

A Cornell Cooperative Extension Publication

WORKING WITH THE MASS MEDIA

Matthew Shulman



Cornell Cooperative Extension
Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

Designed by Dennis F. Kulis

This publication is issued to further Cooperative Extension work mandated by acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. It was produced with the cooperation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Cornell Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Human Ecology, and College of Veterinary Medicine, at Cornell University. Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. William B. Lacy, Director.

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Photography by University Photography at Cornell University
Printed on recycled paper
3/95 2M GP PVC30901

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Introduction

If information is the currency of the extension process, communication is the *act* of exchange. Like money, information is of little use if it sits idly in a vault or file folder. A large part of extension's mission is to take useful and valuable information and get it into circulation—communicate it—so that people in our communities can use it to increase their personal and professional productivity and effectiveness.

The mass media, as the term implies, offer extension practitioners the opportunity to reach mass audiences, quickly, directly, and often in a very cost-effective manner. But how does one make use of this powerful communication conduit? What steps need to be taken to get the mass media to buy into what extension has to offer? And once you've decided you want to use the media to get your message out, just where do you start?

In this concise and readable publication, the author sets out the basics of how to work with the media. The text emphasizes the importance of planning and networking as well as the nuts and bolts of putting together news releases, working with news organizations, and getting your messages into print and on the air.

We hope you find this guide helpful for using the media to reach your clients and your extension objectives.

David A. Poland, Editor

Understanding and Using the Media

Over the decades, Cooperative Extension has developed a considerable reputation for helping farmers and the community-at-large improve their quality of life in a myriad of ways. In the past, much of this work was carried out by extension agents working directly with clients at an interpersonal level. Effective as this approach was, today's Extension Associations are operating in a considerably different environment.

As state and local governments try to cut expenses, associations will be called on to do more with less; to reach more people and have more impact, but with less expense. Public perception of extension's contributions will also be critical to stave off budget cuts or elimination of some programs. The mass media, including publications, radio, television, and niche media, provide a unique means to accomplish extension's educational mission and cast the organization's public contributions in a positive light. To effectively employ the power of mass media, it is useful to understand how the media operate and to acquaint yourself with some techniques for getting your messages out.

Communication Goals and Channels

Extension associations have always needed to communicate with their various publics to achieve such communication goals as

- ◆ creating awareness about community issues
- ◆ informing the public and promoting extension events
- ◆ delivering nonformal education on selected topics
- ◆ reinforcing previous formal and/or nonformal education
- ◆ responding to community concerns
- ◆ recruiting and retaining program enrollees, board members, and volunteers
- ◆ nurturing community support for the county association

Delivering educational programs to diverse audiences on complex issues demands flexibility when choosing communication channels. Associations need to adapt their communication goals to the target audience's communication patterns and design a media program appropriate to the local community.

To reach the public with technical knowledge and educational programs in forms that citizens can apply, Extension must be able to

- ◆ identify and access local and regional mass media and niche media outlets
- ◆ coordinate communications with public, private, and voluntary organizations to deliver research-based knowledge and educational programs
- ◆ engage reporters as informational and educational partners

Systematically providing journalists with concise and precise information about the issues facing society can help them produce factual and timely information that will

- ◆ enhance the accuracy of media coverage
- ◆ link Extension in the public mind to the nationally selected program priorities
- ◆ position Extension within these subject areas as a primary source of reliable research-based knowledge
- ◆ increase public participation in Extension programs
- ◆ build and sustain public support for county associations

If we wish to successfully engage journalists as partners in marketing extension programs, we must understand

- ◆ how the media operate in our community and region
- ◆ the technical, scheduling, and financial constraints that the media face
- ◆ how media evaluate story and photo opportunities
- ◆ what determines the newsworthiness of material that we send to them

Understanding the media's needs can help you use the media to help Extension market educational programming. In other words, ask not what the media can do for you, but ask what you can do for the media.

All News Is Information, But Not All Information Is News

Extension is in the public *education* business, while media are in the public *information* business. This distinction defines many editorial judgments about the newsworthiness of photo, news, and feature stories. Understanding this different orientation should enable agents to help reporters fulfill their public information function in a way that furthers our public education mission. Some of the differences between educators and journalists follow:

- ◆ Educators use redundancy to reinforce learning; the media view redundancy as an expense.

- ◆ Educators expect complexity and are ready to deal with many views; journalists seek simplicity and are most comfortable with only two sides of an issue.
- ◆ Educators rarely expect closure—we see issues as constantly evolving; journalists face the tyranny of story length or sound bites and must meet deadlines with a product.
- ◆ Extension associations strive to avoid confrontation and achieve consensus; reporters use adversarial tension to hold reader/viewer interest.

* * *

Story Placement Basics

Given the constraints of the media environment, how can an association package its program and institutional marketing to maximize coverage and reach its target audiences? Simply dropping a press release in a mailbox will not make our programs stand out from the crowd. Getting the media to pick up your articles and stories requires planning, an understanding of how media organizations function, and developing working relationships with reporters, editors, and broadcasters. To further these objectives, the association should consider taking the following steps:

- ♦ Identify the media players.
 - ♦ Understand the media's principal communication forms.
 - ♦ Seek the "news peg" or "news hook."
 - ♦ Plan a story placement calendar.
 - ♦ Nurture relationships with media decision-makers and practitioners.
-

Identify the Media Players

Develop a plan to work with the media before you send in a story or suggest an idea. A media notebook can help you organize your efforts and implement your strategy. Start by conducting an inventory of all print media (daily, weekly, and shopper newspapers; local and regional magazines) and electronic media (radio and broadcast and cable television). Identify the key players and update your list continually because media have high personnel turnover. If you're in a large media market, think about creating a regional book. Track your impact with the media notebook.

The notebook needn't be elaborate or contain the name of every media employee. A

list of assignment editors and reporters who cover "beats" related to your program area and talk show hosts may be all you need to get started. Get their fax numbers as well as their phone numbers. Learn each organization's policies and deadlines for article submissions to avoid disturbing reporters when they're on deadline.

When compiling the notebook, include public, private, professional, and volunteer niche media outlets. Although school, hospital, and senior center newsletters may not have mass circulation, they let you target audiences *and* have a cumulative impact on the community .

Media Inventory (Any County USA)

Local Newspapers

Hometown Journal

Deadline: 9 AM weekdays

10 Main St.

Anytown, NY

Fax: 000-4444

John Peters (*city editor*) 000-1111

Jane Daily (*consumer affairs*) 000-2222

Billy Goat (*county editor*) 000-3333

The Democratic Republican

Deadline: 10:30 PM weekdays

101 Long Drive

Anytown, NY

Fax: 111-4444

Frank Lee (*editor-in-chief*) 111-1111

Sue Smith (*news editor*) 111-2222

Dan D. Don (*ag. writer*) 111-3333

The Citizen Advertiser (weekly)

Deadline: 1 PM Tuesday

20 Pennysaver Road

Most Anytown, NY

Fax: 222-0000

Loretta Louis (*managing editor*) 222-1111

Radio and TV Broadcasters

WOOO (radio)

Deadline: 10 AM for noon broadcast,

3 PM for 5 evening news

Broadcast Ave.

New Anytown, NY

Fax: 333-4444

Roger Dodger (*manager*) 333-1111

Bill Melater (*news director*) 333-2222

Annette Brown (*reporter*) 333-3333

WCEE

Deadline: Contact at least one day before story airs.

Any County Community College (radio)

1 College Rd.

Anytown, NY

No Fax

Jody Zapper (*director/manager*) 444-1111

Cindy Coals (*news director*) 444-5555

WWAT - (CBS) (Television)

Deadline: 11 AM daily for features.

Anytime for breaking news.

Commercial Blvd.

Bigtown, NY

Fax: 555-4444

Roland Hills (*program director*) 555-1111

Lucy Ducey (*news director*) 555-2222

Mary Lane (*science reporter*) 555-3333

Understand Media's Principal Communication Forms

The same information can be packaged in a variety of media forms or formats. The principal forms found in the print and electronic media are

- ◆ news
- ◆ features
- ◆ opinion
- ◆ advertising

"News is the timely, concise, and accurate report of an event that has importance to a significant part of the population," states Mitchell Charnley. News should never be prescriptive. Ideally, it should chronicle statements, findings, changes, advances, and other evolutionary events that affect life.

Features go beyond a straight news account to provide insight (and often raise emotions) about events, beliefs, personalities, and the human experience. The conceptual scope of feature stories has expanded in recent decades to include news analyses, backgrounders, and interview stories, that permit subjective interpretation of current events without compromising the objectivity of news reports themselves

Opinion pieces reflect the views of media owners, editorial staff, national or local columnists, community notables, and the general public. Because the media strive to be objective in their news coverage, the presentation of opinion pieces is clearly segregated. Print media limit opinions to the editorial and Op-Ed pages, whereas electronic media (public-access cable channels excepted) use oral and visual cues to delineate opinion segments.

