

**Alzheimer's Association Media Relations Plan**

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## Research

### **Public relations issues, problems and opportunities**

The reputation of the Alzheimer's Association Southeastern Virginia chapter and its Memory Walk® fundraiser are in jeopardy. This is because of the fall and injury of a Memory Walk participant, Ms. Smith, and a subsequent possible boycott by the walk participant and her team. Ms. Smith has taken her complaint to the media that the track surface was uneven, and the association should have taken the necessary precautions to ensure the safety of all participants. Ms. Smith has participated in the walk every year, and she and her team have been one of the largest fundraisers for the event.

This unfortunate situation has harmed the reputation of the organization for putting on a safe event, and it may impact the amount of donations for one of the organization's largest fundraisers. The reputation of the Alzheimer's Association and the Memory Walk need to be repaired in order to effectively abide by the mission of the organization, which is:

“To eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.”

### **Audiences and publics to be reached through media**

The list of audiences to be reached for this issue includes: Ms. Smith, her family, her teammates, other Memory Walk participants and volunteers, potential teams, potential companies and sponsors, current and potential donors, and the national office of the Alzheimer's Association.

*good*

### **Media audiences: most appropriate outlets, specific journalists and how best to reach them**

The most appropriate outlets for this crisis include the media that were contacted by Ms. Smith and covered the event. They include:

- **Virginian Pilot:** Nancy Young is the health editor from the Virginian Pilot. This newspaper has previously reported favorably about Alzheimer's and the association in general. It would be beneficial to reach out to Ms. Young and work specifically with her to try to repair the reputation of the association.
- **Daily Press:** Prue Salasky has traditionally written Alzheimer's related articles. It would be beneficial to reach out to Ms. Salasky and work specifically with her to try to repair the reputation of the association.
- **Eastern Shore News:** Ted Shockley, editor
- **Farmville Herald:** Ken Woodley, editor
- **Smithfield Times:** John Edwards, editor
- **Suffolk News Herald:** Ashley McKnight-Taylor, news editor
- **WAVY – 10:** Kathy Hostetter, news director and Stephanie Harris, reporter
- **WVEC – 13:** Lily Nguyen, news producer and Joe Flanagan, reporter
- **WTAR-AM:** Tina George, reporter

This specific issue has been covered by these reporters when they called for the association's comments on the accident. However, these same reporters will be the focus of the rebuild of the association's reputation.

### **Message development**

What are competitors saying?

Competitors at this time are other health nonprofit organizations, for example the American Cancer Society. Nonprofit organizations are constantly competing for funding from donors. Luckily, this situation does not involve a misuse of funds, so it is not likely that general giving will be affected. However, this crisis may affect future Memory Walks, so it is important to restore the reputation of the association and the event before the next walk.

What makes the Alzheimer's Association unique?

Messaging about the organization stems from core program and the mission, stated on page two.

Key organizational messages:

- The association is one of the only, if not the only, groups to work solely with Alzheimer's patients.
- The association has caregivers that go to patient homes to provide individualized and group care consultation.
- The association partners with MedicAlert, an organization that promises safe return in case a loved one wanders.
- The organization also has a 24/7 helpline with translators available in 140 different languages.
- In addition to these core programs, the association provides outreach to companies with education and mental health exercises and funds Alzheimer's-related research.

*Proof points for print bullet?*

Key messages about the Memory Walk:

- The Alzheimer's Association Memory Walk is the nation's largest event to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer's care, support and research.
- The walk calls on volunteers of all ages to become champions in the fight against Alzheimer's.
- There are walks in more than 600 communities.
- A typical Memory Walk is a 2 to 3 mile walk held on a weekend morning in the fall.

*Proof per point/detail bullet?*

### Focus group and message testing

There is no evidence available that any of these messages have been tested with focus groups. However, there is guidance from the national office to keep key messages about the organization focused on the major programs available that make the association unique.

