

Media Relations

Media relations have come to the forefront as we respond to events in the Middle East. Our media efforts are proactive – alerting the campus to our events and positions – and reactive, responding to media accounts and dealing with reporters.

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Proactive Media Relations: Getting the Word Out

Calendar entry – Sent to the calendar section of all your local media provides a brief item giving the correct date, time, location and subject of your event.

Media advisory – Sent to the assignment editors, television producers and reporters with whom you have a relationship to solicit their coverage of an event. The media advisory provides a brief item giving the correct date, time, location and subject of your event.

Press release -- Sent to the assignment editors, television producers and reporters with whom you have a relationship, to solicit their coverage of an event or to print in their publication. Provides a more extensive overview of your event or announcement than the media advisory.

Pitching to a reporter, producer or editor – Speak with your media contacts directly to invite them to cover your story. You can follow up with a press release or media advisory.

Columns and Letter to the Editor – Make your opinion heard.

Press Releases

The press release should contain all the important information you wish to convey about a story. It will be used by a newspaper as written or as background for a story on the subject. The press release is sent to the appropriate reporter, editor or producer.

Since editors cut stories from the bottom up, the most important information should be at the top of the story, should contain the five W's (who, what, where, when and why), and should be written in a compelling manner.

Hillel Sponsors Vigil For Israel, Peace

For Immediate Release

Contact: Your Name, telephone

WASHINGTON, D.C. (August 8, 1999) – Hillel at (Your University) will sponsor a candlelight vigil on the Commons Thursday night at 7:30 in support of Israel and the peace process.

“We want to demonstrate that we stand behind Israel as it struggles to reach a peace agreement with its Palestinian neighbors,” says Hillel Foundation Executive Director _____. “We regret the loss of life on both sides in the ongoing unrest and believe that negotiation provides the only path to peace.”

During the recent unrest, Hillel has.....

For more information on the vigil contact.....

Hillel at State University serves the 3,000 Jewish students on campus through a variety of programs, including.....

This symbol ends the story>>>>> ###

Media Advisories

A media advisory is an invitation to the media to attend your event. It is sent to a specific individual at a media outlet. Make sure that all the information is accurate. Follow-up the advisory by calling the reporter to confirm participation.

Have press releases available at the event to fill in all the relevant details. If the reporter does not attend the event, send the release to his/her office and follow up with a phone call.

Media Advisory

Hillel to Sponsor Vigil for Israel, Peace

YOUR CITY, (August 9, 1999) – Hillel at (Your University) will sponsor a candlelight vigil on the Commons in support of Israel and the peace process.

Date: Thursday, August 00, 1999

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Location: Commons

For more information and to confirm your participation, please contact the local Hillel director (000) 000-0000.

Hillel at State University serves the 3,000 Jewish students on campus through a variety of programs, including.....

Pitching to a Reporter

When you speak with a reporter or editor, you are “selling” the story and establishing a relationship. You may wish to invite him/her to an event, set up an interview or simply inform him/her about the story.

Treat him/her with respect. By understanding a reporter’s work, you can make a more tailored, effective pitch.

Make your pitch and listen carefully to the response. Is this the right contact person? Is there another reporter on another beat who should be contacted? Is this a bad time? Can you compliment him/her on a recent story? Look for another opportunity to call him/her in the future.

If this story doesn’t interest the reporter, another story may. **Look beyond the immediate story to the relationship you are establishing with the journalist and his/her outlet. Don’t be afraid: You have a good story to tell and you are helping the journalist to do his/her job. You are an important member of the community and a newsmaker.**

Before you pick up the phone, make sure that you understand the story and know the message you wish to deliver. Be prepared to be “on the record” as soon as the reporter answers the call. The reporter may want to do the story immediately.

If the reporter is not interested in the story, offer to send a press release and follow up with a phone call. Keep the reporter apprised of new developments in the story.

A Sample Pitch

“Hi this is Suzy Director from Hillel at University of State. How are you? I enjoyed your article last week on climbing college costs. We have a story that you might be interested in covering. This Thursday we will be holding a candlelight vigil at 7:30 on the Commons. The rally will be in support of Israel and the peace process. Would you be interested in more information? Should I call you the day of the event? Here is my office, home and cell phone number. I look forward to seeing you.”