Advertising brings life-sustaining revenue to media outlets, and may also provide opportunities for Extension to target special messages.

An Advertising Piece



Spring Garden Fair and Plant Sale

Saturday, May 14th
9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Ithaca High School
(Cayuga St. off Route 13 at Stewart Park Exit)

Featuring:
Plants for the Shade Garden
Demonstrations and Exhibits
Free Soil Ph Testing
Free Garden Consultations
Plant Sales: Annuals, Perennials, Herbs,
Vegetables, Daylilies, Strawberries. . .
Fun Activities for Kids
Horticultural Raffle

Sponsored by
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County
and the Master Gardener Volunteers with support from Members of Local
Horticultural Businesses and Organizations

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. NYS College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension associations, county governing bodies, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.

Seek the “News Peg”

Media find it difficult to cover processes, such as education. They need a presentation concept, called a “news peg” or “news hook,” on which to “hang” the content or story. News pegs command readers or viewers attention and interest, and make the story relevant or newsworthy. While there’s no single standard of newsworthiness, all media forms must contain *at least* one of these elements:

- ♦ **Timeliness**—Is the topic relevant to current public concerns or daily life?
- ♦ **Proximity**—Are the events nearby? Will people feel real or imagined kinship with the story personalities?
- ♦ **Importance**—Will the information change people’s lives or outlook?
- ♦ **Progress**—Is there something new or improved to draw and hold people’s attention?

- ♦ **Unusualness**—What’s different or unique about the finding or interaction? Are any everyday assumptions dramatically challenged?
- ♦ **Human interest**—Are there strong emotions to engage the public?
- ♦ **Tension**—Is there conflict or the possibility of resolution?

The marketability of any story is correlated to the number of newsworthy elements it contains.

The stories that get used by the media are stories about people. Whether you’re interested in increasing public awareness about an issue, announcing a meeting, marketing program enrollment, looking for support to fund a new program, or trying to create a positive institutional image, couch the story in terms of its impact on real people.

Plan a Story Placement Calendar

Develop an annual “rolling calendar” as a production schedule for marketing Extension’s multiple programs to mass and niche media. Enter agents’ regularly scheduled columns or broadcasts on a month-by-month annual

placement chart. Identify holidays, cyclical local events, and on-going and emerging community issues and link them to Extension with story angles and news pegs that stress actual and potential program benefits, such as

Event	Issue	News peg
summer vacation	bike safety	kids attend bike rodeo
harvest festival	food safety	volunteers do canning demo.
Thanksgiving	environment	soil & water quality since 1621
Mother’s Day	children at risk	parenting skills for future moms
back to school	consumer economics	budgets for books & clothes

Scheduling two or three story ideas and several announcements for each program area will generate an adequate inventory to create the calendar. Draft a 12-month calendar and revise it every four months. Though life won't mirror planning, emerging community issues and your land-grant college's regular press releases will help you fill in gaps to assure a regular and varied flow of information to the media.

If your association is in a metropolitan media market, consider developing a regional calendar. A regional placement approach permits several counties to coordinate the flow of messages to media contacts. Extension can spread its workload, boost marketing efficiency and nurture its institutional image.

Nurture Relationships with Media Decision-Makers

Establishing trusting relationships with the writers and editors who determine media content is the most effective way to ensure Extension's continuing access to the media. Developing, maintaining, and enhancing such personal relationships should be a high priority.

Reporters can write more powerful stories by having easy access to reliable, land-grant resources and Extension referrals. Extension benefits by having greater access to public information channels. And the public benefits because it gets timely, accurate information.

Agents from each program area should contact reporters on a regular basis—even if it's only quarterly at the outset. Although an informal face-to-face chat may be ideal, a brief phone call or handwritten note will still be useful. Such personal contacts will help reporters learn how specific educational programs benefit local residents, prompt journalists to pose questions, allow agents to propose story ideas, and encourage writers to pursue new stories with vigor.

While agents emphasize the benefits of individual programs to local enrollees, Extension leaders may more profitably focus on editors and media management to stress the broader perspective of how society benefits from research-based knowledge and educational programs.

Consider the plans-of-work as baseline marketing tools. Journalists are often receptive to story ideas when they're accompanied by an articulated needs assessment, program strategy, and specific program goals. By providing this unusual resource and the names of local contacts whom the reporter can interview for a human interest dimension, the agent provides a compelling inducement to develop a feature story.

Placement Strategies

If your association is involved in a major local story, press coverage will be spontaneous. If the media know that Extension has special expertise to clarify a breaking news story, coverage *may* be spontaneous. But few editors are breathlessly waiting for news about Extension meetings, programs, and events.

Is there a superior placement strategy? When is it best to develop your own story idea into a finished product? Can we boost local placement of state or national Extension releases? What techniques can reduce our writing load and still generate extensive coverage?

There is no one media placement strategy that is best for all circumstances. Many times you can market a story by pitching the idea to a journalist. Sometimes it will be necessary to customize a previously written news release to either meet a specific media outlet's requirements or increase its overall newsworthiness by localizing the content. And there will be situations when you'll have to conceptualize and write releases on your own.

Market Stories by “Pitching”

Don't assume that you need to write press releases to communicate your message. Consider *placing* stories rather than *writing* them as your primary marketing strategy.

Develop a critical news sense and a repertoire of story marketing techniques to tantalize reporters and editors with interesting story angles and enough information so they'll happily decide to use Extension resources to write the story.

There are many ways to pitch story ideas and generate media coverage. Varied story content, media outlets, and individual personalities will keep you combining and adapting the following techniques as you develop your news sense and increase your placement rate.

Personal Visits—Nothing establishes rapport faster than personal contact. Once the reporter connects your face and name with your voice, subsequent phone and written exchanges will be more effective. But before suggesting a courtesy meeting, pull together several ideas that can help the reporter do his or her job more effectively. To be truly appreciated, keep the meeting brief.

Queries—Often all that's needed to place a story idea is a phone call. Whereas politicians, businesses, and even university news services may be construed as self-promoters if they call to suggest news coverage, Extension has earned a reputation as an educator, so that *occasional* media pitch calls are welcomed—if the proposed topic truly promotes the community's well-being.

Know exactly what you want to propose before you call. Briefly outline the story idea and visual (or audio) possibilities. Propose the names of people who have agreed to be available for comment on the topic. Target your pitch to the assignment editor or the

reporter who'll most likely cover the story. Be certain not to call when the reporters are facing a predictable deadline (i.e., before noon for an afternoon paper, after 2 p.m. for a morning paper, after 3:30 p.m. for TV stations, and on the hour or half hour for radio stations).

If the reporter's not in, handwrite a personal note with your idea and phone number. Fax the handwritten letter; it will get immediate attention—which is something you can no longer say for the traditional mailed letter that often gets lost among the other press releases and junk mail.

Media advisories—When writing an announcement, remember that media outlets have severe staff limitations and an unpredictable flow of competing community events. Refer to the story placement calendar to schedule half-page media advisories about two weeks before scheduled events. The advisory should provide basic information about the event and the name and phone number of an Extension contact from whom the reporter can get additional information. Call to see if the reporter needs more information. This will let you know the likelihood of coverage and permit you to write a full advance or follow-up story if the editor is receptive to the topic.

Tip sheets—A tip sheet is a brief compilation of feature ideas. Each item should have a bold headline summarizing the idea with no more than two or three sentences sketching out the main point. Conclude each tip with the name and phone number of the agent whom the media should contact.

Tip sheets should be published on a regular basis (quarterly or semi-annually) and consist of four to six story ideas. Assign-

NEWS ADVISORY

February 28, 1994

RACCOON, FOX RABIES-CONTROL STRATEGIES ON AGENDA FOR

MARCH 2 MEETING AT BUFFALO'S CANISIUS COLLEGE

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Federal, state, provincial and county officials will discuss strategies for controlling wildlife rabies in the Northeast United States and Canada at a public forum Wednesday, March 2, from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the Student Center Auditorium of Canisius College.

You are invited to speak with participants and to cover the "Symposium on Rabies Control through Vaccination of Wildlife Species," sponsored by the New York State Task Force on Wildlife Rabies Vaccination, the Canisius College Department of Biological Sciences and the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.

Chairman of the task force, Dr. Donald Lein, D.V.M., Ph.D., of Cornell University, may be reached for comment on wildlife rabies vaccination before and after the Buffalo meeting at (607) 253-3900.

"Vaccination of wild animals may be the only way to effectively stop a rabies epidemic in the Northeast and Canada," said Lein, director of Cornell's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and chairman of the wildlife rabies task force. "This symposium will bring people up to date on the current status of wildlife rabies — which is spreading principally through raccoons and foxes — in the Northeastern United States and Canada. We will outline several plans for vaccinating wild animals and listen to public concerns about the spread and control of this disease."