### Action plan

#### **Goal**

In an effort to recover from the controversy, a media plan has been created to meet the goal of improving the overall reputation of the Alzheimer's Association Southeastern Virginia chapter. In meeting this goal, the sole objective is to receive a 75 percent favorable rating in the tone of media impressions after six months of the allegations. There are three strategies designed to help meet this objective.

#### Strategy #1: An expedited response to wrongdoing.

In expediting a response to wrongdoing, the chapter is furiously defending its name. This type of response allows the chapter to dictate which media it reaches out to. This method also

aids the members of the media in securing the information they seek in an effective and timely manner. The tactics that follow through on this strategy include:

- Tactic 1: Mandating an immediate response by a drafted letter from chapter Executive Director Gino Colombara to Ms. Smith, her team and the media.
- Tactic 2: Posting the letter and a video response on the chapter's Web site.
- Tactic 3: Calling all media who dealt directly with Ms. Smith and her teammates, and offering interviews with Executive Director Gino Colombara.

Strategy #2: To develop regular networking opportunities with area media members.

Establishing a relationship with members of the media can help in the total coverage of the chapter. These personal relationships can also help during crises, as reporters have been known help individuals who help them. The tactics to follow through on this strategy include:

- Tactic 1: Host a monthly media luncheon where members of the chapter dine with members of the local media. *Good that you clarified this is one journalist at a time.*
- Tactic 2: Update job descriptions for the media associate, director of development, events manager and CEO to include the responsibility of implementing the communications plan established by the national office by creating and maintaining relationships with the media.
- Tactic 3: Update the company Web site to include a speakers bureau where the chapter offers to use willing "Champions" as free speakers at area media events. *good!*

Strategy #3: A comprehensive media training campaign for the chapter's spokespeople.



This training would teach spokespeople the key messages of the chapter, as well as give them the ability to anticipate the questions a reporter might ask. The tactics to follow through on this strategy include:

- Tactic 1: Call the Greater Richmond, Central and Western Virginia, National Capital area chapters to determine interest in hosting a media relations conference.
- Tactic 2: Contact the national office and determine a date from the associations' national director of communications and an educator from the Virginia Speakers Bureau.
- Tactic 3: Have chapter Senior Management and the Alzheimer's Association "Champions" who are considering participating in the speakers bureau attend the media training and participate in on-air training.

### Key messages

Throughout the six-month process, there are many key messages that the spokespeople must concentrate on. During the initial crisis involving the Memory Walk, key messages about the event should be coupled with messages about the association. These messages include:

- The Alzheimer's Association Memory Walk is the nation's largest event to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer's care, support and research.
- The association is taking the steps to make sure accidents of this nature do not occur again.
- The association is the largest, group to work solely with Alzheimer's patients.

*Key messages could be stronger:  
Memory walk is a major community event and fundraiser...  
safely conducted every year... only time there has been an injury.  
Looking forward to next year and taking steps to ensure safety...*

As the controversy surrounding the Memory Walk subsides, it is important that the spokespeople speak specifically about the great things the association does for patients. Key messages here include:

- The association has caregivers *see comments earlier - these are more proof points than key messages.* that go to patient homes to provide individualized and group care consultation.
- The association partners with MedicAlert, an organization that promises safe return in case a loved one wanders.
- The organization also has a 24/7 helpline with translators available in 140 different languages.
- In addition to these core programs, the association provides outreach to companies with education and mental health exercises and funds Alzheimer's research.

### Channel strategies

In order to spread the message of the chapter, five key channels have been targeted. These channels will allow the chapter to speak directly to each of their publics. The chapter will utilize press releases, feature stories and the telephone in efforts to communicate to the media. In using these channels, the chapter hopes to express story ideas as well as use the media as a conduit to communicate with the general public. To communicate with its other publics, the chapter will use its Web site and social media. The Web site will be a place where the public can gain access to the latest information on chapter events and Alzheimer's research. Facebook and MySpace will also be used to communicate news and find volunteers for the Memory Walk and other events. *good.*

*→ these are not channels. How they will be distributed are channels.*



## **Media list**

The media list for this plan includes both large and small-scale media outlets.

