Montana Nonprofit Association

Montana Advocacy and Communications

NONPROFIT TOOLKIT

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Contents

Introduction

Advocacy, lobbying and media relations all come down to a couple very basic yet critical skills: communication and relationship-building.

The ability to communicate effectively and concisely is critical to persuading legislators and policymakers to support your cause. Likewise, being able to communicate the importance of what your organization does is critical to garnering positive media coverage, which in turn raises awareness of your organization's work, which attracts allies and, hopefully, eventually helps sway public opinion.

But communication alone isn't always enough. Successful advocates are those who also have built, nurtured and maintained relationships with policymakers, key supporters and the media.

This toolkit is intended to serve as a basic guide to communicating with policymakers for advocacy and lobbying efforts, as well as with members of the media for positive publicity efforts. The goal: To be successful in spreading the word about the good work your nonprofit does.

We also hope this handbook will serve as a useful resource – both for those new to the nonprofit world and to seasoned veterans – for building and maintaining strong relationships with policymakers and the media. Both of these are critical to the success of any organization and help you tell your story effectively…therefore, acting as an excellent advocate for those you serve.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

What is the difference between advocacy and lobbying?

Adapted from *Lobbying and Advocacy—Similarities and Differences*
published by Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest

Although most people use the words interchangeably, there is a distinction between advocacy and lobbying that is helpful to understand.

When nonprofit organizations advocate on their own behalf, they seek to affect some aspect of society, whether they appeal to individuals about their behavior, employers about their rules, or the government about its laws. Lobbying refers specifically to advocacy efforts that attempt to influence legislation. This distinction is helpful to keep in mind because it means that laws limiting the lobbying done by nonprofit organizations do not govern other advocacy activities.

Nonprofit organizations often unnecessarily limit how much they get involved in public policy out of the concern that doing so may violate federal rules for lobbying.

The good news is that nonprofits not only can advocate for their mission, they can actually do a great deal of specific lobbying under current federal limits without endangering their tax-exempt status. Most policy advocacy is NOT lobbying, so does not pose a threat to an organization's tax status.

It is important, however, for every nonprofit group to read and understand the rules and requirements and to determine on an individual basis how much lobbying it will be able to do. This handbook does not attempt to provide advice or counsel for nonprofits on the specific federal lobbying laws and requirements. Instead, this toolkit will focus on the broader issues of effective advocacy, lobbying, and media relations.

We suggest the following sources for good information about specific laws and federal rules on lobbying requirements for nonprofit groups.

The Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest – www.clpi.org

The Alliance for Justice – www.afj.org

10 Reasons to Lobby for your Cause

For many of us, lobbying is something other people do. But lobbying, or more simply, trying to influence those who make policies that affect our lives, is something anyone can do. And it is something all of us should do if we believe in a good cause and in a democratic form of government. Read on to find out why.

1. You can make a difference.

It takes one person to initiate change. Gerry Jensen was a single mother struggling to raise her son in Toledo, Ohio, without the help of a workable child support system. She put an ad in a local newspaper to see if there were other moms who wanted to join her in working for change. There were. Over time, they built the Association for Child Support Enforcement, or ACES, which has helped change child support laws not just in Ohio, but across the country. One person—a single mother—made a difference.

2. People working together can make a difference.

Families of Alzheimer's patients working together, through the Alzheimer's Association, convinced the government to invest resources into research for a cure. Other individuals formed Mothers Against Drunk Driving and convinced dozens of states to toughen up their drunk driving laws. As a result, the numbers of drunk driving deaths are lower. Additionally, many people find healing from tragedy by telling their stories and working to prevent it from happening to others.

3. People can change laws.

Many of us think that ordinary individuals can't make a difference. It is hard to change laws and policies. But it can be done. It has been done, over and over again in our history, in the face of great obstacles. People lost their lives fighting racist "Jim Crow" laws. They won. Women didn't even have the power of the vote—as we all do today—when they started their struggle for suffrage. Our history is full of stories of people and groups that fought great odds to make great changes: child labor laws, public schools, clean air and water laws, social security. These changes weren't easy to achieve. Some took decades. They all took the active involvement—the lobbying—of thousands of people who felt something needed to be changed.

4. Lobbying is a democratic tradition.

The act of telling our policymakers how to write and change our laws is at the very heart of our democratic system. It is an alternative to what has occurred in many other countries: tyranny or revolution. Lobbying has helped keep America's democracy evolving over more than two centuries.

5. Lobbying helps find real solutions.

Services provided directly to people in need, such as soup kitchens, emergency health clinics, and homeless shelters, are essential. But sometimes they are not enough. Many food pantries, for example, needed new laws to enable caterers and restaurants to donate excess food so the kitchens could feed more people. Family service organizations working to place abused children into safe homes needed changes in the judicial system so kids did not have to wait for years for a secure place to grow up. Through advocacy, both changes were implemented. People thinking creatively and asking their elected officials for support can generate innovative solutions that overcome the root-cause of a problem.

6. Lobbying is easy.

Many of us think lobbying is some mysterious rite that takes years to master. It isn't. You can learn how to lobby—whom to call, when, what to say— in minutes. While there are a few simple reporting rules your organization needs to follow, it isn't complicated. Countless numbers of people have learned how. Lobbying is easier and more effective when many committed people work together. One person does not have to do everything or know everything.

7. Policymakers need your expertise.

Few institutions are closer to the real problems of people than nonprofits and community groups. They see problems first-hand. They know the needs. They see what works and what doesn't. They can make problems real to policymakers. They care about the problems. Their passion and perspectives need to be heard. Every professional lobbyist will tell you that personal stories are powerful tools for change. People and policymakers can learn from your story.

8. Lobbying helps people.

Some people become concerned that lobbying detracts from their mission, but quite the opposite is true. Everything that goes into a lobbying campaign—the research, the strategy planning, the phone calls and visits—will help fulfill your goal whether it be finding a cure for cancer, beautifying the local park, or helping some other cause that helps people. You may not personally provide a direct service, but through your advocacy work, you enable thousands of others to do so.

9. The views of local nonprofits are important.

Increasingly, the federal government has been allowing local governments to decide how to spend federal money and make more decisions than in the past. This change gives local nonprofits even more responsibility to tell local policymakers what is needed and what will work. And because more decisions are being made locally, your lobbying can have an immediate, concrete impact on people in need.

10. Lobbying advances your cause and builds public trust.

Building public trust is essential to nonprofit organizations and lobbying helps you gain it by increasing your organization's visibility. Just as raising funds and recruiting volunteers are important to achieving your organization's mission so is lobbying. You miss out on an important opportunity to advance your cause if you don't think as much about relationships with local, state, and federal government.

SOURCE: The Nonprofit Lobbying Guide by Bob Smucker
http://www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/lobbyguide.html

Lobbying: The Basics

Targeting Legislators

Lobbying legislators is about persuading them to do what you want. Lawmakers typically can be defined as one of the following, each requiring its own special strategy:

1. Champions

All issues need a group of lawmakers dedicated to being tireless, committed advocates for your cause. What they can do for you is make the case to their colleagues, help develop a strong "inside" strategy, and be visible public spokespeople. What they need is good information, and visible support outside the Capitol.

2. Allies

Another group of legislators will be on your side but can be pushed to do more—to speak up in party caucuses or on the floor.

3. Fence Sitters

Some legislators will be uncommitted on the issues, potentially able to vote either way. These are your key targets and lobbying strategy is about putting together the right mix on "inside" persuasion and "outside" pressure to sway them your way.

4. Mellow Opponents

Another group of legislators will be clear votes against you, but who are not inclined to be active on the issue. With this group what's key is to keep them from becoming more active, lobbying them enough to give them pause but not to make them angry.

5. Hard Core Opponents

Finally, there are those lawmakers who are leading your opposition. What is important here is to isolate them, to highlight the extremes of their positions, rhetoric and alliances and to give other lawmakers pause about joining with them.

Inside vs. Outside Lobbying

Effective lobbying requires a coordination of two very different kinds of lobbying activity:

Inside Lobbying

One form of lobbying takes place in the Capitol. It includes a mix of the following:

- Meetings with lawmakers and legislative staff
- Providing analysis and information to committees and legislative offices
- Testifying in committee
- Negotiating with policy makers and other lobby groups

For the most part this type of lobbying is carried out by or in coordination with advocates who work on a regular basis at the Capitol.

Outside Lobbying

An effective lobbying campaign also requires activity outside the Capitol, aimed at shifting the politics and pressure around the issue. Some of these activities include:

- Media activity including news conferences, editorial board visits, and assisting reporters with stories
- Local lobbying visits by constituents to their legislators
- Building broad and diverse coalitions
- Letter writing campaigns to legislators
- Grassroots activity such as rallies, etc.

It is important that these kinds of "outside" lobbying activities be coordinated with "inside" lobbying activity, to assure that they make strategic sense in terms of timing, targeting, messages, etc.

Understanding Your Lawmaker & Elected Officials

The Basics

- **Relationships are built on a mutual benefit model**
  You want your help, so how do you help them?

- **Every lawmaker has 2 critical questions:**
  So what?
  Who cares?

- **So why would your project matter to them?**
  Is it going to change or save someone's life?
  Will it protect society or the environment?
  Would any of their constituents care or benefit?

To Fund or Not to Fund

How funding/policy decisions are made

- Is there a compelling need?
- Is there money available, and how hard is it to get?
- Who favors this? Who is opposed?
- Will it benefit a lawmaker's district or constituents?
- Is this a lawmaker's personal or political priority?

What Makes a Lawmaker Tick?

- Making a difference
- Policy
- Re-election
- Upward mobility
- Desire to please
- Insecurity
- Ego
- Power

Tips for Contacting Legislators

Writing is one of the most effective means of getting your message across to your legislator and you can do it in just a few minutes. Your letter documents your views, and it reminds your legislators that their decisions have a direct impact on you and their other constituents.

