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PROJECT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN ALBANIA

**MANUAL ON THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MEDIA CAMPAIGNS FOR
THE HIGH INSPECTORATE FOR DECLARATION AND AUDIT OF ASSETS**

*Opinion of the Department of the Information Society and Action against Crime
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1 PLANNING A STRATEGIC MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Your communications office is staffed and equipped. As the spokesperson, you are comfortable with the various devices – press releases, press calls, interviews, newsletters, etc. – you use to communicate with the media about your organization or issue. The next step is to construct an effective media strategy to stimulate media coverage of your issue or organization.

Strategic media planning is a fundamental requirement for the *High Inspectorate on the Declaration and Audit of Assets* (HIDAA) that requires to utilize media coverage to help further its agenda with regard to issues of preventing and controlling conflict of interests by raising public awareness about the dangers of corruption and developing public support for fighting against corruption.

As representative of HIDAA's Public Relations Department, if you do not plan and organize your media efforts, you will spend every day reacting to instead of influencing the agenda.

If you are the spokesperson or media advocate for such an organization like the *High Inspectorate of Declaration and Audit of Assets*, you may have to conduct your own internal campaign to educate your colleagues about the value and effectiveness of an active, planned and directed media strategy.

You will have to make it clear to your colleagues that getting your organization's name, HIDAA, included in news stories about your issues is not enough. It often takes governmental organizations a long time to realize that the failure to create and implement strategic media plans means that your work, concerns, and goals are much harder to reach.

2 ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Organizational commitment in time and money is a must. Press relations should not be a one-time effort. Working with the media should be viewed as a campaign that needs to be planned, supported, and executed as carefully as a campaign for political office, ballot issues or public awareness campaign.

The first question an organization like HIDAA must ask itself is **How** important is media coverage? (Sometimes media coverage is not important) On a scale of one to ten, where do good visibility and media coverage come in your organization's priorities? If media coverage is very important, then time and resources must be spent planning and executing media strategies.

Additionally, if HIDAA decides media is a high priority, it is imperative that the public relations person (or staff) be included in organizational planning meetings. The people planning the events and programs for which HIDAA wants media coverage must work with the public relations people from the beginning for the best chance of success. Designing media strategies and actions for your organization should not be an afterthought, but an integrated part of planning.

Spokespersons are not magicians. Some basic tools are needed to set up and run a press operation. Money is needed for designing letterheads and graphics, developing lists, printing kits, and mailing releases. Money is also needed for telephone calls, faxing, mailings, renting rooms for press conferences, and more. The more money and resources devoted to press relations, the more media coverage HIDAA will receive. However, if you have a limited budget but the right commitment from your leadership, good media coverage can still be achieved.

Lay the groundwork. Before you make a single press call or write a press release, you and the Chief Inspector and other idea people at HIDAA need to ask and answer some very important questions.

- Which issues does HIDAA want to focus its media resources on?
- What is current public opinion about those issues?
- What was the type and tenor of past media coverage of the issue?

These questions cannot and should not be answered by one individual. A successful media campaign or strategy is the result of a team effort.

Set priorities. This first step – identifying your organization’s media priorities – has organization-wide effects and must be discussed by the institution’s top leaders and key policy people and you (the public relations person).

Do not make the mistake many governmental organizations make and decide to generate significant media coverage on all the issues.

This is a particularly bad idea. Not only does it mean that limited resources are stretched thin, it results in inadequate coverage and impact for any of your issues.

The HIDAA Chief Inspector and other key policy people must work with you to determine which issues you will focus your media advocacy resources on. The input of the Chief Inspector is essential for several reasons.

- The Chief Inspector is often HIDAA’S top spokesperson and as such he/she is a major component of your media strategy; his/input input, awareness, and commitment are essential.
- Your Chief Inspector and other top officials will have to defend the decision about which issues get media advocacy focus at the expense of other issues; their own participation in the decision will make their defence of it more effective.
- The Chief Inspector and other top officials need to understand just what a public relations person can and cannot accomplish. Participation in a strategy session to set priorities, identify media and budget resources, and bring up creative ideas can help leaders understand the process.

Considering HIDAA’s organizational structure, scope and size, **small and efficient media teams** may be created. Once the priorities have been chosen, HIDAA should create unofficial media campaign teams for each campaign. These teams should include a member of the media staff, the organization’s policy expert, and the top

organization official who will be the primary spokesperson for the campaign. The media advocate or spokesperson (press secretary) is the team leader and has final say.

Understand public opinion about your priority issue. Once HIDAA has determined the issue or issues for which it will mobilize media resources, take time to educate yourself about two factors that will affect your final media strategy: public opinion and past media coverage of the issue.

Polling data: Knowing what your constituency knows about a certain issue and how the public feels about the issue is essential to your work. Research data can provide you with a fresh perspective on how the public views the problem.

Your organization does not need to commission an expensive professional research poll. Polling organizations can usually provide background reports on the issues by demographic breakouts. These organizations can be an invaluable resource in your use of public opinion as part of your media strategy.

You might also want to conduct some informal groups, in which 5 to 20 people gather to discuss your issue. What you hear from people – how they perceive your issue, your organization, possible solutions – can help inform your media strategy planning.

What you learn through poll numbers and informal groups will help determine whether your campaign goal is to educate the public or change public opinion or activate an already persuaded public.

