



*Exploring our heritage  
Shaping our community*

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## Program Promotion Guide

### THE MOST IMPORTANT WORDS ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM

The heart of a publicity plan is a concise description that contains only the essentials. This is the 30-second version that you would use in a passing conversation, and it's the basis of all longer versions because it also contains the most interesting things you have to say! Before you write anything else—even before you write the grant!—write the shortest statement that establishes the following points:

- Who is sponsoring the event?
- What is happening?
- When and Where is it happening?
- Why is it happening? What is it for? Why are you excited about it?
- Who is it for? Who is likely to be sorry if they miss it? Why shouldn't they miss it?
- Does it cost anything?

You will use this wording countless times in telephone calls and correspondence with media people. It is the basis of anything of greater length.

📞 Keep the details of dates, times, speakers, and locations next to your phones so that you can answer all inquiries quickly.

📖 Prepare a fact sheet for your project workers and for anyone who will be answering telephone inquiries about the project.

### ABOUT THE MEDIA

There are many ways to bring your message to people's attention. The only limit is time, so a publicity committee can be helpful. The local paper, radio, and television stations are only the beginning. Don't forget organizational newsletters, church bulletins, community calendars, bulletin boards in high traffic areas, direct-mail flyers or letters, and posters in good locations.

Somewhere in each promotional piece, mention that your program is supported by the Missouri Humanities Council. We'll provide you with some camera-ready logos of various sizes for programs and brochures. There's no telling how this credit to the council will boost attendance at your event, but people tend to assign a higher value to an activity that "won" the support of a statewide foundation in a state as large as ours.

Remember to send thank-you letters to the newspaper editors, television directors, and radio managers when the publicity is good. It is never a good idea to hassle the media when they don't cover your event or run your story. However, if they get the date, time, or place wrong, ask for a correction right away!

### **WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO GET ATTENTION?**

Studies have shown that someone must hear a message an average of four times before it registers. Just when you are beginning to tire of your own publicity, your neighbor is only beginning to take notice! Attracting an audience requires a steady stream of publicity that builds in intensity during the three weeks before the program date.

To keep your stories and notices fresh, keep thinking of ways to begin with an image of people benefiting from your program.

- “Next month well over 4,000 residents of Poplar Bluff will have the time of their lives when Chautauqua comes to town. The free festival of history takes place...”
- “The children of our town have a treat in store for them next week when “Buffalo Bill Cody” steps up onto the Chautauqua stage at City Park. The free program kicks off at 7:00 p.m. with Wild West music by the Lonesome Road Band.”
- “Kirksville teens will have a chance next Thursday to meet the actor, Hassan Davis, who portrays the Black soldier, A.A. Burleigh in our Chautauqua festival. Davis is giving a talk on the methods of developing a “living history” character at the Community Center at noon.”
- “Anyone with a family is invited to the concluding program on family history sponsored by Links at the Civic Center next Saturday at 8:00 p.m. The program begins with a talk by Bill Ferris, author of *My Story is America's Story*. Everyone in attendance will receive a free workbook on family history as well as pointers about how to get started!”

To keep yourself out of trouble, write a few sentences that begin with the name of your own organization or that of the Missouri Humanities Council, and resolve never to use them. If you can't find a way to begin with an image of the person who benefits from your program, then try some openers that begin with an exciting sentence about what is going to happen.

### **WHO CAN HELP?**

Recruit volunteers to help with promotion. The size of the committee will depend entirely upon the size of your town, the scope of your project, and the number of tasks you'll be assigning.

Involve people with retail experience. People who make their living by attracting the public to their businesses have knowledge that can help you.

Ask other organizations to be co-sponsors and to assign one of their members to your publicity committee. Some organizations have established networks for publicizing events.

## WHAT WILL THE PUBLICITY COMMITTEE DO?

Design a publicity campaign based on the project's goals. What image do you want to convey? What types of people are you trying to reach?

Decide which channels of communication you're going to use and make the necessary contacts. Talk to the newspapers and the radio and television stations to find out how to prepare their publicity materials and when they should be ready. Contact officers or advisors of local clubs and organizations to arrange for a speech or presentation at one of their meetings or arrange for an announcement about the program to appear in their newsletters or bulletins.

Determine potential photos to include with press releases. Editors usually don't want to print photos of large groups, and they dislike photos of poor quality. If you can offer good-quality photos of your speakers or consultants, or of something that illustrates your story, you'll help the editor put together an appealing page. Black and white photos are preferred.

