RALLY LEARNING COHORT

EARNED MEDIA: How to work with reporters to pitch and place your stories in the press.
In collaboration with NAPCS, the Charter Hub (the Hub) is a team of communications professionals from RALLY that provides strategic communications advice, media relations support, and written content to partner organizations to advance a compelling, positive narrative about public charter schools.

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TODAY’S AGENDA

+ What is Earned Media?
+ Crafting a Media Pitch
+ Cohort Case Study
+ Materials to Engage the Media
+ Q&A
+ Storymining Templates
WHAT IS EARNED MEDIA?
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- Earned media is **coverage about organizations, people, and issues** by independent news outlets.
- Earned media **differs from paid advertising and marketing** because it cannot be purchased and provides third-party validation.
- Journalists writing for earned media outlets are looking to write about something that is **new, reflective of a trend, or controversial**.
- Having third-party validation for your school/network **builds understanding** about your school’s mission and identity and **helps to shape your reputation**.
FINDING THE RIGHT REPORTER
The news media can be classified into three main types of outlets:

**Print or Online**
+ The reporter often is knowledgeable about K-12 education.
+ Interviews can be brief or extensive.
+ This medium allows the opportunity to explore a topic in-depth and to correct mistakes on-line in real time.

**Radio**
+ This medium tells stories through sound (ex. school passing bell, band performance).
+ Inflection, and pace is important in radio interviews. It is helpful to invoke mental images in stories.
+ Radio interview programs can involve point-counterpoint interviews.

**Television**
+ Typically runs short stories on schools (45 second to 1 minute 30 seconds)
+ Emphasis on visual story-telling (ex. students engaging in activities).
+ Short, simple sound-bites are crucial.
DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH JOURNALISTS

Developing and maintaining long-term relationships with journalists can provide several benefits to a school/network.

- Journalists are looking for sources that have credibility, expertise, and integrity. Your goal is for your school or school’s leader to be known among journalists for these qualities.

- Journalists are also looking for spokespersons/sources that are responsive to a reporter and their timetable (known as their “deadline”).

- Journalists who know your school/network are more likely to:
  - Be receptive to your story pitches.
  - Ask you or your leadership to offer a perspective on an issue or breaking news story.
  - Be receptive to your perspective if the reporter inquires about a concern or misconception about your school/network.
BUILDING A MEDIA LIST FOR YOUR SCHOOL/NETWORK

Building a media list can help focus your relationship-building with journalists.

+ **What is a media list?** A media list is a compilation of the contact details for reporters, bloggers, editors, producers and other journalists that are critical to the distribution of important news. Media lists should be curated based on the specific media announcement (including beat, geography, timeliness, etc.)

+ **Why is this important?** A solid media list allows you to reach influential reporters, producers and editors to generate interest and potentially cover your announcement.

+ **Who should be on a media list?** Any journalist who covers K-12 education or youth issues.
PRIORITIZING JOURNALISTS FOR A SCHOOL/NETWORK MEDIA LIST

The type of media that can be included depends on the issue that you are publicizing. You may consider:

+ **Local Daily Newspapers** *(The Denver Post, The Colorado Springs Gazette)*
+ **Local Weekly and Monthly Publications** *(5280, Westword)*
+ **Local Radio Stations** *(KGNU, KCFR)*
+ **Local TV Stations** *(KOAA, KCNC, KREX)*
+ **Local and National Education News Outlets** *(Colorado School Talk Blog, The 74, Education Week)*
  + (DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES)
+ **National Networks and Programs** *(NBC Nightly News, NPR Morning Edition)*
  + (DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES)
COMPONENTS OF A MEDIA LIST

Media lists should include the following information for each journalist contact:

+ Contact full name
+ Media outlet
+ Type of outlet (newspaper, radio, TV, etc.)
+ Contact email address
+ Contact phone number
+ Contact’s beat (the issue area(s) the reporter writes about)
+ **EXTRA CREDIT:** Social media information, like their Twitter handle
CRAFTING A MEDIA PITCH
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Finding a Story that Interests the Media

