

GLAAD MediaActivism Training Manual



*gay & lesbian alliance
against defamation*



Our Mission

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) is dedicated to promoting fair, accurate and inclusive representation of individuals and events in all media as a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

GLAAD, a media advocacy organization, works to improve the manner in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues, events and people are presented to the public by the media. Part of this commitment includes training activists on the grassroots level in media skills. An organization's ability to effectively work with media professionals and increase visibility of its mission is a vital component of any overall strategic plan.

Our opponents understand the importance of the media in shaping public opinion, and invest their time and energies into getting their message on the air and into print. Through your continued efforts to increase and improve media coverage, you can make a difference in our struggle for civil rights.



Acknowledgments

MediaActivism was born out of the day to day work of GLAAD: what we learned the hard way in the past 15 years as grassroots activists and what we have gained through the expertise of professionals who have come to be a part of GLAAD's staff. GLAAD's heartfelt thanks goes to those individuals and organizations we have trained and have learned from in the process.

GLAAD especially recognizes the contributions of Patrick Calder of Dan Kaufman Graphics, and the GLAAD staff, volunteers, interns and supporters who have made these training curriculums successful.



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Please visit GLAAD online at www.glaad.org to find supplements to this training manual.

Part 1: GLAAD's History of Media Activism

“GAY AIDS DENSI!”

So read the headline of a 1985 article in the New York Post. Outraged by abysmal media coverage of gay and AIDS issues, a small group of New York journalists and writers formed the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). Their goal: to counter the news media's anti-gay bias and promote accurate coverage of the gay and lesbian community.

In 1988, Los Angeles activists formed a GLAAD chapter to combat homophobia not only in the local news media, but also in the Hollywood-based entertainment media. Within a few years, GLAAD chapters popped up in San Francisco, Washington, DC, Kansas City and Atlanta.

GLAAD has evolved into a united national organization with offices around the country and a multi-million dollar budget. Its many projects focus on all areas of media including interactive and online media. Each year, GLAAD hosts major annual awards ceremonies recognizing outstanding positive media portrayals of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Today, GLAAD is more effective and influential than ever.

As GLAAD has grown in prominence, the organization has increasingly taken a proactive approach, educating the media about issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity. Through meetings between GLAAD and the media, we work to stop defamation before it starts. Still, a central element to GLAAD's work is reactive, that is, speaking out about unfair portrayals of our community and recognizing favorable treatments of LGBT in the news and entertainment media.

The MediaActivism training is designed to give you the tools to monitor representations of LGBT people in your own community, respond effectively to the media, and proactively work to prevent defamation in your local media. In the last twenty years, coverage of our community has vastly improved thanks to the efforts of grassroots activists.

Mobilizing to demand fair, accurate and inclusive representations of our issues and our lives is a crucial component of activism. The media influences public opinion and public policy, and no organization can afford to ignore this aspect of their work. If you don't demand that your issues be covered fairly and accurately, who will?

Part 2: Fair, Accurate and Inclusive Representations

Before you can begin the work of responding to media coverage of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, it is necessary to first determine what kinds of coverage merits a response. The recent and enormous changes in the quantity and quality of media attention to these issues have made it challenging to analyze and respond to coverage. It is vital to develop both a critical sense of what exactly defamation is as well as an outline of precise goals and strategies to effectively deal with media professionals.



Effective relationships with media professionals and outlets require not only a response to defamatory coverage of LGBT people, events and issues, but also positive feedback to professionals who cover our community in fair, accurate and inclusive ways. Supporting and thanking professionals who do so will encourage their continued

sensitivity, as well as model appropriate coverage to professionals who are both ignorant of these issues and who are knowingly defamatory.

Thank professionals who cover our community fairly and accurately.

Further, media professionals who consistently provide fair and accurate coverage of LGBT issues and people in predominately conservative outlets deserve special kudos; they are often fighting an uphill battle for responsible journalism and your support for their coverage will help ensure their continued success.

Fair: Fair representations in the media treat LGBT people and issues with the same respect due to any community, minority or otherwise. Just as fair representations of racial or ethnic minorities do not assume the validity of racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, etc., so too should

representations of LGBT people not assume the validity of homophobia. Media professionals may engage in the controversy that often surrounds LGBT issues without pandering to blatantly homophobic positions.

