

Section 1: Participation by Nurse Leaders in the Legislative Process

ACNL is a nonprofit organization. There are three types of California nonprofit corporation; public benefit, religious and mutual benefit. A nonprofit corporation is simply a corporation that is organized and operated for one of the nonprofit purposes recognized under state corporation law, federal and state statutes. Within this framework, ACNL has published this handbook to educate the membership on political activities and the important role nurse leaders can assume.

- People have power in government because they are the source of information.
- Access to people is critical to any political action
- Access is dependent on developing personal relationships with those in power.
- The most powerful lobbying occurs when citizens with firsthand experience and personal involvement with issues communicate with elected and appointed officials.
- Nursing leaders and other health care professionals can and should play an active role by engaging in grassroots efforts to educate and inform public policy makers.
- When influencing legislative opinions, an individual or group the following applies:
 - Members may not use your affiliation with ACNL to endorse or oppose any candidate for elective office at any level of government
 - Members may not use ACNL membership for any electioneering
 - Members may not speak on behalf of ACNL to legislative bodies unless designates as a spokesperson.

ACNL Guidelines for Political Involvement

ACNL encourages members to participate as individuals in legislative, judicial, regulatory and organizational health care issues that promote the purpose and vision of the association. However, individual members may participate as official ACNL representatives only with the approval of the Board of Directors and the executive director. This stipulation is enforced to both encourage and regulate ACNL's representation in the political process and to protect both the association and its members.

ACNL encourages members to attend various state professional health related activities. Through professional involvement and participation in the formation of the new California health care system you are acting as patient advocates. You are demonstrating commitment to improving the health of California.

Section 2: The State Legislative Process

The legislative process in California somewhat parallels the federal process. This section will focus on the California legislative process. Section 3 will discuss the federal process. In both cases, proposed legislation is heard first in a policy committee that is assigned by the rules committee of the house of origin. Bills with fiscal impact also are heard by the fiscal committees.

The committee hearing is the crucial test of a bill before it can go to the floor for a vote. Once on the floor, members usually have a sense of how to vote based on the recommendation of party caucuses. Intense lobbying occurs at the committee level; asking members to either support, oppose or amend a bill.

Bills must be passed by both the Senate and the Assembly before being sent to the governor for action. A bill can be stopped anywhere along the process, making it easier to defeat legislation than to enact it.

How a Bill Becomes Law - State

Step 1: Generating the idea for legislation

- An organization determines that it has an issue that needs legislation.
- An individual brings an issue to a legislator which may impact the constituents in his/her district.
- A politician wants to implement his/her political agenda or identifies a need. Legislation is often drafted after an issue has received media attention (i.e., domestic violence, or hospital safety and security).

Step 2: Developing appropriate verbiage for a bill

- Once an issue is identified, text must be written for the appropriate code section of that issue. For example, issues that affect hospital licensure would be amended into Section 1250 of the Health and Safety Code.
- If proposed by an individual or an organization, the drafted legislative proposal is shopped to a legislator who is willing to author a bill.
- Bills can only be authored by a legislator.
- Organizations or individuals are listed as sponsors.
- The draft legislation is then sent to legislative counsel where the draft is put into bill form and assigned a number. SB indicates a bill originated in the Senate and **AB** means the Assembly.

Step 3: Appropriate committee assignment

- Once introduced and printed, the bill is assigned to a specific policy committee by the Senate or Assembly Rules Committee depending on the bills house of origin.

Step 4: Committee hearing

- In the first policy hearing a committee hears from both sides on an issue. At this time, a bill may pass out of committee with no amendments, may be amended with the concurrence of the author, or may die in the committee.
- Most of the lobbying takes place around the time a bill is heard in its first policy committee. Occasionally, compromises may be worked out with the opposition prior to the committee hearing in order to keep the bill moving through the process.
- Bills must pass certain committees and receive floor votes by predetermined dates in order to stay viable. Occasionally bills may receive a rule-waiver on meeting deadlines, but the Legislature is generally opposed to rule-waivers as it backlogs the process.

Step 5: Floor hearing

- Once passed all assigned committees, the bill then goes to the floor of the house of origin for a vote. Each bill is debated briefly then put to a vote.
- Most bills require only a simple majority vote to pass
 - 21 votes in the Senate and 41 in the Assembly.
- Bills with urgency clauses, that appropriate money or have taxing power (or to override a governor's veto) require two-thirds majority of each house.

