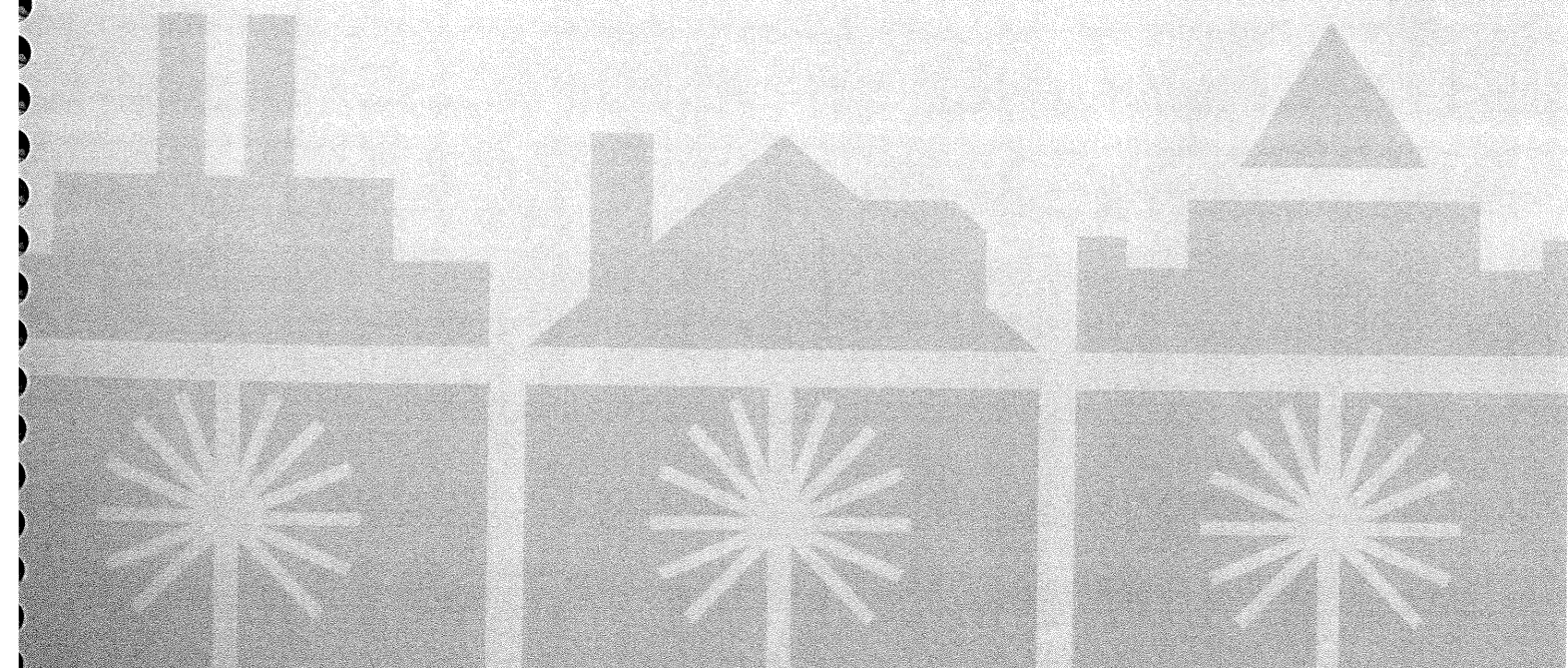


Module Nine

Communicating for Change



Communicating for Change

MODULE NINE INTRODUCES STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION as an important tool to move communities from talk to action by developing and sharing powerful messages with target audiences. Effective communication to diverse audiences helps raise visibility, build credibility, attract resources, and engage important constituencies in community change.

MORE PEOPLE ALWAYS NEED TO KNOW

Whatever issue you are addressing and whoever is involved, more people need to know about it and be engaged if the effort is to be sustained over the long term.

There can be a tendency to regard communications narrowly as a public affairs exercise that takes time and resources away from the crucial work of delivering urgently needed services. This view is short sighted. Community problems aren't solved in a vacuum or by an isolated group of citizens. For substantive change to occur, a lot of people in a community need to know about the issue, be involved, and most important, be motivated to act. This doesn't just happen. It takes deliberate effort and specific skills to sustain a conversation in the larger community about the issue(s) you are addressing.

Informing people about the problems you are trying to solve can involve a wide variety of activities from hosting a neighborhood potluck to holding a national news conference. Using traditional media, such as newspapers and television, is one strategy to raise awareness about your work. Although it is an important tool, media coverage is not an end in and of itself. Newspapers, radio, and television news programs are simply efficient ways to share your message with a lot of people.

