PUBLICITY AND EVENTS

Events that result in publicity via newspaper, television, and radio inform the public about ROR and help build community awareness of the importance of early literacy. Careful event planning will yield great results for your program—helping you to establish important local connections and generating the kind of support you will need to keep the program running smoothly. Publicity for the ROR program will benefit your hospital or health center, generating institutional goodwill. It is also an excellent way to attract volunteers. You can make a publicity “event” out of a generous donation—a Scout book drive, or an individual child who is bringing in books collected at a Bar Mitzvah—or you can approach a reporter who has written about a related issue and propose a story on your Reach Out and Read program, what it does and how it’s doing.

If your hospital or health center has a public relations department, they will already have valuable contacts, as well as established procedures that can guide you as you plan your event. A good working relationship with your hospital public affairs office will be invaluable as you promote your ROR program.

Seven Steps to Maximize Your Publicity Efforts

STEP ONE: Compile a Media List

A media list is an index of newspapers, radio stations, television stations, and key newsletters in a particular area. Make sure you include all local television affiliates (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, etc.), local television and community cable news shows, daily and weekly newspapers, news-format radio stations and affiliates of National Public Radio.

The list should contain names of contact people, their titles, addresses, phone and fax numbers and email address. This information can be obtained from your hospital public relations office, local telephone book, media guides available at your library, or the media lists of some of your local partners.

Remember to identify reporters from various areas who may be interested in learning about ROR: health, education, parenting, human interest, as well as those who report for “lifestyle” sections. You should also include information on television and radio talk shows. As reporters tend to change positions frequently, follow-up telephone calls to confirm names and titles are often a good idea. You may also want to include the newsletters of prominent business or civic organizations on your list.

STEP TWO: Establish Relationships with Local Media

Your first step in getting to know your local media should be to become familiar with the work of reporters for the various outlets. With a better understanding of a journalist’s format and interests, you will be prepared to offer appropriate story suggestions.
Remember, your goal is to help make reporters’ jobs easier by supplying them with useful information that they would otherwise have to research.

STEP THREE: Prepare Press Materials—there are a variety of press materials that you should become familiar with:

Media Alert/Advisory: An advisory alerts the media to an upcoming event. It outlines in a simple, factual, straightforward and informative manner, the who, what, where, when and why of your event on one page for quick reference by reporters. Its purpose is to offer an abbreviated version of the press release.

A media alert should be sent on your organization’s letterhead, and include names and phone numbers of contact people. (See sample media alert at the end of this chapter and at myror.org.)

Press Release: If your story is not event related, a press release is preferable to an advisory. A press release announces something that is happening or has happened recently. Even if you send out an advisory before an event, you should also distribute a press release to reporters on your media list at the time of the event. (See sample press release for start-up announcement at the end of this chapter and at myror.org)

A press release includes a “lead” that outlines the who, what, when, and where of the program. It also includes background information about the program, and the specific event for which you want press attention, as well as quotations from those involved. A press release should end with a consistent “boilerplate” paragraph about ROR. (See the Branding Section or myror.org for suggested boilerplate.)

Photo News Release: Even if a reporter is unable to attend your event, it is possible to get newspaper coverage through the use of a photo news release. This is especially true for community newspapers. Make sure the photo has a headline above it and a caption below. Photo news releases should be distributed in a timely fashion, as soon as possible after an event. Make sure you get signed photo releases from anyone included in the photo.

Pitch Letters: You may want to accompany your news release with a pitch letter. This is a cover letter to the editor or reporter and can be more informal than the news release. The main purpose of the letter is to catch the editor’s attention and explain why this is a newsworthy story.

Letter to the Editor: Writing a “Letter to the Editor” is another way to communicate what ROR is doing in your community. These letters are often written in response to an on-going issue in a community, such as illiteracy or the correlation between reading at an early age and school success. A letter to the editor may also respond to a news story or editorial. In that case, it is crucial that the response is written in a timely fashion.
Interview Alert: If there are members of your ROR community—physicians, volunteers or families—who might be compelling talk-show interviews, consider sending an interview alert to local radio and television stations. This alert would contain a brief description of your subjects and the discussion points that might be used in programming.

STEP FOUR: Prepare Supporting Materials—Backgrounders, Talking Points, and Press Kits

Backgrounders—or fact sheets—are effective ways to inform reporters about Reach Out and Read and your program’s impact on the local community. You can add information about your local program—number of children served, partners and supporters, and other pertinent facts—to the Reach Out and Read National Center’s background sheet. (Please note that this fact sheet can be downloaded from the “About Us” section of the ROR website, and is revised periodically.)

Talking points are helpful pieces of information for you to prepare prior to speaking with reporters about Reach Out and Read. They may include an explanation of the need for the ROR intervention, an description of the program model, and a summary of the research that supports the model. (See sample of Talking Points at the end of the chapter.)