Establish a publicity calendar for press releases, flyers, posters, and mailings. Release these materials in time for people to make plans, yet not so early they will forget about the program.

## WAYS TO PROMOTE

### NEWSPAPERS

Hand deliver your first press release and make personal contacts with reporters or editors. Take time to read through the first release with them and discuss future newsworthy angles. Don't forget to find out the deadline and procedures of their papers.

When you mail future press releases, include a personal letter reminding them of who you are, what you are doing, and repeating the key information from your fact sheet -- who, why, what, where, when. If the release does not appear in a week's time, call the reporter.

Try to get a feature interest story. Contact the Features Editor or City Editor and try to arrange an interview or a photo essay. Let the editor know if prominent people are involved and try to have some ideas for good photos.

"I think I've got an idea for a feature for you. John Hankey, a national consultant to railroad museums is coming to town next week to help us move our depot project to the next level. We've just finished the interior work on the main entrance, and I think it will photograph well, especially in the morning when the sun's not streaming directly through those big windows. We also have some historic photographs of the interior during the 1940s, plus some exterior shots of the work in the rail yards. You could make a nice feature out of those photos, plus the architect's rendering of what the depot site will look like when it's finished."

Get a notice in the calendar of events. Take time to prepare a separate press release for the newspaper Calendar Editor. Give the basic who, what, when, where, why, and how, as well as a line of teaser copy or brief description of your program. If you are conducting a series of programs, remember that you can't count on the Calendar Editor to keep track

of your series schedule, so send a calendar listing for every program of the series as it is held.

Consider buying an advertisement. In some communities paid advertising is essential. Sometimes a discount or donated advertisement is offered to nonprofit groups sponsoring a program of wide community interest. **When purchasing advertising space, ask for your advertisement to be placed in the right-hand corner of odd numbered pages.** People tend to notice that part of a page first, and they tend to remember it better.

## **DIRECT MAIL**

Direct mail is an excellent way to reach a potential audience. You may want to send letters to key people who have broad contacts in your area such as officers of interested organizations, teachers, and heads of civic groups, PTO's and clubs. Invite the reader to attend and ask him/her to announce the event at local meetings.

Develop a mailing list. Make sure that your list is up-to-date. Organizations such as historical societies, museums, or professional groups may furnish these lists at little or no cost. Your local chamber of commerce will probably be glad to provide a mailing list of civic organizations in your area. **Remember to include MHC Board Members, the MHC office, members of the state legislature, and Missouri's U.S. Congressional delegation.**

Create flyers and brochures. An attractive flyer or brochure can be effective when mailed to a targeted group. It can also be used as a handout at community meetings, a small poster for bulletin boards, an insert in church bulletins, or as a restaurant place mat. Postcards can also be used to catch attention and give basic information about the event. Begin early, because about six to eight weeks are required for designing, typesetting, printing, and correcting the flyer, and preparing the bulk mailing. The small MHC logo should go on these promotional materials.

The steps below describe how to prepare a flyer.

Plan. Identify your audience. To save money, your publicity committee should include a volunteer professional who will help write, copy and design the flyer. The publicity, art, and design departments of schools or colleges may help, especially if the teachers or institutions are involved in the project. It is important to produce a quality item; consider hiring a professional designer if you are unable to get the help of an experienced volunteer.

Design and Copy. Determine your style. Keep your copy personal and simple, by choosing only one key idea or theme -- the message of the mailing. Don't depend on the flyer to provide in-depth discussion or description of your project. Rather, think of it as an "invitation" to your program.

## **RADIO**

Prepare public service announcements. Some stations will air announcements free of charge. There is a good deal of competition for PSAs, so stress the importance of your project and use your air time creatively. Meet with the station managers and tell them how

much the PSA will contribute to the success of the project, and remember to thank the station.

Consider the station's listening audience and actively pursue the most appropriate stations.

Most stations will make a tape from your text free-of-charge, some will accept prepared tapes, and others will have the DJ read your copy. Check with the PSA director at the station to find out their usual practice.

Announcements should be an exact length of time--10, 20, 30 seconds. Most stations prefer ten-second PSAs. Ten seconds may seem too brief, but it is long enough for an intriguing opening and the basic who, what, when, where. Test read your copy aloud. Use short sentences and words that are easy to pronounce.