Accurate: Accurate representations portray a broad range of LGBT people, communities and issues: lesbian lawyers and drag queens, leatherfolk and gay men of color, trans and bisexual people, HIV positive women and poor and working class people of all stripes. Accurate representations acknowledge every aspect of LGBT communities, not merely the most sensational or controversial nor the most “fitting” with mainstream culture.

Inclusive: Inclusive representations acknowledge the presence of LGBT people, communities and issues in every facet of life and culture: child rearing, sexuality, relationships, politics, business, health, education, art, spirituality, aging, etc.

Part 3: What is Defamation and How to Spot It

Media coverage of LGBT issues spans a wide spectrum of quality. An effective monitor and response effort must stand ready to respond to all types of coverage, from the groundbreaking work of media outlets like the *New York Times* around transgender and intersex issues to the continued use of anti-gay epithets by local drive-time radio personalities.

Recognizing defamatory coverage when you see it is relatively easy, but in order to affect media coverage most effectively, it is crucial to take a more systematic approach to recognizing defamation. Defamation takes many forms, some stemming from malicious intent and some from ignorance. Understanding the differences between types of defamatory coverage will help you to better strategize a response and to offer constructive feedback to media professionals.

GLAAD has roughly divided defamation into five categories:

- Vicious Slander
- Reliance on Stereotypes
- Casual Prejudice
- Deference to Homophobia
- Defamation by Omission

Vicious Slander:

Even as representations of lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people increase in quality, there are still many direct media attacks on our community. GLAAD's most visible work has centered on its campaigns to hold the media industry, and media personalities, accountable for their blatantly anti-gay positions and remarks. GLAAD's Dr. Laura and Eminem campaigns are two of the most recent, most successful, and most visible examples.

Examples of vicious slander include Dr. Laura's opinions on gay and lesbian sexual orientation:

"I'm sorry, hear it one more time perfectly clearly: if you're gay or a lesbian, it's a biological error that inhibits you from relating normally to the opposite sex. The fact that you are intelligent, creative and valuable is all true. The error is in your inability to relate sexually, intimately, in a loving way to a member of the opposite sex. It is a biological error."

The Dr. Laura Show, December 8, 1998

And rap performer Eminem's hateful lyrics about LGBT people:

*"You faggots keep eggin me on
til I have you at knifepoint, then you beg me to stop?
SHUT UP! Give me
your hands and feet
I said SHUT UP when I'm talkin to you
YOU HEAR ME? ANSWER ME!"*

"Kill You," The Marshall Mathers LP

Reliance on Stereotypes:

In the past, the media frequently portrayed lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as depressed, psychotic, decadent, suicidal, homicidal and/or as pedophiles. For the most part, the days of mainstream media representations relying on such groundless stereotypes are gone.

Today, stereotyping is more commonly found in sensationalized coverage of the LGBT community. Your local newspaper, for example, may consistently focus their Pride coverage only on the most sensational elements of the event. There are many diverse sections of the LGBT community that would interest the paper's readers, and including a broad spectrum, from the most extravagant to the most mundane, would more accurately reflect the event.

Casual Prejudice:

It is often the case that the media representatives will make offhand remarks that reinforce societal prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. While this kind of defamation might not be malicious in intent, it is still damaging given the tacit approval of prejudice against our community.

Examples of casual prejudice:

- In Philadelphia, a newspaper article about flower vendors tried to prove the toughness of the lot by joking: "Make no mistake, these vendors aren't pansies."
- A Los Angeles television news program ran footage of Disneyland to illustrate a story on the ABC-Disney merger. The file footage was of the annual "Gay Days at Disney" celebration featuring two men

holding hands. When the reporter realized the error, he and others in the newsroom could be heard, on air, laughing for an extended period of time as the footage continued to roll.

Deference to Homophobia:

In an attempt to provide “objective” stories, the news media often seeks out anti-gay political and religious extremists to provide “balance” to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. As the quality of coverage of our community has evolved, GLAAD and others are demanding higher standards of representation. While counterpoints within the reporting of political issues are a cherished and important means of education the public through the media, the source must always be considered.

Consider this parallel: while no reputable media outlet would consider garnering comment from the Aryan Nation if they were interviewing a mixed race or mixed religion couple, many stories concerning lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, including feature or “style” stories, still contain representations of bigoted anti-gay spokespeople.