### Print

Eastern Shore News: Ted Shockley, editor – (757) 787-1200

Farmville Herald: Ken Woodley, editor – (757) 357-3288

Smithfield Times: John Edwards, editor – (757) 357-3288

Suffolk News Herald: Ashley McKnight-Taylor, news editor – (757) 539-3437, ext. 603

Virginian-Pilot: Nancy Young, health editor – (757) 446-2947

Daily Press: Prue Salasky, editorial page editor – (757) 247-4784

### Broadcast

WAVY-TV: Stephanie Harris, reporter – (757) 396-6140

Kathy Hostetter, news director – (757) 396-6180

WVEC-TV: Joe Flanagan, reporter – (757) 628-5888

Lily Nguyen, news producer – (757) 628-6229

### Radio

WTAR-AM: Tina George, reporter – (757) 640-8500

If needed, other media contacts are available via the 2008 Public Relations Society of America Hampton Roads Media Guide.

### **Media relations plan budget:**

Monthly media lunch (x6): \$600 *wow! I want to go to these lunches.*

Portion of conference budget: \$800

Portion of speakers bureau educator: \$300

Portion of travel for national director: \$200

Total: \$1,900

**Implementation**

<b>Strategy 1: Expedited response to allegations</b>	
<b>Tactic/Action</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Draft a letter for the web from the executive director to send to Ms. Smith and the media addressing the situation. Create a video to post to the web addressing the issue.	Within 24 hours after the accident
Call all media outlets who interviewed Ms. Smith and offer an interview with the executive director, other designated spokespersons and experts	Within 24 hours after the accident

*good*

<b>Strategy 2: Develop regular networking opportunities with area media.</b>	
<b>Tactic/Action</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Host a monthly media luncheon where members of the chapter dine with members of the local media.	Establish first lunch and learn session at the chapter headquarters in January 2009.  Contact media to schedule a lunch date in December for the 2009 year.
Update job descriptions for the media associate, director of development, events manager and CEO to include the responsibility of creating and maintaining relationships with the media.	To happen immediately – by January 2009.
Update the company Web site to include a speakers bureau where the chapter offers to use willing “Champions” as free speakers at area media events.	Establish a list of champions available to speak by January 2009.

*Good use of chart*

<b>Strategy 3: Provide comprehensive media training campaign for the chapter's spokespeople.</b>	
<b>Tactic/Action</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Call the Greater Richmond, Central and Western Virginia, National Capital area chapters to determine interest in hosting a media relations conference.	Contact the chapters and director of communications by the end of January 2009 to gauge interest in the conference.
Contact the national office and determine a date from the associations' national director of communications and an educator from the Virginia Speakers Bureau.	Establish a committee and make plans for the conference – TBA (once interest is established).
Have chapter senior management and the Alzheimer's Association "Champions" who are considering participating in the speakers bureau attend the media training and participate in on-air training.	TBA – As plans are made for the conference, management and champions will be notified immediately so they can make plans.

### Evaluation

The Alzheimer's Associations Southeastern Virginia Chapter recognizes this unfortunate accident has become a crisis of character that requires immediate attention and a direct response.

In order to keep track of the crisis situation and improve for the future, a log will be maintained to monitor all information received, procedures undertaken and steps decided upon.

The director of development and media associate will be responsible for keeping a log of media contacts – both inquiries and initiatives – by recording the date and time of the contact, the name of the publication, radio or TV station, the name and phone number of the reporter or other contact, and the subject of the inquiry and response given. All media clippings and broadcast news coverage will go through message analysis to determine if key messages are being well-received. We will also assess whether the tonality of the clipping or broadcast was positive, neutral or negative.

*The evaluation needs to tie back directly to the objective. You need to be clear about how you are going to measure - what metrics you are going to use - to determine if media coverage is 75% favorable for the time period.*

Once the chapter has declared an end to the crisis, the executive director and crisis team will sit down immediately afterwards to debrief on evaluation procedures.