

Get the Publicity You Deserve!

A Guide to Do-It-Yourself Public Relations

Now that your team is on its way to World Finals, it's time to spread the word. Your school may have a Public Relations practitioner on staff or someone else to get your good news out. If not, it isn't that difficult a task for your team to take on. In fact, public relations can be fun and challenging. With creativity, solid communication and good follow-through, you should have no problem getting a reporter to cover your achievements.

Remember that when you contact the media, you are the salesperson for your team. You want the reporter to "buy" your story, so be specific when telling it: You've won the state championship and you're headed for World Finals!

Your team will need to make public relations a priority to get the coverage you deserve. Publicity has secondary benefits as well: The more people who know about your achievements, the more supporters you gain and the easier it may be to raise funds and find sponsors. Follow these tips to increase your chances of getting covered:

☒ DO YOUR RESEARCH

- Make a list of all the newspapers and TV and radio stations in your community. Keep a log of whom you talked with and what you discussed.
- If you know of reporters who covered Odyssey of the Mind last year, approach them first. They're familiar with the program, so it will be easier to sell them on doing a story.
- Identify the best reporters for your story. For newspapers, look for those who cover education, community events, or news about kids. For TV and radio, see if the station has any shows about kids, education, or community events. These shows may be more receptive to your story. You may have to talk to several different people before you find someone who is interested, but don't give up!
- Read the paper and/or watch the shows you plan to contact to learn the style of the reporters before you approach them. Each reporter will respond to your information differently, so it helps to know if they're serious or more relaxed in their delivery.

☒ PREPARE YOUR MATERIALS

- Customize the enclosed sample press release for your team. You will increase your chances of coverage if you include a photo with your submission.
- Use your imagination to bring Odyssey of the Mind to life -- it will help you get the reporter's interest. In all your press materials be sure to include *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why* and *how*. If you have an interesting anecdote, include it, but keep it brief and focused on your main story. It may help to add a quote from your coach, principal, or even a team member.
- Timing is important. Your materials should arrive in the reporter's office at least three or four weeks before World Finals to allow enough time to do a thorough job on your story.

OVER ⇨

- If you email your materials, be sure to send them in the body of your message. Many reporters will not open attached files. You can always call to find the preferred method.
- If a reporter wants to know more about the Odyssey of the Mind program or World Finals, refer them to the media section at www.odysseyofthemind.com. You can even download materials from here to send them.

☒ MAKE YOUR BEST PITCH, THE FOLLOW-UP CALL

- Don't expect reporters to call you; they get hundreds of story ideas each week. You must call the reporter. Don't be surprised if the reporter has not read your information when you call. Be prepared to give a brief "sales pitch" on your story.
- When you call the reporter, ask if it's a good time to talk. If it's not, ask when you should call back. Don't launch into your "pitch" if the reporter is busy.
- Don't call TV reporters within one hour before the station's newscast (or during the newscast). They're too busy to talk then.
- Be flexible. The reporter may want to take a different angle from what you pitched.
- Be available to work with the reporter as the story develops. He or she may ask for other sources to interview or to see a demonstration of the long-term problem.

☒ GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING AN INTERVIEW

- Remember that reporters are usually very busy. Be prepared to give a brief but concise overview of Odyssey of the Mind and your long-term problem.
- The better prepared you are, the better you'll sound. Practice speaking in "sound bites," 10- to 20-second segments that explain your story. Read the paper and watch newscasts to get an idea of what a good sound bite sounds like. Practice asking and answering questions with your teammates and your coach.
- Anything you say to a reporter could show up in the news, so choose your words carefully.
- You should appoint one spokesperson for the team. If all team members want input, prepare what each will say in advance so you're not all talking at once or saying the same thing.
- Be energetic and smile! Even if you're talking on the phone or when the camera is not rolling, keep smiling so the reporter will hear your enthusiasm. It's contagious!
- Be prompt about calling reporters back. They may need more details after the interview and they're probably in a time crunch to put the story together. If they ask a question and you need to research the answer, be sure to follow through.
- If you're asked to demonstrate your solution in front of a camera, or to appear on live television, find out beforehand how much time you will have. If you only have time to demonstrate part of your solution, use your time wisely by choosing the most creative parts!
- Relax, and have fun! Don't get discouraged if reporters don't get back to you, it may be because there's more urgent news happening that day. Just keep on trying!