Past media coverage: As important as polling data is to understanding how the public regards your issues, it is equally important that you review past media coverage of the issues you target. Spend time reviewing how the national media cover the issue and find out if any of the national media outlets have done other similar stories. If they have, track by-lines and start a notebook of the coverage. If they have not, suggest stories about your issue when you approach reporters and editors.

Before setting up a meeting with the HIDAA Chief Inspector to develop your plan, write a report reviewing previous coverage on the issues. Analyze the following:

- Headlines: What do they say? How could the article’s content be improved?
- How is the issue described: What definitions are used in the body of the article? Does the article accurately reflect the issue?
- Quotes from supporters: Who is quoted? Do the comments put forward the strongest argument?
- Quotes from the opposition: Who is quoted? What are the key arguments against the issues?

From such analysis, a picture should emerge of how the media are currently “**positioning**” the issue and how much coverage the issue has received. Use it as the starting point for a media strategy session with the Chief Inspector or another top official.

The headlines, quotes and definitions you see in past coverage will help you develop your message, your most powerful phrases and to determine how best to “**frame**” or “**position**” your issue.

Planning the campaign. The next section of this manual focuses on the strategic media campaign planning process. A media advocate should always devise a complete plan, whether she or he is creating a long-term media campaign or a one-time media event. The following outline will help you to think about and create your plan:

- Organizational commitment
- Policy goal
- Media goal
- Audiences
- Media targets
- Message development
- Spokespeople
- Tools
- Tactics
- Timeline
- Budget

3 IDENTIFY CAMPAIGN'S POLICY AND MEDIA OBJECTIVES

The first task is now completed. In other words, HIDAA has determined the issues on which it wants to focus its media advocacy resources. As a public relations person, you are now ready to work alone or, if the Chief Inspector decided so, you have put a media campaign team for each issue. What is next? Now you must identify the media advocacy campaign's policy and media objectives.

Policy objectives. The clear identification of your policy objectives will help you target the appropriate audiences, articulate a clear message, create useful and effective communication tools and tactics, maintain campaign focus, and evaluate the success of your campaign.

To determine the campaign's policy objectives, the media team should ask itself the following types of questions:

- What does HIDAA want the campaign to accomplish?
- Is it a public education campaign oriented towards raising public awareness about a particular issue?
- Is it a political action campaign aimed at affecting pending legislation?
- Is it an advocacy campaign focused on placing a specific issue on the political agenda?
- Is HIDAA's objective sensible, rational and defensible?
- Is our objective attainable and within our institution's area of experience and expertise?

Media objectives. At this stage of the planning process, it is important for you to articulate the type of media coverage HIDAA would like to achieve in the campaign. You need to determine whether the campaign will focus on:

- National newspaper and television
- National radio or billboards

- Specific news outlets
- The placement of articles you write
- Some combination of potential media

You also want to decide whether the campaign should be a long-term campaign, slowly building up media interest or whether your goal is to generate one day or week of significant coverage.

You are not yet ready to identify specific media targets; that task must wait until you have identified and defined your audience.

4 AUDIENCE

Identify and target your audience. Careful identification and targeting of an “audience” is critical to any media campaign. Determining which audiences you want to reach and influence will determine, in turn the message you develop and your choice of media outlets.

There are any number of audiences HIDAA may want to reach: legislators and politicians, civil society, advocacy groups or other stakeholder organizations, donors or international organizations, the general public etc. The audience you choose will depend on the policy objective of HIDAA’s campaign.

You should ask yourself a number of questions to focus your targeting options as you begin your media campaign.

- Is your audience *broad scale* or is it a *narrow* audience?
- Will your audience, and therefore media targets, change over the life of the media strategy?
- What media are appropriate to use, once you have established your targets and audience?

In the beginning of your media campaign, it might be important to reach only the professionals, specialists or activists in your issue field. Alternatively, you might be interested in reaching policy-makers and “media elites” or your campaign goal might be to focus on certain civic or advocacy organizations, and later the general public.

It is a question of narrowing versus broadening your message and your campaign. This part of the planning process can also help determine time frames and budget.

5 MEDIA TARGETS

Once you determine who your audience is, you need to identify what media outlets they access. These outlets will be your campaign media targets. Through these target media outlets you reach your target audience. Once you have identified the appropriate media outlets, you will need to identify within each outlet the reporters,

editors, producers to whom you will direct your story, send faxes invite to press conferences etc.

- If you are seeking to persuade activists or community leaders, remember to target editorial pages, which are read extensively by public policymakers.
- If you want to reach people in certain professions, target the publications that cater to that professional group.

It is likely that your campaign will have more than one target audience. Make sure that you identify the most appropriate media targets for each of your target audiences.

Knowing which audience a media outlet caters to: Identification of your media targets relies on common sense and a little research. Go to your local newspaper kiosk and look what is for sale. National major newspapers target a certain audience that differs from that of the tabloids; general interest magazines target a different audience from special-interest or niche ones; general news magazines are read by a much broader, less defined audience. Look at those magazines and newspapers that appear to target the same audience you are targeting; those should be placed on your media list for the campaign.

Watching television and listening to radio will enable you to differentiate, as well, between types of programs, their focus and intended audience.

Ask yourself and your friends some simple questions: If one of your target audiences is a middle-age career public servant, ask yourself and your friends who are these persons pertaining to the above demographics (*be aware, that even by the same classification as public servants, men tend to have different media usage and habits patterns than women*), what media they use. Do they read general interest or hobby magazines, watch TV shows or soap operas, read the news/financial papers or the daily tabloids? The answers you get should guide your efforts. You can ask anyone these types of questions.

