Work with the Media

"Today, I love my life, and I am grateful for the challenges that have come my way."

Karen

Prevention Engagement

Education

Health

Community

join the voices for recovery

COETE

on pathways to wellness



WORK WITH THE MEDIA

Building relationships with members of the media is essential to the success of **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month).** The term "media" refers to the mass means of communication that reach many people through different channels, including broadcast, print, web, and other social media platforms.

Media outreach and the resulting coverage will increase awareness of events and highlight community efforts focused on mental and/or substance use disorders. Each September, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (http://www.samhsa.gov), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (http://www.hhs.gov), sponsors **Recovery Month.** This national observance increases awareness and understanding of mental and substance use disorders, and promotes the message that behavioral health is essential to health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

This document includes the basics of media outreach, including tips on speaking with the media and creating long-term relationships.

Determine a Focus...

To begin, it is important to differentiate your **Recovery Month** event from other activities in the area since members of the media receive many requests to attend and cover events.

When determining the focus of your media outreach, use the following factors to increase your chances of coverage:

- **Hot topics:** In the crowded news space, a fresh and relevant angle will ensure that an event is considered. Check out health care trends, such as new research or policies, which may be driving the conversation in the news or on blogs.
- Impact: Research compelling and current statistics that illustrate the prevalence of mental and/or substance use disorders, both locally and nationally. For an example, the "Mental and Substance Use Disorders: Fast Facts" section of the toolkit features relevant behavioral health facts. You can use this information to create and supplement a localized fact sheet that outlines the effect of mental and/or substance use disorders in your area.
- **Proximity:** Media outlets have less money to spend on staffing and travel, so make sure the target is the most appropriate outlet or person. When pitching, emphasize the direct connection of the event to the local community, such as the appearance of a local dignitary.
- **Timeliness:** When contacting reporters, take into account how frequently their publications are distributed. Many reporters may request an advance lead time to write about an event before their publications go to print. Other reporters, such as those for broadcast outlets, may only cover "breaking news" live at the event site.

Research...

After establishing the key, newsworthy aspects of your event, identify the appropriate outlets and reporters to contact. To find out who has covered behavioral health topics, set up Google Alerts (http://www.google.com/alerts) online, which notify you when news on a certain topic is published. Google Blog Search (http://www.google.com/blogsearch) is a useful tool to find bloggers, and social media may be useful in engaging the media.



Organize...

It is helpful to keep your media contacts' information organized and accessible. Media lists are best created in a spreadsheet database program. Once you have identified a potential contact, include the following information in your spreadsheet:

- Contact name;
- Contact's outlet and title;
- Email;
- Facebook and Twitter handle;
- Phone number; and
- Pertinent notes (e.g., preferred time and method of contact, previous articles on recovery topics, and remarks from your interactions with this person).

Connect...

Once the list is complete, reach out to reporters via phone or email, depending on each contact's individual preferences. Reporters often have time limitations, so keep the message short when "pitching" the event. Refer to the end of this document for sample pitches and phone scripts.

Bloggers tend to respond to people they have engaged with previously, so it may be beneficial to send an introductory email to the blogger to break the ice and develop a relationship. Once a relationship is established, follow up with details of the **Recovery Month** event.

Likewise, when "pitching" reporters, start with an introduction and then ask about their availability. Don't be discouraged if a journalist is short with you or in a hurry. Instead, offer to call back at a different time or connect with a colleague who may be interested in talking about the event.

After the conversation, thank each media contact for his or her time and exchange contact information to set expectations for potential follow-up. Also, offer to send event materials (such as a promotional flyer) for further details. Confirm by email or phone if they will attend.

Interview...

Reporters who cover an event may request an interview with the host, a speaker, or key member of the host organization. If your team is presented with an opportunity to be interviewed by a member of the media, prepare for the discussion in advance. Research the interested media contact and anticipate the types of questions that may be asked. To best answer the questions, familiarize yourself with the event and all supplementary materials. Finally, practice answering questions with a peer or colleague.

The day before the interview, confirm the logistics and anticipated length of the interview. Whether your interview will be in-person or on the phone, always be professional and polite. Keep in mind that the goal of the interview is to communicate **Recovery Month** key messages, event details, and describe the importance of prevention, treatment, and recovery support services in the local area.



The following tips may also be useful in an interview:

- **Bridging:** This technique allows you to stay on message and avoid answering questions that may steer the conversation to unanticipated areas. Instead of answering the question head on, find a component of the question that can be tied back to one of the main points. For example, a person may say, "That's a great example of the power of recovery..." and then launch into a main talking point about recovery.
- **Bundling:** This technique allows a person to state a key point and then explain their justification for making the point. For example, a key message may include the phrase, "SAMHSA has a series of initiatives that improve prevention, treatment, and recovery support services." This would be followed by important follow-up points that back up the key message: "**Recovery Month** supports these initiatives by..."
- **Blocking:** If a reporter asks you a question that you are uncomfortable answering, avoid saying "no comment," as it may appear you are hiding something. Instead, offer to put the reporter in contact with someone who can accurately answer the question.