+ In determining whether a story you want to share with a reporter is newsworthy, you should:
  + Think about the story from the point of view of a reporter.
  + Know what interests the journalists you are pitching.
  + A newsworthy story should touch on each of the following:
    + **(U)nique** - Does your story bring something entirely new to the table?
    + **(P)roximity and Prominence** – Is the story something the public will care about? Is it a big deal?
    + **(I)mportance** - Does the story impact a large or important group of people?
    + **(T)imeliness** – Is the story current, not old news?
    + **(C)onflict** or Controversy- Does the story have tension?
    + **(H)uman Interest** and Uniqueness- Is there a human interest angle or something unique about your story?
CRAFTING A MEDIA PITCH

+ Media pitches offer a brief and compelling explanation of a particular issue, news angle or exclusive story and put forward a representative from your school to be interviewed on the topic.
+ A media pitch effectively sells a story idea to the journalist.
+ Like pitching in baseball, media pitching is done by taking the following actions:
  + Getting into Position
  + Choosing the Pitch
  + Delivering the Pitch
GETTING INTO POSITION

A reporter needs a "hook" for their stories, and it’s up to you to determine what this is prior to pitching your story.

So before you send out a pitch, get into position by thinking about:

1. Why are you contacting them?
2. What is new, important or newsworthy about the program/event?
3. Why do you think they should be interested? (Sometimes a reporter will ask you this question, so make sure you have a good answer).
Choosing Your Pitch

+ Using baseball as a metaphor, there are three different types of “pitches” in media relations. Unlike real baseball, the goal is not to get the “batter” (reporter) out. You want them to get a hit or reach a base (accept your pitch).
  + **Fastball:** The fast ball involves sending a pitch to multiple reporters—typically through an advisory or press release. It is a fast ball because you cover lots of reporters at once.
  + **Curveball:** In addition to the fastballs, you may build a media list with general assignment and feature reporters, or other reporters who might be interested in the story. Then, when you follow up, you tailor your pitch to what you know about that reporter's interests. Like a good curveball, the pitch needs a “hook” to be effective.
  + **Intentional Walk:** A pitch that is exclusive to the journalist and typically time-sensitive. Like how an intentional walk insures the player will go to first base, an exclusive story arrangement with a reporter ensures that your story will receive media coverage.
DELIVERING THE PITCH

Now that you have your media list ready, it’s time to wind-up and send out your pitch.

+ **Email First:** To respect a reporter’s time, make sure you send them a pitch via email first so they can review it and respond back with their reaction if they are interested.

+ **Subject lines:** A good subject line garners interest.

+ **The Hook:** Most journalists give pitches a one-sentence read to decide whether to keep or toss it, so making the hook creative and relevant counts more than ever.

+ **Links:** Don’t just send a pitch with a link—explain the pitch. Reporting news is about storytelling—how can you tell your story if you can’t put it into words?

+ **Bullet Points:** The best pitches often have bullet points with data and answer the question: “Why now?”

+ **Time Constraints:** It is important to be explicit about timelines/deadline. It has the added benefit of causing the journalist make a decision on the pitch sooner rather than later.
PITCHING PITFALLS: WHAT TO AVOID

Things to avoid when pitching a reporter:
+ Pitching off topic.
+ Not knowing the journalist’s beat (what the journalist covers).
+ Not knowing what they consider news or relevant.
+ Not offering a time frame or news peg.
+ Making exaggerated claims.
When is the best time to pitch a reporter?

+ *It depends on the reporter’s schedule.* For example, the best time to pitch print reporters is 10-11 AM. They prefer pitches via email so they can look at it in their free time. Take into consideration that you should work around their schedule, rather than your own.

Do reporters like getting phone calls?

+ *Email is best for first contact.* It allows you to put everything out there and allows the reporter to respond on their timetable; phone calls should be made sparingly. Unless the pitch is time sensitive, the rule of thumb is to give reporters 24 hours to react to a pitched email.

  + **Extra Credit Tip:** When pitching broadcast, you likely emailed your pitch to the assignment desk, who keeps track of staffing and assignments. The editorial team will usually have one meeting in the morning, between 7AM and 9AM, and one in the afternoon, between 3PM and 5PM, where they decide what stories to cover for the day. If you want to follow up on a pitch, we recommend that you call after the meeting has ended.
You can use media advisories or press releases to announce events or news to a broad list of reporters and journalists.

The following is a sample of a press release written by a charter school announcing its opening.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 9, 2019

MEDIA CONTACT:

Charter School, a humanities and arts-focused elementary school, will provide Atlanta students with high-quality individualized education.