There are countless other ways to raise awareness about your work—from bumper stickers to block parties to Web sites. Module Nine introduces the key skills of communicating for change, including developing a message for specific audiences and identifying effective ways to deliver your message to the folks you need “on board” to accomplish results.

THE WHAT AND SO WHAT? DEVELOPING A MESSAGE

The first step of communicating for change is developing your message: What do you do and why does it matter? This sounds easy but can be difficult. Ideally, you should be able to tell people the gist of your community work in a brief sentence or two. This is tough because community projects tend to be complex and work on a lot of fronts. Your message communicates to people the central idea of your work. Think about the corporate, community, and campaign slogans that people can easily recall and identify:

Nike: "Just do it"

National Crime Prevention Council: "Take a Bite Out of Crime"

— McGruff the Crime-fighting dog

Avis: "We Try Harder"

A message can be longer than these slogans. There is no "right answer" to developing a message. It depends on the type of initiative, the goals of your work, and the audience you are trying to reach. A good rule of thumb, however, is "less is more." You want to develop a message that sparks people's interest in your work—rather than attempting to give them comprehensive information about every aspect of your programs.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW?

Although you may want every person in the community to know about your work, it's very hard to identify any single way to reach everybody. A high school student, a retired insurance executive, a pastor, and a homemaker probably enjoy different social networks, watch different television shows, listen to different radio stations, and read different publications. Depending on their ages, their interests, and their habits, people are informed and entertained by an overwhelming array of sources. The challenge of a communications strategy is to prioritize whom to reach and how to reach them with limited resources and time. Making a message travel demands a lot of creativity and some specific skills. The strategies and activities introduced in Module Nine equip your group to make these crucial decisions.

WHEN AND WHY USE MAINSTREAM MEDIA?

There is no one-size-fits-all way to reach a wide range of people in your community and mainstream local media, such as the daily newspaper and television news programs, may or may not be the best way to go. For example, if you want to organize your neighborhood to start a Crime Watch program, a series of potluck dinners around the block may serve your communications needs better than a series of articles in the

local paper. The dinners would probably give neighbors a better chance to get acquainted and discuss ways of improving neighborhood safety than would coverage of the Crime Watch program in the newspaper.

However, if you want to persuade municipal officials to support the Crime Watch program throughout the region and connect it with community policing efforts, you probably would want to use local newspapers, radio stations, and television news programs to raise awareness about the issue. You can use the media to educate people throughout the region about the importance of this strategy to increase community safety. Mainstream media coverage reaches larger numbers of people, especially established leaders, than it is possible to engage through more informal networks. Media coverage can help you take your message to the specific audiences that need to know about what you are doing.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

The ultimate objective of developing a message and sharing it with targeted audiences is to engage the larger community in solutions to civic problems. Increasing the visibility of your work helps educate the community about the issue you are addressing, the challenges you are facing, and the results you are achieving. As you plan and implement strategies to inform people about what you are accomplishing, it is also important to let people know specific ways to become involved—for example, volunteering, contributing money or other resources, or supporting particular public policies.

Finally, don't be intimidated by the sometimes overwhelming array of communications options and "experts." You and your group are the real experts when it comes to communicating about civic solutions. You have important information to share and an intriguing story of change to tell.

Communicating for Change

INTRODUCTION

Community change doesn't occur in a vacuum or among an isolated group of citizens. For substantive change to occur, the whole community needs to know about it and be involved. This doesn't just happen. It takes deliberate effort and specific skills to sustain a conversation in the larger community about the issue(s) you are addressing. Module Nine provides a foundation for understanding the field of strategic communication. It presents three key strategies that are crucial to an understanding of communicating for change:

- ❶ Identifying your audience.
- ❷ Developing your message.
- ❸ Using a variety of methods and media to inform and engage people in your work.

Strategic communication and evaluation are related aspects of program development. In Modules Seven and Eight, we examined how evaluation is built into a program from the very beginning. Leaders should also think about how to communicate about their work from the early stages of program design and development. Communication is not an "add-on" to attract some extra publicity as time allows. To involve the larger community in their efforts, leaders learn to develop powerful messages and share them with specific audiences on an ongoing basis. Module Nine introduces strategic communication as an important tool to move communities to action by developing and sharing critical messages with diverse audiences.