Speakers include Erie County Commissioner of Health Arnold Lubin; Charles Trimarchi, Jack Debbie and Guthrie Birkhead of the New York State Department of Health; Drs. Susan Stehman, Laura Bigler and Donald Lein of Cornell University; Robert Miller of the U.S. Department of Agriculture; and Charles Rupprecht of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. Other participants include representatives of Ag Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources as well as the states of Vermont, Massachusetts and New Jersey.

-30-

Contact: Roger Segelken
Office: (607) 255-9736
Home: (607) 257-9598

(97/94)

Media Advisory

ment editors appreciate tip sheets because they identify local, human interest stories that can be used when there's a slack period.

Editorial board meetings—Try to set up a one-hour editorial meeting once or twice a year with the management and editors of your major local media outlets. You'll be expected to make a 15- to 25-minute presentation on the association's activities and spend the balance of the time responding to their questions. If a formal meeting cannot be arranged, try a less formal approach such as taking the board to a working lunch. Remember to emphasize the indi-

vidual and societal benefits of Extension programs rather than the educational process.

Editors need facts in writing; put something tangible in their hands. Bring along your annual report, land grant experts list, or any other studies or documents that can help the editors appreciate the quantitative as well as qualitative impacts of Extension's work. Use the opportunity to distribute your last tip sheet and to propose one or two more current story ideas.

Media briefings—If there's a clear issue of public concern in your area, try positioning

Media Tip Sheet

Spring 1994

Any County Cooperative Extension
10 Main St.
Anytown, NY
Phone: 111-2222

Financial Counseling Helps Families Make Decisions

Ten families who requested financial counseling evaluated current expenditures, debt obligations, credit status and income. When there is not enough money, families must earn more or spend less. Financial counseling helped families identify spending leaks, learn methods of decreasing expenses and set financial goals. Families are encouraged to keep an expense diary so that good decisions can be made about future spending.

For more information, contact: Lenda Buck, 111-3333

Produced in New York State Food Contest

Six contestants from Any County put forth their best efforts on March 1 at the Super Shopper Mall in Anytown, NY, where the State contest for 1994 was held. All contestants were judged excellent for their work and were awarded blue ribbons.

For more information, contact: Red Jamm, 111-5555

Parent Education A Community Commitment

Cornell Cooperative Extension agents in ten counties have been named conference coordinators for the bi-annual Celebrate the Family Conference. Parent Educators from central New York will participate in educational workshops at the State University at Anytown. Cornell Professor Heidi Kidd will give the keynote address on Empowering Parents.

For more information, contact, Ann Uddam 111-6666

(cont.)

Tip Sheet

Extension as a reliable source of expertise. Consider coordinating a half-day media briefing on the "hot topic." The media can be attracted to a seminar format where the reporters are able to interact with university researchers, Extension field specialists, and carefully selected non-Extension experts.

Emphasize that reporters will receive extensive contact lists and background materials which they can share with their media colleagues; that they're expected to pose thorny questions as well as listen to presentations; and that they will have the opportunity to meet individually with the visiting experts. Such sessions are best

scheduled in major metropolitan media markets.

Agents from surrounding counties should be encouraged to attend because the informal conversations between presentations are the source of future news and feature coverage as reporters discover the breadth and diversity of Extension programming.

Association and land-grant expert lists—

Reporters often don't know either the ranch of Extension programming or the appropriate agents to contact when a question or potential story arises. The production and annual revision of a county or regional

Cooperative Extension Experts List

Any County Cooperative Extension
10 Main St.
Anytown, NY
Phone: 111-2222

Name	Title	Phone	Area(s) of expertise
Cathy Lee	4-H Program Ldr	111-3333	Child development, outreach programming, childhood education
Ray Sunn Program Ldr	Hum Ecol	111-4444	Family finance, consumer credit, mortgage markets, housing discrimination
Eddie Wright	Nut/Diet EFNEP agent	111-3344	Relationship between diet and growth, obesity, social determinants of diet, diet and heart ailments
Martha Wing	Livestock agent	111-5555	Poultry, livestock marketing, use of antibiotics with livestock
Ken Hedoit	Crops agent	111-5566	Most aspects of field crop production, family farming, organic farming technologies, IPM
Lisa Moore	Home Env. agent	111-6655	Poisons in the home, toxic wastes, accident prevention
Rose Flower	Hort. agent	111-7777	Home gardening, ornamentals, general landscaping, landscaping for energy efficiency

Expert List

“experts list” is an easy-to-prepare tool that will have an immediate payback in increased media calls. The list should be limited to those Extension employees with county or regional expertise in given subjects. Entries should be cross-referenced by name and topic to facilitate quick media access.

It is very likely that your land-grant college news service has already prepared a faculty-experts book. If so, ask for sufficient copies to personally distribute to local editors and key reporters. Personally delivering this resource gives you another opportunity to pitch Extension.

Talk shows—If there’s a local radio or television talk show in your area, you probably already know that it attracts a growing audience. These programs have an insatiable appetite for guests? Although some program hosts have established styles that are inappropriate for presenting Extension information, many shows genuinely seek to link community needs and resources.

With a phone call every four to six weeks, you should be able to fill several guest slots each month with people who can talk about Extension’s involvement in critical issues. Though agents make excellent guests, don’t miss the opportunity to market knowledge-

able board members, volunteers, program beneficiaries, and Extension friends.

Television rating “sweeps”—Twice each year the A. C. Nielsen Company takes a census of America’s television viewing habits. The results are important to the stations because their audience market share is linked to advertising rates. But the sweeps are also important to Extension because news directors are looking for riveting feature stories that will hold the audience for the entire week.

Given the public’s current concern with food safety, nutrition, and environmental

issues, Extension is uniquely positioned to propose important stories that are unlikely to receive such extended coverage at other times of the year. Select a theme and develop several complementary story ideas.

Find out when your local stations hold their sweeps and propose one or two themes several months in advance. If your story is best told with video footage across several seasons, you’ll need even longer lead time.

As you become familiar with using the various arrows in your quiver of marketing techniques, you’ll inevitably find the mix that works with the reporters in your county and discover new ideas to share with others.

To Market by Customizing

Most likely you will need to localize state or national Extension press releases to make them relevant to your audience, but be sure to retain all faculty attributions. Avoid rewriting the entire story. Develop a powerful lead paragraph for the body of the existing article. Summarize the main idea using a local news peg and you will pull the audience into the story.

Whether the article is about agriculture, arthritis, or arson, find locally pertinent statistics or quote a local notable about the problem, or do both. You may add several references to resources or programs available through your association, but the body of the text should not require extensive rewriting.

To Market by Writing

Extension columns, broadcast shows, and opinion pieces usually appear as the result of an agent’s request. The commitment to produce material by the deadline obliges us to carry the process from conceptualization to completion in a timely fashion. Make life easy on yourself with a resource file full of story ideas and clippings. Try to stay one article ahead in case illness or last-minute writer’s block impedes your progress.

If you’ve pitched a news or feature story idea to a writer or editor without success, try to get

some indication of whether they’d accept an article “on speculation.” Though the media outlet is under no obligation to actually use such a story, the fact that they’re willing to take a look at it will assure you that the story will not automatically be thrown out with the majority of unsolicited releases.

In the final analysis, you’ll have to decide if the given event or issue merits the time and effort of the “spec” article. You’re likely to discover that if you follow the writing guidelines set out in *The Communicator’s Handbook*,

your story has an excellent chance of being published *or* of stimulating a reporter to write an article based on your story.

There are some types of stories that reporters simply don't like to write from scratch. Though important to Extension, journalists perceive program registrations, meeting announcements, and award presentations as minor stories. The paradox is that carrying such stories is recognized by the media as being an essential part of community journalism. Reporters are therefore happy to use, or even rewrite if necessary, brief, easy-to-read releases that meet journalistic standards.

* * *

Guidelines for News Releases

News releases, when properly employed, can be one of the most effective means of disseminating information from and about extension. Two critical factors for getting your release used are timing and quality. Timing plays a role in several ways. A news release received during a busy week at a news bureau is less likely to be used than one received during a slow period. The timeliness of the release is also a factor. If the information is old, it's not really news.

The quality of a news release often determines whether or not it is used by the media. Be sure to use the style of writing and format appropriate for each type of media—newspapers, radio, or television.

Try to include a news peg in your headline and lead paragraph so that editors can easily see why they should consider using the release.

Here are some general and technical guidelines for writing releases for the print and electronic media.

Print Media

Some style points:

- ◆ When writing your opening or “lead” paragraph, employ the journalistic maxim of the 5 W’s and H (who, what, why, where, when, and how). The dual objectives of incorporating the 5 W’s and H and your news peg into the lead are to attract the

attention of reporters and your audience and to give them the overall idea of what your story is about.