For a successful in-person interview, remember to maintain eye contact, sit up straight, control hand movements, demonstrate enthusiasm and genuine feelings in your voice, and dress professionally. For a successful phone interview, be sure to prepare by rehearsing and drafting notes. Find a quiet place to hold the call, convey a friendly tone in your voice, and ask follow-up questions if needed.

Practice...

When speaking with the media, it may be helpful to use the following talking points about **Recovery Month**, which can be event-specific.

- For a Specific Event: On [Date] at [Time], [Organization] is hosting [Event or Activity] at [Location] to celebrate recovery and encourage individuals with a mental and/or substance use disorder to seek treatment and achieve a healthy, happy life. Mental and/or substance use disorders can affect anyone, including people in [City], where [Number] people are affected. Our community must remain vigilant and dedicated to the recovery process by helping people address these preventable and treatable conditions, and support individuals in recovery, as well as their family members.
- To Promote Recovery Month: [Organization]'s activities are part of National Recovery Month (Recovery Month), which is sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This year, [Organization] will be observing Recovery Month by [Include the name and brief description of your Recovery Month activities].

Consult Resources...

For more information on **Recovery Month** and the services available for those in need, please refer to the following resources:

• SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD) (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment): Provides 24-hour, free, and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery in English and Spanish.



- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org): Provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Website (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment): Contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.
- The Recovery Month website (http://www.recoverymonth.gov): Contains all the materials from this toolkit and a wide variety of relevant resources.
- SAMHSA ADS Center's "Working with the Media to Support the Campaign for Mental Health Recovery" Webcast (http://www.promoteacceptance.samhsa.gov/CMHR/webcasts/default.aspx):

 Provides helpful tips for contacting the media and useful strategies for organizing outreach efforts.
- **Technical Assistance Centers:** Maximizes self-determination and recovery and assists people on their path to recovery, ultimately decreasing their dependence on expensive social services and avoiding hospitalization. The five technical assistance centers include:
 - National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center at Mental Health America (http://www.ncstac.org);
 - National Empowerment Center (http://www.power2u.org);
 - National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse (http://www.mhselfhelp.org);
 - o The Family Café (http://familycafe.net); and
 - The STAR Center (http://www.consumerstar.org/index.html).
- **BHBusiness (http://www.saasnet.org/bhb):** Offers targeted training and support for behavioral health care executives, CEOs, and directors, including health care insurance enrollment training information.
- Center for Financing Reform and Innovation (http://www.samhsa.gov/healthreform): Supports the need for information, analysis, products, and technical assistance to address significant changes in the organization and financing of behavioral health care, as well as the need to guide and support governments and people on how to most effectively and efficiently use available resources to meet the prevention, treatment and recovery support needs of the public.
- Healthcare.gov (http://www.healthcare.gov/index.html): Contains information on finding health insurance
 options, help using insurance, information on the Affordable Care Act, help comparing providers, and
 information on prevention and wellness resources.
- SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) (http://www.prainc.com/soar/about/default.asp): Increases access to Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income for eligible adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a mental and/or substance use disorder.

Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



Sample Pitch Email

Hello [Name],

I recently noticed your article on **[Topic]**, and I thought you may be interested in an upcoming event celebrating people in recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders. In our community, behavioral health issues affect many people: **[Insert Statistic on Local Prevalence]**. On **[Event Date]**, **[Name of Host Organization and any Noteworthy Attendees]** will host **[Type of Event]** in the **[City/Town Name]** area as part of **National Recovery Month** (**Recovery Month**), a large national observance. This event increases awareness and understanding of mental and substance use disorders, and promotes the message that behavioral health is essential to health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

Recovery Month is sponsored each September by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Included in this message is a media advisory that provides additional details of the event. Please feel free to contact me if you need further information or would like to schedule an interview with **[Name and Title of Person Being Offered for Interviews].** I will follow up prior to the **[Event]** to see if you or someone from your organization will be attending.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

[Your Name and Contact Information]



Sample Pitch Call Script

Hi [Name],

My name is **[Your Name]**, and I am calling on behalf of **[Name of Organization]**. An upcoming event in our community will emphasize the seriousness of mental and substance use disorders. Do you still cover **[Reporter's Beat – Health Care, Community Events, etc.]** and have a moment to chat?

As you may know, mental and substance use disorders are common, and not everyone receives the support they need to get better. [Insert Local Prevalence Statistics to Support the Local Community Impact.] Despite the prevalence of these conditions, recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders is possible.

We are hosting an event on [Date] in [City] as part of National Recovery Month, an annual observance sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The goals of the event are to increase awareness and understanding of mental and substance use disorders, and promote the message that behavioral health is essential to health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

If you are interested in learning more about the event, please contact [Spokesperson Name] at [Spokesperson's Contact Information]. I also have additional information I can send you. Is your email address [Email Address]?

Please let me know if you have any additional questions. My contact information will be included in the email, and I will follow up prior to the **[Event]** to see if you or someone from your organization will be attending.

Thank you for your time, and I hope to speak with you again soon.