Press Kits: A press kit is a folder that usually contains a press release, a backgrounder, your contact information, and any other pertinent information on Reach Out and Read and your local program. It is always a good idea to have them available to hand out to members of the press who attend your event.

STEP FIVE: Contact the Media

After you have mailed or faxed your media advisory or news release, it is crucial that you follow up with a telephone call. Here are a few suggestions to make that contact go smoothly:

- Prepare yourself for a phone conversation by jotting down a few key points about your story and why their audience might be interested.
- Ask if the reporter is “on deadline.” If so, make arrangements to call back at a more convenient time.
- Check to make sure the reporter has received your release, and see if you can provide additional information.
- If you are familiar with stories this reporter has covered before, try to relate them to this story—make it clear you understand this reporter’s “beat” and expertise (everyone likes to be recognized!).
- Try to get a commitment from the reporter to attend the event.
- Whether you are speaking to a print or television reporter, describe the photo
opportunity that will be available.

- Engage the reporter in a conversation about your program. Even if he is unable to report on it now, he may want to use you as a resource in the future.

STEP SIX: Prepare for the Interview

If a newspaper or television station decides to send a reporter for an interview in conjunction with your event, you should be prepared.

- Have a designated spokesperson who will serve as the official voice for Reach Out and Read. Make certain that person is knowledgeable about the program and is comfortable speaking with the media.

- If your program operates within a hospital or health center, make sure you have identified the appropriate spokesperson for your institution, and that that person is familiar with Reach Out and Read.

- Reporters may also be interested in speaking with community volunteers, parents and children. Identify these people in advance of your event and make certain to work through your hospital PR office to ensure that you comply with current privacy procedures.

- An interview is a good opportunity to ask for what you want from the community: books, volunteers, friends and partners. Consider asking the media to include your phone number so that people can contact your program.

STEP SEVEN: Follow Up

A simple thank-you note is always appreciated, and is another opportunity for contact with the reporter. Make sure you monitor the media for coverage so that you can begin to build a press file.

Organizing a Successful Media Event

As discussed above, media events are bigger, media-focused events that publicly acknowledge a Member of Congress, state legislator, foundation or corporation, or publicize a day of celebration for your ROR program. Regardless of the size or scope of your media event, the goal is to help media representatives get their story and to make sure that those stories reflect well on your program. Here are a few tips to help streamline and organize your event:

Location: Select a “successful” ROR site with a strong medical champion (if you have the option of choosing where the event takes place—if you don’t, then you have to make the designated site look good!).

Contact ROR National Center: We can help you plan a successful media event, particu-
larly if you are hosting your legislators.

Plan It Through in Detail: Be sure that key staff at the host institution know what you are doing: seek their advice, guidance and assistance. Also, the person organizing the event should stay in touch with the legislator’s or funder’s staff to be sure that the details of the event are consistent with their wishes, and available time. Be sure to find an articulate doctor that can explain the ROR model in greater detail.

Planning the Event: Again, it is important for the person organizing the event to stay in touch with the legislator’s or funder’s staff, so that the event can be tailored to their preferences and strengths. Remember that the goal of such an event is to cultivate this person as a supporter of ROR, so you want to leave with positive memories of an event that allowed this individual to shine. Select key elements of such an event by answering some of the following questions:

- Is the elected official or funder going to tour just the Reach Out and Read site or the entire facility?
- Will there be a chance to sit down and read to the children?
- Will there be a reception before or after the reading/tour?
- Do you want to have time for formal speeches or just informal discussions?
- Will you be giving an award to the legislator for supporting Reach Out and Read?

Invite Media: Invite local newspapers, magazines, television, cable and radio reporters and photographers. Add state/local specific information to press kits and also contact state press offices.

Bring in Kids: A great media opportunity during an event like this is a picture/broadcast of the legislator/funder reading aloud to a group of children. The clinic may not have many well-child visits scheduled for the day of the event, so call a local Head Start or preschool to see if they would be willing to participate. Offer to serve the children a healthy snack if the event is near lunchtime, and plan on giving the children free books at the end of the visit—or have the legislator/funder pass out books to the kids. If photos will be taken of the children, the organizer must have parents sign a “photo-release” form so that those photos can be used.

Walk-Through: Do a “walk-through” no more than a week before the visit:

- Figure out the physical location of everything. Where will you (or a designated greeter) greet the legislator? How will you all get from reading in the waiting room to touring the rest of the clinic? After the tour, will there be time for a one-on-one meeting? If so, where will this take place?
- Take a look around. Make sure:
– Plenty of books are visible to someone walking by in the waiting room.
– ROR signage is prominent (ROR banner, posters, welcome sign, etc.) in the waiting room—and in exam room if possible.
– There are books in the exam room.