5 W’s and H

The term “5 W’s and H” is journalistic shorthand for what should be included in the lead sentence or paragraph of an article or press release. The “5 W’s” are Who, What, When, Where, Why and the “H” stands for How. While “how,” depending on the content of the article, is frequently omitted in the lead, the five W’s are almost always addressed. It is also common for the categories to overlap, so don’t worry about alluding to each “W” separately—the 5W’s and H are a guide, not journalistic law.

Following are two examples of leads using the 5 W’s and H formula. Example #1 is a “hard” news lead, directly providing readers with the essential information in the first sentence. Example #2 is an example of a “throwaway lead” where the first sentence is used to grab readers attention, while the rest of the opening paragraph provides information on the 5 W’s and H.

Example #1

Joe Extension, a local authority on mechanical repairs in the field, fixed a haybaler with a lighter and some plastic baling twine last Saturday at the Anytown Firemen’s Field Days, to demonstrate the role ingenuity can play in keeping farm operations running under adverse conditions.

Who: Joe Extension

What: fixed a haybaler with a lighter and some plastic baling twine

When: last Saturday

Where: Anytown Firemen’s Field Days

Why: to demonstrate the role ingenuity can play in keeping farm operations running under adverse conditions.

How: a lighter and some plastic baling twine

Example #2

What can you do with a lighter and some baling twine? If you're Josephine Extension you use these common items to fix a hay baling machine and drive your point home. Josephine performed the feat last Saturday at the Anytown Firemen's Field Days to demonstrate how a little ingenuity can go a long way in keeping farm operations running even under adverse conditions.

Who: Josephine Extension

What: What can you do with a lighter and some baling twine?

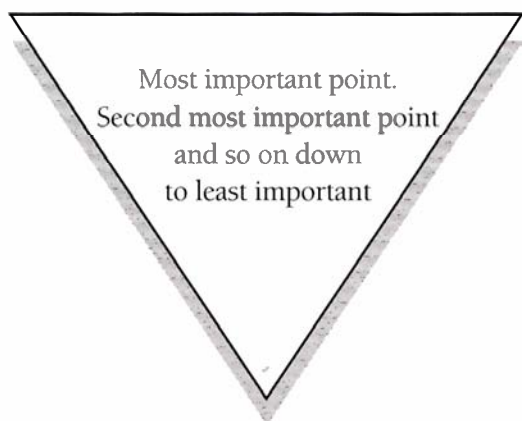
When: last Saturday

Where: Anytown Firemen's Field Days

Why: to demonstrate how a little ingenuity can go a long way in keeping farm operations running even under adverse

How: a lighter and some baling twine

- ◆ Because editors trim stories from the bottom, using the "inverted pyramid" writing style will maximize the chance that important items will remain in the edited version. Start with the most crucial facts in the lead paragraph. Follow with the the rest of the information you wish to communicate in order of its importance. The least pertinent information should come last.



- ◆ Personalize the story with quotes to expand and explain the facts.

- ◆ When writing a release, don't editorialize. Just give the facts.
- ◆ Avoid inaccuracies in your release. Double-check facts, names, dates, titles, and degrees.
- ◆ Write a one-line headline that captures the soul of the story. Reporters will appreciate your helping them quickly understand the point of the release.

And some technical points:

- ◆ Use 8-1/2" by 11" white paper, preferably your office letterhead.
- ◆ Double-space all copy and use wide margins. This allows the article to be easily edited.
- ◆ Don't hyphenate words at ends of lines. Do not carry a paragraph over from one page to another.
- ◆ Identify Extension and the writer at the top of each page. Provide the name and phone number of a contact who can be reached during and after business hours.
- ◆ Omit "for immediate release." All stories are for immediate release unless otherwise

noted. If the story is for delayed release, give a release date and time at the top of the page.

- ◆ Unless the release is just for local media, put a dateline before the first paragraph (e.g., Albion, N.Y., Sept. 10). The date should indicate *when the news takes place*, not the date you put out the release. To avoid untimely or irrelevant distribution of a release, you may wish to include a “STOP USE” date. For instance, you wouldn’t want a piece on preparing a garden for planting distributed in August.
- ◆ If the release is longer than a page, type “-more-” at the bottom of each page except the last. Put “-30-” at the story’s end. Number each page.

- ◆ Only use one side of the paper.
- ◆ Staple all pages of each release together.
- ◆ Fold the paper print side out and insert it into the envelope so that the top of the front page is visible when the envelope is opened.
- ◆ When possible, mail releases well in advance. If you miss the timely news peg, don’t mail them at all.
- ◆ Tailor your mailing list to program area/reporters’ beats. Whether a story gets used often depends on which person at the newspaper opens the envelope.
- ◆ When style or format questions arise, consult an authoritative guide such as *The Associated Press Stylebook*.

Electronic Media

Although well-written, customized radio and television releases have a high placement rate, they can be time consuming and challenging to write. Consequently, organizations frequently send the same releases to both newspapers and electronic media. Whether or not you customize the story, some minor revisions for electronic media can increase the frequency of your releases being used.

- ◆ Start typing one-third of the way down the page, using only one side of each piece of paper. Leave wide margins. As with releases for the print media, write the release on 8-1/2" by 11" Extension letterhead.
- ◆ To make the editor and reporter more comfortable handling Extension releases, triple-space copy. This way the final copy appears in the same form as when it’s read on the air.
- ◆ Give specific dates. If announcing an event lasting more than one day, designate specific dates the release can be used (e.g., “for use

between July 4 and July 7” not “for use between Monday and Thursday”).

- ◆ Never abbreviate or hyphenate words.
- ◆ If names or technical terms in your release are difficult to pronounce, provide the phonetic spelling in parentheses.

If the story merits the effort and you have the time to customize radio and television releases for format, readability, and content, try the following:

- ◆ Think of an electronic news story as an expanded headline. Stay focused and limit copy to the amount of text the announcer can read in 45 seconds—about 200 words.
- ◆ Write copy for the voice—a less formal style than for the eye. Use “don’t” and “let’s” instead of “do not” and “let us.”
- ◆ Read the copy aloud before you send it and eliminate tongue-twisters.



News Release

For Release: February 8

Contact: William Holder
Office: (607) 255-3290
Home: (607) 257-3669

**Dairy Products Better Source of Calcium Than Supplements,
New Cornell Study Shows**

Ithaca, N.Y. — Dairy products have an edge over dietary supplements as a source of calcium for children and women, a study done at Cornell University suggests.

The form in which calcium is consumed has a significant impact on the absorption of iron into the bloodstream, the study showed. Calcium carbonate, the form of calcium commonly found in supplements, reduced the bioavailability by about the same amount as calcium carbonate.

The study examined the relationship between calcium intake and iron absorption in young and adult rats, an animal model for human dietary studies, said Dennis Miller, Cornell professor of food science.

Suppression of iron bioavailability is a significant issue for individuals at risk of iron deficiency, such as children and premenopausal women. Women of childbearing age also are the population group most likely to be taking calcium supplements, Miller said. He emphasized that calcium supplements still may be appropriate for some individuals, particularly for women who don't consume many dairy products.

"Poor bioavailability is the prime reason for impaired iron status," Miller said. Most people in the United States eat between 10 and 15 milligrams of iron per day, and the body requires only 1 or 2 milligrams be absorbed into the bloodstream to replace iron losses. But only about 10 percent of dietary iron is absorbed. Anything that significantly suppresses iron bioavailability is cause for concern, Miller said.

Miller, Maciej Buchowski, a former Cornell post-doctoral researcher now at Maharry Medical College in Nashville, and Peter Minotti, a graduate student, published their findings in the November 1993 issue of *Nutrition Research*.

(cont.)

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

News Release

Cornell University Photography
1159 Comstock Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853-0901
Tel: 607/255-0901
Fax: 607/255-7675

Model Release Form

Cornell University Photography is hereby granted the right to use photographs or slides taken of my child and or children on behalf of the university. I further grant Cornell University Photography the perpetual right in and to any use of the photography to other agencies or organizations where it considers the intended use to be in good taste and appropriate to the educational objectives of the University.

I do hereby release Cornell University Photography and Cornell University, its successors and assigns, from any and all claims for damages for libel, slander, invasion of the right of privacy, or any other claims based upon the use of the photography.

Parent/Guardian:

Child's Name:

Home Address:

Telephone:

Date Signed:

Location and Description of Shoot:

Date of Shoot:

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Release to be filled out, signed and dated at the time of the photography session. Release form will be kept on file indefinitely.

Model Release Form

Legal Considerations

In the vast majority of instances, extension communicators have few legal worries when placing articles with the press or working with the media. There are, however, three areas that should be considered under certain circumstances—copyright privileges, libel, and invasion of privacy.

Copyright Privileges

Copyright is the legal right to reproduce, publish, or sell written, recorded, or artistic works. Materials and articles created in their entirety by extension system staff, may be copyrighted, but generally are available for use with the permission of the copyright holder. Care must be taken when writing articles, releases, or publications that incorporate text from other sources, and when using articles, photographs, or illustrations produced for extension on a contract basis.