Examples of deference to homophobia:

- A Kansas City newspaper article about lesbians and gay men raising children included commentary by a representative from the American Family Association claiming that gay parents make a child gay, sexually confused, and unsure of gender.
- A San Francisco television news feature about two men planning a wedding together had a local homophobic minister talking about how such marriages “destroy the traditional family.”
- A North Carolina newspaper article about women facing sexual harassment in the military and the threat of discharge because of accusations of lesbianism featured Sen. Jesse Helms saying that LGBT people have no right to be in the armed forces because it lowers morale and leads to “orgies in the barracks.”
- A 1996 ABC 20/20 interview with Melissa Etheridge and Julie Cypher about having a baby together included commentary by the virulently anti-gay Lou Sheldon of the religious political extremist group, Traditional Values Coalition.

Defamation by Omission:

One of the major reasons for public ignorance of, and bigotry toward, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people is our history of invisibility in the media. The tremendous increase in recent years of media coverage about our issues has demonstrated the value of visibility. When society-at-large begins to discuss lesbian, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people, it also begins to understand how anti-gay oppression affects all of us, how people are frequently discriminated against solely on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and how, in reality, we are everywhere. Public opinion shifts dramatically with the increase of fair, accurate and inclusive representations of our lives.

Examples of omission:

- Failing to cover proposed additions of sexual orientation and gender identity when discussing hate crimes legislation
- A story on June weddings with no same-sex couples
- A feature outlining diversity within a suburban community that includes no LGBT people.
- A news story on hate crimes that covers such crimes motivated by racism, anti-Semitism, and age, but not sexual orientation.
- Magazines such as *Time* repeatedly failing to include monumental news items dealing with the LGBT community in its special editions (examples include *Time*'s year end issues for 1997 & 1998 and its failure to mention the Stonewall Uprising, the impact of AIDS or the role lesbians played in the Women's Movement of the '70s in its 75th Anniversary edition).

Language Usage

While not necessarily a category of defamation *per se*, inappropriate language to describe LGBT people and events may make otherwise good coverage less so. Words and phrases like "homosexual," "gay agenda," and "admitted homosexual" are antiquated and laden with anti-gay sentiment.

Refer to the GLAAD Media Language Guide (available at www.glaad.org) for more details about language usage. Offer to send a copy of the Guide to media professionals.

Part 4: Responding to the Media

Now that you have an understanding of what defamation in the media looks like, the next step is to figure out what to do about it. You don't have to be a public relations professional to deal with the press effectively. There are, however, guidelines you should follow. Use the Responding to the Media worksheet (Appendix A) to help you guide your discussion.

5 Values of Effective Relationships With Media Professionals

There are five major values necessary for effectively building and maintaining professional relations with media personnel:

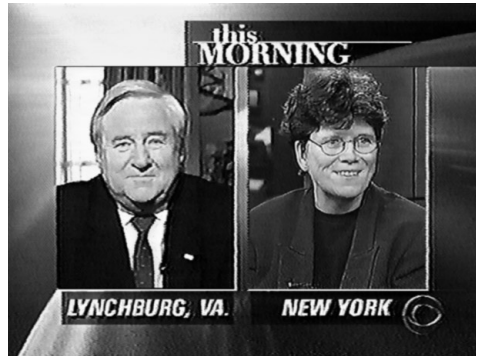
- **Professionalism:** the relationship you are seeking is a professional one. Be sure to treat it as such.
- **Respect:** not all journalists are informed about lesbian and gay issues, understand that these relationships are a long-term commitment and process. You need to respect the people you work with and should expect the same kind of treatment in return.
- **Honesty:** never lie to a journalist! Saying “I don't know, but I will help you find what you need” will earn you the respect of any responsible media professional.
- **Commitment to knowledge of your subject matter and the specific media outlet you are working with.** Know your issues and know the media outlet before you approach its staff.
- **Confidence in the presentation of your issues to the media:** demonstrate your concern for your issues; they will think it is important if you show them how important it is to you.

