

Guidelines for Dealing with the Media

What is the purpose of creating a guide for dealing with the media?

- Example: In one town there were no Hindus that could make a comment about a certain Hindu phenomenon happening in the news.
- There is a need for local Hindus that can make comments on news related to issues related to Hindu dharma
- “It isn’t what they say about you, it’s what they whisper” - Errol Flynn
- If you don’t control the message, the message controls you. Hindus need to make sure that they have a say in the message that is broadcasted

What is Public Relations?

- Transparency
- Empathy
- Building relationships with the following key people/organizations:
 - Stakeholders
 - Neighbors
 - Interfaith community
 - Local colleges
 - Businesses
- Reaching goals
- Not just for external communications, but also internal communications to your own mandir membership so

that they can hear things from the mandir first before they hear it from the external media.

More than Publicity:

- Develop channels
- Build acceptance of mission
- Inform and motivate
- Maintain favorable climate
- A strong identity (brand)

The PR Tool Box:

- Internal Bulletins (electronic or hard copy)
- Meetings
- Social Media
 - Twitter
 - Facebook
 - Instagram
 - And so many other avenues
- Press Relations

Working with the press:

- What is newsworthy?
 - Do send information about events happening at your mandir
 - Don't expect them to publish everything you send
- What is not newsworthy?
- Whom do we call and when?
- What is the pitch?
- Media Advisories
 - Headlines
 - Contact information

- Designate a liaison
 - Do appoint a contact, such as a board member, who is going to be around for a while, several years
 - Do appoint someone who knows how to talk to the media
 - Reporters like people who are able to deliver the message in a succinct way
 - Think about what sounds good in a sound bite

Does:

- ID your self and the mandir you are associated with
- Succinctly give all Who What and Where questions
- Keep the conversation to 3 minutes
- Follow-up as needed
- It is okay to say “I don’t know but I will research and follow up with you”
- Send a thank you note
- Correct something that is not true

Don'ts:

- Correct something that is true but you just don't like
- Play reporters against one another
- Insist on coverage
- Infalate the story
- Data Heavey

Tips on speaking with Reporters (when they call you):

- Be familiar with the temple policy
- Never be confrontational
- No cold calls

- Stick to the facts
- If you don't know, then find out!
- Treat hypothetical like a politician
- Don't give your opinion
- Do not speak off the record
- Never say "no comment" because it sounds like a cop-out
- Never ask for sign off. Don't ask them if you can see the story before they publish it.

Notes from the Group:

How do we deal with negative news stories related to the mandir or mandir community member?

- Temple lawyer may ask you not to comment. You can let the reporter know that you would like to comment but must wait for the lawyer to give you that permission
- Be proactive
- Don't react until you are ready
- Don't get defensive
- How to combat Hindu-phobia?
 - Do temple tours
 - Write in the religion section of your local newspaper
 - Be a part of interfaith discussions and panels

How do we present positive stories about things that Hindus are doing (such as businessmen, events, etc.)?

- Learn positive tips from other faith communities
- Act locally and nationally

- Work together with other temples in your area to help deal with these issues - create a federation of mandirs
- Fund polls on what the public knows about Hindu dharma
- Generate discussion where there was no discussion before
- Create an outreach wing or appoint an outreach member to represent the mandir in the media
- Reach out to interfaith organization and ask for a seat at the table
 - Register the mandir with organizations like the Boy Scouts

Does HMEC & VPHA create a playbook?

- Yes, this is what this guidebook will be all about.
- People sharing experiences

Multiple stages of how information is spread throughout the community

- Providing guidance regarding how the community should respond - there may be some difficulty with doing this
- We cannot be intolerant of the tolerant (?)

How to combat news organizations that are consistently anti-Hindu?

What are the platforms on which we can publish Hindu news?

- Mainstream media
 - Try to get an important person to attend the event in order to get the media there

- If you seek out the right section of the paper, you can potentially get your story published
- Local newspapers, magazines
- Indian newspapers and other types of publications (websites, listservs, magazines, etc)
- Hindu newspapers

Guidelines for serving in interfaith settings:

- Never compare hinduism with other religions
- Never criticize other religions
- Be able to portray Hindu principles accurately and briefly
- Be assertive

Are there any Charitable orgs?

- Sewa International