

# Public Relations

## Objectives:

- **Generate Dance Marathon awareness on a local and regional level**
- **Generate media interest in marathon**
- **Develop other promotions vehicles**
- **Design Marathon apparel and program**

### ➤ The Dance Marathon Vision

- It is important that you become a resource on everything related to Dance Marathon. You will consult committee members, student organizations, campus administrators, media and businesses. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the duties and responsibilities of every committee.
- You are a spokesperson for DM. Discuss and represent the views of Dance Marathon throughout the campus and community.
- Make sure that you understand all rules/ guidelines set up by your school, the hospital, and even your community. These will guide you and your members need to understand the importance of following these guidelines.
- The responsibilities of a director are endless and limitless- you must learn to delegate. Many committees will work together to accomplish their responsibilities. Make sure your committee set-up is comprehensive and that one chair is ultimately responsible for each task.

### ➤ Committee Creation

- Chairs responsibilities can be time consuming. The majority of former Dance Marathon council members say the most important task they accomplished was selecting a strong council. After you relay the Marathon vision, the committee members carry this vision to reality.
- Involve as many people as possible, but make sure to assemble a committee that is dependable and energetic. Search to find individuals that are hard working and able to commit a large amount of time to fundraising for the kids!
- When faced with a great task, many of us find the urge to turn to our close friends. If you feel that urge when it comes to selecting your Dance Marathon council, try to resist it. The committee should be a diverse group that has the drive and determination to make Dance Marathon a hit. Use objectivity in your selection process. Just because someone is a close friend doesn't mean they are a good selection.
- Select a committee to carry out the Dance Marathon PR strategy and divide responsibilities. Many schools have found it helpful to divide responsibilities according to these categories: local media, regional and national media, newspapers and TV & radio. Since this committee utilizes a specific skill, we highly suggest recruiting individuals who are journalism or Public Relations majors.

- With your committee, create a media target list of newspapers, radio and TV stations and other media outlets you want to target for Dance Marathon publicity. One way to find out the contact names and information for these outlets is by researching media directories in your library or university Public Relations office.
- Encourage students of all levels to apply.

➤ Run Committee Meetings

- Once the committee is selected, it is time to bring everyone together. This is a good time to get chairs comfortable with each other. Let them know what is expected and have them set goals.
- Make the first meeting fun. Conduct some ice breakers and team building games. These activities can immediately make you aware of committee members' personalities and how best to work with them throughout the year. Make the meetings motivational with members leaving feeling empowered to help the kids at Riley.
- Teach the chairs everything about Dance Marathon. Every member must know all marathon information inside and out.
- Be the critical eye and ear for your committee. Often chairs have great ideas, but they also have the tendency to get carried away. It is your responsibility to provide members with a reality check and help them design back-up plans.
- Keep the students on track. Everyone has great stories to tell about the weekend, etc, but you are there for a purpose.
- As you move throughout the year, you will be able to gauge how often meetings should be held. Some committees hold weekly meetings, some don't. This is up to you, however as it gets closer to the marathon (no less than three months away) each committee should hold weekly meetings.
- Set your meeting day, time and place in stone. Attendance should be mandatory and it is helpful to send out a reminder one week in advance.
- Be sure to construct a committee timeline and see that the president receives a copy as well as your committee.

➤ Generate Dance Marathon awareness on a local and regional level

- What is Public Relations and how does it differ from advertising? Advertising is paid space or paid time. Public Relations is issues management that often uses advertising as a tool. Public Relations is usually presented as news, which is more believable than a commercial endorsement. The individuals with good media contacts and relationships are the people who get their stories on the air or in the paper. The Dance Marathon Coordinator and university Public Relations Office are invaluable. They have great contacts.
- Publicity and promotion play vital roles in the success of Dance Marathon. Every effort extended to create and increase public awareness is critical. Local media responds best to cause issues, and stories originating in the community of their target audiences. Dance Marathon provides an excellent local 'hook' for media.