Contacting the Press

Once you have identified coverage that deserves a response, the first step is to research and understand the outlet's history of covering LGBT issues. Before you can affect change in coverage of LGBT issues, you must understand the root of the problem: is defamation an institutional trend or the result of particular columnists, reporters, editors, etc? Are homophobic views generally espoused in opinion pieces or news stories, or are LGBT issues generally absent from overall coverage? Does defamation in their coverage primarily occur out of hostility or ignorance? Researching an outlet's history of covering LGBT issues will help you to

direct your efforts toward the correct people, determine the appropriate scope of your efforts, and convince your media contacts that you are committed to their outlet.

Determine whether the poor coverage has distributed misinformation, or whether the coverage was generally acceptable, but could have been improved. In both cases, contacting the author is the first step, but if the article has distributed misinformation you should consider publishing a response.



Call your contact in the morning and before you begin discussing the piece, first ask if he or she is on deadline and if you can have five minutes of his or her time. If the author cannot speak with you at that moment, ask when a good time would be to call and be sure to follow up. If your contact agrees to speak with you, use the following guidelines to frame your discussion:

- Before you contact the press, be clear about your message and your position on the piece. Prepare constructive criticism with with suggestions for improvement; a few broad suggestions are more effective than a long list of specific complaints. Keep in mind that your goal is to inspire change in this writer's work. Putting him or her on the defensive won't help you to accomplish this mission.
- Always begin by assuming that poor coverage is a result of ignorance rather than malice. You may indeed be proven wrong, but give your contact the benefit of the doubt.
- Explain to your contact who you are, your credentials, and why you have an interest in the piece. Citing your organizational affiliation will lend you some credibility.
- Begin your conversation with something positive, even if there is little good to say about the piece. Complimenting the outlet in general, the reporter's coverage of the issue, or something specific in the piece will start your conversation off on the right note.
- Always behave with professionalism and respect, even if you receive a negative response or disrespect from your contact. Your

conversation may or may not affect the professional's immediate coverage of LGBT issues, but it will most certainly make an impression on your contact. Responding to a negative reaction with calm professionalism will leave your contact with something to think about. Reacting with hostility, on the other hand, may prompt him or her to resent both you and your issues.

- Give your contact solutions to the problems you point out, and in fact phrase your criticism not in terms of what the reporter did wrong, but what they could do to improve their coverage. Offer to send a language guide and to be a resource next time your contact covers LGBT issues. Also offer your contact a list of other resources in the LGBT community. Providing the contact with a community directory is a good idea.
- If the coverage has distributed misinformation that needs to be corrected, make this a key point of discussion with your contact. Offer to provide more accurate information for a follow-up piece, and let your contact know that you will be submitting a letter to the editor or an op-ed piece.

Editorial Board Meetings

If poor coverage of LGBT issues is a pattern in the outlet you are targeting, try to arrange a meeting with the outlet's editorial board. A small coalition of representatives from some of the most prominent LGBT organizations in your community might help you to secure a meeting with an outlet who is unreceptive to your requests. With conservative outlets that are hostile to LGBT issues, however, you may have better luck with individual professionals.



Use the guidelines for individual meetings to inform the flow of the meeting. Your main objectives of the meeting should be to convince the editorial board that 1) Unfair and inaccurate coverage of LGBT issues is poor journalism and 2) homophobia is a poor business decision that will alienate

not only their LGBT readers, but their general readership as well. Be sure to explain to the outlet your categories of defamation, and how their coverage relates to them.

Use your editorial board meeting to, above all, develop a relationship with the outlet and to offer yourself and your organization as a resource. Situating your organization as a reliable resource on your issues will help to ensure that the outlet solicits your point of view. Be wary of setting up an overly adversarial relationship between yourself and the outlet, as they may respond by not covering your issues at all, or by covering them unfairly and inaccurately.

Publishing Responses: Writing Letters to the Editor and Op-Ed Pieces

Guest editorials, op-eds and letters to the editor are great ways to address inappropriate and defamatory coverage of LGBT issues in your local media outlets, and to simultaneously reach the outlet's audience with your message. Letters to the Editor are most useful when your goal is to comment on the piece more generally; op-eds are most useful when your goal is to correct inaccurate or incomplete coverage.

Timeliness is key; op-eds and Letters to the Editor are most effective and most likely to be published when they address current topics and coverage. Your submissions should address the audience in a different way than the coverage you are responding to. Be sure to add to, correct, or critique previous coverage, not duplicate it.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are most effective when you want to address a disagreement with an article, editorial, or opinion piece, but do not need to correct a great deal of misinformation. Timeliness is key and you should be prepared to submit a letter the same day.

