



MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

Local, state, national and international media are vital partners in achieving the goals of Move Through Life. In order to maximise the advantages of media presentation and minimise the risks of media misrepresentation it is necessary to establish guidelines for how Move Through Life (MTL) will manage and conduct its relationship with all forms of media.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media.

Principles

Move Through Life operates on the values of:

- **Honesty**; MTL will never knowingly mislead the public, media or staff on an issue or news story.
- **Transparency**; MTL will promote openness and accessibility in our dealings with the media, whilst complying with the law and maintaining confidentiality when appropriate.
- **Clarity**; all communications with the media will be written in plain English.
- **Balance**; information provided to the media by MTL will as far as humanly possible be objective, balanced, accurate, informative and timely.

PURPOSE

MTL works with the media in order to:

- advocate for the goals of MTL
- promote the work and awareness of MTL
- inform the public of the details of MTL
- assist in fundraising for MTL

In order to ensure that these purposes can be fulfilled this policy regulates the choice of people entitled to speak for MTL.

The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the community in holding MTL to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to officers and members and to background information to assist them in this role. To balance this, MTL must have the

capacity to defend itself from any unfounded criticism, and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts (if necessary using other channels of communication).

It is the responsibility of all staff, board members and volunteers to ensure that effective media relations are maintained in order to achieve the aims of MTL.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

MTL

Move Through Life Inc and Move Through Life Dance Company

POLICY

It is important that MTL works with the media to communicate important public information messages about its work and its goals.

Significant issues/event

In the instance of a significant issue or event taking place the spokesperson (the Founder/Director) will be responsible for managing all media relations unless the board nominates a different person. In most instances the Founder/Director or the board's Public Officer will be the MTL's spokesperson.

Staff, board members and other volunteers should only speak to the media on any significant matter in the name of or on behalf of MTL if:

- they have consulted the spokesperson
- they have the required expertise to speak on the issue under discussion
- they have some experience in media relations

and where any of these criteria do not apply it is recommended to exercise extreme caution.

Performance promotion

MTL will appoint a publicist as required for key performances to promote the performance details and manage all media relations enquiries. Working with the Founder/Director and Artistic Director, the publicist will prepare media releases to target key audience markets and other stakeholders.

Staff, board members and other volunteers are encouraged to discuss any media contacts they have which may be able to help promote a show with the Founder/Director and Artistic Director.

General enquiries

Where media inquiries concern straightforward provision of information on **uncontentious** issues responses may be made by any officer or member who knows the facts.

Staff, board members and other volunteers are advised to ensure they are properly briefed and guided by relevant staff/volunteers before talking to the media on any issue related to MTL.

Staff, board members and other volunteers, and third parties are encouraged to deliver public presentations that discuss MTL's work and its goals, provided that they make it clear where such presentations are or are not authorised by MTL.

Staff, board members and other volunteers must observe MTL's confidentiality policy in relation to client records.

Any filming or taping on MTL property or of MTL proceedings by the media is subject to prior permission of Founder/Director.

Image release forms will be completed by all individuals performing in any MTL work.

Responsibilities

Board	Nominate appropriate spokesperson for significant issue or event within one hour of the event taking place. In general this will be the Founder/Director and/or board's Public Officer.
Publicist	In conjunction with the Founder/Director and Artistic Director, promote key performance, projects and other event details and manage all related media relations to maximise MTL's media exposure and increase ticket sales.
Everyone	In dealing with the media staff, board members and other volunteers should be conscious that they may be seen as representatives of MTL and should therefore avoid making comments or participating in photo opportunities that may damage the long-term reputation of MTL.

Procedure

Significant statements on behalf of MTL shall be made by the Founder/Director or unless otherwise authorised by the board in reference to the principles listed on page 1.

It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward regarding any issue relating to MTL are those of MTL or of an individual. At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of MTL.

The Founder/Director shall be the nominated spokesperson unless otherwise indicated by the Board.

The spokesperson shall be responsible for:

- Organising an updated list of key contacts for distribution to local press, radio and TV stations. The spokesperson can also be contacted for preliminary discussions on any story or if a journalist or researcher is unsure who to approach for a comment.
- Production of MTL's annual public relations plan, which shall be consistent with the organisation's business plan and marketing plan.
- Coordinating all media conferences for MTL. All such conferences shall be videotaped by MTL.
- Authorising all media releases from MTL and mounting them on MTL's website. All news releases must also be approved by staff/volunteers in charge of the relevant area before distribution.

