



A Great Idea

communications

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New Mexico's Cost-Free Method of Amplifying Media Outreach

New Mexico Voices for Children

Contact: Cheryl Gooding, Director of Communications, cgooding@nmvoices.org

Founded in 1987, New Mexico Voices for Children is a progressive, non-partisan organization working to improve the health and well-being of children, families and communities in New Mexico. They have four core values: Healthy Communities, Anti-Discrimination, Economic Justice, and Citizen Participation. The organization created the Media Rapid Response Team as part of their communications strategy to engage additional messengers among their allies – who would echo messages regarding tax policy and Medicaid by submitting letters to the editor in response to relevant stories or columns.

Background:

In 2004, New Mexico Voices for Children began to monitor local media coverage of New Mexico's children, families, and communities such as Medicaid funding to get a clearer sense of how these issues were being presented to the public and to policymakers.

They identified an opportunity to keep stories alive in the media by following them up with letters to the editor. Letters to the editor are read by policymakers as one way to assess public opinion about a particular issue. They are an easy way to echo an organization's messages as part of a public education or policy advocacy campaign.

The Media Rapid Response Team is a simple vehicle. New Mexico Voices for Children organized theirs in the spring of 2004 by inviting allies to join the team and then creating a group e-mail of volunteers. They began with eight volunteers and, over time, have built up the team to about 12-15 participants. Members of the team include advocates, the leadership of ally organizations, concerned citizens, and members of our own Board of Directors.

**"The Media Rapid Response Team is an effective way to multiply messengers on your message."
- Cheryl Gooding, Communications Director, New Mexico Voices for Children**

Key Elements

Participant Selection

New Mexico Voices for Children invited a broad range of individuals and ally organizations to form the Media Rapid Response Team. Subsequently, the organizations self-selected participants for the team. Among them are the executive directors of: Health Action New Mexico, New Mexico Community Action Programs, and New Mexico Center of Law and Poverty. Since its formation, the Media Rapid Response Team has remained largely the same, though membership on the team is open.

Strategy & Process

A few days after a story or column appears in the media, New Mexico Voices Communications Director produces three to four letters to the editor in response to the published article. The letters are then distributed to the Media Rapid Response Team via the e-mail listserv for signature and dissemination. Team members have the option of writing their own letter, revising one of the letters distributed by Voices or simply signing one of the letters drafted by Voices. Most often they opt to select a letter and sign it with little or no revision.

Selecting a Topic

The topic selection process is determined by what issues are currently getting the media's attention, especially ones that pertain to Voices for New Mexico's Children core values. Medicaid Funding and Progressive Tax Reform were two important issues.

Costs

There is no direct cost to setting up and maintaining a Media Rapid Response Team. It does not require staff time or funds. New Mexico Voices for Children's Communications Director writes the letters to the editor and does all follow-up necessary with team members. She also tracks which letters are published by a media outlet.

Outcomes

Over the last year, New Mexico Voices has utilized the Media Rapid Response Team more than 25 times. During New Mexico's legislative session, which lasted two months, the organization produced 20 letters, one third of which were published. The placement of letters to the editor was satisfactory to the organization in that they plan to continue to use this as a media outreach tool in the future.