Letters to the Editor should be brief, pithy, and generally under 150 words, though they may be up to 250 words. Stick to a single message point and do not stray from it. With so little space to convey your message, it is imperative that you resist the urge to vent all of your frustrations with the offending piece. Remember, conveying one message point that your readers will remember and understand is better than five that they won't. Keep your sentences short and to the point and maintain an even, professional yet personal tone. Include your name and organizational affiliation with every submission.

Example: Letter to the Editor

USA TODAY

February 6, 2001

Media Focus on Hate Crimes is Long Overdue

It was very disappointing to see Michael Medved distort the facts and insult the lesbian and gay community yet again on the pages of USA TODAY (“TV focuses on one ‘hate crime,’ forgets another,” The Forum, Wednesday).

When individual gay persons are the target of hate violence, it isn’t about that one person. Instead, it is hate directed at all of us.

When will Medved learn that insidious prejudice in our culture has created a climate in which those who hate feel they have permission to take out those feelings on others, be they gay, African American, Latino, disabled or of the “wrong” faith? Finally, we live in a culture that is less inclined to look the other way at oppression and violence against people who are considered different.

The media attention and community concern after Matthew Shepard’s murder was part of that.

It’s only by talking about these issues and educating others – as people such as Shepard’s parents, Judy and Dennis, and the family of James Byrd do so nobly in the aftermath of such tragedies – that we can ever hope to live in a more respectful society.

Medved seems upset that violence against gay and lesbian people is finally getting the recognition it deserves.

But the answer to the question he poses, “What explains the media’s ongoing and extraordinary fascination with the murder of Matthew Shepard?” can be answered very simply: They finally woke up to reality. Victimization and prejudice are everyday occurrences for many of us.

Why it took so long for the media to pay attention; why hate crimes continue to happen constantly; and how we can work together to end hate violence are the real questions.

Cathy Renna, News Media Director
Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
New York, NY

Op-Eds

Op-eds, or Opinion Editorials, are most effective when you feel that your issues are not being adequately covered in the media, or when the personal voice of someone affected by a particular issue could inform the debate more substantively. Op-Eds are longer than Letters to the Editor and more effective for correcting misinformation. Stick to two message points, providing supporting details for each. Op-Eds should generally stay under 500 words, but be sure to check the submission guidelines for your target outlet. The op-ed review process can take up to 10 days at some outlets, so you will need to jump on issues in a timely manner and meet the submission deadline.

Emphasize the reasons why readers of the outlet you are targeting would be interested in your viewpoint and cite recent coverage by that outlet of your issue to drive the point home. Be strategic about submitting your piece to specific publications. Use the message development worksheet (Appendix B) to help you construct a clear and concise message.

Think about the best voice for your piece. The author of an op-ed is as important as the content and will have an impact on whether or not it will run. This doesn't mean that the author necessarily has to be an organizational leader or prominent community name; a parent concerned about discriminatory education policies brings a compelling voice and human face to an issue in a way that others cannot.

Letters to the Editor and Op-Ed Writing Tips:

- Keep letters under 150 words, and Op-Eds under 500 words, if possible.
- Make sure your submission brings something new to the topic.
- Stick to your message points: one in letters and two in Op-Eds.
- Research the most appropriate outlet for your message.
- Don't be boring or long-winded.
- Keep your sentences under 20 words each.
- Use humor to make your submission more interesting, but be careful; humor can often be misinterpreted.
- Use data to back up your messages, but don't overwhelm your readers with statistics. Choose one or two powerful facts.
- Be concise and pithy.

Example: Opinion/Editorial

Letter: A Gay and Lesbian Organization Responds to Dr. Laura

Joan M. Garry, executive director of GLAAD, takes on the talk doc

Time Magazine, Sunday, Jul. 09, 2000 In an interview in *TIME* two weeks ago, Laura Schlessinger spoke out about her reactions to many gays' and lesbians' negative response to her. I was fascinated by how she saw her own reflection in the mirror she has held up to the lesbian and gay community for more than a year. She claims that her image has been distorted; ironically, that's the same claim we have been making about what she has done to our image. The distinction, then, must lie in who holds the mirror and at what angle. Here is how I see it:

When Laura and I met last year, I believe that we both were optimistic that we could either change the other's mind or at least find a common ground about her opinions regarding homosexuality. We could not. By now I think most people reading this have had some exposure to the controversy over her use of such terms as "biological error," "dysfunction" and "disorder" to describe lesbians and gays. Here's why such descriptive words bother us so much.