- Being involved, where feasible, in any approaches to the media to feature MTL's work.
- Being the first point of contact for any approaches from all national press, radio or TV stations or specialist press. The spokesperson will discuss the nature of the story and then contact the appropriate officer or member asking them to respond.

Members, volunteers, employees or board members shall:

- Obtain advice from the spokesperson (preferably before the issue becomes public knowledge) on any issues that are likely to be complex or contentious or to be sustained for any length of time. In such a situation the spokesperson will work with the relevant staff, volunteers and board members to produce a communications plan which will ensure that balanced, timely information is provided to keep all parties informed.
- Not release any photos of members, volunteers, employees or board members to the public via advertising, news media, or web without the approval of the spokesperson, who shall satisfy themselves that MTL's confidentiality policy has been observed.
- Notify the spokesperson if they have had any significant interaction with media representatives on issues related to MTL and provide the name of the reporter or writer and the media outlet they represent.

Any significant media contacts with MTL's staff or members on any issue likely to prove contentious shall, where possible, be videotaped.

Every effort should be made to assist the media in their inquiries. Where media queries involve requests for information that will require substantial staff work to produce, such work must be authorised by the Founder/Director. It will usually be necessary to provide information in addition to that which is requested in order to set the facts and figures in context. Requests for detailed information of this nature, whether from the local or national media, should be referred to the spokesperson.

MTL reserves the right to withhold certain sensitive information concerning, say, commercial transactions or governmental negotiations. Any such information will be clearly labeled and clearly notified to relevant staff.

If any unauthorised releases of confidential information do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action will be taken.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually by the MTL board and amended as appropriate.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Confidentiality policy
- Refer to 'What to do in a media crisis' help card from ourcommunity.com.au

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO A GOOD ORGANISATION: WHAT TO DO IN A MEDIA CRISIS

(Copied from Help Card available on ourcommunity.com.au)

Accidents happen and so do muck-ups, failures, gaffes, bungles, political controversies and many other embarrassments.

When the news breaks, you may find your group in the middle of a media flurry. What you want to avoid at all costs is this flurry turning into a full-blown media crisis that can cause long-term damage to your group and a loss of public confidence.

Whatever it is that has happened to your group - be it accident, muck-up, controversy or legal action - the first priority for your group is to fix it and to ensure there is no continuing danger or risk to the public or any chance of the same thing happening again. And you also need to deal with the media.

PREPARE FOR THE CRISIS

As well as preparing a risk management strategy it is a good idea for community groups to set up a "Crisis Communications Plan". This will ensure that senior staff and volunteers, directors and Board members know exactly what should happen should your group be faced with a media crisis.

This plan will ensure that your group has:

- An appointed spokesperson/s.
- A process where everyone in the organisation knows who to call should a major incident or media crisis develop.
- An established process where senior staff or directors can gather as much accurate information as quickly as possible.
- A process whereby accurate information can be provided to the media as soon as practicable.

So what happens when the media comes calling about something that has gone wrong and it involves your group?

DON'T RUN. DON'T HIDE.

The first reaction - and the worst - for most groups is to try to ignore the attention and hope the story will go away. Resist the temptation to circle the wagons or stick your head in the sand. It doesn't go away and as long as what's on display is your organisation's failings, you're risking the ongoing hemorrhaging of support for your group.

The reality is that your group will end up having to address the issue publicly. The longer it takes, the longer the media and the public believe you have something to hide.

The other reality is that the media will run a story. What you want as much as possible is to influence the nature of that story and ensure that what is run is accurate and fair. It is a bit rich to complain about not having your side of the story aired when you have refused to provide it.

The other theme that you want to stand out is that the incident is not acceptable and not normal and that your group is doing everything in its power to ensure that it's not repeated. Organisations that come out of a media crisis with their reputations intact are those that deal with the issue quickly, effectively, honestly

- and just as importantly, are perceived to be doing exactly that.

So how does a small non-profit organisation with no money for public relations expertise deal with the situation?