Step 6: Passes to second house

- Once passed by the house of origin, the bill goes through the same process in the second house.
- If the second house passes the bill with new amendments, the bill goes back to the house of origin for concurrence.
- If the amendments are rejected by the house of origin, a reference committee is convened to negotiate a compromise between the two houses.

Step 7: Bill goes to the governor

- The bill is then sent to the governor who must act on any bill that passes the Legislature within 12 days after receiving it.
- However, the governor has 30 days to act at the end of each biennial session.

Step 8: Bill becomes law

- Bills with urgency take effect immediately upon the governor's signature.
- All other legislation becomes effective on Jan. 1 of the following year.

Section 3: The Federal Legislative Process

- Two characteristics of the legislative process affect its impact on the American public-- the number of bills passed and the prevailing political climate.
- During a congressional session, any senator or representative can introduce a legislative proposal that addresses a perceived need. The proposal may call for changing an existing law or creating a new one.
- Many sources draft legislative proposals. Congressional representatives typically ask their staffs to draft the legislative language or a proposal. For very complex issues, however, the Legislative Counsel's Office in the Senate or House is called upon to assist in drafting bills.
- Private groups are another source of legislation. It is common for a group organization to approach a senator or a representative to introduce its proposal for congressional action.
- "Executive communications" are another source of legislative proposals. These communications originate from the executive branch and are often responses to a presidential message or federal agency initiative.
- Once a proposal is drafted, there are four basic ways it can be introduced. It can be introduced to Congress as a bill, a joint resolution, a concurrent resolution or a simple resolution.
- An amendment is a rider to a bill. It must be germane to the issue at hand and can provide change to a bill through substituting language, omitting language or adding language to any portion or area of a bill. An amendment which replaces the entire text of a bill is called an amendment in the Nature of A Substitute. Germaneness requires that language must pertain to the purpose/topic of the original bill. The germaneness of language can always be questioned on the legislative floor -- if challenged, it requires a 2/3 vote by the legislative body to retain viability. In the Senate, germaneness applies only to appropriations bills.
- A rider is an amendment attached to a bill that is often controversial and unrelated to the original bill being considered. This used to be used frequently when a bill, that went to the President, had to be vetoed for/against on the full content of the bill. Now that the President has line item veto privileges this may not be used as much.

How a Bill Becomes Law - Federal

Step 1: Bill introduced in House or Senate

- A bill begins its legislative life when it is introduced by a senator or a member of the House. Frequently, a senator and a representative will sponsor identical bills in their respective legislative bodies.

Step 2: Bill referred to appropriate committees

- After being assigned a number by the clerks office (all bills are numbered sequentially), the bill is referred to a specific committee or committees with jurisdiction over the proposed legislation.

Step 3: Assigned to subcommittee

- Once received by a committee, the committee usually assigns the bill to a specialized subcommittee.
- In most cases, while the bill is in subcommittee, the chair has the power to allow the bill to be reported out, be deferred or die in subcommittee.

Step 4: Hearings conducted in subcommittee

- When a committee or subcommittee considers a bill, it can first hold hearings, thus allowing experts to provide testimony.
- Testimony and information compiled by the full committee are published in the committee hearing report, which is available from the committee's publications office.

Step 5: Mark-up session in subcommittee

- After the hearings, the subcommittee holds a "mark-up session" when amendments are offered that can alter the bill.
- When the subcommittee has completed these actions on a bill, the bill is voted on. If it is approved, it is sent to the full committee for approval.

Step 6: Committee mark-up and vote

- The committee holds a mark-up session in which additional amendments may be discussed and voted on.
- At the conclusion of the mark-up session, the committee votes on whether to order the

bill to the full House or Senate.

- If the vote is affirmative, then an official version of the bill is prepared that contains all the changes approved by the committee.
- After the full committee agrees to send a bill to the full Assembly or Senate, it is referred to the House or Senate for placement on the Calendar. This date determines when the bill will be brought before the full House of Representatives or full Senate.

Step 7: Committee formulates a report

- After the committee considers a bill, it formulates a committee report. The report describes the bill and the committee's reasons for specific provisions in the bill. It is written by the committee staff and approved by the members.
- The report is used by other legislators and lobbyists to determine the meaning of the legislation. Also, it is used later by federal agencies to interpret the intent of the bill if the bill later becomes law.

