

How to get press coverage for your church's social justice project

By Jean Stockdale for CNBCDC website

The work that your church is doing to help the poor or other people with special needs is BIG NEWS! Be confident that your social justice project is newsworthy.

Which benefit of news coverage is most important to your project at this time?

1. You want more *clients* – you are ready to serve more people in need
2. You want *volunteers* – you have clients but you need more helping hands
3. You need *funding* – you have clients and volunteers but you need more equipment, supplies, or ability to pay a staff person to carry out your service.

Now write a one-page press release, keeping your above reason in mind. Your press release gives the “Five W’s” about your project: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY. Your answer to these questions provides the newspaper with the information it needs to print an article that will serve your purposes.

Press coverage of itself is of little value to your project, if you are not intentional to synchronize it with the current needs of your project. If your church has set up an ESL program for immigrants, and you have only three people signed up for class, the WHO of your story is the potential students you want to reach. The fact that they do not read English (so they won’t read the newspaper) is immaterial.

Yes, there other recruitment efforts you need to make. Outreach is getting the word out to the people who need your services, making them aware that they can come to your church and get those services. While outreach has to be an octopus with many tentacles -- you may need flyers in the laundromat, handbills in the convenience store, and a banner in your church yard, to directly recruit your students -- the people who will read the newspaper article are those who come in contact with immigrants at the hospital, the domestic violence shelter, the schools ... It is BIG NEWS to them when they discover that they can send people to your church who need a way to learn English.

But if your project is at a stage where you have clients on a waiting list, and what you need is people to help run conversation groups or do ESL tutoring, then the WHO of your press release is volunteers needed. It is BIG NEWS to people who have been wanting to find a way to serve others, who have the time and skills, and want to help, that they can plug into your project.

Please note that the WHO of your press release is *never* your church (though the WHERE may be your church). And if your project has gotten off the ground to the extent that you have clients, you have volunteers, but now you need money to pay for supplies, equipment, or salary for an ESL teacher or a registrar, the WHO of your story can be the immigrants themselves: a success story from your program, or someone waiting who would benefit from your program as soon as you can round up sufficient resources to accommodate more people who need your service.

Sometimes newspapers will print your press release as is, the way you email it. Sometimes they use your press release to fall back on your Five W’s, to state the essential facts correctly, but they want to write their own story about your project. When you send your press release, accompany it with an invitation for the reporter to come see your project in person. You can email photos of your project in action, and even if the newspaper declines to use your photos, they suggest possibilities for pictures their own photographer could take. If you need help writing a press release, or contacting your newspapers with it, just ask. CNBCDC is here for its 28 member churches to accomplish their social justice projects.