

The Muslim Project Media Relations Training Workshop

Sponsored by: Centre for Faith and the Media,
and Canadian Heritage, Multiculturalism for “The Muslim Project”

Why the Muslim Project?
How is this workshop different?

Types of News

“Hard News” – events which have just taken place in the past 24 hour news cycle

Soft News – events older than the last 24 hours, have already been covered as hard news, follow-up pieces, or features

Op/Ed – Opinions and Editorial – copy written by editors, columnists, guest columnists, letters to the editor

Types of Approaches by Communities to the Media

Proactive – When the community approaches the media

Reactive – When the community is approached by the media

To address issues of stereotyping, misrepresentation, and “Islamophobia” in news coverage of Islam, all three types of news must be addressed, using both approaches.


(*Note: When this project was first started, Multiculturalism was a part of Canadian Heritage. Now it is part of Citizenship, Immigration and Canadian Identity).

Type of Approach	Proactive	Reactive
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For type of News		
<p>Hard News</p>	<p>Press releases sent to the media for community events, or community response to other hard news events</p> <p>Press Conferences</p> <p>Media event</p> <p>Release with statements from the community</p> <p>Anticipate future hard news stories, and provide media with appropriate spokespersons in advance. I.e. – headscarf issues, sharia law issues</p>	<p>Letters to the editor to respond to hard news coverage</p> <p>Guest columns to respond to hard news coverage</p> <p>Interviews – with journalists for print or broadcast</p>
<p>Soft News</p>	<p>Create a media strategy to provide journalists with profiles, feature story ideas, on a regular basis</p> <p>Develop a media kit</p>	<p>Letters to the editor to respond to soft news/features</p> <p>Guest columns to respond to soft news/features</p>
<p>Opinions/Editorials</p>	<p>Approach newspapers with guest columns on issues of concern to the community</p>	<p>Letters to the editor to respond to editorials or columns</p> <p>Guest Columns to respond to editorials or guest columns</p>

Media Issues Specific to the Muslim Communities

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1. Stereotypes due to linkage of Islam, and Muslims to terrorists and terrorism
 2. Stereotypes of how women are treated and viewed within Islam
 3. Women wearing hijabs and burkas – identifying the hijab and burka with political points of view
 4. Islamophobia – the fear that Muslims have an agenda to take over western democracies, their legal systems, their constitutional rights and freedoms, and replace them with Islamic models. Muslims regarded as having this goal are referred to as “Islamists.”

Questions:

1. Have you personally been stereotyped by someone in your classroom or place of work, or neighborhood, because you are a Muslim? What was that incident? How did it make you feel?

2. Have you or a Muslim woman you know ever been stereotyped because of wearing a hijab or burka?

3. Have you seen or read specific media stories which perpetuate these stereotypes? In which media?

Linking a Media Strategy to Opposing 3 Stereotypes

Linkage between Muslims and terrorism or terrorists

REACTIVE: Letters to the editor, plan a media event



PROACTIVE: Write a statement from the community in advance, engage other religious leaders in advance to speak on behalf of Islam, compile a list of Muslim spokespersons and organizations which consistently speak out against terrorist acts

Stereotypes of Muslim women being oppressed by Islam as evidenced by wearing hijab or burka

REACTIVE: Letters to the editor, request a guest column in local newspaper written by an articulate Muslim woman providing her rationale for wearing a hijab

PROACTIVE: Write profiles of leading, successful Muslim women in the community, whom media may contact, who demonstrate independence, perhaps have a career, etc., who wear a hijab, and who would make good interviewees

Stereotype that all Muslims are “Islamists”, seeking to replace western institutions with Islamic ones

REACTIVE: Press releases describing the ways in which your local Muslim communities, and individuals within them, are active in upholding and building democratic processes, structures, are engaged in civic life, school boards, etc. , request a guest column to do the same, and to provide examples of how Muslims are contributing to Canadian society, rather than seeking to undermine

PROACTIVE: Prepare in advance profiles of Muslims who are actively demonstrating ways in which Muslims are contributing to Canadian society in your local community, plan a media event to which media are invited to see a Muslim organization actively contributing to the wider community

Recommended Resources

A Few Basics of MEDIA RELATIONS

PRESS RELEASES (see page 32 Making the News)

Attract media attention

Give reporters important details of an event



Need to include the 5 W's – When Where Why Who What
Provide a contact person
Use Organization's letterhead
When the news can be reported – For Immediate Release

Develop a Headline, and a sub-head to provide more detail

All the information needed should be in the first paragraph along with a “hook”. The “lead” should draw the reader into the rest of the release.