• If it is a part of the clinic’s regular ROR activities, make sure to bring experienced volunteers to read in the waiting room during the time of the visit.
• Get the staff on board—you want everyone who works in the clinic to understand the importance of this event to the Reach Out and Read program; you want them to be prepared to say a good word for the program, to a reporter or to the special guest, and to thank people for their interest and support.

Event Management

• Expect last-minute crises and opportunities—on the day of the event, your Public Relations Team should show up early and be prepared for anything.
• During the event itself, one person needs to be the main point person. The person should be involved with the organizing of the event from start to finish.
• Assign a person to take photographs of the event (or hire a freelance photographer). Include any good visuals which come your way: a ceremony, volunteers reading, ROR staff, government officials, and of course, children (again, be sure to get releases signed).
• Assign a person to greet the media representatives who show up to cover the event. This individual should wear a name tag: “Press Coordinator.”
• If several media representatives are expected to attend, set up a well-marked Media Sign-In table so you know which editors and reporters attended the event.
• Have prepared media kits available that day. Kits should include: the news release, ROR fact sheet, copy of the most important coverage to date (contact ROR National Center for national press coverage), staff and speaker biographies, and the contact person’s business card.
• Assist the attending editors and reporters in arranging interviews with children, parents, doctors, ROR spokespersons, community volunteers, legislators, funders, etc.
Follow-Up

- Give the legislator or funder an information packet about your site and ROR in general.
- Send a thank-you note to the legislator or funder.
- Stay in touch with the legislator or funder and his/her staff by updating them on your successes.
- Write to the editors, reporters, and photographers who covered the event. Thank them for attending and taking the time to speak with ROR staff, children, parents, etc. Emphasize this is an on-going story and you hope they will return.
- Maintain a file of media contacts. Stay in touch with reporters who have written about the program, and update them as your program changes or expands.
- Keep track of your publicity efforts by creating a media library. This information will help you document the success of your ROR program and can be added to your media kit. It can also be used to publicize the program to other publications and foundations.

Organizing a Successful Site Tour

If you want to cultivate a relationship with a legislator, legislative staff, potential private funder, or a media representative, invite them to tour your ROR program. The purpose of this kind of event, similar to a media event, is to allow the high-profile visitor to see ROR firsthand. However, this kind of event is much more low-key and more personal.

A typical site tour looks like this: The visitor is greeted by a ROR provider and/or the Executive Director/CEO of the health clinic or the Chair of the Department and then given a tour of the clinic. The tour’s purpose is to explain the program while showing them how ROR is implemented: the waiting room should make a strong pro-literacy statement, with posters, displays, and volunteer readers, and a doctor should begin the well-child exam with a book and give the parents anticipatory guidance.

The person organizing the site tour should do the following:

- Work with the ROR coordinator or ROR Medical Director to finalize the timeline/sequence of events and to determine the other people that will be involved in the site tour. Make sure that the clinic will be staffed with doctors doing well-child visits that day, and choose the appointment you will have the funder listen in on (you need the parent’s permission). Make sure the coordinator has scheduled volunteer readers in the waiting room if that is part of your ROR programming.
• Be in touch with the person that is giving the tour of the ROR program. Go over the sequence of events and the importance of the funder’s visit. Create talking points, to ensure that all of the key points are made.

• Do a “walk-through” no more than a week before the visit. Figure out the physical location of everything: Where will you (or a designated greeter) greet the visitor? How will you get from the waiting room to the exam room? After the exam is over, where will you stand while you’re explaining the program in greater detail?

• Take a look around the waiting room. Make sure:
  – Plenty of books are visible to someone walking by in the waiting room.
  – ROR signage is prominent (ROR banner, posters, welcome sign, etc.) in the waiting room—and in the exam room if possible.
  – There are books in the exam room.

• Make sure there are well-child appointments scheduled for the day of the tour, and that the visitor has permission to attend one—and make sure that the doctor who will be doing that visit understands the significance of the guest, and is ready to speak on behalf of the Reach Out and Read program.

• It’s a good idea to have all the medical staff who will be present in the clinic area during the visit—doctors, nurses, medical assistants—fully briefed on why this is happening; it always helps if the visitor is thanked for supporting Reach Out and Read by several people, or if they want to offer comments on the importance of the program.