- Use the correct address and salutation, e.g., Dear Representative (Last Name)
- Type or write your letter clearly so that it is legible and not discarded.
- Be sure to include your return address on the letter, as non-constituent mail may be thrown out.
- Use your own words and stationery. Legislators feel that personal letters, rather than form letters, show greater personal commitment on the part of the writer, and therefore carry greater weight.
- Keep your message focused and avoid a “laundry list” of issues.
- Be brief, but include enough information to explain your reason for writing.
- Be specific and give example(s) of how the issue affects your district.
- Know your facts; you can hurt your credibility by offering inaccurate or misleading information.
- Acknowledge counter-arguments and evidence.
- If you can, find out how your legislators voted on this issue or similar issues in the past.
- Be timely and contact your legislator while there is still time for him/her to consider and act on your request.
- Be persistent; write back and ask for more information if you do not receive a specific response.
- Say thank you.
- Don’t use a negative, condescending, threatening or intimidating tone.

Activities for Advocacy and Lobbying Efforts

A Phone Call

An Introduction–No pressure. Your first call will not be to advocate policy. In the next month, make a call to each of your legislators. Congratulate them on their (re) election, if appropriate. Invite them to visit your facility, perhaps to make a few remarks at a meeting of your board. Tell them that you will be sending invitations to openings and other events. If you are unable to reach a lawmaker by phone, talk to an aide. Your relationships with key staff will be no less important than your relationships with legislators. Always take notes of conversations.

Effective Lobbying by Phone

1. Understand that you may be speaking to an aide, not the legislator. Write down the name, since you will need it for follow-up conversations.
2. Be clear on what you want from this phone call. You are calling simply to register your informed opinion on a pending issue. You are successful if the lawmaker's office understands that a concerned citizen has weighed in with a strongly held opinion.
3. Introduce yourself and give your address, **making clear you are a constituent**. If you have any special credentials, state them (just the fact that you're associated with a nonprofit organization is a credential, but you may have other qualifications to support your opinion.)
4. Say why you are calling: assuming you are calling about pending legislation, state the bill number and explain what the bill does (don't expect the lawmaker to have every bill memorized). Get right to the bottom line. You are calling to urge a yea or nay vote and asking them to support funding for nonprofit organizations.
5. Pause briefly for a reply but be prepared to continue without feedback (the legislator or aide is likely taking notes and may want to hear you out before commenting).

A Letter

You already know how to write a letter. These points will help you turn your letter-writing skills into effective lobbying.

Your first letter should be about relationship building, not advocacy, a follow-up to your first phone call. In the next month, write each of your legislators. Thank them for their time (or find something complimentary to say about the staff person you talked to). Congratulate them on their (re) election, if appropriate. Also, use this letter to suggest a date for a visit to your facility, perhaps to make a few remarks at a meeting of your board, or extend an invitation for an opening or other event.

When You Write Your Letter

1. Keep your letter to a single page. Remember this is not the place to debate the issue, or even to present every argument. You are showing the lawmaker that yet another constituent holds an informed opinion, and cares enough to write an original heartfelt letter.

2. Use a formal address and salutation. Use your organization's stationery, which should include a list of your board members. Type or write legibly. If you are a constituent, include your home address as part of the letter format.

3. In the first paragraph, reference the bill number/issue and its popular name. In the same sentence, make clear that you are writing to urge a yea or nay vote. Focus on a single issue.

4. In the second paragraph, tell why this bill/issue matters to you personally. Provide one or two compelling points to make clear how it affects your organization, and the quality of life in the district—e.g., how many people, or families, are affected. Remember, you are protecting not merely the interests of your organization, but the quality of life for the entire community.

5. In the third paragraph, if the legislator supports the bill, be grateful and ask how you can help to improve its chances of passage. If the legislator has supported related legislation in the past, be grateful and suggest this bill deserves the same support. Otherwise, stress the broader implications of the bill, beyond its value to your organization, and your district.

6. Close with thanks for hearing you out, and ask how the legislator will vote. Offer yourself as a resource in explaining the bill's importance to colleagues (for example, at hearings) or to other constituents.

7. You should get a reply from your legislator. If it is a form reply, or a mere status report on the legislation, write a second letter. Use the above format but ask again—politely but persistently—how they will vote.

Sample Letter 1

January 15, 2007

The Honorable Jane B. Brown, Senate Legislative Office Building, Helena, MT 59601

Dear Senator Brown,

I am writing to urge a vote of NO on SENATE BILL 2024, which would reduce nonprofit funding to a level of less than half the appropriation for last year.

This legislation would do real damage to the nonprofit organizations in our district. Last year the entire community benefited from the quality of services offered by the performances of the Montana Dance Company, and four exciting exhibitions at The Performing Arts Center. Over 9,000 theatergoers attended the 2006-2007 season here at the Sparkplug Theatre. All these activities depended, in part, on funds received from the Montana Commission on the Arts. The quality of life, and the educational opportunities for our students, would be adversely affected if the legislation should pass.

Your record of support for economic development initiatives in our district encourages me to believe that you understand how these arts activities are also important as economic assets. Nonprofit dollars are not charity; they are an investment that pays dividends back to the public, many times over.

I look forward to your reply; in the expectation that you will be a clear voice in support of the public benefits realized by public support of nonprofit organizations.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter 2

January 15, 2007

The Honorable Jane B. Brown, Senate Legislative Office Building, Helena, MT 59601

Dear Senator Brown,

My name is _________ and I am a manager of a group home in _________run by ________. We support two people with significant developmental disabilities. The direct care staff earns approximately $18,500 a year working full time and all are forced to work two jobs to make ends meet. Some have even worked an additional full time job.

Recently, one of the people we support came very close to death due to a medical problem. If it were not for the superb care rendered by the staff, that could have been the outcome. The level of responsibility that this staff accepts is enormous, and sometimes overwhelming. They assist them with bathing, feeding, taking them to doctor appointments and in many other ways. Those employed by the Department of The Developmentally Disabled earn far more for the same responsibilities and this has led to much frustration for the staff at the group home.

The Support Staff at the group home are not working a second job for the frills. One staff member has a 10-year-old son that she raises on her own. She recently got off welfare; she drives a nine-year-old car, and lives in a three-room cottage. Another staff member works 90-100 hours a week to support herself. Recently her 10-year-old car broke down after an accident and she was unable to come to work for several weeks because she had no money to purchase another. These are just a few of the staff stories from my group home. There are many throughout the agency.

My group home has endured enormous rates of staff turnover caused by a lack of pay for a stressful job with numerous responsibilities.

Raises of 2.3% and 1.5% are unacceptable. At the end of two years, they will only be earning $19,242. Additionally my company has endured health care cost increases of 10% over the past two years. There is no way that my company can continue to pay for these increases without instituting co-pay in the near future. We have also just received a 25% increase in our workman's compensation insurance. Another loss in earning power is another sign of the crisis in human services.

These long-simmering problems of unequal pay rates, low pay, and un-reimbursed medical cost increases must be confronted. These problems are close to crisis proportions, and now is the time to do something about them.

Sincerely,

Sample Action Alert

Sometimes a short note or postcard is sufficient for an Action Alert. This short sample note could help make your point.

Dear Senator Brown,

I am writing to urge a vote of NO on the SENATE BILL 2024, which would reduce nonprofit funding to a level of less than half the appropriation for last year.

Nonprofit organizations are important for our education, our economic development, and our quality of life. Please vote NO on the amendment, and insure that nonprofit funding will be maintained.

Sincerely,

Meet with Your Legislator

Personal visits are important not only to making your point, but also to cultivating a relationship with your legislators. These points are helpful in planning your visit to the district office or the Capitol.

You will also want to visit with your legislator on your home turf for a tour of your facilities. Ask legislators to attend annual meetings of your organization, and similar significant events.

When they attend, be sure to recognize them from the podium. If appropriate, ask them to make a few remarks. Always schedule them early in the program, or announce that you will suspend your agenda to accommodate a brief visit. (Lawmakers' schedules are often jammed and they will appreciate your flexibility.)

1. Research your legislator, so you know their voting history and other relevant facts.
2. Decide on a team to make the visit, for example, a member of your staff, an administrator, and a key board member. Ask around; you may have a particularly appropriate board member for a certain legislator.
3. Convene to be clear on your message. Assign the points you want each member of the team to make, so that you can loosely follow your game plan without over-rehearsing it. Touch all the bases outlined in Item #7 below.
4. Write the legislator to suggest a range of dates and times.
5. Arrive a few minutes early, and be prepared to wait; legislators' schedules are tight, and unavoidable delays are common.
6. Legislators have to deal with a wide variety of concerns. Do not assume familiarity with your issues; rather, expect to have to explain the details. After all, part of the reason you are there is to offer your help in monitoring these issues.

A sample game plan

- The administrator describes who you are, roughly how many people in the district your group reaches, and your association with The Montana Nonprofit Association,
- The board member names the bill you came to discuss, or (for your first visit), your general concern for this session's legislation, and how you hope legislators will vote;
- The staff member discusses the importance of the bill to the mission of your organization, and to the well-being of the entire community, or (for your first visit) the economic, educational and cultural importance of the arts/program services in your district,
- The administrator provides a fact sheet on the bill (for your first visit, an information kit on your organization).

You are not required to be an expert, and if you do not have all the answers, say so, but offer to find out. This will give you an opportunity to follow up the visit with an informative letter. Write a thank-you note, providing any information you promised to send, along with an invitation to visit your facilities.

(Adapted with permission from the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits)

Six Practical Tips on How to Lobby Your Legislator or Elected Official

1. Establish your agenda and goals.

- Know what subject you are going to address. Don't overload with issues.
- Decide what you would like to get out of the visit, i.e., a commitment to vote for your issue, leadership on the issue, or you may decide the visit is simply informational.
- Allow time for small talk at the outset, but not too much. Remember, it's your visit.
- If it is a group visit, decide who will start the discussion and put your agenda on the table.

2. Listen well.

- Much of lobbying is listening, looking for indications of the elected official's views, and finding opportunities to provide good information.
- If you are meeting with a "silent type," draw her/him out by asking questions.
- If you are confronted with a "long-winded type," look for openings to bring her/him back to the point.

3. Be prepared, but don't feel that you need to be an expert.

- Most elected officials are generalists, like many of us. Do your homework, but don't feel that you need to know every detail of an issue. Air personal feelings and experiences where appropriate. Relate the concerns of your friends and members of the community.
- Know when to admit, "I don't know," and offer to follow up with the information.
- Be open to counter-arguments, but don't get stuck on them. Don't be argumentative or confrontational.

