



National Healthy Start Association



National Infant Mortality Awareness Month Toolkit

September 2009

September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month

In 2005, Congressman Michael C. Burgess, 26th District of Texas, introduced Resolution 402 directing Congress to observe September as National Infant Mortality Awareness Month (NIMAM), and the U.S. House of Representatives passed the resolution in September 2006. It is four years later and September continues to be nationally recognized as the month we focus our efforts on saving the lives of babies in this country. The National Healthy Start Association (NHSA) along with several organizations, government agencies and communities understand the importance of raising awareness about infant mortality in the U.S. We each seek to promote the effectiveness of programs and efforts to reduce infant deaths, low-birth weight, pre-term births and disparities in perinatal outcomes.

This year's theme *Healthy Families=Healthy Babies* represents all that we do throughout the year to reduce infant mortality. Through preconception care, prenatal care and interconception care we equip families with what they need to have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy birth. By providing moms-and dads-to be with the tools and resources they need to be healthy, we in turn help them to have a healthy baby. During this month, we have the opportunity to spread the word nationally and collectively about infant mortality. I urge you to reach out to community leaders and ask them to join us as we strive to reduce the number of babies dying in this country.

To help you do this effectively, we have created a toolkit that includes ideas and strategies for fundraising activities, advocacy, facts and statistics, as well as tips for approaching the media. While this toolkit is primarily designed for Healthy Start Projects, it can be easily adapted for the larger community, local public health departments and other organizations conducting activities in September.

The year 2010 is right around the corner and the Healthy People 2010 objective to reduce infant deaths is still achievable with your continued support and efforts. This is a defining year and September will be an exciting time. We look forward to a successful month and hearing about the activities that will be held across the nation!

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stacey D. Cunningham', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Stacey D. Cunningham, MSW, MPH

Executive Director

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1 Infant Mortality Facts & Statistics

- The United States ranks 29th among industrialized countries in infant mortality. The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that 40 countries have a lower infant mortality rate than the United States. Some of the countries with better birth outcomes than the U.S. include the Czech Republic, South Korea, Cuba and Slovenia.
- Premature birth, low birth-weight and shorter gestation periods account for more than 60% of U.S. infant deaths.
- The infant mortality rates among African-Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans are significantly higher than those of non-Hispanic whites. African-Americans are four times as likely to die as infants when compared to non-Hispanic white infants.
- Some factors that contribute to these alarming rates are: poverty, limited access to health care, stress and diet & nutrition.
- There are 102 Healthy Start programs throughout the nation that work to eliminate the racial and ethnic disparities in infant mortality. This continuum of care extends beyond the welfare of newborns and includes mothers, fathers, and families -- the whole community.
- The Health Resources and Services Administration's Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) has published *Child Health USA 2007*, their 18th annual report on the health status of America's children.
 - o *Child Health USA 2007* provides the most current data available. It is not copyrighted and readers are encouraged to duplicate and use all or part of the information contained in the publication.
 - o The Health Status section contains data on low birth weight, very low birth weight, neonatal and post neonatal mortality, infant mortality and international infant mortality.
 - o The State and City sections are excellent resources to localize your message. There are also easy to read graphs throughout summarizing the data.
 - o The book is available in both HTML and PDF formats online at <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/chusa07/index.html>.
 - o For a complimentary copy of the publication, mail your request to: HRSA Information Center 2070 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 450 Vienna, VA 22182-2536 or call: 1-888-ASK-HRSA

2 Friend-Raising & Fundraising Activities

Planning Your Event

Big or small, any special event can raise community awareness. Here are a couple suggestions to make sure your event is a success.

Press Releases/Invitations

Press releases should be sent out at least two weeks prior to the event. Flyers, personal invitations to policymakers, funders and other public figures should be sent at least three weeks out. A personal follow-up phone call, one week prior to the event, will better the odds that you have the folks you want in attendance. Always include an enticement about the wonderful photo opportunities of beautiful babies, moms, dads and loving families with elected officials. If you give advance notice, most elected officials will try to arrange their schedules or send an aid. Within two weeks after the activity takes place, be sure you have sent out a card or letter to the attendees thanking them for their support and a personal invitation to learn more about your local work.

