

How to foster a relationship with your local media

The media require sources in order to do their job. And as an advocate, executive director or program director for a California Rape Crisis Center, you are an expert source on the issue of sexual assault. To reporters, being an expert source benefits you by giving you increased visibility and credibility, along with providing a platform for your ideas. When you're quoted as a leading voice about a statistic, event, idea, issue or service, your knowledge is on display. That speaks far more powerfully about your agency's reputation than any paid promotional advertising — and it makes sexual assault a priority issue to those who are paying attention to the media. Being quoted in the media also opens up new avenues of reaching your target audiences and allows you to communicate with them in a different way. How do expert sources keep the media calling? The following are some tips:

- **Let them know you're in the community**

You do not need an expensive media plan to get going as an expert source. Make phone calls or send emails to health and/or community reporters and introduce yourself with a specific suggestion about stories on which you are qualified to offer expert opinion. For example, let the reporter know about your SAAM event, and follow this by sharing why this is such an important time to raise awareness about sexual assault. You can talk about the National Intimate Partner & Sexual Violence Survey and the state of funding for California's Rape Crisis Centers. Additionally, if you read or hear something about sexual assault that you disagree with, you can contact the reporter and suggest a follow-up story from a different angle. Your aim is to introduce yourself and get on the reporters' contact list as an expert source to be called at the next opportunity.

- **Be quotable**

Journalists want to deliver information to a wide audience in short form. Help the reporter find the essence of your point, rather than forcing reporters to heavily edit and select your points for you. Remember, you're not being interviewed to tell everything you know, but to offer your perspective on what you know. Decide what you have to offer and how you can speak about it succinctly and memorably.

- **React quickly**

News moves quickly, and reporters often face tight deadlines. If you're going to interact with the media, you'll have to keep up with news cycles. Even if the reporter is writing a story about sexual assault and knows that you are an expert, you won't become a reliable source they can turn to again and again if you're not accessible to reporters on deadline.

- **Stick to what you know**

Resist the temptation to speculate or comment on issues in which you are not well versed. Being an expert source doesn't require you to be an expert on everything. For example, if you are interviewing on a particular piece of sexual assault legislation and the reporter asks you about someone else's anti-violence legislation, you do not have to know the answer. If you don't know, don't be afraid to say so. Do offer the reporter some alternatives such as other ways of finding the information so you continue to prove your value as a source.

- **Don't spin**

Don't lie to a reporter, or stretch the truth. A reporter's job security rests on her/his reputation. If you damage a reporter's credibility and you won't get a second chance to become a source.