- **Decide that there is a crisis.** The successful handling of a crisis can be decided in the first hours or days. By recognising early in the peace that you actually have a crisis on your hands, you can start to rectify it. The sooner you take action, the better your chances of coming out with your reputation intact.
- **Understand who the media represent.** While "the media" is chasing you for details, the people who are going to be most interested in reading or listening to your response will be "the public" - and that means your members, donors, supporters, businesses, sponsors, potential supporters etc. Frame your responses with the real audience in mind.
- **Decide who will be the spokesperson or public face.** Where possible ensure it is the highest-ranking person (CEO, chairman/director) who has the important mix of authority and access to all the latest information. You also need to have someone who is accessible and available to journalists. You need to stay on top of a crisis, not create a vacuum where yours is the only voice not being heard.
- **Release as much as you can as quickly as you can.** Sometimes you will be responding to an incident, such as someone getting injured, or a fraud, or a complaint of wrongdoing by an employee, but other times there may be serious and unfounded allegations. The more information you can release that puts the incident in context and puts your side of the story across, the better. And the quicker the better. The sooner you respond and show that you are acting in a sincere, honest and reliable manner, the sooner your voice is listened to and trusted.
- **Avoid the Bart Simpson defence.** What you emphatically do not do is give the Bart Simpson defence - "I didn't do it, nobody saw me do it, you can't prove a thing."
- **Say only what you know to be true.** If you don't know the answer, don't guess at it. Be honest and stick to only confirmed information you know to be accurate and correct. If necessary, tell the reporter you don't know but will check it out and get back to them. Better to provide a correct answer than to flail around and guess incorrectly.
- **Remember that first impressions count.** No matter how much they try not to, the media will come with some sort of preconceived idea which normally boils down to whether you or your organisation are sinners or saints (in this particular incident or generally). Your attitude, openness and commitment to resolving the issue is important in ensuring they leave with a positive impression.
- **Work out what you can legally release.** If there are legal issues that come into play, be aware of where the line is drawn on what you can say. Also be aware that many legal advisers will advise you to say nothing at all and that is advice that should be challenged. You have to publicly address the issue, it is only the manner or amount of information that is up for discussion.
- **Avoid speculation or answering hypothetical questions.** Try to stick to the facts and what did happen, not what might have done. You can fend questions off by saying things such as "I don't want to speculate on that" or "I would prefer not to deal in hypotheticals. What we do know is"
- **Challenge information you know to be wrong.** Don't leave wrong facts out there. If something is running that's wrong, let others know before it becomes common knowledge. Let the media organisation know the information is wrong and let other organisations know so they don't repeat it. Wrong facts left unchallenged are often more damaging than the truth.

- **Show concern.** You are a community group. Your main mission is to care/service/support the community so you need to be mindful of the feelings as well as the issues. If someone has been badly affected or hurt, mentally or physically, by an action of your group, express your concern and demonstrate your compassion.
- **Don't bother blaming the media.** If there is something wrong, point it out. If you have a different view, point it out. But avoid personal slanging matches. If it is a serious issue you want to be seen to be treating it seriously and dealing with it, not wasting time blaming the media for bringing to light an incident involving your group.
- **Ban the words "no comment".** Forever. Even if you keep repeating the same information you have released. Say: "all I can say is ..." or say "I can't provide that information until I have all the details ..." or "I can't answer that until I have a full report" or "I am happy to try to answer those questions once I have spoken to the right people ..." You never see seasoned media performers respond "No comment". The reason is that it sounds as though you know the answer but don't want to provide it.
- **Don't run from the cameras.** The one piece of vision you are absolutely guaranteed to see on television that night is the vision of someone running from the media, or shielding their face, or slamming the door in their face. Again, it makes you look like someone who has something to hide. If you have nothing new to add, say that.
- **Stay calm.** It's important you stay calm under pressure or swap places with someone who can. Anger makes good vision for TV stations and bad news for community groups. Avoid it.
- **Consider bringing the media into your organisation.** Hold frequent media briefings rather than have reporters camped on the nature strip. It lets them show how you are dealing with the crisis and the difficulties and problems that you face. And that you're human. And that you have nothing to hide.
- **Talk in common, easily understood language.** Avoid jargon. Speak in a manner that ensures people can actually understand the message you are trying to portray.

What if the story is just plain wrong?

It makes it even more important to react when the story is wrong or malicious. And this does happen. It may not get into print, it may not get on TV but it may cause you some pain dealing with unfounded allegations.

The British Red Cross was recently tainted by allegations that it had overstated the sum raised for Iraqi Kurds in 1991. It hadn't, but that wasn't going to be enough. "We had to very rapidly clarify our position and committed ourselves to carrying out a thorough investigation," the organisation said afterwards. "Our supporters are essential to us and it is vital that they remain confident in us."

And that is one of the most important aspects of a media crisis. Community groups rely on their credibility. That's what brings in donations, support, members. It is imperative to come out of any crisis with that credibility and standing intact.