Step 8: Bill goes to floor and is voted on

- The bill goes to the floor of the House or Senate. (In the House, the bill must clear the House Rules Committee before proceeding to the floor.)
- The Senate and the House of Representatives have different procedures for scheduling and conducting floor debate and voting.
- Until now, action on the bill has been confined to subcommittees, committees and the majority leadership. Now, all members of the House or Senate participate in enacting or defeating the bill.
- In the Senate, bills can be modified on the floor by amendments, which can change one provision of the bill or the entire text.

Step 9: Conference committee works out differences

- When two bills containing similar subject matter - but differing in provisions - are approved by both the House and the Senate, they go to a conference committee.
- The conference committee is composed of senators and representatives from the committees of jurisdiction. The differences in each version are resolved within this committee.

Step 10: If the conference report is approved by congress, bill goes to the president

- The resulting bill is contained in a conference report and returns to the House and Senate for approval.
- Amendments to a conference report are not permitted; members may only reject or approve the bill.
- The bill then is sent to the president.

Step 11: Presidential action

- The Constitution gives the president 10 days (excluding Sundays) to act on an enrolled bill that is delivered to the White House.
- Presidential Options:
 - 👉 Approve the legislation - The bill becomes law the day it is signed, unless otherwise specified in the act.
 - 👉 Approve the legislation by doing nothing - If the president does not sign the bill within 10 days, it becomes law automatically as long as Congress is in session.
 - 👉 Pocket veto - The bill dies when the president fails to sign it and does not register any objections. This occurs only when legislation is passed near or at the end of a session of Congress and adjournment occurs before the president has had the 10-day period in which to return the bill to Congress for further consideration. In this instance, the bill automatically will be vetoed.
 - 👉 Veto - If the president does not want the bill to become law and fails to sign it within the 10-day period, the president can return the bill to the chamber of Congress where it originated. This veto may be overridden by a vote of two-thirds of the members of each house. If Congress is successful in overriding the veto, the bill becomes law. Otherwise, the bill is dead.
 - 👉 When a bill becomes public law either by authority of the president or Congress, the law is given a new number and the Government Printing Office publishes the official text.

Section 4: California's Rule Making Process

The State Legislature has the authority to grant rule making authority to state agencies and enact statutes requiring regulations. The process for adopting regulations requires a number of steps and action on the part of the specific agency (Department of Health Services, Department of Social Services, etc.) and the Office of Administrative Law (OAL).

The State Agency: First Phase

- Writes proposed regulations.
- Prepares an initial Statement of Reasons.
- Issues notice to the public.
- Begins to develop rule-making file.

Public Response

- The public has 45 days to comment on proposed regulations.
- Written comments may be submitted to the agency during this period.
- The agency will also hold a public hearing when verbal and written testimony may be submitted by the public.

The State Agency: Second Phase

- Evaluates and responds to public comment.
- Provides for an additional 15 day comment period for changes made that are sufficiently related to the original text.

The State Agency: Final Phase

- Adopts final regulations.
- Prepares final Statement of Reasons.
- Completes rule-making file.

The Office of Administrative Law

- Reviews regulations within a 30 day period for compliance with procedural requirements and with the statutory stands of:
 - Necessity
 - Clarity

- Authority
- Consistency
- Reference
- Nonduplication
- Approves or disapproves of the regulations
 - Approved:
 - If approved, the regulation is filed with the secretary of state and becomes effective in 30 days
 - After approval the regulation is published in the California Administrative Code
 - Disapproval:
 - If disapproved, the regulation is returned to the agency
 - Agencies may appeal OAL's disapproval to the governor
 - The governor may reverse the OAL's decision, but must do so within 30 days.

Section 5: How to Analyze a Bill

In analyzing a bill, ask the following questions:

- What problem does the bill address?
- What solution does the bill propose?
- What are the pros and cons?
- What is the legislative history of this bill:
 - Has the bill been introduced before? If so, how do the words differ?
 - Are the sponsors the same?
 - What kinds of amendments were made before?
 - Which interest groups supported the bill? Which ones opposed it?
 - How has the legislature, included the key committees, changes since the last introduction of the bill?
- What is the potential effect of the proposed legislation?
- What is the feasibility of the bill's passage?
- Which special interest groups support the bill and which ones oppose it?
- What is the sponsor's credibility and how likely is that person or organization to give active support?
- Is there a companion bill? On the basis of its sponsor and committee assignment do you think the bill will have a better chance if you supported its companion bill?
- Do you need to seek the support of any other group or person to enhance your position?
- What position do you recommend?

