

## Working with the Media

By strategically working with the media, you can ensure that the public knows that the arts and culture sector is a vital part of your community, particularly at a time when the sector is still rebounding from the devastating pandemic. Here are a few tips to help you gain media attention for your participation and local virtual events held in celebration of National Arts & Humanities Month (NAHM).

### Press Release/ Sample Press Release

Write and distribute a press release to announce your local NAHM activities, whether virtual or in person. Getting reporters' attention can be tricky since so many are strapped for time. Here are some tips to ensuring your press release gets noticed:

- Don't bury the lead. Think of the headline you'd like to see in the paper the next day and tailor your release to fit that message. Pick the few details that you think are the most vital and feature them in your first paragraph (the lead). You can fill in the supporting details later in the release. Here's a helpful way to think about it: Your lead paragraph should answer who, what, when, and where in ideally under 50 words; the rest of the release should address why and how.
- Make sure your headline is strong. Headlines should grab reporters' attention and should read like a shorter version of your lead paragraph. Also consider packing a few additional details into a subhead. The goal is to get a reporter to spend 60 seconds reading what you have to say.
- Dot your "i's" and cross your "t's". Nothing makes you lose credibility with a reporter faster than typos, misspellings, bad grammar, and even not sticking to Associated Press (AP) Style. Consider having a second or third set of eyes look your press release over before you post and distribute it.
- Personalize it. If there are some reporters from whom you'd like to score coverage, be sure to do your homework on them before sending them your release. Read their articles, watch/listen to their broadcasts. And let them know you're doing it. Send them a note complimenting their work – they might remember your name going forward. And if a reporter knows who you are, they are far more likely to read what you send them.

To help you out, we've created a customizable **sample press release** with highlighted placeholders that you can fill in with relevant information. This becomes a press release that you can use to announce your NAHM activities.

### Contacting Your Local Media Outlets

- Become familiar with your local media outlets – newspapers and their websites, TV and radio, public broadcasting stations, blogs, community newsletters, listservs, and membership organizations and their websites. Find out if these outlets have a specific desk for covering the arts, or if arts coverage falls under the Metro desk.

- Create a media list including each reporter's name, e-mail address, and phone number. Individually reach out to reporters with the press release.
- Make follow-up phone calls to the reporters. Be prepared to pitch the story, emphasizing the benefit to/impact on the community and what makes your local event unique. Offer interviews of key people like your organization's CEO and executive directors.

## **Media Interviews**

While every interview is unique, the basic skills required to do the interview are the same:

- Never wing it. The fundamentals always come down to preparation. Whether you work with a professional coach or prefer to go it alone, invest time and effort in media training and rehearsals.
- Don't offer information "off the record." Everything you say is "on the record" and can be used by the reporter. From the moment the reporter walks into the room or calls you on the phone, you are "on." Be friendly but be aware that anything you say to a reporter can be quoted, even if the cameras or recorders are not running.
- Never say "No comment." By itself, "no comment" is the clearest way of saying you don't want to talk about something. As a result, reporters instinctively will want to pursue this item even more.
- Never speculate. If a reporter asks you a hypothetical question, don't offer conjecture. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Then tell the reporter that someone will get back to him/her with an answer right away. Be sure to follow through on that promise.
- Don't keep talking unnecessarily. Do not feel that you must fill silence; that is the interviewer's job. Once you have answered the question, stop and wait for the next question.
- Enjoy yourself. No, seriously! When you're confident, it'll show. Give reporters what they want—access, good quotes, and reliable information—and you'll be accessing opportunities for yourself and your organization to tell the world your story.

For more information, e-mail [press@artsusa.org](mailto:press@artsusa.org) or call 202.371.2830.