

## **Pitch Letters and Pitch Calls**

### **An introduction to the media**

There are two objectives to accomplish when working with the media. First, you need to attract the media to your event so that they come and cover it. This is the primary purpose of the “pitch letter” and the “pitch call.” After you have the media at your advocacy event, your second objective is to have the media take away the message that you want them to convey to their audiences. This is the primary purpose of the press release and it is accomplished by what you do with the media at your event. Preparing a set of consistent talking points helps do this.

### **Your audience: Media personnel**

In order to attract the media to your event and to have them take away the message you want, you must remember how media personnel operate:

- They have their target audience in mind; your event must be of interest to their audience for it to be covered.
- Numerous requests are made for them to cover events; your contact with them must be courteous and professional.
- They are on a deadline and under pressure. Brief and polite conversations with expressed thanks are noticed.

Media sources exist at your school and in your community:

- Newspaper
- Alternate weeklies
- TV stations
- Audiences interested in advocacy, youth, affordable housing, etc.
- Radio stations
- Organization newsletters and bulletins
- Community Web sites

### **Pitching your event as newsworthy**

An interesting angle and relevance to the media source’s audience are key components to consider in how you communicate your event to the media. Student and/or youth involvement is a selling point. Habitat for Humanity is a recognized name. A local homeowner or celebrity attracts attention. Someone with a specific story to share is another good selling point. It will help you in working with the media to create a brief list of three specific details of your event that you can highlight. If you need assistance in pitching your activities to the media, please contact the Youth Programs department at (800) HABITAT, Ext. 7546.

### **Message points**

Message points help your key message remain simple and consistent. They should include specific information about your local event as well as general information about national and worldwide substandard housing and poverty. Order your message points from greatest importance to least, and include no more than 12 in your list. Begin with a point about the local state of poverty housing, local Habitat chapters and affiliates, and

Habitat for Humanity International's work around the world. The following are some examples useful for your event:

- The ultimate goal of Habitat for Humanity is to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the face of the earth by building adequate and basic housing.
- Habitat for Humanity works in partnership with volunteers and low-income families to build simple, decent homes.
- Habitat for Humanity is not a first-response organization. It builds sustainable houses that low-income families own and can pass on to their children.
- Habitat for Humanity builds in nearly 1,700 communities across the United States completing more than 5,000 houses per year and more than 20,000 houses per year overseas in nearly 100 countries around the world.
- Habitat for Humanity has built more than 250,000 houses since 1976.
- Habitat currently completes one house every 21 minutes somewhere in the world.
- Low-income families who have a need for simple, decent housing partner with Habitat by helping to build their own home and then pay a no-profit mortgage. These low monthly mortgage payments go into a fund to help build additional homes with other low-income families in those communities.
- Habitat's work provides a hand up, not a handout.

### **First contact with the media: Writing a pitch letter**

The pitch letter has one purpose: to attract the attention of the media to your upcoming event. It should include relevant information including the event's time, date and location. It should also contain all of your contact information including name, phone number and e-mail address. The assignment editor or a reporter, depending on the size of the media source, may read the letter. The letter may be e-mailed, faxed or postmarked depending on the preference of each media source. It should be sent out at least one month before the event. It should be short — no more than three paragraphs. Use your chapter's/affiliate's letterhead, if available.

### **First paragraph**

- What you will be doing at your event.
- Why it is interesting to the assignment editor/reporter.

### **Second paragraph**

- Date, time and location of your event.
- Three specific details about what your chapter will be doing.
- One sentence about Habitat for Humanity International (see above message points).

### **Third paragraph**

- Contact information to receive more information about your event.
- Express willingness to work with and accommodate the editor/reporter.

### **Preparing for a pitch call**

### **Follow up the letter with a call**

You have already distributed your pitch letters to the media sources that you want to cover your event. Your letter is likely among tens — if not hundreds — of similar letters on the assignment editor's desk. Even an extremely well-written pitch letter may not stand out, and editors and reporters are busy people tracking down stories for the day's

news. It is time to call and continue to solicit the media's coverage of your event.

### **The purpose of the pitch call**

The purpose of the pitch call is the same as that of the pitch letter: to have the media come and cover your event. You accomplish this by making it clear that your event is of interest to their audience, and by making a follow-up phone call. It is possible that the editor/reporter you speak with has not received, has not read or has forgotten about your pitch letter. Tell the reporter who you are, why you are calling and ask if he/she has a free minute to speak with you. If the reporter has a free minute, let him/her know the basics of the event (time, date and place) and why he/she should be interested in the story. If the reporter is unsure if he/she will be able to attend, offer to send a follow-up e-mail closer to the event. This needs to be done in a concise manner. Be sure to resend your pitch letter if it was not received or if it was sent to the wrong place.

### **Multiple calls**

If needed, it is acceptable to make multiple pitch calls to provide additional information such as important changes to the event. This should be done sparingly. Such an update is not meant to nag or bug the media but rather to include a new bit of news that is of interest and importance. If a reporter replies that he or she will not cover the event, take no for an answer and look for another reporter.

### **Common media deadlines**

- TV and radio deadlines are two to three hours before airtime.
- Morning papers have an early evening deadline.
- Afternoon papers have a late morning deadline.

### **Calling hints**

- Have the same person who sends the pitch letter do the pitch calling.
- Make calls before lunchtime.
- If you do not have a contact name, call the assignment editor.
- Reporters on deadline after 3 p.m. will not be very willing to talk to you.
- Determine the deadline for each media source that you are contacting.
- Ask what the reporter needs to make a story out of your event. Perhaps something visual (photo/video opportunity) would increase the chance of your event being covered.
- Thank the person with whom you speak. Such courtesy is noticed. Follow-up thank-you notes to reporters who covered your event build good relationships with media.

### **Sample pitch call**

Your pitch calls to the media are going to be more variable than the pitch letter. Each call you make should be adapted to the media source. For example, in one call you may be informing the editor of your event plans because he/she has not received the pitch letter. Another call's purpose may be to secure coverage from a media source that has not committed to being at your event. The following sample pitch call covers several scenarios with the media:

Hello, this is [name] from the [school name] chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

–OR–

Hello, this is [name] from the [school name] student group involved with [affiliate name] Habitat for Humanity.

I am calling to talk with you about our [event name] event. Do you have a minute to speak with me?

I sent you information about the event. Have you had a chance to look over the information? [If not, briefly explain your event according to the pitch letter.]

*On [date], the [school name] chapter of Habitat for Humanity will:*

- *Sponsor a community roundtable discussion about affordable housing with [city council member] at 10 a.m. in John Doe Hall;*
- *Host a writing campaign to [federal congressperson] in support of the National Housing Trust Fund Campaign from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. across campus; and*
- *Spend the night outside in cardboard boxes to raise awareness about poverty housing at a sleep-out that begins at 9 p.m. in the center of campus.*

*We are taking up the challenge to eliminate poverty housing in [local community] as well as the world as part of a nationwide event called Act! Speak! Build! Week.*

Are you planning on sending anyone to cover our event? [If yes, ask for the reporter's name and provide any directions he/she might need to get to the event. Remember to give parking information and/or parking passes. If the answer is maybe or not sure, offer to send a reminder e-mail later.]

[Give any additional details of interest.] I wanted to let you know that the [president of our college/principal of our high school/community leader] will be joining us in our sleep-out that evening.

This event is part of a nationwide event taking place on high school and college campuses and in communities across the United States. Do you have any questions I can answer?

If you need any more help, please feel free to contact me at [number and e-mail address]. Thank you for your time!