OBJECTIVES

- ❶ To understand the reasons to communicate with the larger community about your work.
- ❷ To learn how to develop an effective message about a community program.
- ❸ To identify ways to reach different audiences with your message.

Materials and Equipment

Flip chart

Markers in different colors, masking tape

Name tags

8½" x 11" sheets of cardstock

Participant Handouts (see below)

Participant Handouts

Introduction to Module Nine

Tips for Framing Effective Messages

Audiences for Community Solutions

Catch-all Communication List

One Size Doesn't Fit All

Attracting Media Attention: A Guide

Reasons to Communicate

Tips for Gaining Media Attention

Major Media Outlets

How to Put Out a News Release

How to Use Community Calendars and Public Service Announcements

How to Hold a News Conference

How to Stage an Event

Communicating for Change

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ❶ Why does our group need to communicate about its work to the larger community?
- ❷ How do we inform others about the importance of this work?
- ❸ How do we communicate our message to different audiences?

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

Joanne Edgar, *Using Strategic Communication to Support Families* (Baltimore, MD: A report in a series from the Technical Assistance Resource Center of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001). Telephone: 410-547-6600. Web site: www.aecf.org

This publication is an excellent resource about strategic communication planning. While the report includes specific suggestions for programs supporting families and children, it offers information that all broad-based community initiatives would find helpful.

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Jason Salzman, *Making the News: A Guide for Nonprofits and Activists* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

The book is a superb, accessible, and witty guide to attracting media attention to social change efforts.

...

Jeanette Smith, *The Publicity Kit* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1991).

This resource is a readable primer for nonprofit organizations and small businesses seeking nuts-and-bolts advice and low-cost media relations strategies.

SUGGESTED ROOM ARRANGEMENT(S)

Begin the session with chairs in a circle or U-shape, so that all participants can see each other as well as the facilitator and the area where visuals will be displayed. The room needs to be large enough for participants to separate into several small groups and work at tables throughout most of the day. The session concludes with participants returning to the U-shaped seating arrangement.

Session Script

SESSION OVERVIEW

Introduction	10 Minutes
Ice-Breaker	30 Minutes
Reasons to Communicate	35 Minutes
Break	15 Minutes
Message Development	60 Minutes
Lunch	60 Minutes
Ways to Reach Different Audiences	70 Minutes
Break	15 Minutes
Working with the Media	45 Minutes
Evaluation and Closure	20 Minutes
Total Time	6 Hours

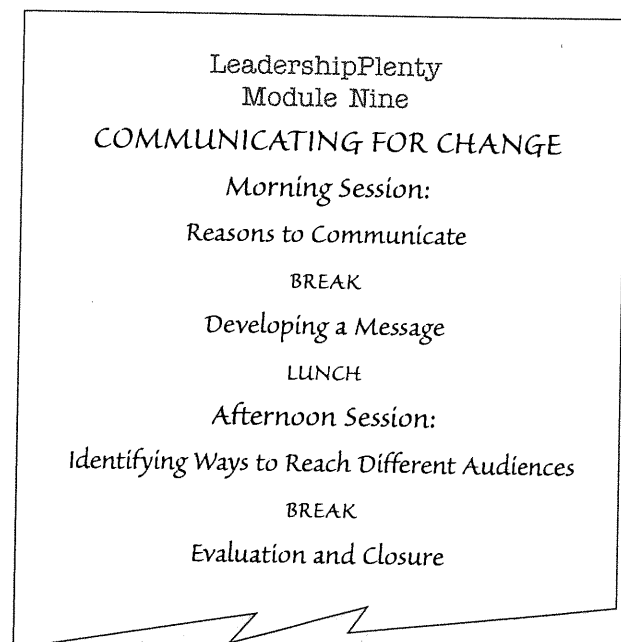
Introduction 10 Minutes

Begin the session by discussing what the session is designed to accomplish by explaining how the major blocks of time will be spent.

Highlight objectives to be addressed during today's session.

ACTIVITY: ON CAMERA! (Approximately 30 Minutes)

A flip chart can display the major topics to be covered during the sessions:



ON THE FLIP CHART

Transition

Explain that the following activity will give the group a chance to get to know each other better. Communicating is about not being boring. To interest total strangers in your work, you need to be—well—interesting! Here's a chance for folks to introduce themselves in a fun and creative way.

Ice-Breaker
30 Minutes

This fun game stimulates participants' thinking about how to engage people's attention.

The purpose of this ice-breaker is to encourage participants to interact with each other and to introduce communication planning as a creative and fun activity.

Materials needed: Blank 8½" x 11" sheets of cardstock and markers for each participant.