Anytime someone is allowed to defame any category of people, whether by description or depiction, those people can become regarded as less than human. In studies, the objects of such discrimination tend to be viewed as less important as individuals and less deserving of a place in our society. What does it matter if hurt or harm comes to such people, such thinking goes; they're not as important as the rest of us, and consequently less worthy of our regard and concern. This erosion of mutual respect is just that: a mutual loss for us all.

Laura plays fast and loose with pseudoclinical rhetoric and nonempirical statistics (mostly from political rather than credible medical sources) to portray lesbians and gays as, well, "biological errors." The fact that she is not medically qualified to make such claims is dodged by her "deeply felt religious perspectives." She not only seems unable to choose whether to espouse science or faith but also mixes an indefensible concoction of both and passes it off as truth.

It is this hubris, advocating her opinion as truth, that is too much. When she states that "some people just don't want to hear the truth," she can't be referring to lesbians and gays. Scientific truth is on our side. She must mean faith. If so, that is her business (increasingly, literally!). But to incorporate her academic title into her program's name implies that she has some medical qualification to dispense guidance on sexual orientation. This is misleading and dangerous to an unsuspecting and trusting audience.

When parents of a gay child hear the words "error" and "deviant" in the same sentence as "gay," it's easy for me as a mother to imagine what conclusions they draw.

If Laura has "cried more at times than I would like to admit" in response to lesbians' and gays' speaking out against her, she has nothing on the misery she has caused us with her virulent and prejudicial denunciations. For a woman who claims to be all about the family, has she considered how many families with lesbian and gay members she has torn apart with her destructive words?

Laura can dry her eyes anytime she wants, just by telling the truth.

Part 5: Coordinating your Media Activism Efforts

Media activism can be an incredibly effective way to not only combat homophobia and discrimination of LGBT people, but can also be a great opportunity to get your own organization's message out into the press. In order to use your contact with the media to its fullest advantage, however, you must strategically coordinate your efforts.

A. Develop a Clear and Concise Organizational Message

Whenever you speak with the press, whether to respond to coverage or to garner it, you should have a clear, consistent organizational message. Different or contradictory messages coming out of your organization will lead to confusion. It is best to assert a single message that people remember and can associate with your organization, than five that they can't.

Use the message development worksheet to outline your organizational message, and make sure that anyone who will be speaking with the press is clear about it. Depending on the level of coverage your organization receives, and the breadth of its concerns, you may need to tailor your message to specific issues. Be sure, though, to have a single mission statement or goal that ties all of your messages together.



B. Determine the Scope of Your Monitoring Efforts

While your response efforts may be restricted to the occasional defamatory newspaper article or television news coverage, you might also consider making monitoring your local media part of your organization's regular activities.

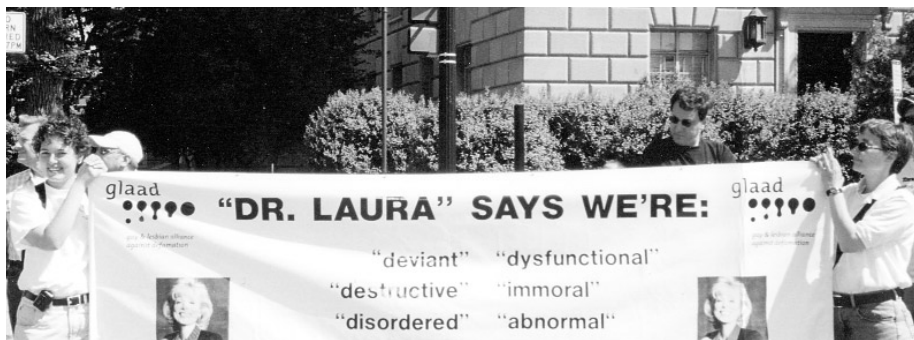
Assign publications, or sections of publications, to specific people who will go through them daily and pull out references to LGBT issues. Consistently tracking your local outlets' coverage of LGBT issues will help you to determine the most effective courses of action in efforts to improve local coverage, i.e. arranging a meeting with a specific reporter or with the entire editorial board.