Atlanta, GA — Charter School opens its doors to its first class of students on Monday, August 12 at 7:45 am, with a class of 162 kindergarten and first-graders.

was authorized by the Georgia State Charter School Commission in July of 2018.

“This opening marks the fulfillment of a 1,600 day day journey to deliver on a promise to hundreds of families in southwest Atlanta and we’re grateful to deliver our mission,” founding Head of School

will employ its core values of tenacity, respect, urgency, and eagerness to teach students how to learn and think critically. Scholars will be exposed to a broad spectrum of disciplines, with an emphasis on humanities and the arts to build curiosity and prepare each scholar for a range of careers.

By reducing the teacher to student ratio with two teachers per classroom, providing daily arts education, emphasizing literacy through extended reading minutes, extending the school day, and giving Atlanta children the opportunity to thrive and develop a love for learning,

will also partner and work closely with parents and the local community to help shape the school’s community. Parents are eager for the opportunity to get involved. With , we will have the opportunity to come in first hand as parents to speak from a parent's perspective on how we can be included in our children's education,” parent

About

is deeply committed to ensuring all students live up to their power and potential by providing a rigorous arts and science-based education; an elementary school built on research and best practices of high performing schools nationwide and is uniquely focused on educating students in South Atlanta.

philosophical approach to creating an extraordinary school for the students of Atlanta is based on three foundational beliefs: 1) Every child, no matter race, socio-economic status, zip code or home language, deserves an extraordinary education that prepares them for a life of choice and opportunity; 2) Students thrive in a warm, structured and supportive environment; and 3) Literacy and the arts are critical components of a robust elementary education. For more information, please visit:
This is a pitch from a charter school in Denver, CO offering a profile of a Health and Wellness Coordinator.

This pitch has a few potential angles:
- Health/Wellness
- Food/Cooking
- Business
- Education

Hi Kasey,

I'm reaching out to gauge your interest in a story around a local charter public school teacher who is revolutionizing the way his students learn about nutrition. [Name] is the Health and Wellness Coordinator at [School Name], a charter public school serving predominantly low-income, ELL students, who developed a program that allows for his students to study their own gut bacteria and develop customized nutrition plans.

After acquiring free stool sample kits, [Name] collaborated with a science teacher at [School Name] to lead a project that has students studying their own gut biomes over the course of the semester to analyze how eating different probiotics changes their results. Health and nutrition in public schools has been recently discussed in Colorado, and [Name] is solving this important ongoing issue in an entirely unique and innovative way.

[Name] has also been able to implement other wellness programming at [School Name], including:
- Using salad bar leftovers for students to create green smoothies designed to fit their nutrition plans.
- A student-led effort to ferment different foods like pickles and kombucha they then sell at local farmers markets.
- He has proactively created external partnerships with companies like Gaiam, uBiome and NutriBullet to transform the way school engages with nutrition and health.

We’d like to invite you to visit the school and profile [Name] or interview students about the program. Let me know if you’re interested.
CASE STUDY: INTENTIONAL WALK

Dear NAME OF REPORTER,

You are the first and only reporter I have contacted about this story. We have launched a first-of-its kind partnership with NAME OF UNIVERSITY to promote college completion for first-generation college students.

On DATE, we will be announcing the SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP. The President of NAME OF UNIVERSITY will be on hand with a host of other dignitaries. Starting in YEAR, the NAME OF UNIVERSITY has set an aspirational goal of admitting X number of students a year from SCHOOL.

The partnership will build on the success of our students in college. Our alumni are completing college at 3 times the rate of students from low-come families.

If you are interested, we can arrange advance interviews with our school principal NAME and the President of NAME OF UNIVERSITY.

We ask that you let us know by DATE if you are interested in this story.

Regards,

NAME
TIPS AND TRICKS FOR NAVIGATING DIFFICULT REPORTERS

Relationship Building:
• Cover the Basics:
  • Make sure you’re always following best practices in your engagement (e-mailing first, targeting your pitches to their beat, etc.)
• Schedule a Site-Visit:
  • Invite a reporter to come see your school in action—putting the student “face” of charters front and center can help strip away the political context that tends to dominate charter school conversations
• Be Helpful—Not Transactional:
  • Just as we don’t like it when people only reach out with requests, try to be a helpful resource to the reporter whenever possible. For example, reporters sometimes struggle to ID parent voices. Is there an engaged group of parent advocates at your school or a PTA meeting you could invite the reporter to?
  • Scan previous coverage to get a sense of what they care about and see if your school has anything to offer that aligns. If you see interesting or thoughtful charter-focused pieces, stroke their ego a bit by shooting over a positive email praising the piece.