Research: If you are uncertain about the target audience of any particular media outlet, call their business or circulation office to ask for information about the size of their circulation or the estimated viewing or listening audience; the distribution area or area of coverage; and any knowledge they have of their audience. Major advertising agencies collect data on publishing and broadcast audience demographics and may be persuaded to share them with you. Armed with this information, you can easily identify those media targets most suited to your purposes.

Media Directories: In some institutions and organizations, there are directories that list the names of media outlets and place those names in pre-determined categories. These guidebooks can make the process of identifying HIDAA's target media much easier.

6 MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

Framing the issue. Media advocates must tailor their campaign messages to reflect *interests, values* and *experiences* of their target audiences to attract support for their efforts.

Most advocacy campaigns begin with a core of supporters within the general population who quickly respond to themes evoked by the initiative. For example a campaign to extend the coverage of the assets declaration law is likely to win – without any special effort – immediate support from dedicated NGOs which advocate transparent government.

To broaden the base of supporters, a campaign’s critical task is to find and use themes that engage the intellect and emotions of those groups and individuals who are not supporters. The media advocate for the extension of the coverage of the assets declaration law campaign must determine what message about this issue will engage a larger segment of the population.

This is known as message development or “framing” the issue. Your campaign is likely to generate the most support if you cite values that can appeal to people across the political spectrum – values, which they can associate their own values with HIDAA’s initiative.

Symbols and language. Public attitudes are shaped by affirmative and negative symbols that capture and widely reflect shared public values. Press spokesmen must identify and articulate the symbols and language that will most effectively make their point and build public support for policy initiatives. Framing the issue is the process by which advocates convey their message to maximize the affirmative values, and minimize the negative ones associated with it.

I.e.: When discussing solutions to the practice of conflict of interest in the delivery of public functions the terms “management of conflict of interest” and “elimination of conflict of interest” may have two entirely different meanings to the public. Management may be associated by many people with acquiescence in or partial toleration of conflict of interest, etc. Elimination of conflict of interest , on the other hand, may be associated to a more resolute stance against such practice.

Research. You need to learn how your issue relates to prevailing public opinion and values. Understanding how your issue is perceived by the public will help you articulate your message and frame the debate.

Remember, you have done a lot of research on public impressions of your issues during the initial stages of designing this campaign. Now it is time to turn your attention back to the polls, group interviews, conversations, previous media coverage, and develop your message – what you want the public to know about your work and your cause.

As you sift through the various approaches, tones, and possible themes, you will begin to understand the cause and effect thinking that is necessary to understanding *“framing the issue”*. When determining how to position or project your issues in the media, a major decision will be: Are you for it or against it? Examples: Are you for

impartial governance or against conflict of interest in governance? Are you for the transparency public officials' assets or against the corrupt officials?

The more your message reflects your audience's core positive values, the more likely it is that public attitudes toward that initiative will be favourable. If for example, transparent government is a general positive value in your targeted audience, HIDAA might consider how to position your support for a certain policy as a reflection of your fellow countrymen's preference for transparency.

An audience also has a set of shared core negative values. When an issue campaign succeeds in associating its opposition (those interest or advocacy groups who disagree with your position) with negative values while continuing to associate the positive values with its own initiative, its chances of generating broad public support are greatly enhanced.

For better or worse, issues are framed by compressing science, facts, and arguments into labels and symbols. The way you frame your issue will determine whether many of the targeted audience members will join you in your efforts. Choosing the right symbols and associating your objectives with them truthfully and effectively can solidify your support and even win new converts to your position. Choosing the wrong symbols may doom a campaign to failure.

You must incorporate within the framework of the campaign the positive symbols you have chosen to frame your message and the negative symbols you use to characterize the opposition into everything you do and say.

Talking points, headlines, and quotable quotes: Successful media coverage of your issues usually does not just happen. Know what you want the coverage to be, develop materials that reflect the desired coverage, and train yourself and your spokespeople to clearly articulate your positions to reporters.

Begin by asking the other people who work with you at HIDAA (including the Chief Inspector and the policy people who specialize in the issue) to imagine for a moment that they are in a position to write an article or produce a television newscast on your issue. Given the messages and frame you have chosen:

- What headlines would you like to see?
- What do you want the first paragraph to say?
- What quotes or statistics do you want included in the article?
- What experts or human interest stories would you like to see reported in your article?

The answers to these questions and others like them should help you decide what material you want to give out, how you want to present your point of view, and how to decide on your "*talking points*" – the three or four points and quotes you want to reiterate in every interview on the issue.

Quotes and "sound bites." Remember that long, complicated statements and responses for broadcast media will not be as successful as short, to-the-point answers. Radio and television news stories are short; your message must be conveyed in a

succinct and clear manner suited to the medium. A “*sound bite*” is a short pithy quote that serves as a central characterizing feature of a broadcast or print news story.

At best a sound bite can serve to encapsulate both information and effective symbols for an audience. A sound bite can compress a group’s position in a quick witty manner, capturing the attention of the media and the eventual consumer of the message.