Give everyone a card and marker. Ask participants to think of their lives as a movie or television show. Then ask them to write the name of a movie or television show on the card with a brief descriptive phrase that relates their experience to the movie. (10 Minutes)

Examples:

Legally Blond
I am smarter than I look.

A James Bond movie
I don't have the adventure—
but I have the gadgets.

Survivor/Gladiator
I want to win, whatever it takes.

When they've completed the task, have participants hold up their signs and introduce themselves one by one. If they don't already know each other well, ask them to give a little more detail to explain their signs. (10 Minutes)

Variation: Sort participants into small teams of three to six according to their community group affiliation. Give each team a blank sheet of cardstock and ask it to develop a movie title and subtitle that would describe its affiliation. When the group comes back together, have teams share their selections and give a little more detail to explain their signs. (10 Minutes)

DEBRIEFING (10 Minutes)

Ask participants to discuss how to communicate the identity of a person or a group in a few words. What grabbed their attention? Humor? Surprise? Drama?

Transition

You can introduce this morning's session by asking participants to think about how they learned about the *LeadershipPlenty* opportunity. Did a friend mention it to them? Did they see a flyer announcing the program posted in a church or school? Did they hear information about the program on a public service announcement of the radio or television? They are here today because a community group developed a message and shared it with a target audience—people who might be interested in the *LeadershipPlenty* program.

**Reasons to
Communicate**
35 Minutes

Begin the session by discussing why leaders need to communicate with a wide range of people about their work.

INTRODUCTION (10 Minutes)

Community change doesn't occur in a vacuum or among an isolated group of citizens. For substantive change to occur, many people in a community need to know about it and be involved. This doesn't just happen. It takes deliberate effort and specific skills to sustain a conversation in the larger community about the issue(s) you are addressing. Another term for this process of sustaining a community conversation is strategic communication.

Strategic communication and evaluation are related aspects of program development. In Modules Seven and Eight, we examined how evaluation is built into a program from the very beginning. Evaluation is not an add-on at the end to say that the effort worked or didn't work. Instead it is a tool to examine continually what you are doing to improve your program.

Leaders should also think about how to communicate about their work from the early stages of program design and development. Communication is not an "add-on" to attract some extra publicity as time allows. To involve the larger community in their efforts, leaders learn to develop powerful messages and share them with specific audiences. Module Nine introduces strategic communication as an important tool to move communities from talk to action by developing and sharing critical messages with diverse audiences.

People do not support initiatives that they've never heard of! Any group's potential is limited until it communicates the importance of its work to others. Increasing the visibility of your work is also crucial to developing and sustaining goals of the program, such as recruiting volunteers, informing people about the issue, or attracting financial resources.

ACTIVITY: GROUP DISCUSSION (15 Minutes)

Materials needed: Flip chart paper, markers.

The purpose of this activity is to encourage participants to think about why an organization should communicate about its work. By brainstorming about the reasons to communicate, participants can gain greater understanding that coverage in the media is not an end in itself—but a tool to accomplish the larger goals that the group has established.

Lead a discussion about why community groups and organizations should communicate about their work. Ask participants to give examples of how an organization accomplished its goals through communication activities. Here are some reasons to stimulate or add to the list the group creates:

Reasons to communicate

- To get attention
- To create a buzz
- To inform
- To inspire
- To build trust
- To organize
- To connect
- To change public perception
- To build a movement
- To counter apathy or opposition
- To change policy
- To disseminate information
- To build bridges
- To sustain reform
- To uncover neighborhood strengths
- To increase visibility of community leaders

Adapted from Joanne Edgar, *Using Strategic Communication to Support Families* (Baltimore, MD: A report in a series from the Technical Assistance Resource Center of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001).

DEBRIEFING (10 Minutes)

Groups inform the larger community about their work for many different reasons. Getting publicity or news coverage of your group's work is not an end in itself. Using the media is a way to share your message with different audiences that you couldn't reach on your own.

Break

(15 Minutes)

Transition

Just as we saw that there are a lot of reasons to communicate about our work, there are many different audiences with whom we need to communicate. Now we're going to examine how to develop powerful messages to reach different audiences.

**Message
Development**
60 Minutes

In this session participants practice techniques to develop powerful messages.

This session gives tips on how to develop powerful messages for different audiences in the community. Creating a message and identifying ways to spread the word about your group's work are crucial steps in strategic communication. First, we will discuss guidelines that apply to creating effective messages for a wide range of audiences.