Columns and Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor and columns enable your voice to be heard in the community. Letters to the editor are generally 250 words or less and address a specific issue already published in the newspaper. A column, commentary, opinion piece or op-ed, usually under 750 words, expresses the writer's opinion on any issue.

Since the newspaper is not obligated to publish your piece, you have to demonstrate its value to the readers. Here is how you can improve your chances of having your column or letter to the editor published:

- **Present your opinions clearly.** If the editor can't understand the item, the readers won't either.
- **Say something new.** Make sure that your piece adds to the "marketplace of ideas."
- **Avoid inflammatory language.** You undermine your credibility.
- **Avoid direct attacks on individuals** Address the person's thoughts and actions, not his/her character.
- **Avoid empty rhetoric** If there are no ideas behind your words, why should the column be published?
- **Make sure the item is factually correct.** If you are lucky, the publication will double-check your facts so that you can avoid public embarrassment or a lawsuit. If your column presents items that are incorrect, you impair your credibility and leave yourself legally vulnerable.
- **Make sure the item is grammatically correct.** No credible editor will publish material that is grammatically wrong.
- **Show your column to another reader before sending it to the editor.** The best defense against a publication offense is another set of eyes. Show the item to a reader who is similar to your intended audience (a student, an administrator, a community official) to ensure that the message is clear. Share the item with a reader who knows grammar and spelling. Ask a lawyer to review the piece prior to publication if it criticizes specific individuals or groups.

Reactive Media Relations: Responding to the Press

Your Rights You are under no obligation to speak with the press. You have the right to determine when, if and how you speak with the media. If you do not want to talk to journalists, you can politely decline to speak and/or to return phone calls. You may deny the media access to any meeting or event unless it is held in an open, public area.

(As a community leader and a representative of Hillel, you should choose to speak with the press. Your words can help to build Jewish identity and serve as a force for *tikkun olam*. Use any opportunity to establish a positive relationship with journalists on campus and in the community.)

Privacy You have a right to privacy. However, The Associated Press writes: “When a person becomes involved in a news event, voluntarily or involuntarily, he forfeits the right to privacy. Similarly, a person somehow involved in a matter of legitimate public interest, even if not a bona fide spot news event, normally can be written about with safety.” In other words, anyone – particularly Hillel professionals and student leaders – can easily become swept up in a legitimate news event and lose their right to privacy.

Libel Losing your right to privacy does not give journalists the right to publish untrue information about you or your organization. You have the right to sue for libel if you believe the media has published untrue information.

Similarly, you may be sued for libel if you impugn another person who is not a public official. Never attack the *character* of anyone who is not a public official in writing. You have every right, however, to criticize an individual’s actions or beliefs if he/she has become a public figure. This is a fine line and it is better to double check with a lawyer before attacking anyone publicly. For example, it is appropriate for you to rebut a columnist for writing an anti-Israel article or to criticize the admissions policy of a school. However, it would be inappropriate – and possibly libelous -- for you to impute anti-Semitism in either case.

Appoint a Spokesperson One person and an alternate should be named the official media representative of Hillel. All other staff and students should avoid speaking on Hillel’s behalf. Inform all other staff and students that media calls should only be handled by the spokesperson or alternate.

On the Record Anything you say to a reporter, from the moment you pick up the phone to the moment you hang up, is potentially on the record. Do not share anything with a reporter that you do not want the public to know. Reporters are not your friends. They are obliged to create interesting stories for their readers and they will fulfill that obligation any way they can. If you do not want a reporter to publish something, tell him/her *in advance* that the remark will be off the record. Better yet, do not say it.

Call Back. When a reporter calls, you may choose to call him/her back. That enables you to compose your thoughts, check with relevant individuals and ascertain that he/she is, in fact, a journalist. Do not allow yourself to be rushed by a journalist claiming “deadline pressure.”

Ethical reporters will always identify themselves when they call. If a caller asks you or your staff detailed questions that make you feel uneasy, do not answer the questions. It may be a reporter or another individual who needs the information for the wrong reasons.