Successful sound bites and talking points are grounded in the following principles:

- Utilize concrete images that evoke a lively response
- Avoid sloganeering, shrillness, and moralizing
- Stay brief, and divide longer ideas into shorter sentences
- Humour is permissible, but avoid cuteness or frivolity that can down play the seriousness of the problem you are discussing. A well conceived quip can deflate even the most carefully crafted adversary’s statement. Biting humour can be effective in conveying an appropriate sense of outrage, but do not be too harsh.
- Be authoritative and commanding.
- Standard literary devices such as alliteration, rhyming, parallelism, puns, and the like can make a sound bite resonate with the journalist and the audience.
- Ironic rephrasing of your adversary’s statements or popular maxims can contribute to a printable sound bite.
- Remember, the goal is not to earn yourself applause but to advance your media advocacy goals.

Also do the preceding exercise in reverse. Ask yourself what the worst possible headlines could be? What quotes or statistics are your opponents likely to publicize? If your policy initiative loses, what are the worst outcomes? Preparing your colleagues to deal with the worst-case scenario is known as “*damage control*”. You must be prepared to put the best face on defeat or failure.

7 IDENTIFY SPOKESPEOPLE

One of the most important decisions your group will make is picking your spokespersons. If you do not choose the person or persons who will present your case to the public – in interviews, at press conferences, on talk shows, and as the author of articles – the media will choose a spokesperson by default. Remember, you can choose different spokespeople for different elements of your media strategy.

A good spokesperson must have following qualities:

- In-depth knowledge of the issue and HIDAA.
- A high level of comfort talking to reporters both on and off the record.
- A willingness to take time to talk with reporters
- Dresses and acts presentably

If the Chief Inspector him/herself is not the spokesperson, choose the one or two of your colleagues who are most knowledgeable and articulate to act as your primary

spokespersons for the campaign. Establish a policy that others who are not the primary spokespeople may provide reporters with background information but are not to be quoted.

It is also best to limit the number of people who initiate or return phone calls to reporters. Make sure all parties know what has previously been said to reporters on the issue at hand. Reporters hate to be bounced around, never knowing if the person they are talking to has any authority to speak for your organization. Nor do they like having to repeat their requests or questions to a half dozen people.

Non-staff spokespersons: Sometimes an advocacy or public awareness campaign will choose a non-staff expert, (a nationally known public figure, for example), a celebrity (a musician, writer, or actor), or an ordinary citizen (a victim of a perceived corruption case or a pensioner who cannot afford adequate living conditions) to act as a spokesperson for the campaign.

This is a good way to generate additional press interest in your campaign efforts but there are some limitations.

- Celebrities or ordinary citizens are not generally expert spokesmen on the issues of the campaign. You must be sure that these people are comfortable with and well versed in the goals of the campaign. Give them relevant press materials, talking points, etc. You must also make sure that these spokespeople refer reporters to you and the organization staff when they are asked questions they cannot answer.
- Non-staff experts and celebrities present another set of problems. As prominent figures, it is possible that enterprising reporters may uncover a scandal, a personal problem, or apparent conflict of interest, generating news coverage that overshadows the actual campaign. Before signing up any such spokesperson, ask the types of questions that will reveal any potential problems. In addition, celebrities may call more attention to themselves than to your cause if they are not properly instructed.

Training spokespeople: Being a spokesperson is hard work. You need to be very comfortable with the material, campaign goals, and the interview process. A good spokesperson will help spokespeople learn the necessary skills.

Whereas, HIDAA's main spokesperson will mostly be the Chief Inspector him/herself who is presumably a good performer given his/her high public status, it is nevertheless important to work with him/her or the other designated spokespersons to improve their skills. One simple way to improve spokespeople's performances is to video or audio tape the media appearances and organize a session during which trusted advisers give positive and critical feedback.

Another simple way to help them learn their craft is to hold trial interviews, press conferences, media briefings etc. During these training sessions, you and the spokesperson can experiment with different techniques for handling tough questions, easy questions, wandering or unclear questions etc.

8 TOOLS

Media advocates use a variety of tools — reports, lawsuits, legislative actions, meetings, public events etc. — as news generating opportunities.

One of the most important tasks a spokesperson can undertake is to help an organization's staff think about and develop media-friendly tools. A good spokesperson learns to ask certain questions:

- Can this technical paper be turned into a non-technical report?
- Can the speakers at this upcoming seminar discuss issue X, which is of current public concern?
- What internal information do we have that is newsworthy?
- What information should we gather and disseminate that will be of interest to reporters and the public and make our point about the issue?

Other opportunities for you to make public comments include:

- Introduction of legislation you support in the parliament or the Council of Ministers.
- Endorsement of your issues or positions by columnists or editorial writers
- Any legislative action on measures you support or oppose;
- Judgments on legal cases relating to your issue or position; and
- Public support of your issue by a celebrity or well-known academic, political or national figure.

Your media team should draw up a list of potential tools. Examine each one for its accessibility to the public, its validity as a news making event, the amount of time and effort necessary to turn it into a successful media tool, and its correlation to the message you have chosen for this media campaign.

9 TACTICS: DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN

Your media campaign team has done a great job. You have identified your policy goal, your target audience, and the media outlets they are most likely to read, watch, or listen to. You have decided how best to present the issue. You have thought through the headlines and quotes you would most like to see, prepared for the possibility that there may be some negative reaction to your campaign, and you've developed or identified a number of news-generating tools. Now what?

Your next step is the development of a strategic plan for communicating your message to the media. The best analogy is the game plan a soccer coach devises for his team of athletes: a coach develops a series of plays he believes will allow his team to win the game. A media strategy is similar; it lays out in detail the game plan for communicating with the media. The strategy you devise should be based on your previous decisions about policy goals, media goals, message, audience, media targets, spokespeople and tools.

