



Public Relations: Connecting with Your Community

Getting the word out about music education can build a sense of community pride, creating a foundation when seeking increased support or preventing cuts. Positive stories, especially those that publicize how important music is to students and parents, will help serve as an ambassador to parents, business leaders, school board members, legislators, and the community at large. This is also important with journalists, who are more likely to be supportive if they “know” local business owners, supportive organizations, and music programs.

Roundtable members are also in a unique position to get the word out about cuts and threats to music education. By voicing concern as a community institution, outside of a school, you send a powerful message of support that at times cannot be voiced by teachers in toxic environments.

Preparing a list of local media outlets (including blogs) in advance that you regularly reach out to is the first step: include names, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, Twitter handles, and Facebook pages. Then, when it’s time to pitch your story, boil down your message to a few key statements. What is the main point—why would people care about it? What can you provide to help the story come alive? When you’re ready, sending journalists a friendly e-mail or calling them with a two- to three-line description of the story idea is a great way to start.

Angles: Making a story newsworthy

- **Timeliness**—Is a program doing something new or in a new way? Even if your program is well-established, highlighting an anniversary, a new number of students/ pieces, or a new space are ways to make something “newsworthy.” Also highlight charitable work, like food/ coat drives or performing for veterans and retirees, and special public performances.
- **Storytelling**—Journalists know that telling a story, not just reporting facts, are the key to engaging readers. Stories, pictures, and quotes put a face to your program and create an emotional connection. If students are involved, working with a school or district’s PR professional is the best way to ensure you’re telling a compelling story while ensuring rules and privacy concerns are addressed.
- **Honors**—Scholarships, awards (individual and program), fundraising goals, and recognizing seniors are all great ways to highlight accomplishments in a media-friendly way.
- **Outlets**—Use both internal and external outlets to garner support within the school community, as well as the wider public: social media (Facebook, Twitter); school newsletter, website, and email mailing list; school announcements via the administrative office; student newspaper; press releases; direct contact with media (TV/ radio, local/ national newspapers, blogs); and online community bulletin boards like [Patch](#).
- **Special Guests**—Never underestimate the power of an invitation. If a program or event is particularly excellent, it’s appropriate to invite local and state officials (especially those who have pledged to support education or the arts). Feel free to include that you hope to have press attend as well. Some guests would prefer that you notify the press that they’ll be there and some won’t; the best way to know is checking with their scheduler.

One anecdotal snapshot of PR in action: A band program publicized its win in a national competition with a press release; local TV and print media told the story; a U.S. congressman read that story and issued a congratulatory resolution on the U.S. House floor, listing all the band members by name. Other state and local lawmakers honored the band at their awards banquet. They can now uphold that recognition when they solicit support.