



**Grants & Foundations Review™**

## **Hear Yea. Hear Yea. Publicize a Grant Award**

Wednesday, May 24, 2006 - Joyce Luhrs

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Contributed By Joyce Luhrs

Every day we are bombarded with a range of news information from television, radio, the World Wide Web, blogs, newspapers, magazines, and many other sources. The media conveys thousands of diverse news information to captive audiences every minute throughout the year.

What is newsworthy? For non-profit organizations, many newsworthy stories are taking place on a daily basis. Grant awards provide a great newsworthy story, but frequently, this opportunity is overlooked in an organization's public relations plan.

How can an organization's grant awards get media coverage? Think about the decisions made in a newsroom. What types of stories do local newspapers, television stations, radio programs and other media outlets in the area cover? By reviewing these different venues first and taking a serious look at what gets covered and when, an organization can increase its visibility in the community, create name recognition, draw attention to its mission, keep its name in front of current funders, and may even attract the eye of prospective funders.

Organizations can do several things to promote grant awards and the results of projects and programs supported by the funds with these techniques that I have used over the years when creating press campaigns for clients. By following these tips, non-profits will be in a better position to capture the media's attention and get their share of news coverage.

The letter of agreement between the funder and a grantee should be reviewed first. Most of the time, foundations, corporations, and government agencies welcome the recognition, but on occasion, funders may wish to remain anonymous. Depending upon the size of the funding source, some may want to develop and implement their own press campaigns with their own spin and perspective.

Know thy funder. Some funders state explicitly in their application guidelines that no information about a grant award may be done without consulting them first. Several reasons

are given for this. Funders may want to ensure that the branding and image of their organization are consistently maintained wherever they appear. For example, while a funder's name may be shortened in every day conversation, this may not be the legal name that should appear in print. They may want to review any press materials first before they are released to the media, ensuring that the name, mission, and other information is presented accurately.

Think like a journalist. Once a funder gives its initial approval, a grantee needs to start thinking like the people who are in a newsroom. What will capture their attention? A newsroom in any geographical area may be inundated with hundreds of press releases and media alerts at a time. With so many press releases covering the desks of editors and reporters, an organization's grant award must have a compelling story that prompts the newsroom to decide that their audience will be interested. Every time an organization decides to write a news release these questions must be answered, "Is this newsworthy?" "Who will want to read it?" "How does our news story affect the public?" By answering these questions, organizations quickly begin to determine those that may be newsworthy and possibly picked up by the media from those that will be shelved.

Concise press releases work the best. The length of a press release should be kept to about one page. Every word should be critical to the release. Delete unnecessary ones.

Convey a great story. Be specific and give examples. An organization's points should be supported with facts, and tell a story that shows this is a go-to group that knows what it is talking about. The media directs their messages to people, and for the most part, their audiences want to hear a good story.

Talk about the organization's results and highlight the numbers of people serviced. For example, a non-profit that receives a grant to provide additional services in a homeless shelter should include information about the amount of the grant, how it will be used, the problem of homelessness, the number of people who will be helped, among other relevant points.

Accuracy counts. Any statistics, research citations, and other information that are presented as facts should be correct. A grantee that is unclear about information that it promulgates to the media will not be well received and will not be taken seriously when other news items are later released.

Use a photo. A photo taken with a representative from the funding agency and the non-profit's executive director, development director, or others showing the recipient receiving a grant award may be attached to a press release.

Get to know the reporters. They may be looking for a good story to cover, especially if their editor has given them a mandate to investigate a news piece with a particular slant like the increased number of homeless people in an area. Timing is everything. Reporters appreciate good, relevant news, and keeping an organization's name in front of them in a positive way with updates like a grant award may result in press coverage.

Reporters and editors want to receive real news and usable stories. Good news stories will capture the attention of editors and get them to take the next steps to include either an article in the local media outlet or have a reporter contact the recipient directly to write or broadcast a news story. Cranking out a stack of press releases every week that does not convey good, hard news will not make the cut on the editor's table.

When a reporter calls, a grantee needs to identify a seasoned staff member to tell the story correctly and accurately. A grantee should have basic information about its mission, services, programs, and contacts in a media kit. Let the reporter know that the organization has a media kit and offer to send it. Before anything is sent to the media, staff should proofread materials carefully for accuracy, currency, and consistency. Sending outdated information to the media is not only an embarrassment but quickly diminishes a grantee's prospect of getting additional coverage in the future.

