



NATIONAL FRAGILE X FOUNDATION

Building Fragile X Awareness in Your Community

20 Media Relations Dos and Don'ts

DO your homework. Craft clear messages. Eliminate jargon, technical language, clichés, and unnecessary words and punctuation marks. Learn to write short and adhere to the AP Stylebook (APStylebook.com) — preferred by most media. Answer the five Ws (Who, What, When, Where and Why) and H (How). Craft a simple, short headline. Format your news release based on best practices. Maintain and update media contact lists. Use media distribution services, such as PR Newswire, when appropriate, such as for major news.

DON'T bury your lead paragraph. State the one thing you want the media to know up front in clear, simple and easy-to-understand language. Begin with the most important facts and continue to the least important facts in descending order. Be concise.

DO keep a news release to one page. Use two, if the content is comprehensive and rich in detail. Journalists do not have time to read doctoral dissertations.

DON'T get carried away. Understand what you are writing about may be exciting to you, but is often not so with reporters, editors and producers — the gatekeepers responsible for reviewing news releases and deciding what to do with them. Your best work may get a three to five second glance on a good day.

DO pitch your work. Follow up your news release. Call the media at times convenient for them. Do not call them when they are on deadline. Pitch newsworthy angles only. Emphasize timely information, such as industry trends, statistics, new technology or products, do-it-yourself tips, techniques or strategies, and useful advice. Consider putting a “face” on your messages by telling your story through a person or people.

DON'T bother the media. If they are not calling you back, they are not interested in your pitches and you probably do not have a relationship with them. Start by building one.

DO build a professional working relationship with the media. Attend events they are likely to attend. Relationships allow the media to confidently share with you what they are interested in writing about and what they are not interested. Always thank the media after an interview.

DON'T be shy. The media have a job to do and you can make it easier for them. Communicate what they need to know and let them do their jobs.

DO look for ways to work effectively with the media. Learn their deadlines and preferences. Develop talking points. Learn how to bring an interview back to your points by “bridging” answers. Practice how to effectively discuss sensitive issues.

DON'T try to snow the media. Listen to what the reporter is asking for and provide that. Be honest, truthful, accountable, proactive and accessible.

DO volunteer to be a resource. Reporters keep “source lists” — experts who are accessible, responsive, informative, friendly and quotable. That's where they turn first when they need to write a story on a particular topic. Be on that source list.

DON'T snub any member of the media. Media professionals change positions and jobs with amazing speed and regularity, but they take their memories with them.

DO assemble an organized and brief media kit for events. Include interesting and timely information, a one-page organization bio sheet and staff chart, pricing, links to online sites where photos can be found and other useful information, key contacts or links. Avoid gimmicks, outdated, false or exaggerated information. Misleading statistics can ruin your reputation. Everything must be accurate and verifiable. A standard-sized folder is best, as these folders easily fit into bags and briefcases.

DON'T ask print reporters to see the story before it goes to print. Reporters may clarify a complicated quote or issue, but they should not show you the story.

DO make every effort to spread the word. Post all relevant information online so information can be easily accessed. Host press conferences for major announcements, new major product or service introductions if they are truly new or improved, and release of new and relevant survey data.

DON'T host a poorly organized event when nothing newsworthy is shared. Doing so will irritate a room full of reporters. Not a good idea. Consult with a media relations professional before planning a press conference.

DO keep your promises. If you schedule an interview, be available and on time. If you arrange to have materials sent to a reporter, make sure they're actually sent. Promised photos should be as described. Reporters work on tight time frames so when you fail to deliver what they're expecting, they don't have time to come back looking. They'll move to another, more accommodating source.

DON'T assume reporters know everything about your industry, organization or cause, especially if they are from a general-interest publication. Provide background data, give real-world examples, spell out acronyms up front and explain the relevance of awards, certifications or honors you may be discussing.

DO seek media placement opportunities in the news. Look for stories on events, trends and activities that may need an expert to provide comments.

DON'T handle crisis communications. Immediately seek the help of professional media relations professionals in emergency or crisis situations.