



Problem Gambling Awareness Month Grassroots Media Tips for NCPG State Affiliates

By Kristin West, Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling

March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month. Each year, NCPG updates www.npgam.org with logos, press releases, kits, discussion topics and more. But what should each State Affiliate *do* with this information? A great way to increase awareness of problem gambling is to get a news story in your local paper or on a popular blog. Contacting the media isn't as daunting as it may seem, but there are ways to make it easier to ensure you get coverage. Also, sometimes other media outlets will pick up and re-distribute the story, reaching an even wider audience for no extra work! A little bit of effort can have a BIG impact.

Here's what to do:

- Email or call reporters directly at local news outlets to “pitch” your story
 - On the website or in the physical paper of a newspaper, there will be a list of the staff with their names, emails and phone numbers (in print it's referred to as the “masthead”). Make sure you're addressing the appropriate person! For example, if Joe Smith covers crime and Betty June covers local news, you would want to contact Betty directly, bypassing Joe. Your message may be ignored if it's not directed to the appropriate person – don't expect them to forward it for you.
 - Triple-check the spelling of all names! There's nothing more offensive to a potential ally than having his name misspelled.
- Be persistent!
 - If at first you don't hear back, try, try again. Just like everyone else, reporters are busy people – in fact, with the budget cuts of most newspapers and media outlets, they're busier than ever before. This can also work in your favor, though. Media needs content in order to survive, which brings us to...
- Package it for the press
 - NCPG's press releases help with this step. You don't want to create extra work for the person you're working with. Most stories will cover the basic “who, what, where, when, why and how”; and the press releases from NCPG give media personnel enough information to work in to a story.
- Pictures, pictures, pictures!
 - While not every publication is going to have the space for photos, if they can use them, make sure you have something ready and that you are the copyright holder. Additionally, images should be large and high-resolution, ideally 300 dpi.

(If you're not sure about working with images some quick online searches can help.)

- Utilize people in recovery who are willing to talk to media
 - “Feature” stories cover topics in-depth and try to have an emotional and personal angle to them, rather than just reporting the news and facts. If you know someone in recovery who is willing to share their story, pitching that as a human interest piece will be a lot more interesting to the media and to readers than facts and statistics. Also, they may be willing to publish a story where the person speaks on the condition of anonymity – I once did a feature on a recovering food addict, and it ended up on the front page of the Sunday paper, without her name or face being used.

Okay, that's great and all, but how do I find them?

- You can try the website www.50states.com/news/ and search your state for a complete list of newspapers. You can also call or visit your local library and ask the librarians to help you generate a list, as they have special search tools that you can't just Google. It's also their job to know of all the community resources in the area, including...
- Don't overlook blogs or websites! Many people get news from non-traditional sources. Also, many areas have a local senior-focused newspaper or publication. Try reaching out to them. If you know anyone who runs a newsletter for a healthcare organization or hospital, see if they need a brief article for their March or Spring issue.
- If you're bilingual or have a friend who is, try a foreign-language publication. Many demographics are at greater risk for problem gambling, and reaching out to people in their own language can have a huge impact.

And once you've got your plan....

- Make sure to write to the audience you're addressing. If it's the general public, stay away from clinical terms. If it's a medical audience, highlight important criteria in the DSM-5 or mention diagnostic tools like the SOGS and NODS. Try to predict what questions the audience might have when they're reading about problem gambling for the first time, and answer them as the story continues.
- Always read your final work out loud to catch maximum errors!
- Include all of your contact info in all correspondence – phone number, email, 24/7 helpline, etc.
- Try several different places (especially spread out geographically if you can), and I bet sooner or later, at least one of them will bite! You can even re-send the same email, just copy the text into new messages sent to new people. (Just make sure to change to whom you address the message. And triple-check the spelling!)
- If the article is indeed printed, share it on your or your organization's Facebook, Twitter and any other social media you use. Add hashtags like #PGAM or #problemgambling so more people can find it online.
- Include the article on your Affiliate's blog or website, and make sure to use tags if you have the option, so it will turn up in future internet search results.

More questions? Contact me, Kristin West, at khwest@evergreencpg.org Happy PGAM!