## ➤ Resources

- There are many resources for you to get suggestions for your Dance Marathon Public Relations (PR) plan. Meet representatives from as many of your campus and community resources as possible for input on your PR plan. Find out if they will be willing to help promote Dance Marathon, and if so, how and when?
- Some examples of people to meet with and questions to ask them.
  - An alumni association representative: What works with the school's alumni? Will the alumni association run a Dance Marathon article or advertisement in the Alumni magazine? Are there opportunities to publicize the marathon at Homecoming? Also, try to obtain a list of alumni working in the media.
  - Your Dance Marathon Coordinator: How can the hospital help? What media contacts do they have? Will the hospital Public Relations or media departments want any input?
  - A representative from the campus athletic department: Will they announce Dance Marathon at sporting events? Are students allowed to collect donations outside athletic facilities? If an announcement can be made, here is a sample script:

“Students are waiting at each exit to receive your donation for the first Dance Marathon at (university). Dance Marathon will be held on (date) in the (building) when a large number of college students will dance for (number) hours to raise money for Riley Hospital for Children. For information, please ask a student volunteer as you exit or call (phone number). THANK YOU!”

## ➤ Additional PR Resources

- Campus: Office of Public Affairs, Office of Communications, Office of Community Relations, Office of Information, Department of Communications, student clubs, Society of Professional Journalists, graphic design department, campus media, campus newspapers, campus radio station, TV Stations and professors.

## ➤ Promotional Vehicles

- Brochures: the who, what, when, where, and why about Dance Marathon. The brochure should include basic information on Riley Hospital and its pediatric services. Be sure to always mention major sponsors in each brochure.
- Fact Sheet: put together a one-page fact sheet that gives all the basic Dance Marathon information. The Fact sheet is especially helpful where Dance Marathon is not a highly recognized effort.
- University Vehicles or Publications: maximize the potential exposure of Dance Marathon through existing campus publications. Promote the event wherever and

whenever possible in publications such as: campus paper, Greek newsletters, university PBS station, bulletin boards, alumni publications, marquees, etc.

- Extend personal invitations to the media to cover major Dance Marathon events. Try to gain as much media exposure as possible through features stories in local newspapers, magazines, TV, or radio shows. If the media is unable to send someone to cover the event, they may still be willing to run a short piece, provided they receive a press release.
- Many events have businesses pay for the cost of a print ad in exchange for recognition as an in-kind sponsor or contributor.

#### ➤ Dance Marathon Advertisement

- All Dance Marathon advertisements should be approved and placed by the PR committee. Request all council members to submit a list of the advertisements they need as far in advance as possible. Decide which advertisements are necessary and return an approved list of advertisements to council. If some requests cannot be met, discuss alternatives such as flyers, posters, and press releases.
- Remind them to give you the specifics for their advertisements and make them due to you at least five days before publication.
- Check with the advertising department at the newspaper, TV or radio stations that you contact about their advertising deadline.

#### ➤ Dance Marathon PR Strategy

- When creating your Public Relations strategy, involve people who are experienced in implementing one or need to know what you are doing. These people can be the communication chair, advisor, overall chair, CMN Director and/or a PR professional or professor. Refer to the “Public Relations Tactics” page in this section.

#### ➤ The Dance Marathon Press Room

- The Dance Marathon press room on your website is the source media outlets will go to when deciding whether or not to cover Dance Marathon. Many of the elements in the press room will be similar elements in the marketing kit.
- It’s important to continue to revise your press contact list. Media personnel change frequently.
- Consider including the following:
  - Press Releases
  - Fact sheet (include graph illustrating the distribution of funds)
  - Backgrounder
  - Dance Marathon history
  - List of other schools involved

- Riley story
- University information
- Information on organization(s) sponsoring Dance Marathon