ACNL's process for reviewing a bill

- The Health Policy Committee reviews the current bills related to health and health care issues with the goal of determining which bills the membership should receive additional information on.
- The bills are reviewed in relation to the organization's mission, strategic plan and position papers.
- If ACNL does not have a clear position statement, the bill can be evaluation in several ways.
 1. A bill should be evaluated as to the impact it will have on patient care, delivery mechanisms, community health, financing of health care and membership.
 2. Bills always are read with the future in mind. For example, a bill may resolve a situation now, but with technological advances will changes be unnecessary in two years?
 3. A bill should be read noting if it's advantageous to one group over another; if it's a scope of practice bill; and if there appropriate safeguards written into the bill.

- Once the Health Policy Committee has reviewed the bill, they then forward their recommendations to the Board, another appropriate ACNL committee or identified experts for further input.
- The Board then either supports the recommendation or provides the committee with reasons why the committee needs to review the issue further.
- Letters are then drafted by the committee to educate the membership about the bill.
- If the board believes that ACNL should take a more active role, then the sponsors of the bill or notified.

Individuals or groups may take the following positions on bills:

- Support the bill
- Support the bill with amendments. Perhaps the language is not clear, specific or concise. Perhaps the enforcement provisions are weak or nonexistent. Perhaps the bill misses key points. Perhaps the bill does not amend the proper statute.
- Support the concept but not the bill specifically. Perhaps you want to go on record in support of an issue, but chances of the bill passing are so remote that active lobbying would be a waste of resources.
- Oppose the bill
- Take no position

Completed bill analyses can help ACNL determine specific conclusions and provide a systematic way to sort out the priorities for action. The process of analyzing a bill guides ACNL's involvement in state and local legislative issues.

Typically, a majority of the bills that are screened may not require a hard position. You may want to follow a bill so that future amendments can be read or merely approved. Many bills represent good public policy and ACNL may want to go on record as supporting the bill.

Section 6: Legislative Visits

Legislative visits are important in two ways:

- When you need to educate/inform the politicians on a specific piece of legislation.
- To get to know your legislator and offer assistance to him/her.

Visits to influence

- Legislation that nurse leaders have taken a strong position on will need to be lobbied in order to educate/inform legislators. Several key considerations are important to remember prior to a visit:

1) Know your subject

If possible, have ACNL's position drafted into talking points or a position statement to assist you with the key points you want to make. You may want to leave briefing documents with the legislator or use the documents yourself so you are sure you have covered all the key concepts. If documents do not exist, be sure you are clear on your position. Be sure you have the latest draft of the bill with you and have read it.

2) Tell your story

Once you are prepared on the issue, personalize it to your own experiences. Always let the legislator know you are a nurse, your background and the organization you represent. Relating specific examples as to what this bill would do in real-life terms helps to both educate the member, as well as illustrate your point. It is important to emphasize how an issue will impact the health care of the citizens of California and not how it would directly benefit or harm nursing. Legislators dislike self-serving lobbying.

3) Never, ever, lie

This should be rule No. 1 and must never be forgotten. Eventually, you will get caught, and you, as well as fellow nurse leaders will lose credibility on this and future issues. If you don't know the answer to the question, don't guess. It's acceptable to explain you don't know, but you will get back to them at a later time then do so. Always follow through with what you promised.

4) Never argue with a member

Sometimes a legislator will have his/her mind already made up and will want to argue with you. One way of deflecting this behavior is by saying, I appreciate your point of view, however, I believe that if this legislation passes/doesn't pass,

etc. If you meet with a legislator and the opposition at the same time, always be polite and respectful as difficult as that may be.

5) Keep it simple

Remember, most legislators are not from the health care field. You are the expert. Use plain English and simple concepts to explain the impact of any legislation. Do not use health care “lingo” or abbreviations. This is an opportunity to educate as well as influence.

6) Be on time

Often you will have to wait on an appointment with a legislator. He/She will not wait for you. If for some reason your meeting time is cut short, ask if you can meet with him/her again or the staff person assigned to the bill.

7) Don't wait to meet with the legislator

Each bill is assigned to a staff member who works in the legislator's office. He/she are often your best contact to determine bill status or a member's position. Sometimes it is impossible to get time with a legislator, but meeting with the appropriate staff can be just as useful as they prepare the legislator's briefing sheets on all bills.