For written PSAs, type on one side of a white index card. Always type the dates to begin and end radio coverage. Include your name, organization name, and phone number in the top left corner.

Arrange for yourself and your program speaker or consultant to be on a radio talk show. A three-way discussion between the show's host, yourself, and a scholar can be an effective promotional vehicle. However, the producers will have to be convinced of the public appeal of your topic.

Consider radio advertisements. Radio ads are almost always more expensive than is practical, considering the availability of free radio spot announcements and interviews. However, in some situations paid advertisement might be an option.

## **TELEVISION**

Through television talk shows, public service announcements, and news coverage you can reach the largest audience. While it is harder to obtain TV time, it is an extremely effective way of promoting events. It is essential to make personal contact with the station directors and to begin work far in advance.

Consider public service announcements. Four-to-six weeks before the desired broadcast date, send the Public Service Director of the TV station a cover letter with a fact sheet that introduces your organization and the project. Request that the station include your project in their community calendar announcements. Mention that you will call later to discuss the request with them. Call about a week later. Talk with the Public Service Director about the project, note the public interest in the topic, and let the director know that the station's help would be appreciated.

If you are interested in preparing a PSA with a background slide and audio portion, seek the advice of the station director before you invest time and money. Hundreds of organizations request PSAs, so TV stations must make decisions based on the community interest and importance of the announcement, as well as the quality of the PSA. It is essential that you contract with a professional to produce the PSA.

Consider talk shows. About two months ahead of time, send a fact sheet and a personal letter to the director of the show. Follow up with a telephone call and a meeting with the director. Offer interesting and informative angles about the project, and emphasize your

enthusiasm for the project. You just might be able to schedule an interview for yourself or a key scholar.

## **OTHER SUGGESTIONS**

Use personal contact. Word of mouth can be the most effective means of promoting humanities programs. Everyone involved in the project can help get the word out. If you have a lot of people to contact you can develop a "phone tree" so that many people make just a few calls.

Speaking to community groups is a very effective public relations tool. Most groups will allow a fifteen to twenty-minute presentation by a guest speaker.

Ask each member of your public relations committee to invite ten people to the program.

Create a Web Page on the Internet. More and more people use the Internet to get information, and more and more people have learned how to create and update a web page. If your project lends itself to this kind of promotion or updating, put your information and photos on the web. Your chamber of commerce or high school might already have a web site, so it might be easy to add a page about your project to an existing site. To see some of the possibilities, look at the MHC page about the coming Chautauqua programs at [www.mohumanities.org/chautauq.htm](http://www.mohumanities.org/chautauq.htm).

Place announcements in bulletins, newsletters, magazines, and journals. Many groups have weekly, monthly or quarterly publications and welcome announcements of importance to their members. PTAs, churches, synagogues, legal societies, social groups, women's groups, study clubs, utility companies, business organizations, and schools usually have a newsletter or bulletin. Find out the deadlines for their publications and try to get your announcement in early. The chamber of commerce may have a list of local organizations. Brief announcements are more likely to make print.

Create posters. An effective poster catches the viewer's eye and gets straight to the point. Provide a phone number for further information. Always make sure that posters are well designed and uncluttered. Professional printing is usually the best option. Post them in recreation areas, banks, shopping malls, hospitals, community centers, supermarkets, laundromats, or even in elevators.

Consider handouts. You could print small announcements to be distributed at check-out counters in stores or restaurants. Also check with banks, utility companies, and department stores.

## **WRITING A PRESS RELEASE**

1. Use white 8 1/2" by 11" (standard) paper with 1 1/2 inch margins. Type on only one side of each sheet and double space the body of your article. Indent all paragraphs and try to use only one page.
2. Type an identifying title for the story in five words or less at the top of page one. On the next line type the name of your organization or group. Skip a few lines and provide a name, address, and phone number of the "contact" person. Type the date of submission and the date for release (the date on which you want the story to run.)

3. If you have to use a second page, type "more" at the bottom of the first page. Use a two or three-word title identification in the top left corner of the second page. Use the symbols ### or "end " at the bottom of the article.
4. Use a good lead sentence that will interest the reader in your first paragraph. The release should provide the who, what, when, where, why, and how. Provide the most important information in the first two paragraphs in case the newspapers cuts the press release. Keep your sentences and paragraphs short.

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