

Now that the new school year is underway, it is a great time to think about media issues that could impact your academy. News is reported instantaneously in today's dynamic social media environment. Anyone can be a citizen reporter from a student, teacher or parent with a smart phone, and it is important that school leaders be prepared to address any pressing issues.

To help you think about ways your team can reach out and strengthen your local relationships, Bay Mills Community College Charter School Office has developed the following media toolkit.

Below, you will find recommended strategies for your team to use when dealing with the media, both traditional and social media. It is important for your team to be prepared for negative media stories, but also look for opportunities to highlight the positive news at your school.

As always, please feel free to contact the Charter School Office with questions. We will keep you informed as we learn more about pending media activities affecting your school.

Thank you!

MEDIA TOOLKIT

Dealing with the media

- **Inform your administration/staff**

Internal communications is critical, particularly when your school anticipates a challenging or controversial issue, situation or policy. Any time media coverage is anticipated, it is important to communicate internally with your team. Not only should you work to ensure no one is blindsided by media mentions, but you can also mobilize your team to work with you to leverage a response, particularly when the coverage is expected to be negative.

Remember that you are a public institution and that all your emails and communications are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Be professional, courteous and smart in your communications, but make sure your team is “in the loop” at all times.

- **Familiarize your internal stakeholders with issues and responses**

Typically when someone has done a media interview, they will gain a sense of the story’s direction. The reporter’s questions, scope of discussion and tone provide important clues that can be used to help frame a response. It is important for this person to share the questions and discussion with your team.

In addition, with education being a top issue around the state, charter schools are often scrutinized. It is critical that your team is aware of issues facing the industry.

Your team can then come together to craft a template for responding. Known as “talking points,” this template helps your team use consistent and effective messages when responding to media coverage. Once developed, talking points should be shared with those likely to engage with the media online, through letters to the editor/op-ed pieces or in follow-up interviews.

It is also important to identify a group of individuals both internal and external to your organization who can respond to the media on your behalf and reinforce your messages. It is easy to overlook local parents and community champions—they are among your best assets. Establishing a line of communication with parents from the beginning is crucial. That way when these circumstances arise, parents will be good partners and willing to respond to the media on your behalf.

Having a team prepared with information and ready to roll can be a great advantage to you when your school is in the news.

- **Add comments and your voice to the article’s web page**

Many publications offer opportunities for the public to comment on their news stories online. The comments are often read by other opinion leaders and have tremendous value. In most instances, these comment threads can be just as instructive as the article itself.

You and your team need to be ready to add your voice and opinion to these comments. Let your talking points be your guide. Your comments should be professional, courteous and appropriate at all times. Be brief, stick to your messages, respect other points of view, and don't be shy about posting positive comments.

- **Take advantage of social media**

Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites offer fresh, informal ways to communicate with your community. Be sure you and your team are plugged in and updating your content often!

Utilizing social media to promote your talking points is key with the current media landscape. News is instant with the use of social media, and one of the first places individuals go to for the most up-to-date news. Voicing your opinions and talking points on your social media platforms will allow your voice to be heard, instantly.

You should designate a few internal team members to be in charge of your social media postings. Making sure it is someone's responsibility will ensure that it is not forgotten.

- **Consider writing letters to the editor**

For members of the public who still choose to get their news in print, you'll want to use the old staple strategy of writing letters to the editor. Letters to the editor can be used as a response to a news story that ran in a particular publication, or just as a means of building awareness of your viewpoint.

Letters should be brief, focused and courteous. As with online comments, stick to your messages and be professional. A well-written and thought out letter is almost never a bad strategy.

- **Contact your local legislator**

It is a good opportunity to invite your House and Senate representatives to visit your school and connect with your staff, students and parents.

Additionally, news articles often have policy implications. It's important to make sure your local lawmaker understands your point of view, so he/she will make informed decisions when the time comes.

It is a great time for you to visit representatives and senators at their locations; many lawmakers schedule "office hours" at local restaurants and coffee shops, and it is a good idea to stop by. You can share information about your school, talk about recent media stories and share ideas.