8) Be available for follow-up

At the conclusion of a meeting, leave whatever documents have been prepared and information on how the member or staff can reach you or someone from your organization if future questions come up.

Visits to introduce yourself or your organization

This is a time when you offer whatever assistance the legislator may need in understanding health issues. Legislators hate to only see you when you want something. Remember, they need support in their districts and often will want to know what you can do for them.

1) Plan for home office visit

The best time to get to know your member is when they are in their district offices. Usually Fridays and during legislative recess, legislators keep regular business hours in their districts. If they are not available, remember key staff members are as good. The best time to schedule these meetings is in the fall. Try not to schedule meetings when key votes are coming up in the Legislature. The reason for your visit may be suspect.

2) Tell your story

Now is the time you can talk in detail about your organization, where you work and the type of patients you serve. Be very personal, giving examples of what it's like. Talk about the positive aspects of your job and the issues nurse leaders

support. Invite the Legislator to your workplace, so he/she can see firsthand what you do. Most important, ask what help you can be to him/her.

3) Follow up

One visit does not make a relationship. Follow up your visit with a letter thanking the member for his/her time. Let him/her know that you are available. Once this is done, periodically check in with staff, either to comment on legislation or provide information on an issue of interest to the legislator. This activity begins your grassroots networking.

Section 7: Giving Testimony

One of the most dreaded of activities is testifying in front of the Senate, Assembly or regulatory committee. Several of the points discussed in Section 6 also apply here.

Senate or Assembly committee hearings:

1. Be Prepared

This means literally be prepared to speak, be asked questions, be interrupted, be argued with, wait through long discussions on other bills, or never have the bill you are speaking on be heard at all.

2. Do Not Read

Unlike regulatory hearings, legislative hearings do not require or even want anything in writing. If there is an exception, the lobbyist you are working with will take care of it. Know your facts and articulate them clearly. It is okay to have notes to assist you, but the legislators like speakers who can provide information clearly and directed to them. Eye to eye contact helps the committee focus on you. Always state your name, the organization you represent, how long you have been a nurse and in what area. Always conclude by asking that the committee vote to support or oppose the measure you are speaking on, depending on your position.

3. Know the History

Before testifying, a lobbyist who has been working the bill will prepare you to discuss the “politics” of the bill. That is, who is the opposition, what amendments have been taken and what is anticipated to happen in committee.

4. Keep it Brief

Usually no more than three to five minutes is the maximum you should plan to speak. There often are several people waiting to speak on both sides of an issue. Make your comments; close by saying you would be happy to answer any questions; thank the chair and the committee for their time and ask the committee to vote either aye or no, depending on your position. Don't repeat what other speakers have said. Although legislators tend to repeat themselves, they quickly lose patience when presenters do and may cut you off. If previous speakers have said it all, it is appropriate to get up and

just say your name, organization and that you support the previous speaker's comments and then ask for a vote.

5. Never Lie or Disagree

The same principle as to how to lobby a legislator individually applies here. When asked a question to which you don't know the answer, say so and offer to get back to them later. Again, you may disagree with specific comments members make and there may be a chance to "clarify" specific issues, but ultimately if a member persists you should just move on and make your points.

6. Tell your story

As much as possible, relate an issue to real life or your experiences as a nurse.

Section 8: Getting Acquainted with Candidates

An election year can be an excellent time to win friends for your hospital. Since candidates often have limited time, it's necessary to design meetings with candidates that are both comprehensive and brief.

The **first step** in developing relationships with political candidates during an election year is to answer several questions:

- In what Assembly and Senate district am I located?
- Who is running for office within these districts in all parties?
- Are incumbents running? If so, what are the incumbents' records on health issues?
- What other elected offices will be subject to political campaigns that could affect healthcare issues?

Activities may be coordinated in several ways:

- Schedule events so there are no conflict between other organizations with similar interests.
- Cooperate on gatherings for candidates. This could take the form of a get-to-know the candidate's conference sponsored by many nurses and coordinated at one location.
- Coordinate candidate's tours so each candidate is shown something different at each hospital in the district.

Almost every nurse has a number of stories about dramatic results in health care. There's much to gain by relating a few stories, especially if they can be documented with slides, voice recordings or video tape.

Planning candidate gatherings

Typically, a candidate gathering takes two forms: 1) a single hospital inviting each candidate, or a group of candidates, to the hospital so that the candidate can meet hospital administrators, trustees, physicians and other selected people; or 2) a group of hospitals inviting the candidates to a larger gathering all the hospitals in the district.