• Be sure to follow up immediately following the site tour with both the funder and the health center:
  – Thank the guests for coming and follow up on any further questions.
  – Thank the ROR coordinator/ROR Medical Director for all of their help.
  – Send a thank-you letter to the CEO or Executive Director.
Read and Romp- A Family Event to Benefit Reach Out and Read

WHEN:
Sunday, October 16, 2005, 11am to 2 pm

WHAT:
Read and Romp is a unique family event which allows children to grab a passport and travel through the pages of some of their favorite storybooks. Activity booths, games, and arts and crafts are based on childhood favorites like Where the Wild Things Are, Harry Potter, and Chicka Chicka Boom Boom. There will be hours of fun as each child has a chance to hold live baby bunnies (Pat the Bunny), have his/her face painted (Olivia Saves the Circus), and decorate cookies (If You Give a Mouse a Cookie).

Along with interactive storybook stations, there will be a buffet lunch, a visit from storybook characters like Clifford, the Big Red Dog, and a children’s musical performance by the popular children’s entertainer SteveSongs.

Reach Out and Read, a national non-profit organization, partners with doctors to bring books and advice about the importance of reading into the lives of families living in poverty. At each well-child visit from 6 months to 5 years of age children receive a new book to take home and keep. Founded in Boston in 1989, Reach Out and Read has more than (insert # of programs in your area) at hospitals, health centers and pediatric practices throughout (insert state). For more information please go to: www.reachoutandread.org

WHERE:
Location of event

WHY:
Read and Romp is an annual fundraiser for Reach Out and Read (insert program). Tickets are (insert price). For more information please call (insert phone #).

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY:
(insert number) of (insert city) children and families enjoying fun storybook activities

MEDIA CONTACT:
ROR Coordinator
Reach Out and Read
Phone
Email
For Immediate Release
Reach Out and Read Program is Introduced at Your Clinic Name
City, State, Date

Getting books from the doctor will soon be a routine part of well-child visits at your clinic name, as doctors and nurses welcome the Reach Out and Read program to the practice. Your clinic joins more than 2,950 programs nationally that are working to make books part of a healthy childhood.

Reach Out and Read is a simple, yet highly effective concept. The program targets children growing up in poverty and without books and features three key elements:

- Volunteers read with children in pediatric clinic waiting areas.
- Pediatricians educate parents about the importance of reading with their children every day.
- Every child from the age of six months to five years receives a new book to take home and keep when they come in for a well-child check-up.

"Giving a book to a young child, along with age-appropriate advice about sharing books for the parents, may be the only concrete activity a pediatrician can routinely do to promote child development," commented Barry S. Zuckerman, MD, ROR co-founder, and Chief of Pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine.

Medical research supports that claim, showing that literacy-promoting interventions by the pediatrician have a significant effect on parental behaviors, beliefs and attitudes toward reading aloud. For more than a decade, studies have indicated that parents who get books and literacy counseling from their doctors and nurses are more likely to read to their young children, read to them more often, and provide more books in the home. In addition, several studies have also shown improvements in the language scores of young children receiving Reach Out and Read.

Quote from your program’s ROR Medical Director.

For more information about Reach Out and Read at _______ or if you would like to donate funds or volunteer as a reader, please contact ____________________.

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About Reach Out and Read

Reach Out and Read is a national, non-profit program that is working to make literacy promotion a standard part of pediatric primary care, so that children grow up with books and a love of reading. ROR trains doctors and nurses about the importance of reading aloud and to give books to children at pediatric check-ups from six months to five years of age, with a special focus on children growing up in poverty. This year Reach Out and Read will provide more than 4.1 million books to more than 2.5 million children, at over 2,950 programs throughout the country.
ROR Talking Points

(Please check ROR website for updated statistics.)

Literacy Facts:

- Almost one in four low-income children has less than 10 books of any kind in his or her home (High, Hopmann, et al, 1999).
- A typical middle-class child enters first grade with approximately 1,000 hours of being read to, while the corresponding child from a low-income family averages just 25 hours (Newman, 1997).
- The only behavior that correlates significantly with reading scores is the number of books in the home (McQuillan, 1998).

An Evidence-Based Intervention

Medical evidence shows ROR improves children's home literacy environments and developmental outcomes. Peer-reviewed medical literature indicates that when families participate in ROR:

- Parents have more positive attitudes toward books and reading.
- Parents read to their children more often.
- Children show significant improvement in expressive and receptive language.

The role of the ROR medical provider:

- Medical providers tend to have repeated and consistent contact with families.
- Medical providers are responsible for assessing child development and offering parents guidance about developmental milestones.
  - The book serves as an assessment tool for child development (e.g., language and motor skills) and parent-child interactions (e.g., emotional attunement).
  - The book offers providers an avenue to broach developmental topics, and parents a tool to promote their children's development.
- Medical providers are trusted by parents.
- Medical providers may be parents only source of expert information.

ROR's impact nationally:

- Reach Out and Read is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Reach Out and Read is affiliated with the Department of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center, Boston University School of Medicine.
- (Please always see ROR website: www.reachoutandread.org for updated statistics.)