4. Don't stay too long.

- Try to get closure on your issue. If you hear what you had hoped for, express your thanks and leave. If you reach an impasse, thank her/him, even if disappointed, and say so. Leave room to continue the discussion at another time.

5. Remember you are there to build a relationship.

- If the elected official is good on an issue you've been involved in or has supported your position in the past, acknowledge your appreciation during the course of the visit.
- If the opposite is true, think of the phrase, "No permanent friends, no permanent enemies." Some day, on some issue of importance to you, s/he may come through. In the meantime, your visit may prevent the official from being an active opponent. In other words, you may help to turn down the heat on the other side.

6. Follow-up

- Be sure to send a thank-you note after the visit. If commitments were made in the meeting, repeat your understanding of them. If staff members were present, write to them too. They can often be important allies.

Do's & Don'ts of Lobbying at a Glance

ACTION	DO	DON'T
Phone	• Offer to call back when convenient • Use your time well—rehearse first	• Talk more than 10 minutes • Call at inconvenient times (ie: dinner)
In Person	• Speak only briefly about your issue at an unrelated function • Offer to make an appointment • Remember that door-to-door isn't good for detailed discussions	• Think your issue is the only issue • Insult • Push when you don't have their undivided attention
Mail	• Send a letter • Get three letters of support from others	• Send a postcard • Send a form letter • Send a petition

Making Your Case

DO	DON'T
• Smile • Be gracious • Relate it to you and others on a personal level • Appreciate their time • Understand what time of year it is	• Threaten • Monopolize • Be impolite • Say they owe you the time • Ask them to sponsor a bill too late in the session or too far in advance of the next session

Drive Your Message Home

DO	DON'T
• Offer to get back. Follow up with a thank you • Give them a reason to get back to you • Make a note to yourself about the date and discussion • If there are no communications after three months, try again	• Forget to follow up • Expect them to remember you and your issue without prompting • Expect too much or too little

(Adapted with permission from the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits)

The Montana Legislature

Montana's Legislature, similar to many in the West, is bicameral and biennial, meaning it has two chambers – the House and the Senate – and meets every two years. The House consists of 100 elected members who serve two-year terms. The Senate consists of 50 elected members who serve four-year terms. Term limits adopted by Montana voters limit both House and Senate members to eight years (four terms for House members and two terms for Senate members) in any 16-year period.

The Montana Legislature convenes in January of every odd-numbered year. Sessions are limited to 90 working days (legislators typically meet six days per week). Additionally, lawmakers take part in standing interim committees during the off years. The committees are directed to monitor the operation of assigned executive branch agencies.

Special sessions may be called by the Legislature or by the governor to address specific issues.

HELPFUL WEBSITES:

Montana State Legislature Website
http://leg.mt.gov/css/default.asp

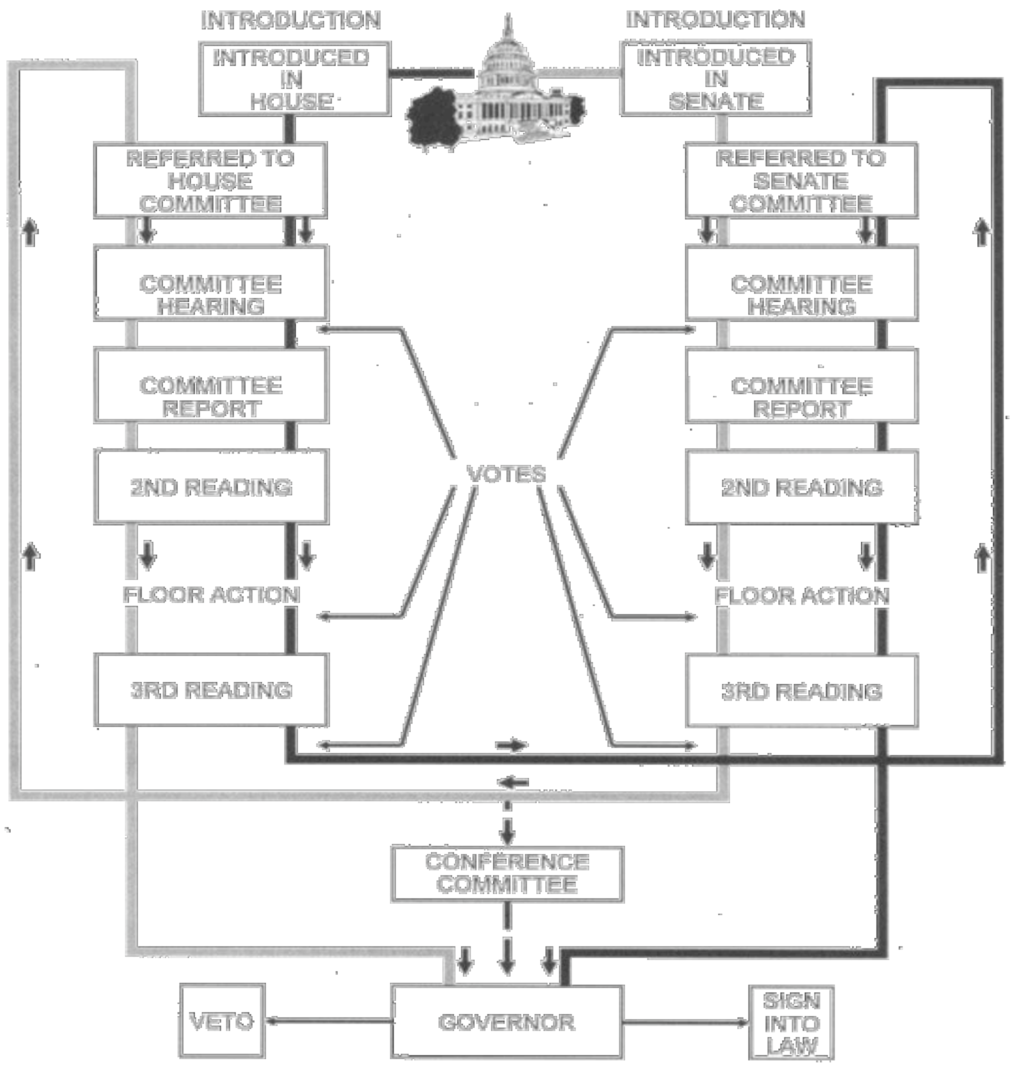
Legislative Rosters
http://leg.mt.gov/css/sessions/default.asp

A Legislative Snapshot District-specific Information (all 50 Senate districts)
http://msl.state.mt.us/districts/

Montana Legislature Maps
http://nris.mt.gov/gis/legislat/legislat.asp

How To Read A Bill
http://www.leg.mt.gov/content/research/faqs/HB8888_with_comments.pdf

How a Bill Becomes Law in Montana



The following 23-step description provides a narrative detail of how a bill becomes law in the Montana legislature.

Step 1. Introduction. Bill is filed for introduction with Secretary of Senate or Chief Clerk of House.

Step 2. First reading. Bill's title is posted, and bill is ordered printed on white paper.

Step 3. Committee reference. Bill is referred to proper committee by Senate President or House Speaker. Referral is posted.

Step 4. Committee consideration. Committee holds public hearing on bill, then discusses it. May vote to amend bill.

Step 5. Committee report. Committee reports its recommendation that bill "do pass", "do pass as amended", or "do not pass".

Step 6. Placed on calendar. Simple "do pass" and "do not pass" reports are printed as such in journal. Text of amendments reported by committee is printed in full. Bills receiving favorable reports are printed on yellow paper in first house (tan paper in second house), incorporating any reported amendments, and are placed on calendar for second reading. Bills with "do not pass" reports are not placed on second-reading calendar unless a motion is made to that effect and passed. If "do not pass" report is adopted, bill drops out of further consideration.

Step 7. Second reading. Entire body debates bill as "Committee of the Whole". Amendments may be offered and voted on. Bill defeated here drops out of further consideration.

Step 8. Placed on third-reading calendar. Bill approved by Committee of the Whole is ordered printed on blue paper in first house (salmon paper in second house), incorporating all amendments made up to that point. (This is known as an "engrossed" bill.)

Step 9. Third reading. Bill subjected to simple "yes" or "no" vote by entire body, in which (by constitutional requirement) each member's vote must be recorded and printed in journal. No amendments may be considered. Bill defeated here drops out of further consideration.

Step 10. Transmittal to other house. Same as Step 1 introduction, except other house works with blue copy.

Step 11. First reading. Summary of title and history is posted.

Step 12. Committee reference. See Step 3.

Step 13. Committee consideration. See Step 4.

Step 14. Committee report. Second-house committee phrases a favorable report as "be concurred in" or "be concurred in, as amended". Unfavorable report is "be not concurred in".

Step 15. Placed on calendar. Same as Step 6, except that instead of a yellow-paper copy, bill is prepared for second reading with committee amendments to blue copy included in bill and printed on tan paper. Bill with unfavorable report is not placed on calendar unless committee recommendation is reversed by full body.

Step 16. Second reading. Same as Step 7.

Step 17. Placed on third-reading calendar. Same as Step 8, except reference bill is reprinted on salmon-colored paper and includes all amendments made in second house.

Step 18. Third reading. Same as Step 9.

Step 19. Bill passed by both houses in identical form. Enrolled and sent to Governor.

Step 20. Bill passed by both houses in differing forms:

Second house returns bill to house of origin approved with amendments, sent with message requesting concurrence in amendments.

Question is voted in Committee of the Whole, e.g., "Shall the (Senate) amendments to (House) Bill No. be concurred in?" If vote in house of origin is in favor of concurrence, bill is enrolled.

If a motion is made and adopted that amendments not be concurred in, originating house will usually request a conference committee (or it may send a message to second house asking it to recede from its amendments). If a conference is sought, a motion is made to authorize Senate President or House Speaker to appoint a conference committee (regular or free) to meet with a like committee from other house to resolve differences. (Regular conference committees may consider only disputed amendments; free conference committees may revise any part of bill.) This action, if approved, is communicated to second house in a message, and second house then appoints a conference committee in same manner.

Step 21. Conference committee reports. If conferees settle differences, each contingent reports to its parent body that bill be further amended in some fashion or that one house recede from amendments and that bill then be approved. Amendments adopted by conference committees are printed on green (House) or pink (Senate) paper. Adoption of conference committee report means house approves bill as conferees recommend.