Interviews/Statement Requests:
• It's ok to call a reporter asking for background, and to let them know you'll get back to them with more answers.
• As a general rule of thumb, not getting back to a reporter if they have given you ample time to respond or not acknowledging a reporter's inquiry is not recommended.
• It’s often best to move the conversation to email if possible. Written statements are often the best way to deal with a challenging reporter—particularly if they reach out for comment and it's on a topic that's not relevant or an issue you don’t want to address.
• Prepare by practicing answers to anticipated questions
• Assume you’re always on the record
• Its okay to say “I don’t know”
• When responding, don’t repeat a negative and try not to get defensive
COHORT CASE STUDY EXAMPLES
COHORT CASE STUDY: DENVER SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (DSST)

• **Story:** African-American students score higher at DSST schools

• **Messages:**
  • Emphasis on the human story
    • What a child can do vs. can’t aka “deficit ideology”
    • Focus on relationship between teachers and students
  • Secondary emphasis on the data:
    • The state avg SAT score for African-American students is 899.
    • At DSST, the average SAT score for African-American students is 1051.

• **Messengers:**
  • Aaron Griffen, director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness
  • Sarah Amey, DSST student
  • Cholena Jackson, DSST student
  • Khlee Mcgaughy, DSST student

• **Channel/Mediums:**
  • Broadcast
  • Radio
COHORT CASE STUDY: PEAK TO PEAK CHARTER SCHOOL

**Story:** Gamification of assessment tools—Peak to Peak is partnering with a company that has developed potential replacements for high-stakes testing tools (such as the ACT or SAT). They need a pilot audience to explore the effectiveness of the tool.

**Messages:**
- Opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery in creative ways
- Partnering with industry as a tool for improving and for building community
- Being a part of reinventing what it means to be prepared for college and post-secondary life
- Accomplishing our Strategic Plan initiatives (innovation and partnerships)

**Messengers:**
- Kyle Matthews, High School Principal
- Peak to Peak students participating in the pilot

**Channel/Media:**
- Broadcast
- Business news/magazines
- Technology news/magazines
- Education news/magazines

**Timing:** October-November 2019
MATERIALS TO ENGAGE THE MEDIA
MEDIA ADVISORY: DEFINITION

Why do we issue media advisories?

+ A media advisory is sent to press in advance of an event, as it tells them key details to help them cover it.

Remember:

+ A media advisory should be short and sweet.
+ Your goal is to make the event sound interesting and newsworthy and make it easy for reporters to quickly figure out the details.
+ Give some thought to the visuals that could make it more appealing for a television reporter or news photographer to cover – and spell them out.
MEDIA ADVISORY: COMPONENTS

The main components of a media advisory are:

+ **Press contact**: The individual serving as the main contact for media.

+ **Headline and Subhead**: explains release in a direct and catchy way. Headlines are your billboard—based on your headline, editors will decide whether to keep reading.

+ **Overview**: A synopsis of the event that you are advising press to attend.

+ **Who**: Spokespeople who will be available to speak with press at the event.

+ **What**: Brief explainer of what will be happening at the event.

+ **Where and When**: Location and time for the event.

+ **Media Notes**: Visual opportunities for broadcast, sound opportunities for radio, other spokespeople, context, etc.
For immediate release
January 7, 2019

Media Contact

Award-winning Academy Robotics teams to host Valley School District for STEM tournament

In the VEX IQ Challenge, classroom STEM concepts are put to the test as teams of students are tasked with designing and building a robot to play with other teams in a game-based engineering challenge.

Longmont, CO — This Saturday, February 9th, Flagstaff Academy will be hosting schools from across the Valley School District for the VEX IQ Robotics Tournament—offering students the chance to qualify for leading up to the Robotics World Championship in Kentucky in late April. Presented by the Robotics Education & Competition Foundation, this competition aims to teach students lifelong skills around leadership, teamwork, and communication. Last year, two teams from Flagstaff Academy qualified for the Robotics World Championship.

