Hello everyone. Today we’re going to cover: how to pitch your service project to the media and get coverage.

The media is always looking to tell good stories of people helping people. That’s exactly what Kiwanis does! So why aren’t all of our clubs are getting coverage of their projects? That’s what we’re going to try to help with today.

But to make it clear, we all know we didn’t join Kiwanis for the recognition. We do “Kiwanis” to help people, especially the kids in our community. But it is important to be covered by the media. It helps boost the morale of the club. Media coverage gets members recognition for doing good and it gets the Kiwanis name and mission in front of potential new members. And clubs should always be looking for new members because as municipalities and school districts make budget cuts, kids need Kiwanis to fill the gap.
Today, we’ll focus on five points to pitching your service project. We’ll spend the most time talking about and looking at examples of molding the project to make it a good story.

The visuals needed to tell that story effectively.

Crafting the pitch to the reporter.

Staging the service to make great visuals for the camera.

And publishing the story yourself.

If you have a question, raise your virtual hand or write it in the chat box and we’ll answer it. We’ll make all this material available to you after today’s webinar. Let’s get started.
Newsroom are shrinking. There are headlines all the time about newspaper layoffs and buyouts. Even as that is happening, the public is consuming more news than ever before. They’re just consuming it in non-traditional way. What this means is that there are fewer reporters feeding a bigger news appetite. That equals reporters who are busier than ever. Every reporter has several stories to write every day. They have to post to Facebook and live Tweet breaking news events. They have to cultivate sources and stay current on current events. Plus, they have to stay on top of their email inbox so they don’t miss a hot tip or an exclusive scoop.
Reporters, editors and producers in newsrooms are bombarded with story ideas all day, every day. Their time is precious, and their tolerance for bad ideas is short—so you need to know what will be most helpful to them.

If you’re in a small town, and your club is presenting a check for $1,000 to the food bank, that might be enough to score some coverage. If you’re in a bigger market, like Dallas or Houston, a $1,000 check presentation by your club is not going to make the news.

Our job as PR people is to take the good work we are already doing and mold it into a good story that’s easy for the media to cover. The easier you make it for the reporter, the more likely you are to score coverage again and again. Plus, good media events are good club events that enhance engagement among club members.
So how do you mold a service project into a great story? Make it about the service — the act of helping someone. (advance) Make the project about the kids you are helping. (advance) Make it about the community. (advance) Don’t make it about the club’s leader. (advance) Don’t make it about Kiwanis. Coincidentally, making a service project about the community will engage more members and get others excited to be involved. There will be an energy around the project that will be unbeatable.

Let’s look at some examples of popular service projects Kiwanis clubs do.
How many clubs do a food drive? Too many to count.

Bringing cans of food to a club meeting to donate to the food bank certainly helps people. But it’s not going to get you any media coverage to drive awareness of your Kiwanis club, which is what we are trying to do. Bringing cans of food to a club meeting isn’t going to get you good pictures to post on Facebook or Instagram. So while beneficial to the community, it’s not engaging.
But look at what the Kiwanis Club of Bentonville in Arkansas does to get coverage. They create and distribute 600 food baskets with chicken, potatoes, corn and dessert. They hand out the baskets to people in need.

**Tip 1: Make it about the service!**

This club is serving the community. The media loves stories of people helping people. So collect the food at your meeting, then have a day where you package it and distribute it to families in need. You can partner with the food bank for distribution. Another distribution option is to partner with the school district. The act of serving others is more likely to generate media interest than a box in the corner of a club meeting.

It’s just that extra step of packing and distributing that makes the project newsworthy.
Here’s another example:
Many clubs collect clothing to give to kids to keep them warm during the colder months. This is very important work. We have a box here at Kiwanis International for staff members to donate gently used coats so others can be warm. Most media outlets are going to pass on this story pitch because so many companies and organizations do this. But with some tweaking, and taking it to the next step, you can get coverage.

**Tip 2: Focus the service project on the kids you are helping.**
The Wood River (Illinois) Kiwanis Club does just that. Working with the school district, the club of 45 members identifies children who need shoes. Then the club takes those kids shopping.

The people who decide what goes in the paper or on the news love these kinds of stories because of the priceless faces the kids make when they get shoes or coats or whatever.

You see it in the picture the paper included with the story. Those little girls faces are priceless. You see excitement and gratitude.

You can do the same thing. If your club is doing a clothing drive, set up a “Kiwanis store,” where kids can browse and pick out what they want. And, it doesn’t have to just be clothes. It can be toys or whatever. Just involve the children you are helping. It’s going to be a little more work finding a partner
who can connect you to families in need, but when the children thank you, it’ll be worth the effort. Additionally, focusing the service project on kids reinforces our core message that kids need Kiwanis.
So now you have a good idea of how to make your service projects more interesting to the media and you’ve probably noticed that the projects we’ve talked about are visually interesting. There is action going on. Things are happening. People are making expressions. Having good visuals is paramount to attracting print or television reporters to a story.

When your club is planning a service project, come up with a list of all of the visual elements that could be available. What can you incorporate service? How will kids be involved? What will people be doing? If you are lacking these elements, find a way to incorporate them. You’re more likely to draw the media, plus members will be more engaged in the project and Kiwanis.
Now that you have tweaked your service project to make the project media friendly, you need to tell the reporters about it.