When excerpting information from copyrighted materials such as quoting from an expert's book or a newspaper article, the legal doctrine of *fair use* applies. Briefly, fair use is based on the character and purpose of the use (educational or commercial), how *much* material from the other source is used, and how it affects the market for the original work. When using materials from other sources, quote accurately and give credit to the source. Generally, it is safe to quote one or two contiguous paragraphs, but never entire pages. The higher the percentage of quoted material in your piece, the greater the possibility of copyright infringement. If in doubt, contact the original source and request permission.

Articles, photos, and illustrations produced out-of-house, may be subject to copyright challenges if they are used or copied for productions outside of the original contract. For instance, freelance illustrations used in a newsletter, may be subject to challenge if used for a bulletin or copied by another organization's newsletter.

An association can acquire copyright ownership to a piece by specifying in the contract that the article or art is a "work made for hire," and that it

was commissioned for one or more of the following uses: translation, atlas, contribution to a collective work, part of an audiovisual work, test, answer material for a test, supplementary work (including illustrations), and instructional text. Author's or artist's permission to reprint or distribute their work in other forms can also be granted on a case by case basis, but be sure to get permission in writing.

Libel

Libel may be defined as injury to reputation, either through print or public statements. Legally, charges of libel may be based on a combination of malice (the intent to harm) and the partial or complete inaccuracy of the piece. Comments about public policies, institutions, and officials (in their official capacities) are not generally subject to libel suits. The probability of your association being sued for libel is very small, but to minimize the possibility avoid inflammatory remarks and statements, make sure your information is accurate, and carefully phrase passages and captions when dealing with delicate topics.

Invasion of Privacy

The question of invasion of privacy comes up most often in regards to photographs. Photographs taken during newsworthy events, such as a county fair or a field demonstration, are considered news and may be used with stories related to that event. The use of the same photos to accompany unrelated articles, however, can be subject to challenge. Although many publications rely on a person's verbal agreement to be photographed, the safest course is to have people prominently featured in a photo sign a release allowing the association to use their image in its publication or release (see page 23). To protect against possible litigation, make sure the caption accurately reflects the content of the photograph.

Photos and Other Visual Images

Good visual images can determine whether a newspaper, magazine, or television station selects one story over another. Print editors know that readers are drawn to photos and artwork before the printed word. Television editors seek illustrations, charts, and diagrams on highly technical stories to clarify and complement the announcer's voice-over.

Well-composed, high-quality photographs and other visual aids are always in demand *if* they're newsworthy and capture the spirit of a breaking news story, complement the technical information in a background story, illustrate the assertions in a news analysis, or portray the human condition described in a feature article.

In fact, when an editor must choose between two stories of equal merit, the one with photos, maps, or illustrations will likely be chosen because the editor needs eye-catching material to break up blocks of text.

News Sense and the Marketable Image

Before spending a lot of effort taking photos and preparing visuals for regional media, invest a little of your time gathering background information.

First, make sure your target publications will accept photos or illustrations from outside sources. See how many and what types of images local newspapers, magazines, and television stations use. Check out a dozen issues. Compare weekday with weekend editions, look at special supplement sections (e.g. “back to school”), and determine the quantity and emphasis of visual material in issues at different seasons and holidays. Consider these questions:

- ◆ Do the newspapers or magazines use photos and artwork from community sources or only from staff or wire service photographers?
- ◆ What’s the mix of breaking news photos versus feature photographs?

- ◆ How frequently do the publications run photo stories (i.e., groups of photographs that visually narrate a feature)?
- ◆ How often do they use “grip and grins” (shots of small groups of people staring directly at the camera in a static pose)?
- ◆ Do local publications or television use “head and shoulder” portraits of community personalities?
- ◆ How frequently and in what contexts do the publications or TV stations use drawings, diagrams, or other artwork?

No statistical analysis is needed. Trust your impressions and reflect about the types of visuals that editors are likely to use. With this knowledge and a little marketing, your association should significantly increase its visual presence in your community media.

Marketing Visual Images

Once you have a reasonable idea of the images local media outlets use, successful placement of extension photos and artwork involves

- ◆ recognizing news and feature opportunities
- ◆ conceiving images that visually transmit the message
- ◆ knowing how to transform the ideas into visual images without creating more work for yourself

There are essentially three ways of marketing your visual images to mass media. They are prioritized here to help you maximize placement and minimize wasted effort, with the most successful and least onerous way listed first.

Hand-off the photo opportunity. Save yourself the time and effort that go into the technical production of shooting the image and making the negative and print. Interest the assignment or photo editor in the news or feature value of the image so that a staff photographer will be assigned to do the job.

Photograph a pre-marketed idea. If the event isn’t sufficiently newsworthy to justify a staff photographer, interest the media in the photo idea and offer to take the photograph to their specifications. Even though your photo may still be rejected on compositional or technical grounds, you’ve gotten the

editor's attention. On a positive note, the photo may be seriously considered, and it will have a fair chance of being used.

Submit on speculation. Produce a photo or other visual without prior indication of media interest. If this is your only way to

capture an unexpected event, don't just send the photo in the hope that an editor will select it from the mass of other material on his or her desk. If you don't know the editor (and publication deadline schedule) well enough to give a call, write **TIMELY LOCAL PHOTO** in colored ink on the envelope.

Tips For Taking Better Photos

When you can't delegate photography to the media and don't have access to a professional or experienced amateur photographer, it may be up to you to

- ♦ organize, compose, and execute the photo shoot
- ♦ be responsible for film development
- ♦ select, order, and pay for suitable prints
- ♦ deliver the photos to local newspapers.

If you become the photographer, the following tips about selecting your materials, composing visual images, and catching the significant moment may prove useful in getting the editor to use your submissions.

The camera

Although 110 and 126 cartridge-loading cameras can produce nice snapshots, a 35mm camera is the all-purpose choice for publication-quality black-and-white photographs. Adjustable 35 mm cameras have many features, but a low-cost, compact 35mm camera (with automatic exposure settings, built-in flash, and a focal range from 6 feet to infinity) is adequate.

Avoid instant-photo cameras (such as Polaroid). Unless the content is dramatic (e.g., Extension agent wading into a river to rescue children), most editors won't use instant pictures because they reproduce poorly.

The film

Most newspapers, newsletters, and local magazines only want black-and-white prints or negatives. If an event justifies the cost of reproducing color images, they'll send a professional photographer.

Choose your black-and-white film based on the ambient lighting conditions you anticipate (outdoors, indoors, or flash). You'll generally use a 100 to 200 ASA film (such as Kodak's "Plus-X") in natural daylight or a 400 ASA film (such as Kodak's "Tri-X") for indoor and flash shots. If you don't know which film to buy for a particular application, consult your photo supply store.

Film is heat sensitive, so don't risk ruining your effort by buying marginally less expensive expired film or by leaving the film in a hot car or on a windowsill.

Composition

Photo composition is the arrangement of people, objects, and backgrounds combined with the angle from which the picture is taken. In most cases, the composition determines how effectively the photograph communicates your intended message to the editor and ultimate viewing public. Planning the composition before you click the shutter may make the difference between a dull record and a lively visual commentary of an event.

Consider the following composition guidelines as you plan your photographs:

- ◆ Arrange the picture with the center of interest in a well-lighted area because the eye automatically moves to the brightest part of the photograph.
- ◆ Get in close to the action; omit irrelevant backgrounds, people, and objects.
- ◆ When taking group shots, focus on an action (e.g., doing, looking, receiving, analyzing, responding, etc.) and ask everyone to look at the point so the viewer's eyes will be guided to that spot.
- ◆ “Environmental portraits” can be compelling. Shoot a person looking directly into the camera, surrounded by the place or objects that define the person.
- ◆ Limit the number of people in a picture to as few as possible, with a camera angle that shows faces. Avoid placing a short person between two tall people.

- ◆ Avoid “grip and grins”—those boring shots of people shaking hands or impassively holding an award. Photos of people doing things are most effective. For example, if someone wins an award, photograph the person performing the activity for which he or she received the award.
- ◆ Identify the subjects when the picture is taken.

Lighting and Exposure

If the camera is not fully automated, use a light meter to guide your choice of lens opening (the “*f*-stop” setting) and length of time the lens opens (the “speed” setting). Read the exposure guide that came with your film and tape it to the back of the camera. The guide will help you select the settings in ordinary light conditions.

If you're unsure about lighting conditions, take several shots of your subject using the

Grip and Grin Photo (Boring)



“bracketing” technique. Using the exposure guide, estimate your shutter speed and *f*-stop for the first shot. The second shot should be one *f*-stop *below*, and the third at one *f*-stop *above* the original setting.