What: VEX IQ Challenge robotics engineering tournament

When: 10:00am-2:00pm

Where: Flagstaff Academy

Who: 35 teams of 5-8th grade students from across the district

Visuals: 5th-8th grade school district students competing in various games with robots they’ve designed and built themselves, and a “snow bot” demonstration (see video attached for footage from last year’s tournament).

About: Located in Longmont, Colorado in the Valley School District, Flagstaff Academy is a PreK through 8th grade Core Knowledge public charter school. Founded in 2005, Flagstaff Academy’s mission is to develop students who are equipped to be well-rounded, ethical leaders in the world community with a foundation based on science and technology.
PRESS RELEASE: DEFINITION

Why do we send press releases?

+ A press release informs the media about a key moment in a campaign. As opposed to a media advisory which focuses on logistical information, a press release is longer, often follows a narrative, and contains quotes from your spokespeople.

+ The media are inundated by dozens of news releases every day. If your release is to be read and considered for coverage, it must offer a newsworthy story, stated clearly and simply, long on information and short on adjectives.
A press release should contain the following components:

+ **Date and Embargo:** Include a date indicating when the release is issued and a date indicating when it should be made public (if embargoed).

+ **Press Contact:** The person who will serve as the media contact. Use email and phone.

+ **Headline and Subhead:** Explains the release in a direct and catchy way. Headlines are your billboard—based on your headline, editors will decide whether to keep reading.

+ **Body:** Your messaging in the release needs to sound like unbiased reporting.

+ **Quotes:** Quotes from your spokespeople should reflect your campaign messaging.

+ **Letterhead:** Make sure your release is issued on letterhead. The letterhead lends credibility and professionalism to your presentation.

+ **Boilerplate:** This is the one-liner found at the end of a press release, and briefly describes the company or organization mentioned in the announcement.
Writing a Release: Inverted-Pyramid News Style. To write a good release, you must first understand what it is about your subject that is important. Then you must know how to summarize that information at the beginning of the release and quickly back-up the lead statement with facts, and save the less important details for last.

+ **Start with your lead. Your lead should read like the lead of a news story.** All of the essential information summarizing the story and answering journalism’s five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why) should be contained in the first paragraph.

+ **Back-up the lead with facts and secondary background information.** You want to provide facts about the news for the journalist to use in their story.

+ **Pepper the release with quotes attributed to spokespeople.** The quotes should be from leaders of the organization or key supporters and reflect your key messages.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 9, 2019

MEDIA CONTACT:

CHARTER SCHOOL OPENS ITS DOORS

Charter School, a humanities and arts-focused elementary school, will provide Atlanta students with high-quality individualized education.

Atlanta, GA — Charter School opens its doors to its first class of students on Monday, August 12 at 7:45 am, with a class of 183 kindergartners and first graders.

It was authorized by the Georgia State Charter School Commission in July of 2018.

“This opening marks the fulfillment of a 1,600 day journey to deliver on a promise to hundreds of families in southwest Atlanta and we’re grateful to deliver our mission,” Ethos Founding Head of School said.

The school will employ a pedagogy of isomorphism, respect, urgency, and eagerness to teach students how to learn and think critically. Students will be exposed to a broad spectrum of disciplines, with an emphasis on humanities and the arts to build curiosity and prepare each scholar for a range of careers.

By reducing the teacher to student ratio with less teachers per classroom, providing a rigorous education, emphasizing literacy through extended reading minutes, extending the school day, and giving Atlanta children the opportunity to thrive and develop a love for learning.

It will also partner and work closely with parents and the local community to help shape the school’s community. Parents are eager for the opportunity to get involved. With , we will have the opportunity to come in first hand as parents, to speak from a parent’s perspective on how we can be included in our children’s education,” parent said.

About Ethos Classical:

Ethos Classical is deeply committed to ensuring all students live up to their power and potential by providing a rigorous literary and arts-based education. is an elementary school built on research and best practices of high-performing schools nationwide and is uniquely focused on educating students in South Atlanta.

Ethos Classical’s philosophical approach to creating an extraordinary school for the students of Atlanta is based on three foundational beliefs: 1) Every child, no matter race, socio-economic status, zip code or home language, deserves an extraordinary education that prepares them for a life of choice and opportunity; 2) Students thrive in a warm, structured and supportive environment; and 3) Literacy and the arts are critical components of a robust elementary education. For more information, please visit:
STORYMINING
TEMPLATES