Most PR people will write a news release and send it off to the newsroom. That’s a fine approach and one that has been done forever. (advance) Make sure your news release has contact information. The contact doesn’t have to be the club president. The contact person should be someone who responds to email and answers telephone calls immediately. Don’t make a reporter wait too long on a story or they’ll move to another one. They have deadlines to meet. (advance) When you send a release, copy and paste it into the body of an email. Many newsroom email servers block messages that contain attachments because of concerns about viruses and phishing attacks. And, so many of us read our email on our phones, clicking the attachment isn’t always easy. If you’re making a journalist open an attachment, it’s another step for him or her. The more steps it takes, the less likely your release is going to be read because, as you remember, journalists are always in a hurry and need information fast. (advance)

Like the projects themselves, focus your news release on the service project, the kids or both. Let’s look at some examples.
What do you think of this one? The headline, which can also be the subject line in the email, says: Kiwanis club hosts food drive. The subhead reads members to collect 300 cans of beans. No need to read anymore. A journalist isn’t going to. It’s not interesting. This release makes it all about the club. Nothing about service. Nothing about kids. (advance) An editor presses delete. Event not covered.
Let’s take a look at this release. Same club, same project.

The headline, which can also be the subject line in the email, says: 300 families to get baskets of food. That is neat. As a journalist, I’m going to open the email and read some more. The subhead reads: families pick up turkey, beans and potatoes for holiday meals on Wednesday. Now the journalist knows that there is going to be an activity and activity equals opportunities for visuals. The journalist keeps reading: The students at Pike Elementary School will have food in their tummies while they dream about Santa because of the Kiwanis Club of Indy. Now the journalist knows there is an event to get images of families and kids. Hook, line and sinker.

This news release focuses on a service project. And, it focuses on kids. (advance) Winner, winner, turkey dinner!
Sending a news release to the newsroom is just one way to pitch your story, but the best way is to reach out directly to a reporter who has covered you or another Kiwanis club in the past because they have a relationship with you or the club. They know who you are and hopefully they respect you. Send that reporter an email, thanking them for the past coverage because they may not remember it and alerting them to the upcoming event. You can copy and paste the news release into that email as well.
Sometimes a reporter will tell you he or she is coming to your event to give you time to prepare. Sometimes they just show up. You need to be ready in case that happens.

In addition to the visuals you promised in your news release, when you’re planning your project, request all members wear their Kiwanis gear. (advance) If the club members can all be in matching t-shirts or sweatshirts, that’s great. (advance) Take a look at this photo from a service project in Baton Rouge. Everyone is wearing matching Kiwanis t-shirts. It looks good for the camera and it gives a unified look. There’s no way you can miss that this is a Kiwanis event when participants post this on social media.

But sometimes, it’s not possible for everyone to be dressed alike, but if everyone is wearing properly branded Kiwanis gear, it will be clear in any photos or video that this is a Kiwanis project. (advance)
Also, display Kiwanis banners around the project area so the audience sees Kiwanis in every video shot of the story. It also makes a good backdrop for any on-camera interviews.

(advance)
Take a look at this interview the president of the Kiwanis Club of Biscayne Bay did. It’s clear this is a Kiwanis event. She’s wearing her Kiwanis shirt, her Kiwanis nametag and talking in front of a Kiwanis banner.

(advance)
This leads to a side note about how important it is for clubs to be current on branding standards. All brand guidelines can be found in the brand guide. You can download it from Kiwanis-dot-org-slash-brand.

(advance)
To help get your club brand compliant, Kiwanis International will create an image with the Kiwanis logo and your club’s name. It’s a free service we’re doing to help clubs match their branding to Kiwanis International. You can make a request for that at Kiwanis-dot-org-slash-customlogo. It’s important your club’s branding matches the Kiwanis branding to take advantage of our name recognition. And, It’ll help all the Kiwanis clubs around the world.

By following the brand guidelines, having everyone wearing their Kiwanis gear and having Kiwanis signs around the service project area, you’ll also get great photos for the media and members social media channels.
Sometimes, even the best pitches don’t attract media coverage. Maybe there were no crews available to cover the story. Maybe the journalist got pulled off the story for breaking news. Or maybe the timing just didn’t work out for the newsroom. That’s ok. Take the news release you wrote and post it on your club’s website and social media channels. Post the photos you took and have your members share the story.

Our job is to present a positive image of Kiwanis in the community to drive awareness of our organization. Sometimes we do that through newspaper and television coverage. Other times, we have to go around them and use whatever is available to us. Use your club’s own website, Facebook page or Twitter account to share your story. Because members are proud of what they are doing for the community, they’ll share the story to their own networks. When club members are sharing stories and posting pics on their social media accounts of them volunteering, they’re evangelizing for the club and the work it does. There is no better positive public relations than that.
Today, we hope we gave you a foundation on how to get coverage of your service projects.
The takeaway points we want you to remember when you design the service project and pitch it to the media are:
• Focus on service
• Make it about the kids
Questions?

We’d now like to take your questions. Let’s first answer any questions on this topic, then we’ll open it up to any topic on public relations at Kiwanis International.