Many photos are blurred because the photographer moved while taking the picture. When shooting with available light rather than flash, lean on a ledge or table to steady your arm if possible. Use a tripod if you’re using a shutter speed slower than 1/60 second.



Effective Photos (Active and Interesting)



Preparing Photos for the Media

Type a complete and accurate caption on a piece of paper, double-checking the left-to-right identification of people and the spelling of names. Tape the paper to the bottom edge of the picture so the caption can be read while looking at the picture. Position the tape so that it is attached to the back of the photo, rather than the front. Don't tape the caption on the back of the photograph.

Never write on the back of a photograph with a pen or lead pencil because the writing can show through on the picture side. To identify the source of the photo, attach a stick-on address label with the information or write very lightly with a grease pencil.

Submit 5 x 7 or 8 x 10 glossy black-and-white photographs to newspapers. Local television stations prefer videotape, but check with them on what standard (VHS, Super-VHS, U-Matic), they would be willing to use. They may also accept 35-mm color slides for archival shots of significant newsmakers or file shots (e.g., kids sliding into a pool at 4-H camp).

* * *



tape

As the first female bunker in Ithaca Fire Department history, Stacey Gloub spent last year living in Collegetown's Station #9. This year she's on active volunteer status, responsible for responding to at least 50 fire calls. (Photo by C. Hildreth)

Interviews and News Conferences

Interviews are usually requested by reporters, but may be proposed by Extension. News conferences, on the other hand, are always called by the news source, which determines when and where it will be held and who will be invited. Interviews are conducted for features or news stories; news conferences are commonly associated with breaking news.

Many educators and researchers are nervous about interviews or news conferences. They may fear a hostile media, inaccurate or out-of-context quotations, or that they will appear to be self-promoters in the eyes of their colleagues.

Be prepared, but don't worry; journalists have a vested interest in being fair and accurate. The Extension educator who explains clearly and who provides written information to support his or her statements, will not likely be mistreated, misunderstood, or misquoted.

Interviews

Interviews may be proposed by a journalist who wants to talk to an authority about a specific news story or feature idea, but may as easily be suggested by Extension. One of the most effective ways to market an interview is by a letter or telephone call to an editor or reporter with a demonstrated interest in the topic or with whom you've established a personal relationship. Outline the story idea, including visual and aural possibilities for the radio and TV press, stressing the intended local beneficiaries of the interviewee's knowledge or program.

If the proposed interviewee is credible and the topic newsworthy, reporters like interviews because they yield exclusive features. Exclusivity is important. You should contact another media outlet about the same story idea only if you're turned down by your first choice of outlets. When one newspaper, radio, or TV station conducts an interview, be an equal opportunity marketer and pitch *different* feature ideas to other media outlets.

If you are unexpectedly called for a phone interview, find out if the reporter is facing an imminent deadline. If not, determine his or her needs and set an appointment for which you'll be prepared. Even if the reporter is facing a deadline, ask for a few moments to finish something in progress. Use this time to jot down the main points you want to communicate, and call back promptly. Make every effort to help the reporter meet the deadline, but get the facts in order first.

Gather as much pertinent written material for the reporter as possible. Provide relevant releases, reports, clippings, photos and diagrams, and background papers so the reporter doesn't have to rely entirely on notes and memory to recall the principal points, rationale, and supporting facts.

If you're asked a question that's in poor taste, *politely* decline to answer it. If the reporter

neglects an important issue in the interview, go ahead and bring it up.

Reporters generally dislike material that is "off the record," even when it is used for background purposes. "Off the record" means different things to different reporters. For some, the material may not be used in any form in the story. For others, the comments can be used but not attributed. In the long run, off-the-record remarks are dangerous because, in the confusion of researching, writing, and editing, the reporter may include them in the story.

If you are willing to reveal information but unwilling to be quoted, clearly say so. Never give data and then belatedly ask that the information not be attributed. If you must place any remarks off the record, current standards of journalistic ethics should be followed:

- ◆ Preface each off-the-record statement by saying, "The following material is off the record." Make sure both parties understand what off the record means and that the reporter agrees to hear the material off the record.
- ◆ Indicate clearly when the discussion is "on the record" again.
- ◆ Don't say belatedly, "The material I have just given you is off the record."

You may want to review a story for accuracy, but phrase the request with great tact. Journalists are under no obligation to show the interviewee the copy—though many occasionally do so. Limit any corrections to matters of fact or the accuracy of direct quotes. Comments about style, tone, or story emphasis will be counterproductive.

Tips for Radio and TV Interviews

Interviews are frequently held at sites and times chosen by the interviewee. For radio and TV interviews, select a location that adds an aural or visual texture to the human dimension of the activity, data, or people the interviewee is discussing.

Do not use speaker phones for telephone interviews intended for radio broadcast. They degrade sound quality and make it difficult for both the reporter and the audience to understand your taped comments.

Remember that broadcast reporters have more limitations than print journalists. They'll sometimes discuss the questions in advance so that you can think about your responses. They're looking for brief answers to one or two questions that will be edited to sound bites of 10 or 15 seconds, documentary or long broadcast reports excepted.

Rehearse answers to the likely questions.

Less is more. Speak succinctly and avoid jargon and technical terms. If the ordinary person in the street can't understand the message, you haven't successfully communicated!

Even experienced broadcast journalists stumble occasionally. If you misspeak or mumble in the middle of a radio or TV interview, just ask the interviewer to let you do a second "take." You'll almost certainly be given another chance to express yourself more clearly.

If you're not sure that your initial attempt at an answer for TV or radio news was clear, ask if you may listen to your response for this purpose. A request to clarify is generally honored; a damage control effort to "search and replace" is not.

News Conferences

A news conference should be called only if

- ◆ the story is current and best told by the association, will generate media questions, or is something that could not be communicated effectively by news release or telephone
- ◆ the presenter is ready, willing, and able to answer reporters' questions in detail
- ◆ the story can be released immediately after the conference (a conference about a speech and conducted prior to it is an exception)

If these elements are all present and the event merits a press conference, consider these guidelines:

- ◆ Generally schedule news conferences at 10 a.m. or 2 p.m., but verify local media deadlines to avoid conflicts. Select a suitable

date that avoids predictable conflicts with scheduled community events.

- ◆ Reserve a room and arrange for convenient parking.
- ◆ Make site and audio-visual equipment arrangements. Assure easy access to adequate power outlets.
- ◆ Notify the media well in advance. Mail or fax your press advisory to a specific reporter or editor at each media outlet and attach a personal note, if possible. If the conference is called on short notice, contact reporters by telephone followed by a fax. Invite public officials, VIPs, and influential members of the community with an interest in the subject.
- ◆ Prepare press kits (news release, background articles, reports to be released and/or supplemental data with photos and illustrations).

- ◆ Review the speakers' materials and provide coaching, if necessary. Remind speakers to talk into the microphones at all times.
- ◆ Post signs directing media to the conference site.
- ◆ Display Extension's logo on the lectern and Extension's banner behind the speakers' table.
- ◆ Arrange to have someone register and greet the media.
- ◆ Take notes in case reporters call later about the content.
- ◆ An association officer should introduce the presenter(s) and call the news conference to a close. If there are time limitations, announce these at the outset.

- ◆ The presenter should deliver a brief, focused statement that sums up the story and its significance. Remember that TV and radio prefer 10-15 second sound bites.
- ◆ After the opening statement, open the meeting to questions. If anyone in the room can't hear the question, the presenter should repeat it before responding.
- ◆ After the conference, respond to media requests and send press kits to those who couldn't attend.

Nothing you say, absolutely nothing, is ever "off the record" at a news conference.

* * *

Newspaper Supplements

Periodic special supplements (e.g., gardening, automotive, agriculture, 4th of July, back-to-school, harvest, real estate, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas) are often glorified advertising supplements, but they must carry enough news or feature material to qualify for preferential postal rates that are not available to Pennysavers.

To minimize costs, many newspapers subscribe to services that provide generic stories (“boilerplate”) to fill the obligatory editorial space instead of assigning supplement stories to their own writers.

Imagine the reception you’re likely to get if you can provide your local daily or weekly newspaper with stories and illustrations for their supplements that can

- ♦ reduce cash expenses
 - ♦ contain labor costs
 - ♦ feature high-quality locally credible stories
 - ♦ lengthen the time readers spend with the paper
 - ♦ attract advertisers
 - ♦ reinforce the newspaper’s community-service image
-

Placing Articles in Supplements

First, get local newspapers' supplement topics and publication schedules from the advertising managers. Find out from them which editor decides on each supplement's editorial content—the news and feature sections.

Second, evaluate which supplement topics encompass issues targeted in your association's plan-of-work. Holiday supplements, for example, are always suitable for articles on nutrition, food safety, 4-H projects, consumer economics, and intergenerational activities, among others.

Third, ask your university's news service for their story list of recent feature stories and a list of story topics planned for the next few months. Find out if there are illustrations or photos to accompany the stories. Also determine if the news service produces text or art filler materials that can complement the features.