You have every right to call an individual's editor to ascertain that he/she is employed by the newspaper.

Message You can make the most of your encounter with the media by promoting your message, whether that message is solidarity with Israel, the pluralistic nature of Hillel or the beauty of Jewish holidays. Promote your message over and over again in different ways with the reporter. Do not answer questions that make you uncomfortable and do not let the journalist put words in your mouth. Phrases like, "Wouldn't you agree that..." or "Isn't it true that..." should raise a red flag.

Accuracy Mistakes will be made. You can minimize the damage by asking reporters to show you an advance copy of the article before publication (which they won't do) or to read back to all direct quotes, which they will do.

Objectivity. An article that is located on the opinion page, the editorial page or is labeled commentary or analysis does not need to be objective. It is the opinion of the author. All other articles must be objective and present both sides of a story. If a reporter writes an article that fails to do so, you have every right to complain to him/her, to the editor, or to submit a letter to the editor.

Editorial Discretion. A newspaper is under no obligation to publish anything. An editor may use editorial discretion to include or exclude articles, columns or advertising. On the one hand you can hold a newspaper accountable for publishing inflammatory or defamatory material. On the other hand, the newspaper is under no obligation to publish your submissions.

Responding to the Media. If you disagree with an item in the media you have many options for responding:

- **Refrain from response.** You may not want to direct any more attention to the item.
- **Discuss the matter with the reporter.** Explain your position. Ascertain how the problem was created and whether it can be rectified.
- **Discuss the matter with the editor.** Explain your position. Ascertain how the problem was created and whether it can be rectified. Ask the newspaper to publish a letter to the editor or a column. If necessary, demand a retraction (the newspaper withdraws an entire article after it has been published and apologizes), a correction (the newspaper corrects a fact in the article) or a clarification (the newspaper clarifies a fact in the article).
- **Speak with the reader's representative or ombudsman.** Explain your position. Ascertain how the problem was created and whether it can be rectified. If necessary, demand a retraction, correction or clarification.

- **Request a meeting with the editorial board.** Explain your position. Ascertain how the problem was created and whether it can be rectified. . Ask the newspaper to publish a letter to the editor or a column. If necessary, demand a retraction, correction or clarification.
- **Write a letter to the editor for publication.** Succinctly and clearly explain your position.
- **Write a column.** Succinctly and clearly explain your position.

In the event that these methods do not work, contact Jeff Rubin in the International Center, 202-857-6534, jerubin@hillel.org.

Media Relations Tips

Here are some proven methods for working with reporters.

◆ The Inverted Pyramid

- Tell your story with the headline first.
- Follow with your key message.
- Add in supporting details.
- Bring up your other key messages.

◆ Use Bridges To Get To Your Key Messages

Use the following phrases to “bridge” from one subject to the message you wish to convey. “We will trust students to tell us the truth on their applications *but the important thing* is that we are trying to engage Jewish students who may not be involved in Jewish life on campus.”

- “And let me add.....”
- “What you should know.....”
- “The important thing is.....”
- “What I can tell you is.....”

◆ Use Flags To Make A Point

Use these phrases to underscore your message.

- “The key thing to remember is.....”
- “The most important issue for us.....”
- “It really boils down to.....”
- Not all flags are verbal.

◆ More Ways To Succeed

- Don’t repeat negative words/issues or raise them yourself.
- Beware of getting bogged down in details.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Speak in layman’s terms (“Student will meet with Israeli peers” *not* “Students will have mifgashim.”)
- Talk from your audience’s viewpoint.
- Tell the truth. Never lie.
- Bring up points you want covered.

◆ If You Need To Cool The Heat

- Reframe the question to your game plan.
- Address the question and bridge to your key message.
- Don't be bullied or coerced into answering something you shouldn't.
- Explain what you know, not what you don't.
- You have a right to withhold information.
- Ask to have your quotes read to you before publication.

◆ **Reminders**

- Prepare your messages and rehearse.
- Remember, first impressions are lasting.
- Imagine your interview being replayed over and over, how did you do?

◆ **Comfort, Confidence & Control = Success**

- Know your objective.
- Focus on your audience.
- Select key messages.
- State them well.
- Be credible.