A well-thought-out media strategy utilizes a number of different communication vehicles (press releases, press conferences etc.) to publicize the existing information tools (reports, media events, etc.) to the target audiences (local reporters, opinion pages, talk shows) while articulating the campaign's messages.

- If the goal of your media campaign is to raise public awareness of a certain issue, you might decide to hold a press conference in the capital to release a new report.
- If your campaign goal is to pressure a few key legislators to vote for a certain bill, your strategy may focus on generating a few well-placed human interest stories in newspapers followed by a number of press conferences.

How and where you convey your message depends on the type of campaign you want to conduct and the size of your budget. It is important to keep in mind that everything requires money-mailings, photocopies, numerous phone calls, staff time, room rentals are all budget items you need to consider when planning the campaign.

Leave room for flexibility and spontaneity: A sound media advocacy or public awareness campaign requires careful planning, but ample room must be left for flexibility and spontaneity. Media advocacy requires the ability to react quickly and creatively to the evolving news environment. The ability to seize an opportunity is the essence of media advocacy. The public relations person is constantly on the hunt for news stories that can provide a reason to talk to the press, appear on radio, write a letter to the editor, place an article on the subject in the paper, or stage a media event.

Do not be intimidated if your opponents have massive media access recourses. Successful media advocacy requires confidence and the willingness to engage the media aggressively and creatively with limited financial recourses. When your opponents say something outrageous or untrue, challenge them publicly.

10 TIMELINE

Once your strategic media plan is complete, you must set a timeline. A timeline is the schedule of events, and the planning necessary to make those events take place. A timeline is invaluable.

- It enables a public relations or media relations person to keep track of the status of various tasks that must be completed to make a media event effective and successful.
- A timeline encourages you to think through the smallest detail of the press event.
- A timeline keeps you on schedule so that the event takes place when planned.

If your strategy includes a press conference, your timeline will note the following:

- The date of the press conference;
- When the spokesperson will make press calls about the upcoming press conference;
- The deadlines for the press packet elements; and

- The deadline for finalizing the press list for the press conference.

Every element of a media strategy must be incorporated into the timeline – the time needed to write an article; the days required to book a press conference room in advance; the deadline for placing an advertisement in a magazine.

Remember, a media strategy is a complex plan with elements that progress at different rates. Without a timeline, a spokesperson is likely to find that she has spent three weeks planning a press conference and forgotten to do any of the work necessary to implement the rest of the strategy. A timeline is a spokesperson’s most invaluable organizational tool. Do not ignore it.

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MEDIA ACTION TOOLKIT

This toolkit outlines the essential elements for building an effective communications and media relations program.

Development

1. Introduction – What is the purpose of a “Media Action Toolkit?”

In today’s cluttered communication environment in Albania and while the public opinion tends to be a bit cynical about rhetoric, every institution and organization is vying to get the wider audience’s attention. Therefore, for institutions like HIDAA, it is indispensable not only to allocate time and resources to promote public awareness and support for its mission and objectives, but also to craft a communication message and plan without losing credibility and authority. And, even successful, well-led organizations can have trouble communicating with the public if they fail to present a compelling message about who they are and what they contribute to society.

As a public institution HIDAA will often focus most of its attention on its core functions and the public interests it was created to serve. In the process of doing so it is important not to underestimate the necessity to convey to the public what is being done, the obstacles that are faced and achievements. Improving HIDAA’s ability to communicate can have twofold benefits:

- It can raise public awareness and inform on policies that will help advance your mission, and,
- by creating new possibilities for enhancing HIDAA’s visibility, the institution will become more attractive to potential new target audience members in becoming the desirable partner in implementing your activities.

2. Develop a Plan – Why develop a communications plan?

Define your target audience & determine the objectives of your communications program.

MAKE COMMUNICATIONS PART OF YOUR OVERALL WORK PLAN

Like any important element of your organization, effective use of the media must be properly and carefully planned in order to produce the most effective results. The media is essentially your lifeline for sharing HIDAA’s successes and strategies.

The first step in developing a communications plan is not to write a press release and start developing better relationships with local media, but to integrate your media work into your overall work and strategies. Media should not be an afterthought.

Media should be integrated in your annual and even five-year strategic plan. Media should be a line item in your budget, no matter how much or little money you plan to spend.

For the size and scope of a mid-size public institution like HIDAA, the public relations representative's media skills will be instrumental in establishing the public's perception of the entire institution.

Once media and communications have been incorporated into HIDAA's long-term plans, you can begin planning your short-term or immediate media action steps: define your target audience and determine the objectives of your communications program.

DEFINE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Prior to taking any action, you need to have a good idea of who you want to receive your message. Possible target audiences include:

- decision makers
- influential individuals
- opinion leaders
- multipliers
- the general public

DETERMINE THE OBJECTIVES OF YOUR COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

Possible objectives include:

- **identify and promote** understanding of issues relevant to HIDAA
- **launch** new projects supporting HIDAA's mission
- **stimulate** interest in HIDAA's events or activities
- **change** perceptions or attitudes toward HIDAA and its work
- **gain** access to key policy-makers or opinion leaders
- **attract** quality staff, volunteers, and donors

3. Clarify the Message – How do I communicate my message?

CREATING YOUR MESSAGE

After you have defined your target audience and determined the objectives of your communications program, you need to create the message that you want conveyed.

