



FieldNotes

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Conducting Media Outreach

From organizing art exhibitions in subway stations to engaging famous athletes, from hosting press events in Internet cafés to being featured on national television, the International Youth Foundation's (IYF) local partners have pursued a variety of innovative strategies to increase the visibility of their projects.

What role does communications planning play in ensuring the success of media outreach activities? What factors can contribute to media coverage for a special event? What is the role of young people in telling their stories? Captured here are the experiences of IYF partners in the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and Turkey, who are part of a global youth development initiative of Nokia and IYF.

Each offers inventive ideas that are readily adaptable to other contexts. Together, they reflect the creativity and diversity of the IYF partner network as a whole.

The Importance of Communications Planning

Having a communications strategy in place is critical to conducting effective media outreach, stresses Maggie Pinar, International Programme Director of the Education Volunteers Foundation of Turkey (TEGV). Through its Dreams Workshops, TEGV trains youth to teach disadvantaged children to express themselves through art. "Know what your final goals are before you start your communications activities," advises Pinar, "and have a strategy in place for achieving them so that everyone is on the same page."

Just as you would plan your overall project, Pinar and other partners emphasize the importance of developing a communications plan that clearly articulates your goals and objectives, the primary audiences you seek to reach, the key messages you want to communicate, and your strategies for achieving desired goals. The communications planning process should take stock of the resources you have available, and your strengths and weaknesses in the area of communications. Lastly, it should include a time line of dates when

elements of the plan are to be delivered and indicators for measuring success (e.g., the number of media stories generated).

Figure 1 provides a snapshot of a communications plan created for the *Kapcsolódj be* project in Hungary, which promotes youth volunteerism. The plan was developed by the Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA), implementer of the project, in conjunction with Nokia's in-country office and public relations firm. While not all elements of the plan are included here, the summary demonstrates a creative, yet strategic, approach.

In its first five years, *Kapcsolódj be* generated more than 200 media stories in newspapers and magazines, along with radio and television coverage. Ágnes Zsók, Project Manager, attributes such media suc-

cess to DIA's reputation in the country, the assistance DIA received from Nokia staff and public relations professionals, the endorsement of the project by well-known 'patrons,' and the role of young people in telling the *Kapcsolódj be* story.

At the same time, Zsók points out that reaching out to the media with the project's message of volunteerism has not been easy, particularly given the nation's communist past. "Volunteerism is not a trendy topic, and people have trouble understanding what we are doing," she explains. As a result, DIA meets regularly with reporters to educate them about its work and the role of youth volunteerism in building a strong democracy.

As is the case with other IYF partners, DIA has adopted a regionalized approach to its media outreach, holding both national press events and tasking its local volunteer groups with conducting outreach to regional media outlets.

To reinforce its local outreach, twice a year, DIA organizes "media road shows" in locations around the country where its youth groups operate volunteer projects. Each road show includes a press conference and brings attention to the volunteer projects developed by youth. Effort is made to engage well-known public officials, such as the vice mayor in one city. In conjunction with a road show in the city of Debrecen, youth volunteers working with orphans organized an exhibit of the children's artwork, which was displayed at a local mall. "Many people saw the exhibit and identified it with our program," says Zsók.

Each of the above media outreach activities was carefully articulated in DIA's *Kapcsolódj be* communications plan, produced annually in collaboration with Nokia's local office.

Hosting a Successful Press Event

How can you maximize the time and resources invested in planning and implementing press events? IYF partners emphasize the importance of generating a compelling 'news hook,' and creating multiple points of interest for reporters. Simply announcing a project launch or anniversary is generally not enough to capture the media's attention. For example, local projects in both Hungary and the Czech Republic generate significant media interest around the announcement each year of their youth grant programs. A special event designed to coincide with the announcement gives them the opportunity to talk about what previous year's grant recipients accomplished through their projects.

Partners offer the following tips for hosting a successful press event:

- **Select a venue with symbolic value that draws people.**

Several partner organizations have achieved success in attracting media when they host events at youth-oriented venues

FIGURE 1

Communications Planning in Hungary: A Snapshot

Below are core elements of a communications plan developed by the Foundation for Democratic Youth in Hungary, with assistance from Nokia's local office and its public relations firm.