If conferees cannot settle differences, they report their disagreement and either body may ask that a new conference committee be appointed.

Step 22. Enrolling. Bill is checked for accuracy and printed. Correctly enrolled bill is delivered to presiding officer of house in which bill originated. After being signed and recorded in journal, bill is transmitted to other house where same procedure is followed.

Step 23. Governor's desk. Governor either signs or vetoes bill or allows it to become law without his or her signature. Legislature may vote to override a veto if it has not adjourned. (Refer to Montana Constitution, Article VI, section 10.)

SOURCE: How A Bill Becomes A Law In Montana
http://www.leg.mt.gov/css/research/faqs/howbill.asp

Committee Procedure in Montana

Having Your Say Before a Montana Legislative Committee– It's Your Right!

Guaranteed by Constitutions

The Constitutions of the United States and of the State of Montana ensure every citizen the right to speak on every public issue and to be heard by officials at every level of government. The Montana Legislature extends that right to any bill (which includes any resolution).

Montana's Legislature functions in a completely open atmosphere. After full consideration and with comments and advice from the public, every vote by committee and by either house must be a public vote.

The Citizen's Rostrum

The key events in any bill's legislative life are the hearings before committees. Citizens may communicate personally with legislators at any time about any bill, but the committee hearing is the occasion when an individual may publicly state approval or opposition or suggest changes to a bill.
You may testify on any bill that concerns you. All committee hearings are open and are scheduled well in advance, usually at least 3 days ahead and often longer.

The hearing allows you to speak your mind before the committee takes any action and before the bill is brought to the attention of each house for debate and final vote.

How to Find the Committee

Each committee of the House and Senate is assigned to a meeting room in the Capitol. Occasionally, a hearing that is expected to attract a large crowd may be moved to a larger venue; such changes are noted on hearing schedules and notices are placed outside the regular meeting rooms.

The time and place of every committee hearing is posted several days in advance on the boards reserved for that purpose in the legislative lobbies. In addition, computer terminals are placed in the legislative lobbies for the convenience of the public in obtaining accurate, up-to-the-minute information on the status of each introduced bill. You can also call or visit the Legislative Information Office, located in the 1st floor lobby in the capitol, telephone (406)444-4800, or check hearing information on the Internet at http://leg.mt.gov.

The state's major newspapers also print the schedule of committee hearings each day of the session.

Bills are Available

Copies of bills are available, at a small charge, at the Bill Distribution Room (Room 74) in the basement of the Capitol. Because amendments may change the language of a bill at any of the stages of its life, **be sure that you are referring to the latest version**. Bills are also available electronically for download from the Internet at http://leg.mt.gov. (Please note that the printed version of a bill is the official version; the electronic version may not be in its final form when posted.)

Know the Committee

You may find it helpful before coming to the meeting to know to whom you will be speaking. Members of all committees are appointed before the opening of the legislative session. Rosters are announced in the press, listed in various directories, and available on the Internet at http://leg.mt.gov.

The Speaker of the House or the Committee on Committees of the Senate designates the committee presiding officer who conducts the hearing and applies the rules of the Legislature. The vice presiding officer, who presides in the absence of the presiding officer, is also designated. Both the presiding officer and vice presiding officer are members of the party holding a majority of seats in the house that the committee represents.

A staff person from one of the legislative agencies is permanently assigned to each committee to provide professional assistance. Each committee also has a secretary assigned for the session to keep the record and to perform clerical functions.

Paid Lobbyists Must Register

If you are being paid to support or oppose legislation, you must be licensed as a lobbyist by the Commissioner of Political Practices, which requires payment of a $150 fee.

Access to Committee Room

You may enter a legislative hearing room at any time, even if the door is closed or a hearing is proceeding. The common standards of courtesy and respect apply; enter quietly if a meeting is in progress.

How a Hearing Works

Hearings are as informal and unpretentious as decorum allows.

Because the committee tries to hear several bills at each meeting, the presiding officer will allot time for proponents and opponents of each measure and will reserve a period for questions from the committee members following testimony.

Seating in committee rooms is limited, so plan to arrive a few minutes before starting time to ensure yourself a chair and to reduce diversions after the meeting opens.

Sign the witness sheet for the committee record, and indicate the number of the bill that you are interested in and whether you support or oppose it.

Inquire to find out if other persons also plan to present testimony similar to yours. If so, the committee will appreciate your effort to coordinate testimony to eliminate time-consuming redundancy.

At a hearing with many prospective witnesses, lack of time may prevent all individuals from testifying. In that case, you may be asked to state only your name and whether you are a proponent or an opponent (in such an instance, please be aware that you may always submit written testimony to the committee, even if you are not given the opportunity to speak due to time constraints). At a large hearing, proponents or opponents may designate one or several representatives who share their viewpoints.

The hearing opens with the bill's sponsor explaining its purpose and the background of the legislation. Statements will then be requested from proponents, followed by opponents.

When your turn to testify comes, address the presiding officer and committee members and identify yourself with your name, hometown, occupation, affiliation, or other information that will indicate your acquaintance with the subject. Be specific, confine your remarks to the subject at issue, and indicate clearly your reasons for supporting or opposing the bill.

In order for your testimony to be part of the official record, you are strongly encouraged to provide a written copy of your testimony to committee members and the committee secretary. If you have access to copying facilities, it will be helpful if you provide sufficient copies for each committee member plus two for the staff. However, do not let the fact that you have not prepared a written statement prevent you from testifying.

Press Coverage

Because all committee meetings are open, members of the media may be present. Your statements may be quoted, or you may appear on television. Additionally, many meetings are broadcast by TVMT, which is a state government broadcasting service. TVMT may distribute the televised proceedings to various Montana local access and public television stations. Helena Civic Television has recently begun live feeds of the Montana Legislature, including floor sessions and committee hearings.

Questions from the Committee

After both proponents and opponents have spoken, the presiding officer will allow committee members to ask questions. If you are called upon, respond directly, but remember that only committee members are allowed to ask questions and that you may speak only when called upon.

When committee members have concluded their questions, the sponsor will make a closing statement to end the hearing on that particular bill.

Executive Action

The committee may hear a second or even a third bill in a single meeting.

If the hearings do not consume all of the meeting time allotted, the committee may go into executive session to review the information that it has gathered and to discuss its recommendations.

The executive session is also open to the public, and you are welcome to observe and listen, but the audience is not permitted to join in the discussion.

During the executive session, the members may express their views on the bill, propose and adopt or reject amendments, and finally take a recorded vote for a recommendation of "do pass" or "do not pass" or other action on the bill.

It may be necessary to continue executive action to a later meeting to allow more time for consideration.

Don't Get Stage Fright

Don't allow yourself to be intimidated by the hearing process, the objective of which is to gather all pertinent information so that the committee can make an informed recommendation. Your statement will be heard by a committee of legislators elected to represent citizens like you. Therefore, don't miss your chance to talk.

SOURCE: Committee Procedure In Montana
http://www.leg.mt.gov/print/research/faqs/yoursay1.asp

Lobbying and Advocacy Through the Media

In dealings with the media, send them information only if it is truly newsworthy. You will be quickly and permanently dismissed if your news is unimportant, inaccurate, or untimely. There is a herd instinct in the media. If one influential newspaper picks up your story, others may quickly follow suit and contact you. If you can be responsive to all, your issue may maintain momentum for several days or even longer. Equally important, if the media have come to you as a source on this issue, they will view you as a source on related issues.

Reporters look for quotable sources, people they can count on for good one- or two-sentence comments that will add color and credibility to a story. It is wise to have that supposedly off-the-cuff comment well rehearsed before you talk with the reporter. It is also essential to be well briefed on an issue before giving an interview.

Keep a list of media people who have contacted you or have written or spoken on your issue. They will be an important resource for future press conferences and press releases. Your organization can present information to the media in a number of ways that will draw more attention to your issue and increase the interest of the legislature.

SOURCE: The Nonprofit Lobbying Guide by Bob Smucker

Nonprofits Working with the Media

What's News?

Knowing what is news is important to improving your media relations. Keep in mind that not all news items will or should generate a story. Sometimes the goal is to get your organization's news listed in media event calendars, people or announcement columns.

***Special Events*:** Just having an event does not usually constitute a story; there also needs to be a hook – a unique speaker, award winner, milestone, or information about how your event or program affects the community.

***Services and Programs*:** Do you keep track of how many people you serve in a year, month, or decade? Is the demand for your services changing? Is this trend tied to an external situation like the downturn of the economy, a change in demographics, or new legislation?

***Studies*:** Does your organization have a study revealing new information about factors impacting your mission? What were the results and how will they affect the community?

***Donors and Volunteers*:** All nonprofits benefit from the support of their donors and volunteers. These individuals typically get involved with nonprofits due to strong personal convictions or experiences. Do your donors and volunteers have stories to tell about their lives and why they support your organization?

***Public Policy*:** Is there a new bill or regulation being considered that will hurt or help your organization's clients? How will a new federal, state or city budget impact financial resources of organizations such as yours? This type of story can also be an opportunity to educate reporters about nonprofit lobbying rights.

***Fundraising*:** Has your organization launched a capital campaign, succeeded with a new fundraising strategy, or seen a change in donation patterns? When your fundraising activities receive coverage, it is important to followup with the reporter to share the impact and result of your fundraising. Encourage them to write a story about how the money was used.

***Partnerships*:** Is your organization entering into a partnership with a business, government agency, or another nonprofit? What brought the groups together? What were the difficulties encountered during the process? What will the benefits of the partnership be to the community?

***Operations*:** Has your organization completed a new strategic plan, changed its business practices, or acquired new equipment? How will these changes affect the organization's ability to fulfill its mission? Who will benefit from these changes in operations? Is the organization turning a corner in terms of effectiveness? Is there a market trend such as rising insurance rates or energy costs that is creating a change in your operations?

***Leadership*:** Has your organization recently hired a new leader or added new board members? Consider a release about the attributes of these leaders and their aspirations to successfully serve your organization.

***Tragedy*:** When unfortunate events occur, nonprofits are often the first to respond. Does your agency provide a service that can help people recover? Does your organization provide a service that has been shown to be successful in preventing this type of unfortunate event? Do you have stories to share of how your work led to a quick solution?