After this groundwork, make an appointment to visit the newspaper editor. Explain the advantages of including professionally written extension features in their supplement:

- ◆ **Reduce cash expenses.** There's no charge for Cooperative Extension feature stories.
- ◆ **Contain labor costs.** Stories on computer disks can eliminate type-entry costs; hard copy is also available.

- ◆ **Feature high-quality locally credible stories.** Cooperative Extension's research findings have earned high reader credibility.
- ◆ **Lengthen the time readers spend with the paper.** Readers spend more time reading the paper when the articles are of local interest and are prepared by a credible source.
- ◆ **Attract advertisers.** Enhanced reader interest is an incentive for advertisers to purchase space.
- ◆ **Reinforce the newspaper's community-service image.** The paper's initiative in carrying Extension features on topics of critical interest to the local community will be appreciated.

Suggest trying the placements for one or two supplements so that the newspaper and Extension can judge the benefit of a permanent arrangement.

Once you have an indication that the newspaper is seriously interested and know which topics will likely be used, contact the state Extension media specialist and/or news service writer for assistance.

Fortunately, newspaper supplements are scheduled months in advance so you'll have lead time before the deadline to put together a packet of stories, photos, artwork, and fillers.

Paid Supplements

In some situations, individual counties or a group of associations within a region may find it both financially and programmatically cost-effective to create a Cooperative Extension supplement to appear as an insert within a local newspaper.

Annual reports, for example, can be converted from public reporting documents to highly effective marketing tools. They will simultaneously enhance Extension's institutional reputation and build support for current and future activities. Answer the following questions to help you evaluate this option:

- ◆ How much did it cost to produce, print, and distribute your latest annual report, including the dollar value for professional and support staff time? What would it cost to produce, print, and distribute the same (or expanded) content in a tabloid newspaper format?
- ◆ Who actually receives it? Does the annual report reach all key county decision-makers (approximately 200 to 500 elected officials; public and voluntary agency directors; and health care, business, education, and social leaders)? What's the market penetration of the newspaper's circulation? What percentage of county households will actually get the report distributed as a newspaper supplement?

- ◆ Are accomplishments reported only as counts of phone contacts, program enrollees, and publications sold, or does the report emphasize the actual benefits that improved local people's lives? Are future programs described in terms of projected benefits for program participants? A program marketing effort should emphasize actual and intended benefits.
- ◆ Are critical issues presented with quantifiable local examples, policy options, and suggested community strategies to attain specific outcomes? Localization of national or regional problems and specificity of resolution options are keys to engaging community participation.

This marketing strategy is clearly not appropriate for all county associations. Though some of the technical writing skills may be shifted to a cooperating local publisher, producing an annual report for media distribution involves a significant commitment of capital and staff resources. Nevertheless, such an annual report can be a flagship publication that sets Extension's tone and public image and delivers its message to the entire local population. And you're required to publish an annual report anyway.

* * *

Commentary

Whereas news and feature stories are the channels for you to present and objectively analyze information, other channels exist for an association staffer, volunteer, or supporter to

- ♦ express an opinion about a current event
- ♦ make extended comments on possible local impacts of regional, state, national, or international trends
- ♦ reply to an editorial, news article, or feature story that the association feels may have omitted significant information
- ♦ introduce a new vision for addressing a community need
- ♦ enhance Extension's public profile as a credible source of reliable research information on a broad range of topics.

The mass media (particularly newspapers) offer several channels for commentary, including letters to the editor and "Op-Eds." An agent's newspaper columns and scheduled broadcast slots are often limited to a single subject area, but there's virtually no limit on the topics that can be broached in letters to the editor.

Keep in mind that when you present an opinion in the media and give your credentials as an Extension employee, you are serving as a spokesperson for Extension. Therefore, be sure to present views that are consistent with Extension's positions on issues and not simply your own personal opinions.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are rarely neutral. Youth and adults, rich and poor, cranks and geniuses, public and private citizens all sign their names as they praise, cajole, persuade, condemn, implore, and debate in this most democratic public forum. As such, these letters are religiously read by decision-makers who want to know the pulse of the community.

Letters to the editor allow Extension to continually keep the human impact of its programming before the public eye. Whenever staff, board members, and program committees meet, consider these questions:

- ◆ How has program “X” made a difference in someone’s life? Would he or she be willing to write a letter about how the program improved his or her life?
- ◆ Is a demonstration, program registration, or event coming up? Can letters to the editor supplement other publicity?
- ◆ Who has gone out of their way to help Extension? Which private or public figures have done something significant for the community? Can we thank them in a letter?

Letter writing shouldn’t be scheduled like a metronome. Simply be sensitive to the results of your programs. When an opportunity presents itself, you can find an appropriate person to write the letter. Select an enrollee, volunteer, or friend of Extension with appropriate knowledge or personal experience. Determine if the person feels comfortable with the communication objective. Ask if he or she can write the 100 to 300-word letter in the next two days (five if it’s for a weekly), and delegate the task.

A few well placed and timely letters to the editor can increase the visibility of a county association and enhance the public perception of the range of issues addressed by Extension.

* * *

Media-Initiated Contacts

On occasion reporters may contact you for information on a story they wish to do. When the media initiate the contact, you can be pretty sure that they will do the story whether you grant an interview or not. If you decline to talk to the reporter, he or she will likely find someone else outside Extension to interview. So try to view these media-initiated contacts as opportunities to get Extension in the news and grant the interview if you feel qualified to discuss the topic. Also, if you decline to comment on an issue, the media may think you or Extension have something to hide.

Responding to the Press

When you receive an unplanned phone call or visit from a reporter who wants to use you as a source of information, follow these general guidelines.

- ◆ When a reporter calls, determine what the story is about and what he or she is trying to find out. The reporter is probably not a specialist in your field, so it's your responsibility to understand the context of the question.
- ◆ Write down the question(s). If you rely on your memory, you may give the right answer to the wrong question.
- ◆ If you're not absolutely certain you have a complete answer, tell the reporter you'll call back; tell him or her exactly when; and follow through on time. You may be pressed for an immediate response, but take a moment to get it right the first time.
- ◆ Ascertain the nature of the story (is it breaking news or a feature?) to determine the reporter's deadline.
- ◆ If the story's a feature or backgrounder, there may be more time to seek information. Offer relevant background material. This will give the reporter the depth and perspective to write a balanced story. Also use this time to organize your response. Given the story line, what do you want to say? Outline your points; then call back.
- ◆ Stay focused. There probably won't be space or time for more than a few brief references, quotes, or sound bites. In an interview (as opposed to a press release) redundancy can work for you. Emphasize the same point in different ways.
- ◆ Give the topic a human face. Protect privacy, but personalize problems with real-life examples of how Extension programs make a difference. Avoid abstract or unfeeling language about illness, risk, injury or death. Acknowledge that any loss is tragic.
- ◆ Listen carefully to the question. If it is unreasonably provocative (for example, "Why does Cornell recommend spraying poisons?"), reframe the question to restate your major theme.
- ◆ Everything you say to the media can be used—each word, each phrase. If you must talk "off the record," get the reporter's consent before you speak. Even then, the information may be used if the reporter finds another source for attribution.
- ◆ Explaining why you can't comment is better than declining to comment. If you (as a nutritionist, for example) are asked about the effects of industrial pollution on shellfish, explain what you do know and offer to help the reporter reach another expert.
- ◆ Don't ask to see a story before it runs because this is a professional insult to a reporter. On the other hand, after an interview, feel free to ask that a portion of your comments be read or played back so you can be sure you expressed yourself clearly.
- ◆ Radio and television use 10 to 20 second actualities called sound bites. To make the most of sound bites, use concise comments and accessible imagery and language to effectively reach your audience. Appropriate settings and backgrounds will also enhance your presentation. Taken together, these elements are the "silver bullets" the media will use to deliver your message.
- ◆ Sometimes your interview won't make it into print or on the air. If you've been a good source or performed well, your time's not wasted. Reporters will come back to you another time.

- ◆ Don't argue with the press; you can't win.
They may not understand the subject matter, but most reporters know how to get information and are fair. If you must complain about a story, there are ways to do this, but do so only as a last resort.
- ◆ If things go reasonably well, respond with a thank you note and suggest follow up stories.

* * *

Niche Media Marketing

All messages are not equal. Mass media may be very effectively used to produce a behavioral or attitudinal response in the general public. But Extension messages intended for defined population segments (e.g., benefits of enrolling in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program or helping a present or potential funder appreciate Extension's efficacy) may be more efficiently channeled to target audiences through niche media.

Niche media are communication channels targeted to highly segmented, commercial, professional, public, or voluntary agency audiences.

Because there's no single rule to use for selecting between interpersonal, mass media, and niche media marketing strategies, you'll want to consider

- ♦ the importance of a particular message
- ♦ available communication channels to reach the target audience
- ♦ your access to the mass and niche communication channels given your budget and time constraints.