C. Develop Relationships with Local Media

The most effective way to influence media coverage is by developing relationships with media professionals. Offering yourself and your organization as a resource on LGBT issues is one powerful way to accomplish this. Begin by sending press kits and introductory letters. Place local outlets on a media list and send them regular media releases. Research the outlets and contact the reporters who cover LGBT issues. Always follow up your print materials with a phone call.

D. Mobilize Your Constituents

As with any activist effort, your message will grow in strength with each voice that expresses it. If a particular issue with the media arises, such as a case of defamatory coverage, mobilize your constituents to address your concerns. Develop a plan for reporting defamation in your local media and for notifying your constituents about action they should take.



Email lists and phone trees are great ways to mobilize your supporters. Make sure your constituents have a list of talking points, contact email addresses and phone numbers, and a plan of action. Ask your supporters to write letters to the editor and make phone calls to the media themselves, though be sure to be clear as to who is authorized to speak on behalf of your organization. Be aware that it is often more effective to have constituents speak as individuals rather than as members of your organization.

Call upon other LGBT organizations in your area to support your case as well. Ask them to contact the media outlet as an organization, and to ask their constituents to respond as well.

E. Join a GLAAD Monitor & Mobilization Team

MediaActivism is time consuming and initiating media action in your organization can be a little intimidating. If you are ready to begin monitoring your local media, but aren't quite ready to create a response infrastructure, join a GLAAD monitor and mobilization team!

Visit www.glaad.org to find out more about internet-based activism in your region.

Conclusion

Media activism is a crucial step towards securing civil rights for LGBT people. The media is perhaps the most powerful tool in shaping public opinion, and no organization can afford to ignore its power.

GLAAD's MediaActivism training has given you the tools to get started, and with the time and commitment of activists like yourself, you can affect change in the media.

Appendix A: Responding to the Media Worksheet

Before you respond to the media about poor coverage, use the following worksheet to focus your comments.

- What category(ies) of defamation does the piece fall into?
 - Vicious Slander
 - Reliance on Stereotypes
 - Casual Prejudice
 - Deference to Homophobia
 - Defamation by Omission
 - Language Usage

- What is/are your goal(s) in contacting the media?
 - Correct inaccurate coverage
 - Affect change in future coverage
 - Solicit a public apology
 - Other

- List all of the incidents of defamatory or poor coverage in the piece:

- List a couple of positive points about the piece, the author, or the outlet (coverage of the issue, terminology, the author's past work, etc.)

- Using the categories of defamation as a guide, list your three main criticisms of the piece, in general terms. Try to find three points that will cover all of your specific concerns.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

- Referring to your three points above, list concrete and specific ways your contact could improve his or her coverage:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Appendix B: Message Development Worksheet

- What is your organizational goal/mission statement? If you don't have one, write one!

- What is your issue and how is it newsworthy?

- Identify your message's "big picture." What is the universal appeal; how does this issue affect the community-at-large?

- Identify 3-5 key points that support your message or mission:

a.

b. _____

c. _____

- Review past media coverage. Study the opposing message and any misinformation or criticism about your effort. Determine a counter-strategy and anticipate questions from reporters.

- Even when providing “neutral information” the media will look for another point of view. You may choose not to counter an opponent’s argument, but you will need to be prepared to answer their charges and correct their factual errors in your talking points.

GLAAD Across the Nation:

Atlanta

159 Ralph McGill Boulevard
Suite 506
Atlanta, GA 30308
(404) 614-3700
fax (404) 614-3701

Kansas City

1509 Westport Road, Suite 203
Kansas City, MO 64111
(816) 756-5991
fax (816) 756-5993

Los Angeles

8455 Beverly Boulevard, Suite 305
Los Angeles, CA 90048
(323) 658-6775
fax (323) 658-6776

New York

248 West 35th Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10001
(212) 629-3322
fax (212) 629-3225

San Francisco

1360 Mission Street, Suite 200
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 861-2244
fax (415) 861-4893

Washington, DC

1700 Kalorama Road, NW, Suite 101
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 986-1360
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