Tips for Generating Coverage

***Build Relationships*:** Working with the media is about building relationships. The media are usually not experts at subjects they cover – they depend on the people they interview and the research they do to provide them the information they need. Establish yourself as an expert in your field by reliably providing good information. If an article is run that you wish you had been interviewed for, contact the reporter and let him/her know that if they need a contact on that topic in the future, he/she can call you. When a good story is run or you are well quoted send a thank you to the reporter responsible.

***Localize Your Story*:** How does your story or information relate to the community you are addressing. If you have a release you are sending out statewide, are there quotes from local people or statistics from different areas that you can include to make it relevant to different areas of the state?

***Know Your Audience*:** Who is the audience of the publication you are approaching, i.e. retirees, young adults, women, Latinos, etc.? Avoid using excessively big words; write at around an 8th grade reading level.

***Tie to Current Events*:** Pay attention to events the media in your community, across the country and around the world. If the media are closely covering stories about an issue that is related to your mission or programs, send a press release about your organization and how it is related to the issue, or call the media covering the story and offer to serve as a local resource on the issue.

***Avoid Jargon and Acronyms*:** Nonprofits are notorious for jargon and acronyms. Keep your message easily readable by avoiding terms and acronyms that not everyone knows. You and your friends know what a term means, but don't take for granted that others will also. If there is any doubt, either find another word or briefly define its meaning.

***Build on Success*:** If you have had success with a story, you can strategically use that success to spin more coverage. If you got coverage about a program you have initiated, you may be able to follow up with the same media outlet, or another one, about future developments in that program.

***Use Media Wisely*:** It is good to generate media coverage on a regular basis; but it is not good to overwhelm the media. Sending regular press releases is good, but don't send them so frequently that people get sick of them and quit reading them. Take advantage of media opportunities in addition to press releases. Many news outlets now have online forms you can fill out to list events in calendars – some won't even take calendar announcements submitted any other way.

***Distributing Releases*:** Some media still prefer to receive releases as faxes, some even prefer mail, but many, especially in print media, prefer to receive releases via email. If you are sending a press release via email, be sure to use a catchy subject (use your title for ideas) and paste the text of the release in the body of the email NOT AS AN ATTACHMENT. You want the reporter to open the release, quickly be able to determine what it is about, and want to read more.

(Adapted with permission from the Colorado Nonprofit Association)

Establishing Your Message

Contacting the media is about more than just getting your group's name or cause in the paper or on the airwaves. For reporters and editors, there has to be news. Simply being a worthwhile cause often is not enough for newspapers, even small weeklies in Montana, to write about your group.

Following one of the very first lessons of journalism, "The Five Ws," can help you decide and craft the news release or news conference message you want to get out.

1. WHO
2. WHAT
3. WHEN
4. WHERE
5. WHY

How to Establish Your Message Example:

Who: *Who are you?*
The Montana Poverty Task Force, a statewide coalition of poverty reduction groups established in 2005.

What: *What is the announcement? What is the NEWS?*
The Task Force is one of only two groups nationwide to receive a $2 million grant from the Goodguy Foundation.

When: *When was the grant awarded or announced?*
The announcement of the grant is being made May 31.

Where: *What area does this affect or where did it occur?*
The grant will be divided among poverty reduction groups across the state.

Why: *Why is this important? Why is it news?*
This is a lot of money that will have a significant impact in our efforts to reduce poverty, particularly among children in Montana. It is also significant because the Montana Poverty Task Force is one of only two groups nationwide to receive this grant.

How to Write an Effective Press Release

1. A press release is brief and highlights an important event, decision, or piece of information. The first paragraph of a press release should include who, what, when, where, why and sometimes how. Make verbs active and the subject concrete, for example. Cover the most important facts first and follow with details.

2. Give your press release a catchy title, e.g., "Nonprofit hails ban on assault weapons." Write the heading as if it were the headline you'd like to read in the paper. Write a first sentence that makes it tough to stop reading.

3. Be sure to include a contact name and telephone number on the top right corner. List a number that will be answered by a live person – even if that includes cell, home and work numbers.

4. Don't forget to include the date of your release on the upper left corner of your release. Write "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Month day, year."

5. Include a quote from your spokesperson. Be sure to use his/her title and the full name of the organization. Sentences in quotes should be short and to the point. It is a good idea to alert your spokesperson about the release and their quote so they are not caught off guard.

6. Write in the third person. Using the first person will make your release more like promotional material than news.

7. Follow AP Style. The AP Stylebook is a guide to usage, spelling and punctuation, and a reference for terms and topics commonly encountered in journalism. Some examples of AP style: Always spell out "percent;" for a specific date, abbreviate the month, but spell out when using alone or with a year alone. Never abbreviate March, April, May, June or July. For a copy or online subscription visit: www.apbookstore.com

8. At the bottom of page one write "more" if necessary, otherwise write "end" or use the symbol "###"centered below the text.

9. Limit your release to one or two pages. Reporters hate getting long faxes/e-mails. If you need to include more information and facts, send your release by mail.

10. If a major event warrants an immediate and lengthier response from your organization than a press release, write a one-page statement from your president. Use the title: "Statement by (president), President of the (nonprofit)."

11. Proof everything at least twice. If your press release looks disorganized and is badly written, the nonprofit's image will suffer. Conversely, if the release is well written, the paper may print it verbatim.

12. Never editorialize in press releases. For example, do not write that a speaker is gifted. Keep opinions and judgments within the quotes.

13. After sending your release, make follow-up calls to specific reporters, making sure they received your release.

Print on Letterhead

ORGANIZATION
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Month day, Year
or NEWS RELEASE (if not timely)

CONTACT: Name, Title
Phone
Email

Headline – One Or Two Lines That Capture
The Essence Of What You Want To Say

Subhead – A line of support or another level of intrigue.

City, State (Date) – One (maybe two) sentences that summarize the whole story. If the reader gets no further, they will know what this story is about. In general, attribute something happening to someone: "Such and such happened," according to Sally Jones, Queen of The World, Inc. This first paragraph may be repetitive of the first headline.

"Follow up with a quote as soon as possible," Jones said. If the quote is attributed to the same person introduced in the first paragraph, just use their last name and don't repeat the title.

Support what you said in the first paragraphs with more about why this article is relevant and any facts to back it up and make the point stronger.

If the release goes to a second page, make that known by…

MORE

Headline summary

Date
Page 2

At this point in the release, support information can be given in bullet form if that makes it easier to read at a glance.

A news release should never be any longer than two pages. If it is, you can:

- Make sure everything in the release is relevant and important. Otherwise, cut out the fat.
- Take some of the support information you feel is important and include it in a second piece, like a fact sheet or by-the-numbers sheet.

Photo Opportunity
If there is a photo opportunity with this story, make it known.

Boilerplate – Short paragraph that includes information about your organization (when it was founded, what it does, hours of operation, contact information again, web site.) It is something that should be included on and the same in every release you do.

About The World, Inc.
The World, Inc.'s mission is to…. Major projects include blah, blah and blah. The World, Inc is located at 1111 Main Street, Some Town, MT, 59601. The Phone number is 406-555-5555 or toll free 800-555-5555. The Webaddress is www.-----.org.

Let the reader know the release is over by…

###END###

Sample News Release

MONTANA POVERTY TASK FORCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 31, 2007

Contact: Bob Jones, director
(406) 123-4567 office
(406) 543-2100 cell
Bjones@mna.org email
www.mna.org

Montana Poverty Task Force awarded $2 million poverty grant

Helena, MT- The Montana Poverty Task Force was one of just two programs nationwide to be awarded a $2 million grant Friday from a private foundation to help combat hunger and poverty among children in Montana.

The grant from the Goodguy Foundation of Washington state, will be earmarked for nonprofit programs around the state that specifically work to address poverty among children, said Bob Jones, director of the Task Force.

"Being chosen for this grant is a tremendous recognition of the work we do here," Jones said. "There are so many groups nationwide that work to reduce poverty, but only a very small number get this grant every year. We are very honored and will put this money to very good use."

The Montana Poverty Task Force was established by the Governor two years ago and is made up of directors of nonprofit groups from around the state, as well as a number of legislative leaders. The task force is charged, among other things, with helping coordinate and assist local poverty-reduction programs. It gets some funding from the state, but relies most heavily on federal and private grants.

The Goodguy Foundation, based in King County, Washington, provides grants to organizations that specifically benefit children and their families.

Foundation Director Beth Mullins said The Montana Poverty Task Force was chosen for the grant because of the "significant work and the dedication it has shown to improving the lives of children in Montana."

"The Task Force has been in existence for only a short time, yet the state of Montana is already seeing the benefits of its work," she said.

The only other program to receive a Goodguy grant this year was the Illinois Poverty Reduction Program, based in Chicago.

Jones said the grant money, which will be distributed over a two-year period, will be divided among the groups that are part of the task force, with funds allocated depending largely on the number of clients each serves.

"In a state like Montana, $2 million can go a long way toward helping a lot of people," said Task Force member Barbara Miller of Billings. "We are very thankful that the Goodguy Foundation recognized the work we do here and this generous grant will allow us to continue doing that."

###End###

How to Write a Media Advisory

1. A media advisory functions as an FYI that alerts journalists to an upcoming event. It gives the basic information: who, what, when and where.

2. A media advisory "what" is much like a news release headline. Clearly state the news here with a short description of the event and the issue.

3. List the speakers at your event. Explain who will speak and what they will discuss.

4. Tell when the event will take place. Include the date and time.

5. A media advisory "where" provides the location name and address. Directions may be necessary if the event is held in an obscure location.

6. The contact should be the person who will speak to the media or facilitate interviews. This person must be easily accessible. Place the contact information in the top right corner of your media advisory.

7. In the top left corner, type "Media Advisory." Beneath that, type the date.

8. Include a short summary of your organization in the last paragraph.

9. Mention "Photo Opportunity" if one exists and be sure to send it to the photo editors of local news outlets as well as to reporters– they don't always share information with each other!

10. Type "###" at the end of your advisory. A media advisory should never be more than one page.

11. A media advisory should arrive 3 to 5 working days before the event. Fax or mail (if time permits) your advisory to the appropriate reporter, editor or producer at each news outlet on your press list.

