

SUCCESSFUL EVENT ORGANIZING

by Robert Field, CSDP Co-Chair

This is a guideline for maximizing the productivity of visits by out of town authorities:

- 1) There are three productive stages for communicating your message and expanding outreach efforts: Preparations, the day of the event, and follow up.
 - 2) The media is always interested in reporting local events, especially when someone who is deemed important visits from out of town.
 - 3) The key local event needs to take place at a respected venue: A college or university, a fraternal organization such as the Rotarians, a church, a governmental committee, a professional organization such as the Chamber of Commerce or medical associate, or a political party.
 - 3) You should try to arrange the following during the day: Other events; media coverage of the event; appearances on local radio talk show; visits with the newspaper editorial board and/or columnist; a meeting with government officials; a reception (breakfast, lunch, dinner, coffee) for activists in your area to meet with the guest be it in someone's home, a local meeting space, or at a restaurant. Your goal is to make the most of the day and each effort amplifies the importance of the others.
 - 4) In some cases, a peaceful vigil might be held.
 - 5) The key to success is very early planning and in organizing. Ideally the process starts three months in advance!!! Why? It takes that long to arrange for the key event of the day, be it an appearance on a college campus, at the Rotarians, before a professional organization or whatever. Sometimes it can take even longer. The biggest mistake new comers make is failing to plan far ahead, enlist the help of others, and commence the process soon enough.
 - 6) An attempt should be made to increase the audience and expand the importance of the major event. You may be allowed to invite others. You may be able to stimulate the persons responsible for organizing the event to distribute information concerning your guest and promote the meeting more than they would otherwise. You may want to meet with the organizers three or four weeks before the event and keep in touch with them. Don't assume anything. Follow up on everything!
- Literature might be distributed to the organization's membership at an earlier gathering, through regular organization mailings or via a special mailing. Volunteers might be solicited within the event organization to make phone calls.
- 7) Upon confirmation of the major event, subsidiary event might be planned. This could be with other groups, at a church, at a college or school.

- 8) Local radio and television interview shows should be researched and the most appropriate shows should be contacted for the purpose of booking your guest as soon as you confirm the main event, even if it is three months ahead of time. You will want to be able to submit written material concerning your guest's qualifications and subjects of interest to the audience. (The fact that your guest is to be a guest speaker locally is key to newsworthiness and legitimacy.)
- 9) A week before the event, appropriate columnists and the editorial staff of the local newspaper(s) should be contacted and advised that the guest will be a speaker at the key event and available for an interview or to meet with editorial staff members to discuss issues. If there is a local magazine, it should also be informed also.
- 10) If you are in a large city, you should also contact the community newspapers, the alternative weekly and the university and college radio stations and newspapers. They are often eager to cover happenings relevant to their localized audience.
- 11) Three days prior to the event, a page-and-a half to two page, double spaced, press release over the name of a prominent organization (perhaps the sponsor of the event but conceivably yours) should be faxed to the news editors of the newspapers and radio and TV stations that carry local news and local magazines. Remember to cover the following bases: Who, when, where, why, who and about what. Provide contact information so that they can verify the information and have questions answered. Use your name or someone equally or better qualified. The person must be readily accessible so give job, cell and home phone numbers. Then telephone the news desks the day before the event to make sure they received the press release and answer their questions.
- 12) Know what key points you want to make and how to encapsulate them so as to best convey your messages. Encapsulations should be short, cogent, comprehensible and convincing. Whoever is designated as the contact should stay on message, not wander. Place the focus on visitor and the topic, not your spokesperson or your organization. Make points in a professional manner. Avoid personal attacks or appearing mean spirited. Words should be chosen carefully. Avoid jargon!!! It isn't what is meant, it is what is understood!
- 13) A skillfully written press release provides all the information that enables a reporter or editor to rewrite it in final form.
- 14) A local driver with a reliable vehicle should become familiar with the destinations and best routes and accompany your speaker to avoid arriving late or not at all. Arrive twenty minutes early even if you have to walk around the block. The driver or another should accompany and act as aide to your guest throughout the day. Never just deliver the guest to the destination!
- 15) The accompanying person should remind your guest of the key points you desire that the guest make. (We once flew in a Hollywood star at considerable expense for an important press conference just to have the star forget to mention the movie that he

was supposed to promote!) You should have materials available for distribution to those with special interests and the media. And your speaker might request that interested persons come up after the talk to chat and perhaps sign a list with their name and contact information. These are potential allies and funders for your organization! It is up to you to secure their names and to follow up with them.

16) Ask your guest to mention your local and / or national organization at the meeting and in his press and radio, TV interviews. Your speaker might introduce you to the event audience.

17) Make sure you write down the names and applicable web site on a card and give it to your speaker so that the speaker gets it right! It should be mentioned twice in a row so people have a chance to remember or write it down. And it should be mentioned a couple of times over the course of the show. If given the information upon the arrival of the guest, TV show directors will often flash the phone number of web site on the screen and radio interviewers will actually ask for the speaker to provide the information to the audience.

18) At events, arrange for interested parties to come up front afterwards to speak with the guest and try to get them to sign a list with their name and contact information including phone number and e-mail address.

19) After the events, contact parties who signed the sheet at the event(s) expressing interest in further information or helping out. Also thank those who contributed their efforts to making the day successful by note or phone call. This will solidify your relationship with the media and cooperating organizations and pave the road for future events. And it will allow you and them to find ways to work together towards common goals.

Good luck!

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