#### ➤ Press Releases

- One idea that has worked at many schools is to prepare press releases or advertisements for the campus newspaper beforehand. Some events you could prepare for in advance are:
  - The arrival of Dance Marathon on campus
  - When committee applications are being accepted
  - Time, location and details for an informational and/or dancer meeting
  - A thank you to corporate sponsors
  - An announcement just before the Dance Marathon weekend
  - A huge thank you to everyone involved after Dance Marathon is over
- Coordinate the print dates with council. That way if committee applications will be available on September 15, you will know to send a press release on September 12.
- Send press releases to news organizations throughout your community to inform them of when students will be out canning. Explain canning, Dance Marathon and when to expect students in front of businesses. Send one week prior to the canning day.

#### ➤ Implementing Your Plan

- Once you have your plan in place and your press kit together it is time to put the PR gears in motion. Here is a sample guide to follow for sending out information.
  - 8 weeks out- Send a press release to your target list updating them on Dance Marathon's progress.
  - 6 weeks out- Follow up on all press kits with a phone call.
  - 3 weeks out- Send special-interest press releases with unique Dance Marathon stories (hooks).
  - 1 week out- Send specific press releases reminding them of Dance Marathon's location, beginning and ending time and reminders of why Dance Marathon is worth covering.
  - 1 day before- Fax media alert and follow up with a "Did you get our media alert?" phone call.
  - 1 day after- Phone and/or mail Dance Marathon results and thank yous.

#### ➤ Developing a Public Relations Plan

- Here is a step-by-step guide to help you develop your Dance Marathon PR plan:

- Determine focus points. Why should the media take notice of Dance Marathon and cover it? What are the highlights (who, what, when, where, why, & how)? Is there local interest?
- Develop key messages. Say something positive about the audience and the focus points. Explain why they are important or why they matter.
- Evaluate all efforts and activities. Compare results to original PR and business goals.

#### ➤ Public Relations Tactics

- The competition for attention is intense. Information is everywhere. In fact, the average person is exposed to 1,100 promotional messages every day. This fact makes your responsibility to promote Dance Marathon a challenge, but with every challenge comes rewards. If you accomplish your tasks well, Dance Marathon should generate stunning media coverage.
- Most of your press releases will be mailed or delivered to an assignment editor. Assignment editors receive dozens of press releases every day. Therefore,
  - Produce excellent press releases
  - Emphasize the cause
  - Focus on the unique aspects of Dance Marathon
- Each medium looks for their own angle. Provide a different perspective, interview, or story to the major media in your community. Before you contact other media, offer your best media relationships the unique stories. Help the media find different approaches.

#### ➤ At the Marathon

- Invite everyone on your media list to Dance Marathon. If you have invited them to attend, prepare for the media to arrive at Dance Marathon. Appoint PR committee members to greet the media at the door to give the media representatives a tour of the Marathon. Let them see preparation and tear-down. Select several dancers and council members to be interviewed. Prep these individuals before Dance Marathon begins. Work with the Facilities committee to arrange for a place for media representatives to check in. Some schools have tables while others have a room for media representatives.

#### ➤ After the Marathon

- What went right at Dance Marathon? What didn't? The best way to find out how to make next year's event even better is to prepare a post evaluation questionnaire for all dancers and volunteers. Some of these people will come up with ideas that will become a Dance Marathon tradition at your school for years.
- Thank everyone who had anything to do with Dance Marathon being successful. If possible, place an ad in the campus newspaper listing all of the major sponsors,

sponsoring organizations and individuals who danced or volunteered. Send thank you letters to every person who helped promote Dance Marathon. Your list will probably include reporters, editors, radio personalities, sponsors, store/restaurant owners who hung posters, the alumni association and professors.

- Save copies of all articles that were published, all flyers, posters and billboards you create and record all broadcast coverage of your event. If you have video coverage of your marathon, send it to the Dance Marathon Coordinator. Every year at the *CMN Champions* broadcast, they air a Dance Marathon video and might want to include footage from your school. Beta is preferred, however; if you only have VHS footage, we would enjoy seeing clips from your Marathon. (Beta is broadcast quality and we can only use footage on beta for the *CMN Champions* piece.)