1. The message must be clear and simple.
2. Use plain language.
3. Your message should include the following components:
 - a) ***Key message***
 - b) ***Highlights***
 - c) ***Data***
 - d) ***Citations***

If you are using the media to **advocate change**, answer the questions as you develop your message:

What is the problem or issue?

What do you want to happen? This question is crucial in your planning. It will help identify who and what your targets are, who the best messengers are and how to reach them.

What is the solution or policy that will reach this goal? Sometimes you will be using the media to get someone to change their behaviour and thoughts about your issue. In that case, your solution may be a changed behaviour.

Who can make it happen?

Who are our allies/opponents? This will help you figure out who's on what side of your issue and who might be able to be swayed either way.

What would they need to hear to make it happen?

How do we frame our message best?

What themes work well with this audience? This could be a concern about the quality of legislation that enables HIDAA's functions, a concern about the implementation of the law or the cooperation with other government agencies, a concern about international cooperation etc.

WHAT MAKES NEWS?

The more newsworthy elements a story contains, the broader the audience, thus the more likely it will be covered by the media.

Conflict & Controversy: For example if the declaration of assets of a prominent person is involved in the conflict it is more likely that HIDAA's case will make news.

Timelines: Is your news happening right now? Possibly tie in your news to another current event or an anniversary of a historic event.

Proximity: Is your news nearby? If the event takes place elsewhere, "bring the story home" with a local angle. For example an international conference on conflict of interest that was attended by the Chief Inspector could be newsworthy if it is related to local development.

Human Interest: Does it elicit strong feelings, either for or against? Stories that commonly derive from HIDAA's core business (verification of assets and conflict of interest) usually trigger human emotions such as curiosity, anger or sympathy (depending on the nuances of the case and the involved persons). This needs to be borne in mind when developing a message that is due to be conveyed to the public.

Injustice & Hypocrisy: Are the circumstances unfair? Are the interests of other people abused as the result of the behaviours of one or several persons (this is typically the case with conflict of interest)?

Number of People Involved or Affected: How many people are involved in or affected?

Possible Future Impact: Can something happening today potentially affect many people or governance in Albania in the future? This is generally easy to show in the case of HIDAA's business.

Prominence: Are prominent people involved in your news in some way? Is there someone who could help your story?

Unusual: Is the story usual, unexpected, unique or ironic?

Suspense: Does your news have an uncertain ending?

Progress: Does your news involve progress, breakthroughs or something new and improved? **Great Visuals:** Is there a visual that highlights any of the above elements?

4. Prepare the Messenger – What does the messenger need to know?

Make sure the messenger fits the message — the Chief Inspector is not always the appropriate messenger

Preparing the messenger begins with HIDAA developing a solid relationship with the media.

1. *Take the time before a crisis strikes to get to know key reporters.*
2. *In addition to the Chief Inspector, limit your messengers to a few people who have been trained.*
3. *Make sure all of your messengers are familiar with the issues to be conveyed.*

Other useful ideas:

Don't just wait for reporters to call you, because it rarely happens. Identify someone whose work has impressed you - call their office and congratulate them. This is such a rare occurrence that they are certain to be pleased that you have taken the first step to get in touch. If you have a story to tell them, even better.

Establish and maintain regular communications. Give them story ideas and help them cover the stories.

Show interest in their work. Ask about the deadlines of the publications or programs on which they work. Don't view your media relations job as the task of getting something from the editors and reporters; your function is actually to help them do their jobs.

Help them frame your issues in a way they can convince their editors that your story is important. Even though you and the journalist think the story is interesting, there is

a lot of news to compete with! Keep an eye on what is going on in the media, be able to relate your issue with other ongoing discussions and stories.

Answer their questions immediately. Journalists have deadlines and they will most probably call you half an hour before they pass the deadline. If you are not prepared to answer to their questions in the moment, ask for few minutes to organize yourself and call them back with ready information.

Select the Method – How do I choose the most effective method(s)?
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What method will be most effective to further your goals?

- Editorial Board Meeting
- Interview
- Letter to the Editor
- Media Advisory
- News Conference
- News Event
- Press Release

Reiterate your main point. Be repetitive. Be repetitive. Be repetitive. Keep coming back to your main point!

Editorial Board Meeting

One of the most powerful ways to reach the public is by having the press on your side of an issue.

Before

- Read their newspaper
- Know where they stand on your issue
- Write down key facts
- List your main points

During

- Know what you want to ask them and ASK

After

- Leave printed, supporting material
- Follow up with a thank you note

Interview

These can be very effective, BUT require careful planning and preparation.

Before

- Determine your message
- Know who your audience is and speak in a way that reflects their ability to understand
- Develop “sound bites” – short, memorable phrases that are easily quotable that explain your basic message
- Make sure the interviewer has plenty of background information
- Be clear of the “ground rules”
- Prepare visual aids, if needed

- Practice

During

Nonverbal

- Always look the interviewer in the eye
- Maintain good posture
- Be yourself and smile
- Look alert

Verbal

- Speak in clear, short, declarative sentences
- Always use complete sentences
- Use relevant facts and data when appropriate
- Speak from personal experience as much as possible
- If you don't know the answer, admit it!

