)
- “It’s unfortunate, but many people don’t realize there’s a simpler way to handle this problem.” *(pause)*



Bridging

Bridging allows you to transition from off-topic questions back to your key messages.

You **verbally build a bridge from one side of the question** to the answer you’d like to say on the other end.

Sample Bridge

Host: Speaking of public health, the state legislature in a neighboring state introduced a bill to end vaccine requirements for school entry. What do you think about that?

Spokesperson: There has been a lot of discussion about that, **but I’m here to talk about** *[key message]*.

Sample Hook

Spokesperson: Many communities are concerned about changing weather patterns that can cause unpredictable emergencies, like poor air quality due to wildfire smoke. **But there are things individuals and communities can do to be prepared...**

Reporter: Like what?

Spokesperson: In the case of air quality and wildfire smoke, close your windows, circulate internal air conditioning, and use an air filter system, if available. Also, pay attention to the air quality index at AIRNow.gov—if it’s above 100 in your area, keep children, the elderly, and those with health conditions, like asthma, inside.

Additional Bridge Phrases

“I’m excited to talk about...”

“I’m here today because...”

“The thing to focus on is...”

“Perhaps, but...”

“Another thing your readers/viewers/listeners may be interested in knowing more about is...”

“Related to that...”

1. PR.co. “Media Relations: everything you need to know.” Available at www.pr.co/media-relations#:~:text=Media%20relations%20refers%20to%20the. Accessed February 26, 2024.

Tips and Tricks to Guide an Interview (Continued):



Flagging

Flagging is a verbal cue that the information you're about to share is important.

It helps grab the attention of the reporter/host and the audience.

It's a great way to end an interview if the host/reporter asks if you have anything else to add.

Sample Flag

"What you really need to remember is..."

"What's important is..."

"Don't forget..."

"Look..." (*in an upbeat, nice tone!*)

"The bottom line is..."

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS



Video (Zoom)

- Be sure that you have the latest version of Zoom (or other video app) downloaded and updated.
- Check your sound/audio to make sure they work.
- Arrange appropriate and flattering lighting.
- Ensure that camera is positioned center to your face.
- Wear a simple wardrobe (no bright colors or patterns—blue or black reads well on camera; collared shirts and blazers are good).



Audio

- Download Zoom, Skype, etc., for podcasts or terrestrial radio recordings.
- Have water or tea ready.
- It's ok to have notes in front of you.
- It's ideal to be in a small space (even a closet) where you will not be disturbed.
- Ensure that your phone and other alerts are **off**.



Phone

- Use a landline, if available.
- Ensure your smartphone and/or earbuds are fully charged.
- Find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed.
- Ensure that your phone and other alerts are **off**.

1. PR.co. "Media Relations: everything you need to know." Available at www.pr.co/media-relations#:~:text=Media%20relations%20refers%20to%20the. Accessed February 26, 2024.

KEY MEDIA RELATIONS DEFINITIONS



Press Release:

A written statement distributed to media outlets to announce news or events related to an organization, typically formatted as a news story and intended for publication.



Media Briefing:

A scheduled meeting or session in which representatives of an organization provide information or updates to members of the media, often followed by a Q&A session.



Media Monitoring:

The process of systematically tracking and analyzing media coverage to monitor mentions of a company, brand, or topic, as well as to assess public sentiment and reputation.



Media Kit:

A collection of promotional materials and information about an organization or event, typically provided to journalists and media outlets to facilitate coverage.



Op-ed:

An opinion editorial written by an individual not affiliated with the publication, expressing their personal viewpoint on a topic of interest, often submitted to newspapers or online media outlets for publication.



Media Advisory:

A brief notice sent to journalists and media outlets to announce upcoming events, press conferences, or opportunities for coverage.

1. The Motion Agency. "Public Relations Terminology Helpful PR Definitions." Available at <https://agencyinmotion.com/public-relations-terminology-helpful-pr-definitions/>. Accessed February 26, 2024.

TOOLS & RESOURCES

To Manage Media Efforts and Asset Management:

These tools aid in journalist identification, media coverage tracking, and press release distribution.



CISION

www.cision.com

A comprehensive media database and PR software that helps identify journalists, track media coverage, distribute press releases, and analyze PR campaigns.



MUCK RACK

www.muckrack.com

A media database and PR software that helps identify journalists, monitor news coverage, and manage media relations efforts through a centralized platform.



GORKANA

(CISION PR EDITION)

www.gorkana.com

A suite of media tools that include media database, monitoring, and distribution services to help PR professionals identify journalists, track media coverage, and distribute press releases effectively.

TOOLS & RESOURCES

To Monitor and Analyze the Media:

These tools track your sentiment and campaign effectiveness for health department media mentions.



MELTWATER

www.meltwater.com

Provides media monitoring, social media listening, and influencer engagement tools to track brand mentions, monitor news coverage, and analyze media sentiment.



PR NEWSWIRE

www.prnewswire.com

Offers press release distribution services, media monitoring, and analytics tools to help organizations reach journalists and media outlets worldwide.



MENTION

www.mention.com/

Tracks brand mentions across online channels, including news sites, social media platforms, blogs, and forums, helping organizations stay informed about media coverage and brand sentiment.



BUZZSTREAM

www.buzzstream.com

Helps PR professionals build and manage relationships with journalists and influencers, track outreach efforts, and measure the effectiveness of media relations campaigns.



CRITICAL MENTION

www.criticalmention.com

Offers real-time media monitoring and TV clip tracking services, allowing organizations to track and analyze broadcast coverage across television networks and online video platforms.



CISION COMMUNICATIONS CLOUD

www.cision.com/lp/next-gen-comms-cloud

Provides media monitoring, measurement, and analytics tools to help PR professionals track and analyze media coverage, measure PR campaign effectiveness, and demonstrate ROI.

Additional Resources



HARO (Help A Reporter Out)

www.helpareporter.com

Connects journalists with expert sources by sending daily email queries from reporters seeking input for stories. It's a valuable tool for building relationships with journalists and securing media coverage.