\*\*\* Remember:

- Always have a back-up plan!
- Delegate! Do not allow yourself to become overwhelmed.
- Act as a DM role model. You represent DM whether you are meeting with a potential sponsor, briefing campus administrators, or sitting in a class. Encourage all committee members to remember they are also role models; everything they do reflects on DM. Have fun but remember to never jeopardize the perception of your organization.

*Do it for the kids!*

## *PR Suggestions*

- ✓ Read the news constantly. This will help you write better press releases, learn the personalities of reporters and become familiar with the opinions of different media.
- ✓ Know people in the market (campus, city, businesses, etc.).
- ✓ Consider all media such as newsletters, Greek organization communications and signage at events.
- ✓ Research station, publication, or medium before you phone. Know the name of the person you need to be in contact with.
- ✓ Use a Public Relations and publicity handbook. You might find one in your campus library bookstore. The most universally used handbook is the *Associated Press Stylebook*. It covers spelling, usage, punctuation and grammar used by media professionals.
- ✓ Be persistent!

### *Keys to Media Coverage*

- ✓ What you send them is good material for the press to use and quickly assessable with little research time. This is what press releases and fact sheets do. They are sometimes used verbatim.
- ✓ Build credibility
- ✓ Be enthused and excited
- ✓ Be available to answer questions
- ✓ Work with media one-on-one. Dance Marathon is “soft” news and you must sell the story.

### *Public Relations Pointers*

- ✓ Press packets can get expensive. Try not to waste these packets. One way to conserve packets is to call all media on your target list before you mail or deliver a press kit.
- ✓ A possible script for this phone call:
  - “Hi, my name is (your name) and I am a member of the Public Relations Committee for a campus-wide fund raiser at (university). I am calling to ask if you would be willing to review some information on our philanthropy. The event is known as Dance Marathon and is held to raise money for Riley Hospital for Children.”
  - “Universities throughout the United States host Dance Marathons and collectively raise millions of dollars each year.”
  - “(Year) will be our first Dance Marathon. In our first year, we need to increase public awareness and recognition of the event. It would be a great help if you could run a PSA, on-air mention, press release, etc.”
  - “Should I mail or deliver a press kit?”
  - “We also have several press releases. I’ll send those as well. Thank you very much!”
- ✓ Have committee members who are familiar with specific regions work with media organization from that area. Knowledge of the area and media markets is a huge plus!
- ✓ Assign someone to work one-on-one with your campus newspaper. Most likely the campus paper is your biggest and most important media contact.

## *Press Materials*

### Press Kits

Press kits contain materials used to execute a successful publicity and promotion campaign. Some items to include in the kits are: news releases, CMIN brochure, local hospital information, Dance Marathon fact sheet, background sheet, university information, list of benefits, etc.

### Brochures

A who, what, when, where, and why about Dance Marathon. The brochure should include basic information on the local hospital and its pediatric services. Be sure to always mention major sponsors in each brochure.

### Fact Sheet

Put together a one-page fact sheet that gives all the basic Dance Marathon information. The Fact sheet is especially helpful where Dance Marathon is not a highly recognized effort. Included Fact sheets in all press kits that are sent to the media. Remember to always mention major sponsors c each fact sheet.

### University Vehicles or Publications

Maximize the potential exposure of Dance Marathon through existing campus publications~ Promote the event wherever and whenever possible in publications such as: campus paper, Greek newsletters, university PBS station, bulletin boards, alumni publications, marquees, etc.

### Other

Extend personal invitations to the media to cover major Dance Marathon events. Try to gain as much media exposure as possible through features stories in local newspapers, magazines, TV, o radio shows. If the media is unable to send someone to cover the event, they may still be willing to run a short piece, provided they receive a press release.

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