Though the big circulation daily newspaper may be most effective for reaching the general public about an independent living program for older people, a local agency bulletin that goes to 150 seniors may be more efficient in attracting program enrollees.

Instead of choosing between mass and niche media, consider using both. If the target audience already trusts a niche media channel, use it to communicate potential benefits to enrollees. To build public support for Extension, use mass media to communicate actual program benefits.

The following is not an exhaustive list of niche media, but a sample of opportunities chosen to stimulate your imagination.

Niche Publications

Every county in America has a variety of public, private, professional, and voluntary niche publications that Extension can call on to

- ◆ inform people about issues addressed by Extension
- ◆ describe the benefits and impact of specific Extension programs
- ◆ build program enrollment
- ◆ promote public participation at Extension events
- ◆ heighten Extension's public identity

Many local, state, and federal agencies publish newsletters and occasional bulletins. Some are available at drop-off points; others are sent to program enrollees or people with similar interests; some are mailed to all households in a political locality.

Although these agencies don't generally promote educational activities per se, Extension program benefits often complement agency goals and help contain public expenditures. Can we place an announcement of a parenting program in a social service department newsletter? Will ASCS distribute a supplemental farm income information flyer in its regular mailing? Could a health department mailing targeted to doctors, nurses, and pharmacists help us find volunteers to deliver AIDS education to parents? Should Extension ask to place videotapes in well-baby clinic waiting rooms?

Marketing Extension programs through other voluntary agencies' niche publications or piggybacking our messages in their mailings, increases Extension's public outreach and contains mailing costs. Such arrangements are

most successful when they are reciprocal and when mailing list confidentiality can be assured.

Find out how extensive these niche media channels are in your county. Ask community organizations if they will

- ◆ include targeted program and meeting announcements or short features about Extension programs in their publications
- ◆ distribute an Extension hand-out with a publication mailing

Extension should also consider selected commercial providers as communication partners. As a condition of their monopolies and state public service board oversight, public and investor-owned utilities (electric, gas, and telephone companies) may be receptive to Extension requests to include energy conservation and seasonally oriented consumer safety information in their monthly billing packets. Allow three to six months lead time to establish these relationships.

Student newspapers are an unexploited channel to deliver research-based knowledge to youth. A survey of New York's public and private high schools showed 98 percent with student newspapers. More than 80 percent of the principals and newspaper advisers contacted wanted to receive Extension releases if agents will include ideas for the students to make the findings relative to their lives. For example, interviewing a local doctor on the importance of good nutritional habits on sports performance, relates extension nutrition information to a topic of considerable interest to most students.

Signs and Posters

Signs and posters placed in high-traffic public locations are an effective Extension marketing tool within a coordinated communication plan. Professionally executed combinations of concise, active text and attractive images can be targeted to specific audiences as well as to the general public.

Public buses; school corridors; bank lobbies; daycare, senior, and community centers; and hospital and doctors' waiting rooms are places where large numbers of people who share certain socio-economic characteristics spend time.

Though Extension's status as a publicly funded educational organization provides

excellent leverage to negotiate free (or nominal cost) placement of public service materials, the production of high-quality posters can be costly. Accordingly, plans to use niche media may be most productive when coordinated at the association rather than program level.

An association may opt for continuous marketing by rotating various extension messages at the same site. It may, on the other hand, promote a special event or raise the public's consciousness of Extension, by scheduling a single message, timed to appear simultaneously throughout the county. Make arrangements to remove signs and posters after the conclusion of the event.

Milk Cartons and Grocery Bags

Because of their nearly universal presence in American homes, milk cartons and grocery shopping bags provide another largely untapped Extension niche-marketing opportunity. In New York, cooperative and proprietary bottlers, supermarket chains, and convenience store chains have welcomed Extension messages. Extension-produced artwork featuring messages about nutrition, food safety, and 4-H youth programs have appeared on one-quart and half-gallon milk cartons and plastic and paper shopping bags.

Plan well ahead because of the lead time needed for text approval, artwork, the physical milk carton production, and store distribution. Expect to make your initial contact *at least* three months (and preferably six) before the date you want the public to see your message.

Placemats and Tray Liners

Businesses, schools, and restaurants frequently use blank or preprinted paper placemats or tray liners to occupy people while they're awaiting service. These can be used to entertain, inform, or market a product or service.

Offer free camera-ready art to food service providers who use these products. The number of placemats or liners they order and how long it will take to use up the stock will help you decide what subject matter to incorporate in the proposed artwork.

But whether the artwork features mazes in a 4-H motif, consumer tips, a synopsis of educational programs, or promotes a single association event, Extension will

- ◆ communicate a substantive message
- ◆ develop a new communication channel to cultivate the association's overall image, and
- ◆ create partnerships with area businesses

* * *

Crisis Communications

Extension, like other public organizations, will occasionally face crisis situations that demand rapid public comment. The crisis may be precipitated by

- ♦ an adverse event directly within the Extension system, (e.g., 4-H camp accident, budget crisis)
 - ♦ a local situation or event that affects people in the community
 - ♦ a national story that directly or tangentially touches subject areas covered by Extension (e.g., food safety, product tampering)
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Crisis Factors

To some extent, the nature of the crisis dictates the response. A crisis where extension might be vulnerable to litigation differs from providing local commentary on a breaking national story. Whatever the topic or origin of the crisis, the quality and rapidity of Extension's statements may be as important to Extension's credibility as any technical response to the situation.

Crises exhibit certain regularities. "The universal characteristic of a crisis," says Albert Tortorella, "is surprise, if not at the event then

with its timing . . . with no one really knowing the full scope of the problem and/or its solution(s)." Surprise leads to insufficient information; insufficient information leads to rumors and fear; and public responses may be exaggerated, inappropriate, or unwarranted.

Crises also provoke a predictable pattern of media demands. Extension associations can successfully respond to these demands with a crisis communication process that fosters fruitful contacts with the media.

Crisis Response

Anticipation and preparation are the keys to successful crisis communications. It will be easier to survive a crisis if you've done some planning. Have an up-to-date summary of association programs and activities; your annual report and plans-of-work provide a starting base. Develop a media plan using the material in this section and do some role-playing with a local reporter (if you know him or her very well).

Every association should have an authorized spokesperson available at all times to answer questions from reporters. Because the association has a duty to answer questions as soon as possible, all reporters should be referred to the authorized person for quick access to information. Too often, reluctance to respond to media inquiries results in inaccurate or incomplete news reporting. If an emergency is expected to last several days, a pressroom should be set up with adequate electrical and telephone outlets and access to a photocopier.

When there's a crisis involving your association, expect to be contacted by the media. If it appears that your association may bear some direct or indirect responsibility for the crisis (for example, an accident occurring during an

extension event), have your spokesperson or crisis coordinator contact your association's counsel for advice *before* issuing a statement to the press.

If you can foresee a problem, prepare a statement *before* the media calls and assemble background information (with visuals) that reflect the facts.

When an adverse story breaks, treat bad news surgically. Neither downplay nor exaggerate the situation—you risk making the association look worse. Neglecting to release all information at once may result in a series of negative stories. Be prepared to answer five basic questions:

1. What happened?
2. Why did it happen?
3. What are its present and long-range consequences?
4. What will be done about it?
5. How, if applicable, can a recurrence of the situation be prevented?

After a crisis hits establish the facts quickly. Define what knowledge, skills, and resources your association can contribute to its immediate, mid-term, and long-range resolution. Turn to campus faculty and news service writers for aid in assembling supplemental resources to help media efficiently communicate this information to the public. Have the material sent to you by fax, e-mail, or overnight delivery.

To minimize speculation, fear, rumor, and conjecture, establish an Extension information center, be it an office or even a phone number, to provide authoritative information and coordinate your media responses to the situation. All media requests for information and Extension releases should be funneled through the center. The center should gather and consolidate pertinent information, share news and communication strategies with other public and private groups involved in the crisis, manage media requests, and direct reporters to your designated spokesperson for official comments and explanations.

Because the journalist who calls is usually “on deadline” to make the next edition or

broadcast, he or she can’t wait indefinitely while you prepare an in-depth statement. Respect deadlines if you want to be part of the story. Failure to return calls before the deadline may also compromise your future relationship with the media.

Reporters may need Extension expertise to clarify a technical issue, or be seeking quotes about local impact or whether such an event poses any immediate or future threat to the community. Even in the case of national stories that don’t immediately touch area residents, reporters may call to gather information to localize a wire service story or an accompanying local article, called a “sidebar.”

Rapidly identify public attitudes. Demonstrating understanding about groups’ or individuals’ concerns, and openness about the facts, can help your association weather public scrutiny after the crisis. Solicit employee, volunteer, member, and community input to develop short- and long-term solutions.

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Notes