OBJECTIVES

- Promote and make volunteerism, community service, and service learning accessible to young people and their communities
- Support youth volunteer efforts and make young people aware of the program
- Create awareness of life skills and their importance

AUDIENCES

Primary

- 14- to 25-year-olds
- Schools and teachers
- Social workers within civil society organizations
- Local governments

Secondary

- Alumni
- Parents
- Partners and supporters
- Media outlets

KEY MESSAGES

- DIA gives young people an opportunity to develop specific life skills and to acquire valuable experience through engagement in volunteer activities and civic life
- DIA prepares young people for life, equipping them with life skills that help them to enter the labor market

STRATEGIES

- Publish newsletter four times annually
- Develop web presence for each local group within the DIA website, including email addresses for all DIA volunteers
- Hold press conferences
- Conduct two media road shows
- Hold workshops and summer camps

(e.g., Internet cafés) that reinforce the program’s youthful nature. Others have opted for venues with historic significance.

- **Engage celebrities.** Invite public officials, popular performers, artists, and media personalities to participate as appropriate.
- **Demonstrate the impact of your efforts by highlighting project participants as speakers.** Consider inviting accomplished alumni to speak of how they continue to apply what they learned through the project.
- **Highlight what makes your project unusual or unique.** In describing its support of youth-led volunteer projects, DIA often highlights those that are unusual, such as a canine therapy program used to help hospital patients.
- **Produce a short publication or video highlighting success stories.** Or, host a photo or art exhibition in conjunction with the event that illustrates the program ‘in action.’

In addition to designated press events, partners generate media coverage of significant project activities. For example, IYF’s partner in the Philippines, the Consuelo Foundation, invited reporters to its Youth Congress, during which program participants—indigenous youth who received leadership training—exchanged ideas and celebrated their achievements. While not designed as a press event per se, the Congress received local and national media coverage.

Engaging Celebrities

Engaging sports, entertainment, media, and political figures as spokespeople can offer many benefits according to partners. Hungary’s Zsók speaks highly of the role which that nation’s Social Youth Minister has played in the project. DIA also engaged a well-known actor in its efforts to appeal to youth. “He had grown up in an orphanage and was emotionally involved,” says Zsók. “He came because he liked the program.”

Jantje Beton, IYF’s partner in the Netherlands, selected Leena Von Jaarsveld, a local host for MTV news for its patron. Given the project’s focus on developing young people’s life skills through journalism training, a media celebrity made for a natural fit. In Turkey, TEGV invited a famous sculptor to participate in the project. Over the course of 24 hours, the artist worked with project participants to create a sculpture at one of TEGV’s project sites. The event was widely covered in the local media.

The Zest project in Finland, implemented by IYF’s partner, the Finnish Children and Youth Foundation, is rooted in the active participation of national sports and entertainment figures (called Zest “team members”). Members visit schools and share with students their own personal experiences related to developing life skills, such as confidence, teamwork, responsibility, and goal-setting. Due to their substantial time commitment, team members are paid for their services.

Partners caution that it’s important to clarify up front the amount of time a celebrity is willing to commit. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Civil Society Development Foundation (NROS) engaged a famous actress and singer and ended up “stopping the cooperation because her involvement was too passive,” explains Anna Onucová, Programme Manager. While the actress attended national press events, her schedule did not permit her to participate in local events. As a result of its experiences, NROS is now pursuing regional patrons, such as local government officials.

Telling Stories that Move People

As part of an integrated communications strategy, IYF partners have developed innovative ways of telling their project’s story—in print, online, and through exhibitions of photographs and art—that illustrate the human dimension of their work and its impact on young lives.

Communicating Effectively: Questions to Consider

In planning and implementing your communications activities, it’s helpful to consider:

- How to integrate communications into your overall project plan and the role that communications can play in achieving specific objectives (e.g., recruiting participants or generating support among parents and/or community members).
- How you can best work with your local corporate sponsor to develop shared communications goals and strategies for achieving them.
- Your strengths and weaknesses in the area of communications and existing staff resources and expertise. You might consider pursuing additional support through internships, part-time staffing, or creative media partnerships.
- Connections you, or members of your staff or board, may have to editors, journalists, or other media professionals. Also consider how you might engage a prominent individual as a spokesperson for your project.
- What are the core messages you seek to communicate and are they presented in such a way that they will appeal to your target audiences?
- Whether you have a built-in medium that could be helpful in communicating your project’s message. For example, TEGV uses artworks produced by its project beneficiaries to communicate the project’s goals and impact.
- How you can best use outcome data to emphasize your project’s impact on young lives.
- Ways of engaging young people in telling your project’s story.