Never assume anything. If a staff member is unsure about the thrust of a question or information requested, ask. For example, inquire about the deadline that the report is working with, and if the reporter asks staff to provide additional information, respond promptly and stick to the deadline. Ask how information should be sent. While some reporters may want information sent as an attachment with an e-mail, others may work for media outlets that do not permit attachments with e-mails. If attachments are permitted, they should be scanned first and cleared of any viruses before they are released into cyberspace.

Similarly, others may want the information faxed, but they may not have the time to go through a stack of paper sent to them. Organizations need to be selective about the information that they send to reporters. As a writer for several publications, I have interviewed many people over the years, and when working under a tight deadline, time is not aplenty to read several pages of text.

Pitching good stories like grant awards that are newsworthy, clear, and concise helps media outlets create articles that their audiences want to read or hear. This also provides a grantee with another avenue to create ongoing, positive relationships not only with the media but also the public. By following these techniques and understanding better what the newsroom wants, an organization can herald its grant awards and get its share of media coverage.

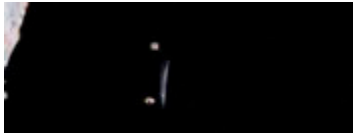
#### About the Contributor



**Joyce Luhrs:**

As President of Luhrs & Associates, Joyce Luhrs brings a diverse background in the for-profit and non-profit sectors. She has 19 years experience providing marketing, public relations, and management services for businesses, nonprofit organizations, schools, and colleges throughout the country.

Among her accomplishments, she has implemented public relations campaigns to English- and Spanish-language media; conducted marketing



campaigns to diverse cultural groups; written winning grant proposals; placed stories in business, educational, and multicultural trade press; conducted outreach efforts to various sectors, and worked with clients in various locations. Ms. Luhrs is a nationally published author on public relations, marketing, grants, the arts, home-based businesses, women-owned companies, micro-enterprises in Cuba, education, and dance.

An accomplished ballroom dancer, she was a columnist for over seven years for *Dancing USA*, and is currently a columnist with *Amateur Dancers*, a publication of USA-Dance. Her articles have also appeared in *Enterprising Women*, *Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, *The Bottom Line*, *New Jersey Jewish News*, *Garden State Woman*, *The Ballroom Review*, *Salesian Sisters Partners In Giving*, *Business in Bergen*, *The Ohio Journal of Science*, *Psychological Reports*, 201, and *Social Behavior and Personality*.

In addition to owning her own business, Ms. Luhrs has served as vice president of philanthropy for a manufacturer. Through her efforts, the company created and implemented a product corporate giving policy and program that helped those most in need in the United States and in other parts of the world.

In 1996, she received the New Jersey Women of Achievement Award from Douglas College of the State University of New Jersey of Rutgers and the New Jersey State Federation of Women's Clubs and was recognized with a Salute to Women Leaders honor from the New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners. Ms. Luhrs was awarded in 2004 a Teal Heart Award from the New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners for demonstrating outstanding service and dedication, and she was also recognized with this award in 1996. She is listed in the 1997-1998 edition of *Who's Who in the East*.

Ms. Luhrs has provided valuable community services and has been a recipient of several civic awards. She served for several years on the scholarship application review committee of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (formerly the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund), the League of Women Voters of New Jersey's state education committee, and on the board of trustees of a local League of Women Voters. Her contributions have also encompassed serving on the board of trustees of a New Jersey community foundation.

In 1995, the *Bergen Record of New Jersey* named Ms. Luhrs "Robin Hood to the Region's Poor" for her founding of the Resource Reutilization Network, Inc. (RRN), a non-profit organization that collected reusable items that individuals and businesses no longer wanted that were redistributed to non-profit organizations helping people in need in New York, New Jersey, parts of Appalachia, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, and the country of Liberia. She was recognized for her extensive contributions to the community with the Volunteer Center of Bergen County's Adult Volunteer Group Award.

She is an active member of the New Jersey Association of Women Business Owners (NJAWBO), the oldest statewide organization addressing the interests of women business owners. Ms. Luhrs served two terms as Vice-President of Marketing on NJAWBO's State Board of Trustees and previously served as Public Relations Chair. She also completed one term as Vice President of Marketing of the NJAWBO-Bergen Chapter.

Ms. Luhrs holds a B.A. degree in sociology/anthropology from Oberlin College and a M.A. degree in the social sciences from Columbia University. She is the recipient of a Leadership New Jersey fellowship and public policy fellowships from the State University of New York/Albany-Center for Women in Government, the City of New York and the Washington, D.C. based Institute for Educational Leadership's Education Policy Fellowship Program. She is a four-time Hispanic Scholarship Fund awardee and the

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