After

- Thank the reporter
- Offer to be available so the reporter can double check your quotes
- Always be professional and courteous

Letter to the Editor

- Keep it short and focused on one main point
- Make your letter timely to a specific event or local activity of interest
- Support your facts with documentation
- Familiarize yourself with the coverage and editorial position of the paper
- Check the letter specifications of the newspaper. Follow these guidelines, particularly the length requirement
- Keep your letter brief--Shorter letters are more likely to be published
- Monitor the paper for your letter

Press Release

Focus on the:

- **WHO**
- **WHAT**
- **WHEN**
- **WHERE**
- **WHY**

A press release is intended to gain journalists' interest. Press releases generally follow a **standard format**. The format is designed to give the reporter or editor all the information needed quickly. May be emailed, faxed or mailed with or without a cover letter.

Release statement

Usually one or two days before the event

Organization's name

Contact information

Headline and dateline

Lead paragraph

This is where you should tell the most important information of the release

Body copy

Use quotes here if possible in order to put a human face on your news

Final paragraph boilerplate

End your press release with a final standard paragraph (not more than 3 sentences) about your organization.

Media Advisory (same as Press Advisory or Media Alert)

Keep your issue on their desk and eventually you will break through.

- Quickly becoming the preferred document for media
- Clearly and concisely outline **WHO, WHAT, WHERE and WHEN** of an upcoming news event
- Provide basic facts only
- Use a interesting headline
- Include information on directions to an event site, interview opportunities, or visual for TV cameras
- Should be sent at least a week ahead of time
- Include contact name and number

News Event

This is an event used to generate news interest with the goal to achieve coverage. News events also help spread awareness and build media campaigns.

Consider:

Choice of Topic and Speaker

- Topic should be clear
- Choose speaker with stature and influence in the community

Size of Audience

- Know your target audience
- Arrange seating accordingly, so the site won't appear too crowded or too empty

Choice of Location and Timing

- Location should be easily accessible
- Location visually appealing, but prepare an alternative if the site is outside
- Time should be early enough in the day for TV reporters to put coverage on the evening news

Publicity

- Allow two to three weeks of publicity prior to the event

News Conference (or Press Conference)

A news conference is a type of news event. Careful **PLANNING** is required!

- Determine the participants and confirm their involvement
- Develop talking points for each speaker
- If location is indoors, confirm number of electrical outlets
- Send out a news advisory one week before the conference
- Prepare a news release to hand out on the day of the conference

The day of the conference:

- Send another round of news advisories in the morning
- Limit the total speaking time to 30 minutes or less

Always Evaluate – Another evaluation?

What have you accomplished?

The Value of Evaluation

Evaluation seeks to determine whether activities worked and to what extent they achieved their outcomes, and if not, why not.

This is important for two main reasons:

1. **Accountability.** Accountability is not possible, unless the results of activities are measured and reported.

Communication activities are no different in this regard to any other kind of activity, except that communications outcomes can be more difficult to measure than other types of programs.

2. **Continuous Improvement.** Evaluation is good management practice. In recent years agencies at all levels have moved from a focus on inputs and processes to a much greater emphasis on **program outcomes**.

Analyzing Results

- Did it work?
- Did it accomplish the predetermined objectives?

Spend a good amount of time analyzing outcomes. Usually results are mixed and every time a communications campaign is conducted, the organization will learn more about each audience and will become more successful in future campaigns.

Key principles

The following principles should guide evaluation activities:

1. Evaluation involves assessment of the degree to which a communications activity's objectives have been met as a result of the activity. Evaluations are only as valuable as the objectives they are based on are appropriate.
2. Evaluation is an integral part of all communications projects, not an optional extra.
3. Evaluation should be planned at the outset of a communications project, not left until the end.
4. Evaluation must be properly budgeted for. As a rule of thumb, ten percent of a project's budget should be allocated to evaluation.

5. A good test of the usefulness of an evaluation is to ask the following questions:
- Does it effectively identify the *success/failure* of the project?
 - Does it effectively identify *the reasons for success/failure* of the project?
 - Does it effectively identify the *cost-effectiveness* of the project?

Know the Lingo – What terminology is needed to be “Media Savvy?”

Donated Print Space – Advertising space available in print media (newspapers and magazines) for *pro bono* placement of public service advertising.

Editorial Board Meeting – A meeting with the editor or editorial staff of a periodical.

Interview – A pre-planned one-on-one formal conversation between a journalist and a newsworthy person or a representative of a group.

Letter to the Editor – A letter written by individual who wants to express a point of view on current issues. The letter is submitted to a newspaper and published in one of the most widely read sections. Tend to create a public forum.

Media Advocacy – The use of any form of media to help promote an organization’s or a company’s objectives or goals, which come from the group’s vision and mission.

Media Outlet – A specific media company.

Medium – The singular term for a media type (radio, television, newspaper, magazines, cable systems, outdoor companies, etc.). Plural = media

News Advisory (or Media Advisory or Media Alert) – One-page document that lists the basics – logistics, purpose, background information. Generally used to notify the media of a news event at least one week ahead of time.

News Conference (or Press Conference) – A media event designed for a speaker or representative of a group to present a statement, answer question, or make announcements to a roomful of people who represent different media outlets.

News Event – An event that generates news interest with an intention to create visual coverage and sound bites. A news conference is a type of news event.

News Media – Television, newspaper, and radio journalism. Provide the broadest and most in-depth coverage.

News Release (or Press Release) – “Conversational” one- or two-page document that gives details about a certain event, initiative, study, contact information and often includes quotes.

Public Service Announcement (PSA) – A non-commercial message that is broadcasted or inserted at no charge to the non-profit responsible for the campaign.