- If a meet-the-candidates event with two or more invitees is scheduled, make sure the event is clearly nonpartisan to avoid any feelings of ill will by the participants. A hospital may want to invite candidates separately to take advantage of the opportunity to get to know each candidate individually and extend to each the opportunity to have the limelight.
- Organizing a candidate gathering will show that nurses are paying attention to the candidates, and demonstrate to the candidates that the health care community has an interest in the outcome of the election.

Preparation for such a gathering may include the following steps:

- Develop a schedule that gives no favoritism to any candidate.
- Plan for a relaxed atmosphere.
- Consider inviting the media.
- Don't plan expensive events.
- Give the candidates a list of participants and information about your organization prior to the event.

After the gathering, take the followings steps:

- Run a story in your organizations publication and send a copy to the candidates.
- Prepare and distribute a story to the media.
- Send a thank you to the candidates while reinforcing the name of the persons at organization and its representatives.

After an event, your organization may want to evaluate the candidates' positions on health care issues. Typically, you would use your strategic plan, goals or position statements as a benchmark for determining if you should support a specific candidate.

Section 9: Writing Letters to Legislators

The most accessible means of legislative involvement is writing letters and sending telegrams. Never underestimate the power of one letter to a political official. An effective letter should have individuality and a positive, creative approach. It should be timely, concise and reflect your knowledge of the issue.

Congressional courtesy provides for letters from any constituent to be forwarded to the respective legislator for a reply, even if the letter was not originally directed to that legislator.

Your letter can have several different purposes:

- It can request legislators to take a position.
- It can educate legislators to change their point of view.
- It can encourage legislators to continue their efforts on behalf of an issue.

Tips for writing letters to legislators

- Use your own stationery, not hospital or agency stationery. Do not give the impression that you are speaking for an organization unless you are the designated spokesperson. Make your letter creative and original. A letter is better than a post card or email. However you may fax or email your letter – in today's world these are acceptable forms of communication with elected officials!
- Identify your subject clearly. State the name of the legislation and the Assembly or Senate bill number for which you are writing.
- Be brief, stating your position on the legislation. Explain how the issue would impact you, your profession and your community.
- Know the committees on which your legislators serve and indicate in the letter if the bill is being brought before those committees.
- Sign your name with R.N. Be sure your correct address is on the letter as well as the envelope.
- Be courteous and complimentary. A rude letter neither makes friends nor influences the legislators. Express appreciation for work well done, a good speech, favorable vote or fine leadership on committee or on the floor.
- Timing is important. Try to express your position while the bill is in committee. Your legislators will usually be more responsive to your appeal at this time rather than when the bill has already been approved in committee.

- Limit your letter to one issue and do not write more than once on the same subject.
- Keep a copy of all correspondence for your files.

Section 10: Dealing With the Media

The media can be influential in educating the public and legislators on the need for health care reform and other health care related issues. As long as what you are doing is worthwhile and fills a public need you, probably have an interesting story to tell. Journalists are receptive to factual, well-documented stories.

Perhaps the most important concept to remember when communicating with the media, regardless if it is TV, radio, or written news, is be clear, concise and focus on the key issue. Don't let the reporter lead you into areas that are not part of the issue. Stay focused on what you want to communicate; you need to take control of the interview. Remember when conducting an interview **nothing is ever off the record**, even if the reporter tells you the interview is over.

A strategy that is helpful regardless of who is interviewing you, is to develop "sound bites" - brief key statements of 10 seconds or less that summarize the issue. These "bites" then become the key phrases or messages you wish to convey to the public. They will help to center your message and thoughts. They also help to ground the nervous interviewee.

The essential elements of news

Reporters are interested in news. There are four essential elements of news that makes a story or issue newsworthy. These elements include:

- Timeliness.
- News value. Does it affect the audience's daily lives?
- Local appeal. Does it have immediate impact on the audience's geographic area?
- Interesting subject matter.

Most of us read the news. We are not usually in the news. However, times are changing. There will be times when you wish to convey an issue or story to the media and there will be times when the media thinks you have a key piece of a story to tell. Develop a relationship with the media so they know who you are and what you do. Partnerships with the media are certainly reciprocal.