12. ALWAYS make follow up calls the day before your event and have the advisory ready to be faxed or emailed.

(Adapted with permission from the Colorado Nonprofit Association)

Sample Media Advisory

Montana Poverty Task Force

Bob Jones, Director
(406) 543-2100 cell
(406) 123-4567 office

MEDIA ADVISORY

WHO: Montana Poverty Task Force
What: News Conference on award of major grant for poverty reduction programs in Montana
When: Friday, May 31, 2 p.m.
Where: 812 Great Northern Blvd. Suite 100, Helena, MT

About the Montana Poverty Task Force
The Montana Poverty Task Force was created in 2005 and consists of nonprofit organizations from around the state who target poverty and hunger in the state. The Task Force has a seven-member board of directors appointed by the Governor. The Task Force works with state and local groups and agencies to coordinate poverty reduction programs.

###END###

Who Does What

With individual variations, almost every newspaper and magazine, radio and television station has the following sort of editorial lineup. Use it as your guide to "pitching" your idea.

DAILY NEWSPAPERS

- Editor, managing editor or executive editor. Determines overall editorial stance of the newspaper (in conjunction with editorial page personnel) and the general thrust of news gathering.
- Metropolitan or city editor. Makes day-to-day decisions on what to cover and who will do it. Can refer you to the reporter who covers your beat.
- Editorial page editor. Writes some or all editorials. Supervises any other editorial writers and those responsible for selecting op-ed pieces and letters to the editor.
- Sunday editor. Assigns and oversees feature articles and other soft news in the Sunday paper, including sections on art, entertainment, lifestyle, nature, outdoors, sports, and travel.
- Feature editor. Assigns and often writes human interest stories.
- Lifestyle editor. A good prospect for stories on people in your organization who are doing interesting things.
- Columnist. These tend to be generalists. Most have special interests as well, such as the environment, politics, or the arts.
- Beat reporter. Specializes in a particular field, such as energy, education, labor, medicine, religion or government.
- Feature writer. Specializes in stories about people (human interest stories).
- Correspondent/stringer. Covers a region in the outlying circulation area of a newspaper.

WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

- Editor. In addition to traditional duties, usually writes editorials, some stories, and maybe a column.
- Correspondent. Reports on your town or region.
- Columnist. May also be the editor.

TELEVISION AND RADIO

- Executive producer. In charge of a particular program or series of programs.
- Producer. Responsible for certain segments of a news program or a specific program in a series.
- News director. Responsible for overall tone and content of news programs and, at smaller stations, assigns crews to stories.
- Assignment editor. At larger stations makes day-to-day decisions on what to cover and who to send.
- Station manager. At smaller stations sets policy on news coverage and supervises overall operation.
- Program director. May determine content and select participants of talk shows (or you can deal directly with the talk show host.)
- Public affairs director. In charge of public service announcements (free commercials) that you provide, usually aired during off hours.

Creating an Effective Press List

1. Include major newspapers in your area. Consider the media source's audience(s). Make sure that your media list includes all of the audiences you are trying to reach, i.e. local audiences, statewide audiences, young people, retirees, different ethnic communities.

Remember, your target audience may change depending on the nature of the releases you distribute).

2. Get a list of state and local specialty publications/magazines that might be interested in your project.

3. Monitor your media relevant to your organization and keep an updated list of reporters covering your issues. Look for bylines and add them to your press list. Update your press list on a regular basis.

4. Include television and radio stations with news and current event talk shows. For broadcast news shows, send a release to the specific reporter covering your issue, or to the senior producer for smaller stations. For talk shows, send to the producer. Target drive time – early morning shows or late afternoon/rush-hour radio shows.

5. Check to see if you have a local wire-service bureau in your area that would help distribute releases. A couple large wire services include PR Newswire, www.prnewswire.com, and Business Wire, http://home.businesswire.com. The Montana Newspaper Association offers a press release distribution service to all the daily & weekly newspapers across the state of Montana. In addition, they offer a clipping service so you can see every paper that ran your release.
www.mtnewspapers.com
(800) 325-8276
Email: mtnews@mtnewspapers.com

6. Include relevant university newspapers, church bulletins and nonprofit newsletters.

7. Be sure to send your press release to the newswire daybooks. Both Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) have daybooks, which are wire printout listings of times and locations of each day's press events. Send your press release at least two days in advance. Make a follow-up call to ensure it will be listed.

8. Send notice of all events to newspaper community calendars.

9. Verify that you have proper contact names (e.g., assignment editor, health care reporter, community/lifestyle reporter and editorial writer). Obtain correct spelling of names, telephone numbers, email addresses, fax numbers and addresses for background mailings. Media professionals like receiving information in various formats. While many now prefer receiving press releases via email, others still prefer fax or mail. Be sure to note in your press list the best way to contact them.

10. Find media contacts searching the web for "Montana media" or asking nonprofits with similar missions to share their lists. The Montana Small Business Administration has a comprehensive media list that you can access at http://www.sba.gov/idc/groups/public/documents/mt_helena/mt_medialist.pdf

(Adapted with permission from the Colorado Nonprofit Association)

Preparing for an Editorial Board Meeting

1. The purpose of an editorial board meeting is to establish a good relationship with your local and state newspapers. They might not agree with all of your positions, but they should know who you are and respect your work.

2. Another important goal of editorial board meetings is to encourage the newspaper to write an editorial in support of an issue or campaign. The editorial board also could decide to publish a Q&A based on their discussion with you at the meeting.

3. Call the senior editorial writer at your state or local newspaper a week to ten days in advance. Tell her/him that you would like to talk with the editorial board to discuss your group's issue priorities, project or campaign. Time the meeting around your project or key action in the Legislature.

4. If the editor is not keen on an editorial board meeting, suggest that you send her/him a press packet on the issues or event that you would like to discuss and make a follow-up call. Get the editorial writer's direct phone number, fax number and mailing address. If the paper is small, suggest a meeting with the paper's publisher or editor, or an informal get-together over coffee or lunch.

5. Find out what positions the newspaper's editorial board has taken on your organization's issues. Search for stories pertaining to these issues on the newspaper's website and read them carefully before the meeting.

6. Before the meeting, arm yourself with useful facts and figures. Don't be intimidated. They want to hear what you have to say.

7. Limit the number of people you bring to the editorial board meeting to two or three.

8. Reconfirm the meeting one day before. Send your nonprofit's president with your project manager or issue expert. Be sure to leave your business cards, with contact phone numbers.

9. Prepare an agenda for the meeting. List the points or issues you would like to cover. Distribute the agenda and fact sheets on your group's campaign or issues at the beginning of the meeting. Explain why you are there and why your issue or campaign is important. Invite questions from editorial board members during your presentation.

10. Make a follow-up call after the meeting to find out if the paper plans to run an editorial. Be sure to get a copy if it does. If the paper runs a negative editorial, ask for space to place an opinion editorial, or op-ed, stating your position.

MONTANA TIPS: Editorial Boards

Remember: Most of Montana's daily newspapers have editorial boards, which typically meet once a week to discuss positions the newspaper's editorial page will take on key issues. Most boards welcome stakeholders in key issues to come in and talk with them, but they will not always take an editorial stand. Groups and stakeholders typically can simply call or email the editorial page editor to arrange a meeting with the board.

Tips: Be prepared. Have written background materials to distribute. Be concise. Be available for follow up. Be prepared to have the board NOT support your cause. Be gracious for the time.

How to Write and Submit a Letter to the Editor

1. The letters-to-the-editor section is one of the most widely read sections of any newspaper. Letters to the editor are usually written in response to an article or editorial published earlier in the newspaper.

2. If you see an article or opinion piece that presents a position that is opposite your group's, write a letter to the editor disagreeing with the article and stating your organization's position. If you don't disagree but have a different perspective, that too can be the basis of a letter to the editor.

3. Call the newspaper and ask to speak to the "letters-to-the-editor" department. Ask how long the letter should be. Find out the name, fax number and mailing address of the person you should send it to.

4. In the first paragraph of your letter, refer promptly to the article or position that you are writing about. Name the reporter who wrote the article and the date and the title of the article. State why you disagree and proceed to give your group's position on that particular issue. Short and pitchy is better than long and rambling.

5. Send with a cover letter addressed to the appropriate editor. Attach your business card. Be sure to sign the letter with your name, title and the name of your organization.

How to Write and Submit an Op-Ed

1. An Opinion-Editorial, also referred to as Op-Eds, is an opinion piece a publication's reader writes and submits to a newspaper or magazine on a topic relevant to the publication's audience.

2. Learn the name of the newspaper's op-ed page editor and the length specifications for op-eds and the address or fax number. Most are 700-800 words long, so you need to be succinct in your writing.

3. Monitor your paper's op-ed page to see what kind of op-eds it publishes. If the paper recently ran a piece on a position that your nonprofit disagrees with, you might have a better chance of getting your organization's position in print.

4. There should be a compelling hook to generate interest in the op-ed and demonstrate its relevance to the readers and the community. Give it a strong local angle. The reader needs to be able to relate quickly and easily to your story.

5. Decide what message you want to convey. Write it in a brief sentence. Decide the key arguments supporting your message and develop each in turn.

6. Have an opinion and state it assertively. Make your case from the top down. Begin with the premise of your opinion and then back up your opinion with facts. Don't present facts first and save your opinion for the conclusion.

7. Print your op-ed on your organization's letterhead and sign your name and title.

8. Send your op-ed with a cover letter and background information on your nonprofit to the op-ed editor. Include your business card with both home and work numbers. Make a follow-up call a day or two after the editor has received your op-ed. Ask if the paper intends to print it. If so, find out when. Get a copy.

Op-ed Questions: Prior to writing an op-ed, answer the following list of questions to ensure that you make the necessary points for an effective piece.

- ☐ What is the problem in the community that your organization is solving?
- ☐ How does your organization help to solve this problem?
- ☐ Describe your organization. How does it work?
- ☐ Why wasn't the problem solved before? What was the obstacle?
- ☐ Is there a villain in the story?
- ☐ What is the cost of the solution you propose?
- ☐ How can you "paint a picture" in someone's mind through your words?
- ☐ Which community leaders, groups or people in the community agree with you? Why?
- ☐ Which community leaders, groups or people in the community disagree with you? Why?
- ☐ What is the urgency?
- ☐ Who does this affect?
- ☐ What is the history of this story? What has been done before? What was the process to get to this point? Was there a cliffhanger or suspenseful event?

