



DREAM FOR DARFUR PRESS TIP SHEET

This tip sheet is to serve as a guide as you organize and publicize your local Dream for Darfur event. Getting media attention is a helpful way to raise awareness of the issue in general and is a crucial tool to creating a successful event. Remember, though, that media advocacy is merely another tool in the activist's belt and not an end in itself.

Getting Started

- **Get to know the lay of the land.** Look at what media outlets are in your community (daily newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, weekly/community newspapers, websites and blogs). Take note of who has covered Darfur and/or the Beijing Olympics and how they've done it. Look at how similar community events have been covered.
- **Begin building a press list.** Get phone numbers, fax numbers and email address (if possible) for all of the news outlets and keep it in a well-organized spreadsheet. If there are organizations sponsoring the event, many times they have press lists you can build from. Don't be afraid to call the news desk and ask who covers Darfur, as well as who covers events in your community. Be sure to include calendar editors, the people who compile a list of what's going on in town.
- **Know the messages you're trying to get across.** See the fact sheet and talking points documents for more information. Memorize these. Work them into sound bites and build a case in your head for the event's newsworthiness. Imagine yourself trying to convince a reporter to cover the event.
- **Think strategically.** When planning your event, you can make choices that will help the press outreach. If you want to get cameras (video and photo), make sure there's a good visual – a compelling image like the ones you see on the nightly news. If you're having speakers, think of who is notable and might attract media. Consider pairing unlikely allies (political opponents, for instance), a tactic that can also be helpful in post-event media work. Politics might make strange bedfellows, but strange bedfellows make news.

Materials

- **Press List**
 - Update it regularly.
 - Keep precise notes of messages sent and voicemails left.
- **Media Advisory**
 - This document serves as the “who, what, where, when” for journalists in order to get the event on their radar. It is typically in the future tense. Briefly introduce the event in a paragraph announcement and then spell out the Ws. Make it easy for a journalist to find the event’s key stats (speakers, time, location, etc.) just by glancing at the sheet. (See the template provided by the Coalition).
- **Press Release**
 - This document, on the other hand, typically is distributed the day of the event and is often included in a press kit at the event. It is typically written in the past tense and reads like a news article. Make sure to put the piece of news in both the headline and the first sentence. Include quotes from the speakers at the event or the event’s organizers.
 - HINT: On occasion, some smaller outlets have been known to take the release and print it with only making a few minor changes. While you can’t guarantee this will happen, it is best to make the press release as close to “printable” as possible. This means to keep the text seem impartial, with the opinions and emotion inserted in the quotes from the speakers. (See the template provided by the Coalition).
- **Press Kit**
 - Sometimes all you need is the press release, but on many occasions it’s helpful to include other information for journalists who cover the event – a speakers list (in order, with titles and correct spelling of the names), speakers’ bios, a background document on the crisis in Darfur, a fact sheet on Dream for Darfur. (See the materials provided by the Coalition).
- **Letters to the Editor**
 - Encourage supporters to write short letters to the editor about the situation in Darfur, plugging the event. These are usually about 200 words, max., but you should check on each individual publication. Give the writers everything they need – talking points, the email address and rules of submitting the letters, etc. Use the message themes to build from.
 - HINT: Write many letters yourself and ask your supporters to sign them and send them in. This allows you to control the messages going out and also is much easier for the person you’re asking to be the sender.
- **Opinion-Editorials**
 - Get your event speakers or organizers to write a longer piece, using the Dream for Darfur messages and calling attention to the crisis. It is often

helpful just to call a newspaper and ask if they'd be interested in an op-ed written by your author about Darfur and your event coming up. Op-eds should not be too essay-like. Rather, jump right in and get to the point. (See post-event media relations below).

How to Reach Out to the Press

- **Send, then call.** Fax or email the advisory and follow up on it that day (within a few hours, if possible). Journalists get a ton of these things, so draw their attention to it by calling to make sure they saw it. Leave a message and follow up on it after a day or two; don't be offended if a journalist doesn't call you back.
- **Be brief.** News stories require concise, succinct messages that can be made into short quotes or sound bites. But most of all, respect the reporter's or editor's time. Journalists are often on deadline and need you to keep it short and sweet.
- **Have a plan.** Know what you're going to say before you get on the phone. It is often effective.
 - Confirm he or she has received the document. (If not, make sure you have the right email address and resend it.) "I'm just calling to make sure you saw a media advisory I sent a little earlier today."
 - Briefly describe the event. This is your pitch, your chance to make the case of why this event is newsworthy.
 - Confirm he or she is the right person to be speaking with.
 - Gauge his or her interest. Sometimes, they'll say if they're interested, but most times it's easiest just to ask "Do you think this sounds like something you'd be interested in covering?"
- **Know the outlet and tailor your pitch accordingly.** If it's a local community paper, pump up the local angle. If it's a television station, tell them about the visuals.
- **Make it personal.** Journalists often look to humanize their articles and reports with real-life stories. Consider telling the story of your event through the people who are organizing it or participating in it. Are there local Darfurians or Sudanese people in attendance? Find the compelling stories and use them in your pitches, especially to the journalists who are interested or on the fence about covering it.
- **Make his or her job easier.** Make spokespeople and the event's organizers available to be interviewed before and after the event. Just because a journalist can't make it to an event doesn't mean he or she can't cover it. (See Post-Event Media Outreach below as well).