In Turkey, for example, TEGV collaborated with municipal authorities in various cities to showcase a traveling exhibition of participants' artwork within the nation's newly constructed underground transit system. Entitled "Me in 2020," the exhibit portrayed how the young artists saw themselves in the future and how they intended to achieve their dreams through developing their creativity, communication, teamwork, and other life skills. "We made octagonal panels that wrapped around pillars," Pinar explains. "As passengers walked through the station they encountered various messages. It was a win-win for all," she says.

Examples of effective storytelling abound throughout IYF's global partner network. In Hungary, for example, DIA is compiling a booklet of stories of its volunteer leaders. Each profile will explore volunteers' motivations for 'giving back,' while describing their projects. Earlier, the project developed a photo exhibition of its grant recipients engaged in volunteer activities around the country, which was displayed at a Nokia factory employing more than 2,000 people.

Developing Media Partnerships

Media partnerships have emerged as a potentially valuable means of obtaining exposure for local projects. For example, in the Czech Republic, NROS entered into a partnership with one of the nation's largest search engines in order to publicize the project's youth grants program. The search engine published banners associated with the project during the period in which NROS was recruiting young applicants. In exchange, NROS displayed the company's logo on its outreach materials.

In Finland, Zest partnered with a national television program, Buusteri, in producing a weeklong series of episodes focusing on key life skills. The program featured Zest team member Lenni-Kalle Taipale interacting with project participants in schools. Concurrently, a web competition was launched on the Zest and Buusteri websites that asked young people to answer the question: "What talent would you most like to develop in yourself?" Nearly 2,000 youth responded. The most valuable talent they identified was that of being a good friend who listens and communicates well.

For projects with a youth media focus, such as the Youth Press Agency (YPA) in the Netherlands, the possibility exists for generating interest among news outlets in young people's journalistic works. For example, two youth-produced videos created through YPA will soon be broadcast on a local television station where the youth live.

Lessons Learned

A number of country partners underscore the important role that local corporate partners—and their public relations firms—could play in contributing to the success of their media outreach efforts.

In Hungary, for example, efforts to engage the media have benefited greatly from the active involvement of Nokia's Public Relations Manager, Anna Simai. "She [Anna] really understood the program from the beginning and offered her support," says Zsók. Nokia's local PR firm has also been integrally involved in generating visibility for the project, including developing a communications strategy and helping to plan and execute key elements of that strategy. "The firm knows the journalists, they know who to call, and who to invite," explains Zsók.

Local projects offer the following advice to those seeking to strengthen their communications outreach:

- **Clearly identify goals and objectives—and who is responsible for what—from the start.** Many of our best ideas emerged through an open, creative dialogue with Nokia's local office, says TEGV's Pinar. Once a communications plan is approved, it's important that local partners and corporate supporters agree on respective roles and responsibilities, she adds.
- **Develop simple, accessible messages to describe your project's goals and the issues you seek to address.** In Hungary, for example, DIA speaks to the importance of promoting youth volunteerism; while in Turkey TEGV emphasizes nurturing young people's creativity and self-expression. The development of specific life skills is often communicated as a secondary message. "Life skills terms are integrated as part of our campaign," says Pinar. "Our work is not just about art, but about applying transferable skills that are needed for success in life, such as communications and teamwork."
- **Be creative; think 'outside the box.'** In telling your story through the media you are competing for the time and attention of reporters and the public at large. TEGV's subway art exhibition attracted significant media attention because it was highly visual and hadn't been done before. Reporters in Hungary were drawn to a recent DIA press briefing because it was held in an Internet café, which reinforced the project's youthful message.

Field Notes is a publication series of the International Youth Foundation (IYF) aimed at capturing valuable lessons and experiences from its programs worldwide. For additional information about IYF, visit www.iyfnet.org.

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