MONTANA TIPS: Op-Eds vs. Letters to the Editor

Remember: Op-eds or guest opinions in Montana typically are written by someone with more than just a casual knowledge or interest on an issue. They run longer – 600 words is not uncommon in Montana papers – and usually get prominent play on the editorial page, often with a picture of the writer.

Most Montana newspapers limit letters to the editor to 200 or 250 words, and set limits on how many letters they will run from the same person in a given time. They also tend to limit the number of letters they will run on a specific topic, especially if it appears one side in an issue is attempting to "stack" the editorial page.

On letters to the editor; the shorter the better. Stick to the message and encourage supporters of your organization or cause to write them as well.

Remember: Montana papers get quite a number of requests to run op-eds, so it is important to use this approach sparingly: Reserve it for the most important issues and have key, prominent officials pen the editorial. Contact editorial page editors ahead of time – try to give notice of at least five working days – that you want to write an op-ed and offer to send a mug shot of the writer. Distribute the op-ed to more than just one paper if it is a statewide issue.

How to Respond to Questions from the Media

If you do an excellent job submitting your story, reporters will be interested in learning more. Here is how you effectively answer their questions.

1. When a reporter contacts you, reply back immediately. Be prepared to ask them:

- What is your deadline?
- What questions do you have?
- Who else have you contacted?

2. Know your message.

- It is important that everyone in your group is clear about the message being conveyed. Have your message points written out and practice saying them before being interviewed.
- Your message is where your expertise lies.

3. Your response to any question should tie back into your message.

4. If you know that an issue has come up where you might get calls from the media, prepare yourself by making up questions that the media will most likely ask and answering them in ways that tie back to your organization's message.

5. If you have initiated an interview with a member of the media, provide the interviewer with a fact sheet including information you would like to share and even suggestions of questions he or she could ask. The interviewer might not stick to what you gave them, but providing them information in the beginning will increase your chances of being able to cover the information you want to cover. Generally, the interviewer will appreciate your time preparing for the interview.

6. If you are able to schedule an interview, prepare yourself through role-play.

- Make up some questions that you would expect a reporter to ask.
- Answer those questions and familiarize yourself with them. Do not forget to tie in your message.
- Have a partner repeatedly ask you those questions so you can practice answering and better prepare yourself for the interview.

7. Do not be afraid to say you do not know.

- If you are unable to answer a reporter's question, refer him/her to someone who can, or offer to research the question and get back to him/her. If you take the second approach, be sure to follow up quickly.
- If you realize you stated an incorrect fact or misstated your thoughts, immediately let the reporter know.

8. Provide any information that you may have for an upcoming story.

- Reporters appreciate the gesture and this helps to build connections with media outlets.
- Building rapport with a reporter will give you a better opportunity to frame your story for the public.

Preparing for and Giving Great Interviews

1. Never go to a media interview without reading the morning's newspapers. You should be very well informed.

2. Be sure to watch or listen to the program or host that will be interviewing you before you appear. Get to know the style and format of the show.

3. In some cases, it is good to send some questions for the reporter to ask you or preparatory fact sheets to the reporter prior to the interview. This will make it easier for the reporter to interview you and help you make a good impression by being well prepared.

4. Focus on no more than two or three major points to make during the interview. For each point, be sure to have two or three good facts to back it up. Don't let the reporter's questions get you off track. Keep coming back to your major points. Don't forget the reason you are there.

5. Listen carefully to the reporter's questions. Always answer by coming back to the main points you want to make. Never answer with a simple yes or no. Never say "no comment." It makes you sound guilty. The easier you make it on the reporter, the more likely she/he is to have you back.

6. Maintain good eye contact with reporters. Speak clearly and distinctly in a normal conversational tone. In TV interviews, ignore the camera.

7. Don't use technical jargon or acronyms. Be friendly. Avoid long sentences. Remember, you want to be quoted.

8. Never get upset or lose your temper with a reporter. You want the media on your side. Maintain a sense of humor. If the reporter is antagonistic, use your charm. Keep cool.

9. Remember, you represent your organization. Don't give personal opinions that might compromise your group. Never go "off the record." And never make partisan statements—even if prodded—or your quote could end up as a headline in tomorrow's paper.

10. You have a serious message to deliver. Don't wear clothes that are too flashy. Stripes, checks and white are not good on TV. Don't wear dangling jewelry. Don't fiddle on camera. Assume microphones are on at all times. Assume you are on camera until they tell you that you're not.

11. Remember, you know more about your issue than the reporter. You've got the upper hand! If the reporter wants facts and figures you don't have – tell her/him that you'll find out the information and go back to making your important points. If you are not sure about a fact or figure, don't use it! You want the media to rely on you as a reliable source of nonpartisan facts.

12. If possible, try to obtain a tape of your performance. Review it. Get a friend to critique it. Correct your mistakes in the next interview.

(Adapted with permission from the Colorado Nonprofit Association)

Checklist for Press Conferences

One week before your press conference:

1. Arrange for a room that is not so large that it will look empty if attendance is light. Sites may include hotels, local press clubs or public buildings near media offices.

2. Check on:
   - ☐ Podium – stand alone
   - ☐ Speaker system – if needed
   - ☐ Microphone stand – on podium
   - ☐ Backdrop – blue if possible
   - ☐ Chairs – theatre style, large center aisle
   - ☐ Easels – if needed
   - ☐ Electricity – outlets for TV lights
   - ☐ Table – for media sign-up and materials
   - ☐ Water – for participants

3. Pick a convenient date and time. Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday is best. Try not to schedule before 10:00 am or after 2:00 pm.

4. Send out written announcements by fax, email, mail or hand deliver to:
   - ☐ Editors
   - ☐ Assignment desks
   - ☐ Reporters
   - ☐ AP daybooks
   - ☐ Weekly calendars

5. Prepare written materials, including written statements and press kits.

The day before:

- ☐ Formalize the order of speakers and who will say what
- ☐ Call all prospective media and urge their attendance
- ☐ Double check the wire service daybooks
- ☐ Collate materials and make extras for follow-up
- ☐ Walk through the site and review details
- ☐ Type up names and titles of spokespeople for media hand-out

That morning:

- ☐ Make last-minute calls to assignment desks and desk editors
- ☐ Double check the room several hours before
- ☐ Walk through the press conference with principal speakers

During the press conference:

- ☐ Have a sign-in sheet for reporters' names and addresses
- ☐ Give out press kits
- ☐ Hand out a written list of participants
- ☐ Make opening introductions
- ☐ Arrange one-on-one interviews if requested

Checklist for Press Kits

It is not necessary to send a press kit every time you have information to share. A press kit is a useful tool for introducing your organization to a member of the media. It can also be helpful if you are announcing a major project or event. Keep in mind that reporters are inundated with information about potential stories. If you send them too much information, they may not have time to read it.

- ☐ Cover memo or press release with contact name and phone number
- ☐ Fact sheets on the issue
- ☐ History of the issue
- ☐ Quotes or comments by experts
- ☐ Selected press clippings
- ☐ State-by-state or city-by-city analysis
- ☐ Speeches or statements on the issue
- ☐ Charts, visuals or photographs
- ☐ Background biography on spokesperson
- ☐ Annual report
- ☐ Typeset copies of speeches or public testimony
- ☐ Standard one-page description of your organization

MONTANA TIPS: News Conferences

Remember: Montana is an incredibly small market when it comes to news coverage, and it can be quite difficult to guarantee a large media turnout at a news conference. In many communities, there simply isn't a large media presence, and most media in the state are not going to travel great distances for a news conference.

Tips: Focus most efforts on one or two key media contacts in the community. Give them an early heads up about the news conference; who will be there, why the issue is important. Get a sense from them whether they will send a reporter or if they believe it doesn't fit their needs on that particular day. Keep in mind they may be the only press at your event and plan that accordingly. Set up a preferred way to get a news release and contact information to a much broader, statewide media audience (Fax, email) and then follow up with a phone call to the media for a brief explanation on the importance of the issue.

Tips From Montana Newsrooms

For information on all Montana Newspapers, visit the Montana Newspaper Association site at http://www.mtnewspapers.com/

Billings Gazette

Q&A from Managing Editor, Kristi Angel:

What makes something newsworthy?

If there is something NEW happening. What's different about your business/event than in years past? Will your effort help others? Will there be a donation? Will nonprofit agencies benefit? Will the results stay here in Montana?

What sort of things does your publication offer for nonprofits to deliver their message?

We have a place where we run news briefs in our local section. We'll always run announcements of upcoming meetings, forums, workshops, etc. as long as they are not-for-profit. We run them as space allows. We cannot guarantee that material will run on a given day. If you are having a workshop on the benefits of lasik surgery at your business, the TLC eye center, we will not run that. If you have a huge announcement—now offering free chocolate dip with purchase of every vanilla ice cream cone—and it begins on a certain date, you should purchase an ad. We have many avenues in which to promote a product. We are niche-tacular. We have a publication for almost every demographic. Or you might want to advertise on our web site. Or if you have just completed a huge project—Billings Clinic just opened a $22 million emergency room—other people may buy ads for a special section trumpeting your accomplishment. People who were in the Billings Clinic section included contractors on the job, doctors' offices, oxygen suppliers and the like.

How does someone know the best person at your publication to contact for their organization & need?

Good question! It depends on what the item is. If it's a letter to the editor, you want to send it to our opinion editor, Pat Bellinghausen. Letters may be no more than 250 words long. Or you might have a topic you'd like to write a guest column about. You should pitch that to Pat Bellinghausen too. Her number is 406-657-1303. Story ideas can be emailed to our email citynews@billingsgazette.com Put the words, STORY IDEA in the subject line.

What is the best and most convenient way to submit information to you?

Email or call. Our newsroom receptionists, Rachelle Lacy and Cathy Ulrich (both at 406-657-1241) and Pat West, (406-657-1469) will be able to direct you to the appropriate person for what you want to do.

What is the best piece of advice you would give to a person trying to be an advocate for their nonprofit organization?