Being Interviewed

- **Before an Interview**
 - Research the interviewer and the outlet
 - Develop 3 to 4 key messages
 - Develop facts, anecdotes or examples that back up the key messages
 - Anticipate difficult questions

- **Use every opportunity to bridge to your message.** “Bridging” is a rhetorical tool to get from a difficult question or line of conversation to the heart of your message, such as “But the point is...,” “But the real question is...,” “What is important is...,” and “We have to remember that...”
- **Control the Interview**
 - Remember that you are the expert
 - You can’t control the questions, only the answers. Use the questions as platforms for your messages.
- **Hook the reporter.** Make reporters listen to your key points by using phrases such as “There are three things your readers/listeners/viewers should know...” or “There are a couple of ways to answer that question. First...”
- **Tips for Radio:** For radio interviews, voice quality and expression are critical. Try to picture your audience and speak to them
- **Tips for TV:** Talk conversationally. Use short answers and avoid too much detail. Keep eyes on the interviewer, not on the camera. Natural hand movement is fine, as long as it’s not excessive. If you can, provide video footage and photos from Darfur region. Save Darfur Coalition has video B-roll packages available at www.SaveDarfur.org.
- **Tips for Print and Online:**
 - Nothing is off the record – don’t say anything you don’t want to see in print.
 - Speak in short, complete sentences.
 - Give the sound bites you want to see quoted in the article.

Timeline

- **Right now.** Start to prepare. Build your press lists. Write your letters. Think of strategy and how you’re going to go about getting press coverage for the event.
- **2 Weeks Away:** Distribute the advisory (by fax and email, if possible) and make follow-up calls to the calendar editors and your key journalists. You’re just looking to get it on their radar, get them thinking about how they’re going to cover it and make sure it’s in any community calendar the publication publishes. Send in letters to the editor.
- **1 Week Away:** To your top target outlets, pitch a story that would run in advance of the event – a profile on an interesting speaker or even just a preview of the event. Prepare an op-ed, if possible, to run in the days leading up to the event. Keep the letters coming.
- **2-3 Business Days Before:** Resend the advisory. Make follow-up calls to all journalists and ask if they plan to cover the event. Follow up, follow up, follow up! (Don’t assume someone received your voice messages). Push for an outlet to publish an op-ed or a preview story to run in advance of the event. Don’t let up on the letters!

- **The Day of the Event:** Make one last round of calls to anyone you haven't gotten a solid answer from. (If the event is on a weekend, note that many smaller print outlets probably are not operating. Get your calls to them in before.) Prepare a media sign-in sheet – with name, outlet, email and phone – to keep track of the journalists who come. (See the post-event media for how to work with those who didn't). Distribute the release immediately after, shortly before or – if possible – during the event. If the event is at night, you might want to send it again the next morning.

At the Event

- **Make the media sign-in visible.** Ask all journalists and photographers to sign in. Type this list up and compare it with your media list.
- **Ensure that each reporter gets the story he/she wants.** Ask them if they have any questions or if they'd like to speak to anyone. If the reporter wants to talk to the organizers or the speakers, make them available. It's a good idea to keep track of them and even to check in with them on occasion as the event progresses and after it ends.
- **Make sure the photographers have the shot they want.** Same principle at work here, folks.
- **NOTE on Crowd Estimates:** If necessary (if you expect the group to be too large to count), make sure you have a plan for making an "official" organizer estimate and communicate that figure to anyone who would speak to the press once it is announced. Be reasonable. Journalists probably are estimating too, and if you're way off, they'll be much more likely to go with a much more conservative figure. It is important to remember that the event is much less about the size of the crowd than it is about the people of Darfur – and don't be afraid to tell a journalist that.

Post-Event Media - Immediate

- **Look for the articles and follow up.** Use your media sign-in to keep track of each reporter and what/when they cover the event. Most of the time (except for weekly papers), it's within the first 24 hours. If you haven't seen an article from a reporter you know attended the event, don't be afraid to call and ask when he or she expects to write the story.
- **Follow up on the release.** Remember, just because someone couldn't attend the event doesn't mean they can't cover it. Some smaller outlets that don't have a large amount of staff will even run a news story that you can offer to prepare for them. Include photos from the event.

- **Follow up on the deadbeats.** Call the reporters who said they would attend, but didn't. You're not looking for an apology, you're looking for a way to get the story written. Ask if they'd like an interview with an organizer or a speaker at the event.

Post-Event Media – Longer-term

- **Plan.** Think about the post-event media before the event happens. Be creative.
- **Get the most bang for your buck.** Again, reaching out to the press is not about getting coverage for the event; it's about getting your messages to a wide audience. Often, the most important part of a media strategy is the way you capitalize off of the initial coverage of the event to generate more awareness of Darfur and bring more people into the movement.
- **Pitch an op-ed piece** that uses the event as a hook to reinforce the Dream for Darfur messages. Send in follow-up letters-to-the-editor thanking outlets for their coverage and reinforcing the messaging.
- **Ask the newspaper to editorialize about Darfur.** There's nothing like a local news angle to get a newspaper editorial board to weigh in on an issue of a much larger scope. Ask the papers that cover the event to consider writing an editorial and get them any information they need.
- **If there's an obvious next step, take it. And promote it.** If the event involves, for instance, gathering a petition, deliver it. Let journalists know how many people signed it.