Spell out acronyms of organizations.

Keep the release to a single page

Include quotes of pertinent individuals but keep them short

Provide contact information at the bottom

Make sure the contact is available immediately by phone to reporters

Research where it should be sent – to specific journalists, to newswire services, to local/national media

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (see page 73 Making the News)

The very best way to respond to a news story in the newspaper is to write a brief, concise letter to the editor

Do so as soon as possible to give your letter a better chance of being published



Keep it to 200 words or less

Refer to the story and its date in your opening sentence

Lay out an argument to refute wrong facts, or lack of context in the article. Do not engage in an emotional rant.

Stick to one issue.

Make sure to sign your letter. Email the Editor of the Editorial page of your newspaper.


To respond to broadcast stories, most major broadcasters also have online editors now for their websites, and you can send letters to them.

Eg. John Cruickshank, Publisher for the CBC.CA

They will publish letters online.

GUEST COLUMNS (see page 71 Making the News)

You can request a guest column in a newspaper. Each newspaper will have its own criteria for who can write a guest column. Generally, it needs to be a person who has strong writing skills, who has something to say which is of interest to readers. A guest column is NOT an opportunity to do public relations/promotion of a particular community or cause.



It IS a way to present an argument, to defend a point of view, to bring a new angle to an issue which is in the public sphere. It should be timely, engaging a topic which is in the news recently or which is receiving ongoing news coverage.

Review the kinds of columns printed in the paper, who writes them, the style of writing, how they develop an idea or an argument.

Stick to 700 words or less.

Spell check.

Submit it to the Editor of the Editorial pages in the newspaper, or the publisher for an online news source.

Muslim communities are very diverse, therefore it makes sense to see diverse images and points of view coming from Muslim communities reflected in the media.

An issue for journalists is....who speaks for Islam? As there is no centralized hierarchy or single view, journalists often only reflect one source in a news story.

You might not always agree with the Muslim voices which appear in the paper or on TV, but remember two important points:



**You need to acknowledge their right to be there
You need to add your own community's point of view to the mix**

Recognize that the media also stereotypes people of other faiths, including Christians (particularly Catholics, and Evangelicals), Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists.

Because the media focuses on the 3 C's – CONFLICT, CONTROVERSY, and CRISIS – this is why negative portrayals dominate

What to do?

Learn about the media.

Take advantage of the many great resources that are available which talk about Media Relations.

Organize a thoughtful communications plan for your organization, and within that, a media strategy

How to get positive stories about Muslims into the news

First, know what news is....news is what is new/different/unexpected. Ie. Obama

Eg.

Stuart Laidlaw's story in the Toronto Star about Muslim Boy Scouts

CBC Edmonton's story about Muslims and Quakers adopting an Iraqi town



Other ways – letters to the editor, guest columns, press releases, profiles for features

Countering stereotypes of Muslim Youth

Muslim Youth are perceived as being isolated, at risk, more worried about the international scene than contributing to Canadian society, vulnerable to becoming radicalized through online sources

SO how to counter that perception?

Create events that demonstrate how Muslim youth are contributing to their community, city, school, and promote them to the media.

Eg. Muslim and Jewish students for peace

Or Muslim youth promote online peace

Books:

Esposito, John L. and Dalia Mogahed. Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think. Published by Gallup Press, 2007.

Karim, Karim H. Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence. Published by Black Rose Books, 2000.

Longhurst, John. Making the News: An Essential Guide for Effective Media Relations. Published by Novalis Publishing, 2006.

Said, Edward. Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World. Published by Random House, Inc. 1997.

Websites:

Common Ground News www.commongroundnews.org
Provides news stories and resources including terminology guides for reporters covering stories about Islam and Muslims (see www.sfcg.org under Partners in Humanity Programme, Terminology in Muslim-Western Dialogue)

http://www.commongroundnews.org/lib/Muslim-Western_Terminology.pdf