Set yourself apart from other organizations by doing unique things. When you pitch a story to us you should be able to hook us up with REAL LIVE people who have benefited from your programs. It's more interesting to hear them tell their stories rather than have the anecdotes told by someone else.

Does your publication routinely honor "embargoed" stories? Can we get information to you ahead of time for a story we don't want publicized until a specific time or date?

Yes.

Are there advance deadlines for specific days/pages that we should include in this guide?

Business achievers are due the Monday before publication in the next week's Sunday biz section. The key to getting stuff in the paper is to contact us far enough in advance that we can make plans. Especially if you want to get a brief in the paper, we need it early to ensure it will run before your event.

Bozeman Daily Chronicle

Q&A from Managing Editor, Karin Ronnow:

What sort of things does your publication offer for nonprofits to deliver their message?

News stories, feature stories, area news briefs (to announce events), calendar (to remind readers of regularly scheduled events) and people in the news (Sunday section for new hires, board members). Donations are noted in Sunday economy section as long as the information comes from the nonprofit, and not from the donor. Also, our entertainment section frequently features events sponsored by nonprofit organizations.

How does someone know the best person at your publication to contact for their organization & need?

letter to editor/op-ed – assistant managing editor/editorial page editor
story idea – city editor
area news brief – newsroom clerk
upcoming events – entertainment section editor

What is the best and most convenient way to submit information to you?

Email

What is the best piece of advice you would give to a person trying to be an advocate for their nonprofit?

Use the people you serve to tell the story about what you do.

To get news coverage of an upcoming event, how much advance notice should a nonprofit give a newspaper?

As much as possible. At least a week.

Does your publication routinely honor "embargoed" stories? Can we get information to you ahead of time for a story we don't want publicized until a specific time or date?

Yes.

Are there advance deadlines for specific days/pages that we should include in this guide?

The Entertainment section and Sunday business sections have early deadlines, Monday and Wednesday respectively.

The Missoulian

Q&A from Missoula City Editor, John Doran:

What makes something newsworthy?

Newsworthiness is sometimes difficult to portray, but typically it comes down to the two "I's" Impact and Interest. A story that has a wide interest level for our readers is something we'd consider newsworthy, and a story with a significant impact or potential impact is also a very newsworthy item.

What sort of things does your publication offer for nonprofits to deliver their message?

We have two specific means to deliver nonprofits' messages: A column called the Nonprofit Roundup, which lists a number of nonprofit briefs on events, fundraisers, projects etc.; and a column called We Care, which is geared to help people in need who are registered through an accredited nonprofit. Both columns run once per week.

How does someone know the best person at your publication to contact for their organization & need?

Doing a little research will go a long way in getting your information in the newspaper. At the Missoulian, and at all newspapers, we have beat reporters who cover specific areas. So, for instance, if your nonprofit was tied to public education, you'd be best served to look up who is the Missoulian education reporter, and that's Rob Chaney. For very general information, we have a news desk e-mail in box that our news assistants monitor. Some—but not all—of those e-mails will go to an editor's desk to determine whether it remains a brief, or if a reporter follows up for a larger story. So, in short, try to be specific especially addressed with a name. We receive so many press releases and notifications, and we're more apt to open and read one that's addressed personally.

What is the best and most convenient way to submit information to you?

E-mail really is the best way, because not only do we monitor it incessantly (personally, I'm trying to become less and less of an e-mail slave) but it's in electronic form, so we're able to cut and paste into our news system.

What is the best piece of advice you would give to a person trying to be an advocate for their nonprofit?

Follow up e-mails with personal phone calls, and try to set up meetings with reporters if the nonprofit advocate feels it's an exceptionally newsworthy story. I'd also recommend being persistent to a point, but reserving personal meetings with a reporter or editor for special occasions.

To get news coverage of an upcoming event, how much advance notice should a nonprofit give a newspaper?

As much as humanly possible. Especially on weekends, when we typically have one reporter and one photographer working each day, we schedule our coverage at least a week in advance. And with night events, we must work a special schedule, so notification the day before or the day of is too late.

Does your publication routinely honor "embargoed" stories? Can we get information to you ahead of time for a story we don't want publicized until a specific time or date?

Absolutely. We are nothing without our word. Plus, it gives us advanced time to do some background reporting and have a fully developed story in a timely fashion—as opposed to days after news is released.

Are there advance deadlines for specific days/pages that we should include in this guide?

Yes. Most of our special pages in the newspaper—Religion, Families, Health, Foods, Outdoors, Unwind, Territory, etc.—are actually built and printed nearly five days in advance. That means for a Saturday religion page, the very latest you'd want to get the information to the Missoulian is on a Monday. Health publishes on Tuesdays. Food is Wednesdays. Outdoors Thursday. Unwind Friday. Religion Saturday. Territory Sunday. Hometowns and Families Monday.

Helena Independent Record

Q&A from Helena City Editor, Rich Myers:

What makes something newsworthy?

As a rule of thumb, something that's new. New staff. New programs. An event. Something going on in the community people might not be aware of. In terms of non-profits, frankly, what's often not new is the general issue they're addressing. For example, the fact that heart health is important isn't news. A new program being offered to help people keep their heart health is news. A trend from a new study showing people in Montana are fatter than the average bear, putting their hearts at risk, would be news.

What sort of things does your publication offer for nonprofits to deliver their message?

We have access to the paper for briefs and stories. We also have a special sections department, which is part of our advertising department. They put out various publications during the year that feature the resources available in the community. The content in some of these sections is paid for, but there are a number of publications that broadly address what's in the community, and there is no charge to be included. I'd suggest contacting the advertising department about what's available, letting them know the nature of your organization and what issues you address.

How does someone know the best person at your publication to contact for their organization & need?

Similarly, there are a number of sections in the paper. A good start to identify a contact is to figure out which section of the paper your news would fit. A basketball camp sponsored by a non-profit would probably go to sports. A concert sponsored by the same organization would go to our arts and entertainment section Your Time, etc. The editorial page editor deals with everything on the editorial page – letters, columns, etc. The city page and the city page editor is sort of the catch-all if you're uncertain. Each section front in the paper has the name of the editor along with his or her phone number and e-mail address. These editors are also the people you would want to pitch ideas for larger stories to.

What is the best and most convenient way to submit information to you?

E-mail is best. It's much easier to get into the paper because we can cut, paste and edit. Never send a PDF, even if it's via e-mail. We can't use it electronically, and we have to print it out to even keyboard the information. Don't send electronic or print "flyers." If you make the busy editor hunt for info on the page, you're less likely to get what you want. It's not that we won't use information in those formats or that we're being vindictive. We just need to get information in as quickly as we can, and we're more likely to miss something if we have to hunt and keyboard. Simply write something as close to what you think a news story would look like as possible. It works really well to put the information in a Word document and cut and paste it into the e-mail message as well for a fail safe. If you do use hard copy, never handwrite it and make sure that the copy is easily scannable. Basic Times serif fonts work fine. Don't be Mac happy. A bold, italic word underlined and followed by a field of exclamation points will not make the press release stand out. The same goes for faxes. If you send the paper a photo, expect in your heart never to see it again. People can get their photos back from us, and we're really very good about it. But the system is never perfect with so many people handling them. In this day and age, a jpeg electronic version or a photo quality copy of a hard copy photo works best.

What is the best piece of advice you would give to a person trying to be an advocate for their nonprofit?

In terms of the paper, I'd say to remember that we're really talking about people. If you have a new program and you can find a person it affects for us to talk to, not only are we more likely to write it, the reader is far, far more likely to read it. A compelling personal story can often far more eloquently tell the public what you do than any dozen press releases. Also, I'd say take responsibility for what you send to us. Try to make sure the information is there in understandable, non-jargon English. Follow up. People often send a fax—the newsroom gets scores of them a day—and apparently think all is well until the day before their event or a deadline for a section, and then they panic. Find out who you're sending the fax to and call or email them to let them know you've sent it. If you don't see anything in the paper in the amount of time you think you should, call the section editor as soon as you can.

To get news coverage of an upcoming event, how much advance notice should a nonprofit give a newspaper?

It depends on where you're hoping to place the item. Because sections are printed at various times during the week and deal with different amounts of submissions, they have different deadline requirements. Check with the section editor. The city page generally has a more flexible deadline.

Does your publication routinely honor "embargoed" stories? Can we get information to you ahead of time for a story we don't want publicized until a specific time or date?

It depends on the information. Things like studies and even decisions in hiring can often be embargoed. But if there's something that the community is aware of in some other ways, that makes it tougher. Say someone was tearing down a building and wanted to embargo what was going on. Or we hear through other sources that an agency is going to fold. We couldn't make you talk to us, but we could and would try to confirm what was going on through other sources. Embargoes make journalists jittery, just because we're afraid we're going to get beaten on a story. News is new, and if we have it second, it's not new. If you do embargo information, do it for all media sources. If you embargo information to one media source and give it to another, the loser in that situation is going to see you through a filter that looks like a burning bridge for a long time.

Are there advance deadlines for specific days/pages that we should include in this guide?

They sometimes change. I'd just recommend they find the section they want to deal with.

Recommended Resources: Advocacy for Nonprofits

The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations, available from the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, was written by Marcia Avner of the Minnesota Council for Nonprofits. The book provides some very practical approaches to influencing policy at the local, state, and national levels and includes help on creating a planning process. The most helpful section of the book is the Worksheets, which provide step-by-step guidance. To order the book, go to: http://www.wilder.org/pubs/lobbying_handbook/index.html

The Nonprofit Lobbying Guide, by Bob Smucker is available online (in Adobe PDF format) on the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest website. This is an essential resource for any nonprofit wanting to take on more of a role in lobbying. It includes background on the lobbying laws, on grassroots coalitions, and on using electronic media and other topics. The entire website is an excellent source of information. To access this guide go to: http://www.clpi.org/

The Nonprofit Lobbying Guide, Second Edition—the definitive guide to advocacy for nonprofits, is available on the IS website at: http://www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/lobbyguide.html

Playing by the Rules: Handbook on Voter Participation and Education Work for 501(c)(3) Organizations, by Caplin & Drysdale is also available on the IS website at: http://www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/Playing_by_the_Rules.pdf

The Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (CLPI) offers additional resources on their website at: http://www.clpi.org/

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