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Media training report



CEEWEB Annual Meeting 2008 Szentendre



The 2008 Annual Meeting was preceded by a one-day **workshop on media skills**. The day was packed with new knowledge and practice. The general impression of participants was that the day was well-worth the time. Our learning was facilitated by an experienced journalist.

Although the members of the 2007 Annual Meeting expressed a keen interest in this topic, there were not as many participants as we expected. We discussed the reasons behind this at the Annual Meeting and concluded that in future we will organize shorter events. Since many members may find it difficult to leave work for more than four days in a row we will offer such workshops as a separate program.

In the first session we discussed how we can issue news items. We agreed that the press wants news items to have a clear message with the right frequency (not too scarce, not too frequent). The issue needs to be credible and proactive, providing the press with easy-to-use materials. We also discussed what **'newsworthiness'** means: a "shocking" up-to-date issue that has caused some type of conflict or damage. Finally, we built up **the structure of a news item**:

1. Who?
2. What?
3. When?
4. Where?
5. Why?
6. (How?)

We talked about several ways of conveying our message through the press. The main channels were press releases, press conferences and websites.

Press releases

We concluded that press releases need to be relatively short (a couple of pages maximum) and should have a specific structure. It should be written on the official paper of the NGO with contact of organization, date and place of publication and title. A lead should sum up what the paper is going to be about. The lead should then unfold in several paragraphs. At the end we can add links or other sources for further information on the topic. The end is also the place for our 'boiler plate' – a short standard description of our NGO. We can also attach a so-called editor's note for editors to find further materials on the issue, including photos or movies. To help us understand the practical implications of a professional press release, we rewrote an environmental press release in the tone of several newspapers and magazines. This brought it home to us how important it is to issue a well-organized and argued press release to make the work of editors and journalists easier.

We talked about the process of writing a press release. First a competent colleague should put the material together, then it should be read by the leader of the organization to grant authorization.

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Before going to the press lists, the text should be printed and checked on paper to find additional mistakes.

Press conferences

When organizing a press conference we should take care of the following things: We should collect the business cards of journalists arriving. (This way we can add interested persons to our mailing lists or update their contact information.) When journalists are arriving, a person should be waiting for them at registry desk. She or he will also give each journalist a press kit.

There should be a moderator who leads the event. S/he introduces the topic and the speakers. The persons who give speeches or presentations should have a visible name/title card before them. The press conference itself should not be longer than two hours. During the event have some refreshments. After the event there should be room for interviews. If there is a lot of press, appointments can be made in advance about who you will give an interview first. If you decide to do this, be **PRECISELY** on time with all interviews.

At the end of the conference you can give a little reminder to the press: a small gift that will sum up your message: a flower, a book on the topic, a T-shirt, a calendar or a CD with music.

Some further advice:

- To make the event go smoothly prepare a to-do list for your team about guests, catering and technical issues indicate responsible persons and deadlines.
- For press events avoid Fridays and times earlier than 10 o'clock. Also avoid Monday mornings.
- The location of the event can be connected to the topic. It can be in a natural spot with transportation organized there and back.
- Send out your invitation 1-2 weeks before the event, and send a final reminder a few days before.
- If you expect important journalist to attend, phone them personally about attendance.

Websites

Websites are useful for the press only if they are regularly updated and they contain a specific press corner. The press corner should be accessible from the main page. So if you want the press to find your website useful, update it **at least every second month** with a news section with fresh items, success stories from your work as well as feedback from other (possibly) famous people about your NGO and your work.

A good **press corner** contains the following parts: previous press releases, quick info and facts about your NGO (when it was founded, what its mission is, etc.), the contact data of spokespeople, press kits of major events, photos and videos (both in low and high resolution), and an option to subscribe to your newsletter.

Your **newsletter** should be 3-5 pages at the most. It should come out monthly or bimonthly. The best format is pdf. Make sure you always have an unsubscribe option at the end.

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