Cultivating local reporters

- 1) Develop an up-to-date media list, a small yet manageable list of reporters to call periodically.
- 2) Become a reliable regular. Use introductory letters and periodic phone calls to convey interest and the ability to function as a media expert.
- 3) Understand time pressures. Ask the reporter if they are on a deadline. Respect the reporter's time line by responding as quickly as possible.
- 4) Remember you are the expert. Your education and experience will enable you to respond to many topics without the need for research.

- 5) Ask for more time when you need to do research or get your thoughts organized. Often deadlines can be extended if you tell the reporter you are willing to comment and get back to him/her.

Press releases

A news release (press release) is an up-to-the-minute summary of your news. Always provide detailed background information (who, what, where, when, how and why) when communicating with the media. The news release should present information succinctly. It will be judged based on its interest to an audience or target public. The news release should always include the name of your organization or coalition, date, and the name and phone number of a contact person.

Prior to spending writing time on a news release, ask yourself the following questions:

- What do you hope to accomplish from the press release?
- Who will be interested in the release?
- Is the subject matter truly news worthy?
- Will press coverage help the cause?
- Can we accomplish our goal through alternate channels?

It is best not to over use the press release concept. It is better to save press releases for news worthy issues. It will lend credibility to your organization and cause.

Press Release Guidelines:

- Keep it simple, clear and direct.
- Engage your reader from the start.
- Get to the point then expand on it.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Cover all points. Don't leave anything unanswered.
- Use short, clear, to the point sentences.
- Adhere to the essential details.
- Limit the written release to two double spaced pages.
- Ask a third party to read the release before you send it out.

News conference

A news conference is held to notify the media and legislators of significant information on a new project, cutting-edge research or perhaps a major policy statement. **News conferences should be approached with caution**, and some specialists recommend that you do not attempt to conduct one without professional guidance.

Call a news conference only in the event of extremely timely, controversial or very big news.

Newspapers

Letters to the editor can be effective in reaching the public and legislators. Be advised, however, that letters and stories submitted to newspapers are subject to editing. If a reporter calls you, be brief and to the point when interviewed. Use “sound bites” - brief key statements that summarize the issue.

Television

In-depth coverage of your issue on network television news is difficult. Consult with an expert if TV interviews or radio talk shows are desired. News shows are usually 2 to 4 minutes without time for visuals. Talk shows provide 7 to 10 minutes on actual topics and may allow for visuals. Public-service announcements are educational and informative, and can run from 20 to 60 seconds.

Radio

Radio, serves as the primary news source for many people. When delivering information on the radio, use simple descriptive language that creates images in the minds of listeners. Talk shows are usually 10 to 30 minutes. Call-in shows are 30 to 50 minutes with many breaks. Public affairs programs are 10 to 30 minutes and concentrate on educational information.

Tips for using the media

- 1) Write and submit articles to local newspapers.
- 2) Prepare press releases.
- 3) Write op-ed or opinion pieces for publication in newspapers.
- 4) Offer to write articles for journals and magazines.

What to do when the Media Calls:

1. Why is the media calling?

Are you the appropriate person to respond? Is this your issue or is the press trying to make it your issue? Are you familiar with the subject matter? Is someone else better prepared to convey the message you want the public to hear? Who will benefit from the interview? Will the interview further clarify the issue? Will the interview place you in a proactive or reactive mode?

2. Deciding to do the interview:

Establish contact with the interviewer. Determine what the reporter is looking for. Decide on a time frame for the interview. Is the reporter on deadline? Ask if you can get back to him/her in an established time frame. This will allow you a few minutes to collect your thoughts. **Don't consent to an interview if you believe your position is at risk.** Tell the reporter that you will get back to him/her as soon as you can.

3. Pre-interview tips:

Determine your message. What do you want to convey. Develop sound bites to help you clarify your key points. Select two or three key points you feel must be conveyed. Know your audience. Will this interview be aired or printed? Is it directed at the general public, special interest groups, legislators or health care professionals? Your approach may be quite different depending on your audience. Brainstorm with a peer or colleague difficult or sensitive questions that may come up during the interview. Practice handling these difficult questions.

Develop strategies that you can use if the interview gets off track. Practice using “bridging” techniques -- sentences or phrases that help you get back to your key points. Statements like... “That is one way of looking at the issue but the real concern is ...” or “I can’t speak for that organization, but we believe...” Again, these are statements that allow you to come back to your original key points. If the reporter asks you something other than the issue at hand, bring him/her back to your key points. Keeping the interview focused on the issue and your key messages will make for a successful interview.

If time permits, prepare a pre-interview worksheet.

