



# Strategic Communications and How it Can Help Advance Family- Strengthening Policy

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# Workshop Objectives

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- ✍ Focus on the value of Strategic Communications – and its role in changing public policy
- ✍ Increase understanding of *why* and *how* to work with the media
- ✍ Discuss the issues, challenges and opportunities facing us as we work to advocate for policies that support families and communities



# Communications

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- ✍ What is it?
- ✍ External vs. Internal
- ✍ Why Media counts More in the Policy World



# Strategic Communications

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- ✍ Intentional use of communications as a tool to effect change
- ✍ Particularly important to the world of policy advocacy – especially media relations
- ✍ Critical if you have limited resources
- ✍ Rooted in marketing principles – understanding your audience, using communication tactics in strategic manner



# Why Work with the Media?

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- ✍ Key tool in reaching elected officials
- ✍ It's part of our Reality
- ✍ AB 636 and Child Welfare Outcomes –  
It's *really* part of our Reality
- ✍ Either work with media by choice or  
through crisis
- ✍ More effective to be pro-active



# Positive Media Coverage Can:

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- ✍ Boost Agency's mission and morale
- ✍ Build support among influentials and get the attention of elected officials
- ✍ Help agency recruitment efforts
- ✍ Enhance public understanding of key policy issues
- ✍ Create a better system of care for children and families



# Negative Media Coverage Can:

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- ✍ Demoralize staff
- ✍ Cause havoc with elected officials
- ✍ Mean “early retirement” for top directors
- ✍ Trigger lawsuits and other legal actions
- ✍ Impede key reforms



# Negative Press Results From:

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- ✍ Child deaths
- ✍ Severe neglect and abuse
- ✍ Lawsuits
- ✍ Mismanagement or internal scandal
- ✍ *Antagonists who will not quit*



# Media Trends in Children, Youth and Families

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- ✍ Telling stories
- ✍ Civic journalism
- ✍ New access to information (and 24/7)
- ✍ It if bleeds, it leads vs. solutions
- ✍ McPaper: It's the frame, not the details
- ✍ Judging Amy



# Quick Tips

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- ✍ Personal contacts are key
- ✍ Good written materials with a dissemination plan
- ✍ Clear messages, repeated again and again
- ✍ Pro-active media outreach
- ✍ Written strategic plan with crisis management and rapid response capacity



# Types of Media Interaction

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- ✍ Proactive Media Outreach
- ✍ Crisis Communications



# Proactive Communications Activities

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## Positive News Coverage

- ✍ Develop a calendar of events on key issues
- ✍ Initiate and plan additional events and activities to expand news opportunities
- ✍ Coordinate and develop written materials
- ✍ Schedule news conferences and briefings when warranted
- ✍ Distribute news releases on significant developments by fax, mail or hand delivery



# Proactive Communications Activities

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## Feature Story Development

- ✍ Arrange personal stories and visits with families, social workers, policy experts and stakeholders
- ✍ Develop sidebar stories to national coverage of welfare reform, new adoption legislation and other local/state initiatives
- ✍ Facilitate stories on major developments in the state



# Proactive Communications Activities

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## Media Placements

- ✍ Write and place by-lined opinion articles or op-eds
- ✍ Coordinate timely, sharp and relevant letters to the editor
- ✍ Reach out to columnists with story ideas
- ✍ Schedule regular appearances on radio talk TV public affairs programs



# Proactive Communications Activities

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## Editorial Endorsements

- ✍ Editorial Board Meetings

- ✍ Dailies

- ✍ Weeklies

- ✍ Neighborhood

- ✍ Send follow-up mailings and faxes with clips, fact sheets and requests for supports



# Issues and Challenges coming from a Program-Driven World

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- ✍ Know your Audience! (Hint: it's not us)
- ✍ You can't say everything – keep it short!
- ✍ Key Messages
- ✍ Language matters!
  - ✍ Jargon, Acronyms
  - ✍ “Family Support” as a term
- ✍ Have an Ask
- ✍ Make it real! (site visits, personal stories)



# Must-Have's

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- ✍ Good written materials on your Agency (one page fact sheet)
- ✍ Marketing Mindset
  - ✍ What do you need your Audience to know and/or do?
  - ✍ Why should anyone care? What do you want me to do?
  - ✍ Would your Mother read this?
- ✍ Be proactive
- ✍ Build relationships



# Resources

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- ✍ Your Agency Public Information Officer (PIO) or County PIO
- ✍ CWDA Public Awareness and Education Committee: Kerri Aiello, Chair, (916) 874-4667 or [aiellok@saccounty.net](mailto:aiellok@saccounty.net)
- ✍ Family to Family Resources: [www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily/tools.htm](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily/tools.htm)
- ✍ Renée Wessels & Associates (916) 565-3882, [rwessels@renewessels.com](mailto:rwessels@renewessels.com)