Suggested content (15 Minutes)

The key to successful communication is developing a clear message about your program.

Distribute Handout #1, *Seven Tips for Framing Effective Messages*.

The heart and soul of effective communication with any audience is a simple, straightforward statement about what you are doing and why it matters. (Refer to specific examples from the "At the Movies" ice-breaker to illustrate this point.)

Write the following *Seven Tips for Framing Effective Messages* on a flip chart.

**SEVEN TIPS FOR FRAMING
EFFECTIVE MESSAGES**

Clear, concise, free of jargon

Stories about people

Truthful

Identify specific audience

Local

Visually interesting

Include logos, Web addresses,
phone numbers, etc.

ON THE FLIP CHART

Source: Jason Salzman and Paul Klite, media consultants. (Adapted from *Using Strategic Communications to Support Families*.)

Participants develop messages to attract the attention of specific audiences.

Ask participants for examples of how each of these factors can help create an effective message. Examples could include advertising campaigns for specific products, public information programs (such as to stop smoking, wear seat belts, etc.), or other community issues. Here are some ideas if people have difficulty generating examples:

- ❶ Clear, concise, free of jargon: "Just Do It" —Nike.
- ❷ Stories about people—Person whose life is saved when a stranger donates a kidney.
- ❸ Truthful—don't exaggerate. Mentoring is not a cure-all for helping disadvantaged young people. However, recent research demonstrates that young people with a mentor are less likely to start using drugs and less likely to skip school than their peers who do not have one.
- ❹ Identify and target specific audience—Campaigns to discourage youth smoking use images, celebrities, music, etc. that will appeal to a young audience.
- ❺ Local—(give example of something in your community).
- ❻ Visually interesting—photos of speakers at lecterns are *not* visually interesting! Children, animals, banners, signs, and artwork are visually interesting.
- ❼ Include logos, Web addresses, phone numbers, etc. to inform people how they can contact you.

ACTIVITY: DEVELOPING A MESSAGE

The purpose of this activity is to introduce participants to the need to develop different messages for different audiences. (35 Minutes)

Materials: Handout #2, *Knowing Your Audience*, flip chart paper, markers.

Divide participants into groups of two to three people depending on the size of the larger group. The facilitator should briefly review an issue of importance that the group examined in Modules Seven and Eight or use the afterschool example. Any issue that affects a large number of people in a community will work for this activity.

Tip: Questions are written on the handout, but you also might want to summarize them on a flip chart in front of the room.

- ❶ What aspect of this issue affects this person? Why should he or she be interested in addressing it?
- ❷ What do you want this person to do when he or she hears your message (volunteer, enroll children in the program, raise money for the program, etc.)?
- ❸ Write two or three sentences to tell this person and the audience he or she represents about your group's actions to address this issue in an interesting way.

DEBRIEFING (10 Minutes)

Reconvene participants in the larger group. Have each team report out its message for each individual on this list. Summarize the messages on a flip chart.

Variation: To make sure that all groups can participate in the debriefing, you might go around the room and ask each group to give its message for *one* individual on the list, until all groups have had an opportunity to participate.

Suggested probes

- ❶ What is a powerful message for a potential volunteer?
- ❷ What is a powerful message for a parent?
- ❸ What is a powerful message for an established community leader or potential funder of the program?

Lunch

(1 Hour)

Transition

In the last activity, we developed different messages for different audiences. Now we're going to examine the many ways there are to deliver those messages.

Identifying Ways to Communicate Your Message

70 Minutes

This session demonstrates the diversity and range of communications vehicles for different audiences.

Suggested content (10 Minutes)

It is usually necessary to use many different conduits to deliver your message to diverse audiences. There is no one-size-fits-all way of informing an entire community about your work. Communication strategies include the mainstream media, such as the daily newspaper and television news programs. There are also countless ways to communicate your message that don't involve mainstream media. A neighborhood picnic, a poster, and an e-mail alert can all be ways of spreading your message.

ACTIVITY: ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

The purpose of this activity is to stimulate participants' thinking about the variety of ways to reach different types of people in the community with their message. (45 Minutes)

Materials needed: Handout #3, *Catch-All Communication List*; Handout #4, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*; flip chart paper; and markers for each group.

