

Media Outreach and Effectiveness

In order to be effective, conservation districts need to inform their communities of their activities. It is important to keep the public informed of plans of work and accomplishments of the district. In addition, if or when controversies arise, a good working relationship with the media can help get your message out quickly and accurately.

Public Relations Strategy

Districts are advised to devise a public relations strategy to help improve accuracy and effectiveness of the district's message and to allow the district to function effectively in a crisis.

Get the Message Straight

Designate one person to serve as the district's spokesperson. This may be the district chair or other supervisor or the district manager. Although everyone should be informed, the district spokesperson must thoroughly understand the issues, goals and concerns of the district in order to give clear, concise and factual information.

Focus on the News

Stick to one message at a time for short news stories or radio briefs. Any person speak on the behalf of the district should not give personal opinions – rather, they should stick to district policy and statements, using “the board” or “the conservation district.”

Building Media Relationships

Districts should take time to develop relationships with their local media before a crisis arises. Identify the critical media personnel in the district, whether they be print, radio or television personnel. Take the media to lunch, host them at events such as a district banquet, cover their expenses for events and functions.

It is also helpful to nominate your local media for awards wherever applicable. Not only does this lets them know that the district appreciates the time and effort they spend on district issues, but it also looks good to their publisher and is a welcome addition to any resume.

Districts should be sure to keep their media contact lists up to date. Contact information for all Wyoming newspapers can be obtained through the Wyoming Press Association at <http://www.wyopress.org>. Keep notes on all media contacts, such as their phone, fax and cellular numbers, e-mail addresses and hours of work. Also know when their deadlines are to know what is the best time to contact them.

Whenever possible, districts should purchase paid advertising space. Radio stations and newspaper are businesses with a bottom line, and occasional paid advertising can help improve the number of times district news makes the paper or the airwaves. Consider purchasing advertising space announcing award winners, district events or to say thank you to important sponsors.

Finally, always be courteous and send thank you notes to media contacts whether or not district stories were used in the final publication.

News Release Structure

A professional, well written news release has a greater chance of being used. Call your media contacts to find out what in what format they prefer to receive news releases, i.e. fax, hard copy or e-mail.

When writing the news release, be sure to answer Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? News release should be one page in length, typed and double spaced. Always double check spelling and grammar. Stick with a single subject, and include meaningful quotes from appropriate people whenever possible. Be sure to include contact information for the district, including a specific name and phone number.

Make the news release interesting. Include a catchy lead or something memorable in the first paragraph. Wherever possible, include high quality, action photos and photo cut lines that tell who is in the photo and what is happening. When e-mailing photos, call media contacts ahead of time to see what formatting requirements they have for photos.

[Click here for a sample news release](#)

Interviews

Districts should respond quickly to requests for interviews. The designated spokesperson should be prepared, and should know what topic they will be asked to discuss. Professional dress, even for print interviews, is recommended.

WACD suggests developing a 3-point message to ensure that your message is effective. Make sure talking points are clear and have factual information to back them up when necessary. The spokesperson should bridge when asked about an issue not related to the topic.

It is acceptable to call the media contact back if the spokesperson is unprepared for an interview. This will help eliminate confusion and inaccurate information. The district spokesperson should never go “off the record,” or discuss what they don’t understand or don’t know. It’s acceptable to say “I don’t know, but I’ll get back to you with a correct answer.”

Summary

Always know what message the district wants communicated, and designate a knowledgeable, concise and focused spokesperson to speak on behalf of the district. Treating the media with fairness and professional courtesy will help promote district programs and activities in the local community.