- What is your goal in doing this interview?
- What are your three major messages or points?
- What facts are critical to effectively make your points?
- Are there any anecdotes or examples you can use to make your point or points more clear?
- How will you sum up the interview: What is your final point?

4. Basic interview guidelines:

- Appearance and body language-- Consideration should be given to your appearance for all in person interviews. How you present yourself will help convey your issue. If you are interviewed in person or on TV the following may prove helpful.
 - Wear dark solid clothing, preferably a dark suit.
 - Minimize jewelry.
 - Avoid distracting body language.
 - Control facial expressions. Use appropriate expressions but don't over-do.
 - Use good posture.
 - It's okay to use your hands, but keep them away from your face. They may interfere with the camera.
 - Practice deep breathing relaxation exercises to help calm and center you before the interview.

- Delivery-- Your first thought will be to speak as fast as you can to get the interview over or to get all your points across in a very short amount of time. Try not to rush through your responses. Take a moment, have the points you want to make in your mind, before you open your mouth. Speak clearly and slightly slower than your normal pace.

- Breathing -- You must do this to complete the interview! Use abdominal breathing. Begin to speak as you exhale. This will prevent you from running out of breath and /or choking on your words. Your throat may be dry during the interview (usually from anxiety) keep a glass of warm water available. Cold water will tighten up your vocal cords.

- Voice volume and word jumbling -- As anxiety builds, the pitch of your voice increases and words become garbled. When words or sounds blend together too much, they can sound the same. It is important to enunciate carefully. Always speak up. Be careful not to drop your voice at the end of a sentence. Increase your volume and slow the delivery when stressing critical words and concepts.

- **Remember nothing is ever off the record.**

General Information:

- Don't argue with the reporter
- Don't let the reporter see that he/she has frustrated you.
- Avoid hedging. Instead say "That's a good question-lets come back to it." (Then state your point which will allow you time to think of an appropriate response to the question.) Or Say "I don't have the answer to that," or "I'm not qualified to answer that, however XXX could respond to that question."
- Attempt to end the interview if it becomes antagonistic.

- Be prepared.
- Try to enjoy the experience.
- Keep to your key points.
- Thank the reporter for his/her time.
- Get back to the reporter if you promised additional information.

To improve your interview techniques practice developing sound bites and holding mock interviews on subjects that interest you. Keep informed on issues confronting health care and your community and reporters will be sure to call on you again.

Managing the Media During a Crisis

Managing the media during a crisis should be something that your company has thought out and developed a plan for should such an event occur. What constitutes a crisis may vary from institution to institution. It is the actions that follow that will allow you and your facility to respond quickly and appropriately. A successful media relation during a crisis involves preparation as well as a level-headed and intelligent response during the crisis itself. Your organization's media/public relations specialist should be available to manage the media should a crisis develop.

There are three overriding principles to keep in mind when managing the media during a crisis:

1. Rapid response is essential. However, it is imperative that time is taken to frame your organization's response appropriately. Make every effort to avoid premature or "off the cuff" responses.
2. The media and public will usually be forgiving of the crisis itself, but will not tolerate corporate arrogance, indifference or stupidity.
3. There needs to be a corporate voice during a crisis. Strategies for handling a crisis should be consistent with your organization's image.

Developing a plan for managing the media is essential. Anticipate what types of crisis your organization may confront. Develop a plan for the different scenarios. Know who within the organization would be the best spokesperson for the given crisis. It is critical that only those designated individuals act as spokespersons.

If you are the appropriate spokesperson for your organization, take a few minutes to think through the situation. Completely assess the situation before responding. Make sure your response is appropriate to the situation. If you have to respond before having the full details, make an appropriate broad-sweeping comment and promise to get back to the reporters with further information as soon as possible.

Handling the Media during a Crisis Checklist:

- What is the crisis?
- Who is the best spokesperson to discuss the issue?
- What are the facts?
- What facts are critical to effectively communicating your message/key points?
- Develop key sound bites around the facts and key messages.
- How will you sum up the interview? What is your final message?
- Post-interview work.
- After the initial interview regroup. Follow through on promises made during the interview. Reassess the situation. Adjust your media strategies appropriately.

ACNL members who need additional assistance with interview preparation or coaching prior to an interview or media event may wish to call the office. Names of ACNL members who have developed expertise in the area of media relations are available by calling the office.

Resources

Updated resource letters and documents will be available after
the 2011 Annual Meeting