

Don't just complain...20 steps to improving MEDIA Coverage of poverty issues

Doug Dobmeyer received a fellowship in 1994-95 from the Chicago Community Trust to examine the media's coverage of poverty issues. Through interviews, observations, and practical media involvement he developed the following tips for community groups and the media.

**TEN TIPS
FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**

- 1.) **Be credible:** Have your facts straight. Don't say or write something that isn't true or can't be supported. If you don't know the answer, get back to the reporter or refer them to another source.
- 2.) **Be available:** If a reporter needs your quote, fax of a document, or referral to another source NOW...then it needs to be produced NOW!
- 3.) **Be concise:** Whether you are pitching a story, doing a news interview, or appearing on a talk show, get to the point. Understand that if you don't edit your comments, the media will do it for you.
- 4.) **Be image conscious:** Create good-looking documents, handouts, fact sheets, and media release packets. Cite sources on handouts when possible.
- 5.) **Be consistent:** Many reporters complain they don't receive enough material from community leaders. Excuse or reality? It doesn't matter. Give reporters relevant and timely materials.
- 6.) **Be controversial:** If controversy is warranted, don't be afraid to use it. Controversy expresses your commitment to the issue at hand.
- 7.) **Be innovative:** Think of new ways to present your information and thoughts. Briefings, press advisories/releases, letters to the editor, broadcast editorial responses, immediate responses to news stories.
- 8.) **Be involved:** Read the papers, listen to the radio, and watch TV news and public affairs shows. It's hard to be effective if you don't bother to know the big picture and monitor your cut of the action.
- 9.) **Be educated:** If you don't know, learn how the media works; and
- 10.) **Be gracious:** Don't pout if your interview doesn't go like you thought it should. Don't quit...just try harder...Don't complain to the reporter and thank the reporter for listening and producing a reasonable story.

**TEN TIPS
FOR THE MEDIA COVERING POVERTY ISSUES**

- 1.) **Be honest:** Have the facts straight. Avoid stereotypes and seek to break away from the conventional wisdom about poverty issues.
- 2.) **Be aggressive:** Dig for the details. Go directly to community sources for the interviews if you need confirmation of a fact or a quote for the story.
- 3.) **Be persistent:** Go to the communities and its organizations for interviews. Include the views of the poor, not just the politicians on an issue. Actively seek background material and positions from community organizations.
- 4.) **Be creative:** Employ fresh approaches to present complex issues to the public. Use interviews, case studies, and illustrative graphics.
- 5.) **Be attentive:** Do follow up stories that will detail the impact of an issue on people and the community.
- 6.) **Be factual:** Tell the facts, get all sides, but leave the editorializing on the editorial pages.
- 7.) **Be analytical:** Ask the hard questions about crucial and often complex proposals. Measure the impact of all policy ideas on people who are affected. Think bottom line: *How will this policy impact families, single people, and communities?*
- 8.) **Be informed:** Take time to inform yourself about the issue and its effect on the community.
- 9.) **Be open:** Keep your eyes open to new ideas. Avoid reporting something won't work just because a politician says it won't fly; and
- 10.) **Be watchful:** Watch out for creeping cynicism if you have covered a particular issue extensively. Avoid rehashing the same old story if you have grown tired of covering the issue.

About Doug Dobbmeyer...

Doug Dobbmeyer has many years of hands-on experience in the non-profit sector, media work and journalism in Chicago and Illinois.

Doug was the founder of Lakefront SRO Corporation. He served as executive director of five-Chicago based homeless and statewide advocacy groups. As a Chicago Community Trust Service Fellow and a Fellow at Loyola University of Chicago, he has been involved in researching, teaching writing and media training for many people.

As journalist and author, he published *Poverty Issues...Dateline Illinois* from 1996 to 2001. He also developed and wrote political column for *Streetwise*, from 1998 to 2001. During the spring legislative session in 2000, Mr. Dobbmeyer covered state issues and political news at Illinois' State House a web-based news service and other publications. He has also written a book on media for non-profit organizations, *Competing Successfully for Media Coverage*.

Doug has been an activist and leader in the non-profit arena for more than 30 years. He is constantly in touch with many organizations and has an extensive network of contacts in both the print and electronic media regionally and nationally, many of whom consistently use materials from his clients.

Doug is a 1971 graduate of Indiana University with a degree in political science. He served two years as a VISTA volunteer with Cook County Legal Assistance Foundation from 1971-1973.

For more information, contact:

Doug Dobbmeyer
P.O. Box 268617
Chicago, Illinois 60626
773/338-9825,
FAX: 773/338-9859
Cell Phone: 312/315-6887
E-Mail: dcdobbmeyer@aol.com
www.Dobbmeyer.com

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