Ask participants to return to the same small groups from the previous activity, *Knowing Your Audience*. Explain that you will now explore ways to communicate with the diverse

audiences that you developed messages for in the previous session. Distribute Handout #3, *Catch-All Communication List* and Handout #4, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*. Have one person in each group read the handouts aloud. Then have participants discuss the following questions and summarize their answers on the flip chart:

- ❶ What is the best way to reach this person with information about the program?
- ❷ What does this person see/read? (Newspapers, billboards, bus advertisements, newsletters, posters, fliers, Web sites)
- ❸ What does this person listen to? (Radio stations, TV programs, sermons, workshops, etc.)
- ❹ With whom does this person regularly communicate? (Coworkers, supervisors, clergy, neighbors, social workers, physicians, teachers, friends, family)

DEBRIEFING (15 Minutes)

Reconvene the participants in the larger group. Using Handout #12, ask the group to apply these strategies to a critical issue in the community.

Suggested probes to facilitate the discussion

- ❶ What individuals do you think it could be hardest to communicate with about the program? Why?
- ❷ What are ways to reach hard-to-reach people with information about the program?
- ❸ What are ways to share your message with established community leaders, such as elected officials and business and nonprofit executives?

Break

(15 Minutes)

Transition

We've spent the day so far looking at how to develop a message and identify ways to reach diverse audiences in the community. Now we're going to examine some specific tools to communicate using mainstream media, such as daily newspapers and television news programs.

Working with the Media

45 Minutes

This session focuses on specific techniques to communicate effectively with the media.

Introduce the idea that community groups can bring the media in as an active participant in their organization's communications plan. (10 Minutes)

Suggested content

Think of the media as a potential partner with whom you can build a relationship. You need them and they need you. It is the job of reporters and editors to identify and cover interesting stories about people and events in the community.

This session gives tips on how to build working relationships with the media. Media coverage of community programs usually doesn't just happen. Increasing the visibility of your organization demands a sustained effort to develop ongoing relationships with the media and keep them informed. It involves being constantly aware of communications opportunities and providing up-to-date and accurate information about your program and its results. Building relationships with the media is important for all community projects—both new initiatives and established organizations.

ACTIVITY: GROUP DISCUSSION (25 Minutes)

Read the following four principles for building good relationships with the media to the group.

Four principles for good media relations

- ❶ Honesty
- ❷ Deadlines
- ❸ Accessibility
- ❹ Accuracy

As you read the principles to the group, ask participants to phrase a tip that would apply to each. You can use examples below if people get stuck. Write the tips on the flip chart as the group suggests them.

Four tips for good media relations

- ❶ Honesty – Be truthful and to the point. Don't exaggerate or mislead.
- ❷ Deadlines – Get reporters information when they need it. Don't procrastinate.
- ❸ Accessibility – Return reporters' calls promptly. Be available.
- ❹ Accuracy – Do your homework. Be prepared. Admit when you don't know the answer.

Tip: Chapter Eleven, "Become a Master Interviewee," and Chapter Twelve, "Call a Reporter After You've Sent a News Release," in Jason Salzman's book, *Making the News*, provide practical advice to help you put these tips into action when talking to reporters.

SUMMARIZE (10 Minutes)

There are certain tools of the trade that you can use to communicate effectively with the media. Although there isn't time to examine all of these tools in today's session, you can distribute *Attracting Media Attention: A Guide* to all participants and encourage them to use it as a resource in their continuing strategic communication efforts.

Topics addressed in the guide include:

- ➊ Identifying major media outlets
- ➋ Writing a news release
- ➌ Using community calendars and public service announcements
- ➍ Holding a news conference
- ➎ Staging an event

Evaluation and Closure

20 Minutes

Review why strategic communication is an important skill for leaders.

Review the objectives:

To understand the reasons to communicate with the larger community about your work.

To learn how to develop a message about a community program.

To identify ways to reach different audiences with your message.

ON THE FLIP CHART

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ➊ Why does our group need to communicate about its work to the larger community?
- ➋ How do we inform others about the importance of this work?
- ➌ How do we communicate our message to different audiences?

Close with a discussion of how communication skill-building pervades all aspects of community leadership by reviewing previous modules.

- Modules One and Three examine reflection and listening as disciplines of leadership and explore issues of cross-cultural communication.
- Through the asset approach to community development, Module Two introduces a new language of leadership that emphasizes strengths rather than weaknesses.
- Modules Four and Five equip group members to manage meetings and resolve conflict so that substantive dialogue can occur.
- Modules Six through Eight look at the role of communication in specific areas of program development—partnership, strategic planning, and evaluation.
- Today's activities in Module Nine cover the importance of developing and sharing powerful messages with different audiences to make real change in the community.

Note: If you choose, have participants complete a session evaluation form before they leave. (5 Minutes)