Video News Release (VNR) – Requires script development, interviews and tapings, editing and production, satellite time, station notification and placement and tracking.

Contact the Media – How to get in touch with media resources?

- Daily Newspapers
- Weekly Newspapers/Magazines
- Television Channels
- Radio Stations

Plan for Pitfalls – What problems might I run into?

Common Media Opportunity Pitfalls

Unfortunately, no one can guarantee that if HIDAA includes in its media campaigns every element suggested above it will be assured a perfect media campaign. However, if you recognize some common pitfalls, you can prevent your advocacy efforts from becoming a lost opportunity. Here is a list of common pitfalls when working with the media:

“Column inches envy” - All too often, staff will resent the success of a spokesperson who is called upon time and again to speak on behalf of HIDAA. It may be inevitable that the media will continue to turn to the most informed and most persuasive (typically the officially designated spokesperson) of the HIDAA staff. Resist the pressures to subdue an effective voice simply because others are envious.

Wrong Spokesperson - Your best spokesperson may or may not be the Chief Inspector or HIDAA’s official spokesperson. For example, the Chief Inspector may be the right name on a press release, or the named author of a letter to the editor, but not always an effective broadcast presence. Other HIDAA staff could be entrusted this task. Of course, choosing the right spokesperson sometimes requires exquisite tact, and considerable courage and is the kind of decision that needs to be taken ultimately by the Chief Inspector.

“Ghettoizing” media responsibility within your organization - It is not uncommon for organizations to relegate media work to the press or public affairs office. However, since media advocacy in the case of HIDAA is so critical to the goals of the entire organization, those responsibilities could be spread more broadly within the organization.

Debating (even winning) the wrong fight – To cite an example. Privacy advocates can be reasonably effective to bash the work of HIDAA as an intrusion into peoples’ private lives. Their claims and accusations may sting so sharply that the overall government policies on transparency and accountability are drawn into elaborate denials or quibbling over tangential issues. Ignore the attacks and return to your strong themes and high ground.

Passivity - Don't be intimidated by a famous TV show host or a celebrity sharing the same air time with you. Don't mistake passivity for civility. If you don't like the way a question is framed, restate the issue, and proceed to answer the question that should have been asked.

Wordiness/jargon/mouthfuls - You're trying to persuade a general audience, not impress a group of experts. Don't ramble. Stay with one or two clear points at a time. Speak simple, plain Albanian. Use short, recognizable words. Let your opponent get a few words in edgewise, but don't allow him or her to pass off misleading information as truth. Challenge falsehood tactfully.

Wasting opportunities/getting drawn off track - There's a danger in getting too comfortable with a charming and gracious host and being drawn off into an interesting side issue that does not advance your policy goals. You may think you've got all the time in the world, but even an hour-long talk show can pass by so quickly (if you're having fun) that you lose the opportunity to hammer home your main points. Don't allow the show to stray far from your program goals, if you can help it.

Losing with your face and body language what you win with your hands - Scowling doesn't win many friends, nor does looking bored and distracted when you're not talking but remain on camera. Tension and anger can also be conveyed by your unconscious body language. A small, sad smile and a gently but clearly noticeable shaking of the head can effectively convey to an audience that you know what they know — that this fellow is a paid mouthpiece and is talking nonsense. A subtle gesture may be much more effective than a scowl or a laugh — and more effective than interrupting.

Being Unprepared - Needs no explanation.

Being Over prepared - If your words and mannerisms sound memorized or rehearsed, they lose much of their punch. Your arguments and main points should be thoroughly and comfortably worked out in advance but not rigid formulas committed to memory.

Relying on one's status or credentials - If you think that a sceptical host will treat you respectfully because you have impressive curriculum vitae or are a high-ranking executive of a prestigious organization, think again. Television and radio programming does not favour status or credentials alone.

Bullying, lecturing - Don't lecture or appear to speak down to you host or adversary. It makes the audience feel that you're lecturing or attacking them, and that is no way to win friends and influence people.

Mistaking cuteness and cleverness for wit and humour - Wit and humour are wonderful weapons to disarm a sceptical host or hostile adversary, but not every would-be humorist is good at it. Don't reach for humour or sardonic slogans or labels, unless unbiased friends or colleagues confirm that you're good at it. Otherwise, be serious and straight. It's safer.

Excerpted from the original source: The Advocacy Institute, Washington, DC

One of the Most Common Pitfalls in interviews or talking with a reporter is being asked a question you can't or don't want to answer. Here are some tips for getting out of a tough situation:

- I can't tell you that. What I can tell you is....
- The REAL issue is.....
- That brings me back to my most important point.....
- The critical issue that I mentioned earlier is.....
- The most important point to remember is.....
- Let's go back to the point you need to keep in mind....
- As I stated earlier.....

Refer to Examples – What works and what doesn't work?
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- Sample Press Release
- Sample Media Advisory
- Sample Letter to the Editor
- Successful Local Submission: Letter to the Editor

Sources and Resources:

Community Toolbox, University of Kansas.

Check out Chapters 6 and 34 in the Tools Section: <http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/>

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting: <http://www.fair.org/>

“Marketing Your Organization” Training Manual from the Ad Council. August 20, 2003

The Marin Institute

Check out their media advocacy section: <http://www.marininstitute.org>

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Check out their Communications Toolkit at:

<http://www.wkkf.org/Toolkits/Communication/Default.aspx>