Information Table

Your Project's information table should be located at the main entrance of any activity you hold and be staffed at all times. This is a good way to engage volunteers. Have readily available your press kits, the National Healthy Start Association brochure, and other local marketing materials. Drawings for a prize of some kind work well at bringing in crowds. Be sure to have some sort of mechanism to collect attendees contact information. For a smoother process, have plenty of pens and pre-printed information cards available for easy completion. Include email if your office has the capability to send mailings electronically. You can also have boxes to check if there is interest in volunteering, tours or a phone call to learn more about your Project.

Event Ideas

The following activity suggestions can be done on a large or small scale. Engage your collaborative partners. They will offer wonderful additional resources to make your activities successful.

Baby Parade

During prime time at your local park, schedule a unique parade of families pushing their babies in strollers and carriages. Before the parade begins, have a Healthy Start pep rally and ask the participants to help distribute promotional flyers through the park and their own neighborhoods. The parade should last at least 20 minutes to gain attention. Try to obtain a local celebrity as a Grand Marshal. Recruit members from area Junior Leagues, mommy playgroups, and mothers and fathers from your projects. Ask the participants to continue flyer distribution on future walks in their neighborhoods. Come up with a catchy slogan for your parade such as “Buggying for Babies” or “Infant Mortality is NOT a Stroll in the Park.” Make signs to hang on the sides of the strollers for additional exposure.

Bowling for Babies

Management at bowling alleys will usually welcome hosting a bowl-a-thon when there is a lull in their business. A bowl-a-thon can be a great way to fundraise and raise awareness. Bowlers solicit money from their friends and colleagues based on what they think their score will be. If you are restricted in your fundraising efforts, bowlers can solicit baby items instead. The winning bowler is the one who brings in the most items or of highest value. Items can be used for future consumer baby showers. This activity is excellent for all ages.

Neighborhood Health Fair

Informational booths could include prenatal care, basic baby care, free consultations with pediatricians, car seat giveaways including installation and safety checks of existing car seats (fire departments are a good source) and Safety Child ID kits. To encourage participation, individuals receive a raffle ticket at each booth they visit that is then placed into a drawing for a grand prize. Prizes can be gift baskets or certificates to family-friendly restaurants, theme parks, stores, etc.

Also plan some family fun with potluck dinners and friendly competitions, such as diaper changing races (baby dolls are recommended), baby food identification contests (participants are blindfolded), baby doll weighing contests (contestants guess the weight; fishing weights are indiscreetly attached; use a baby scale for full effect), crib races, and “Name that Lullaby” contests. Be sure to have some activities for dads, too. You can also plan baby crawl races, basketball tosses or a teen talent show. Invite your local policymakers and funders to participate along with their families.

Open House

Plan a continental breakfast, box lunch, or a simple reception immediately after work hours. Your guests will appreciate the convenient time and any food and beverage provision you can afford. Besides recognizing the policymakers and other VIPs present, part of your program should offer

consumer testimonials from both moms and dads, given either in person or read by Healthy Start staff. If office space is not conducive for an open house, this activity can easily be done in the home of a Board member or volunteer. For security reasons, if receptions are held in someone's home, the event turns into an "invitation only" activity and is not publicized as an open house would be.

Poster Contest

This event can be geared for teens, so approach high school clubs, religious youth groups and other community-based youth leadership programs. Your contest theme should relate to "fighting infant mortality." The promotional flyer should include your local statistics along with a brief overview of Healthy Start. Be specific on the requirements and size of the posters. Clearly state that the posters are non-returnable and will be used to help promote Healthy Start. The contest should last no longer than 4–6 weeks. The judges can include consumers, volunteers and local VIPs who support your Project. Contest entries should be displayed and winners announced at a designated activity. The top 12 posters can be used in a future calendar you might want to produce or submitted to the National Healthy Start Association for consideration in future marketing materials.

The Un-Birthday Party

On a children's playground, host a candlelight vigil. A birthday cake decorated in pink and blue with a memorial black ribbon should be prominently displayed on a piece of playground equipment. Each candle should be numbered according to your local statistics (e.g. if there were 250 deaths last year, your candles should be numbered 1-250). In your opening comments, draw attention to the cake, the playground that the deceased never got a chance to play on, and to the numbers on the candles representing those infants. The program might also include testimonials from caseworkers and consumers.

Clothesline Project

This event could be held in a park or neighborhood center, using cloth diapers or pink and blue baby onesies. Individuals can decorate their baby items honoring their parents or babies. Themes could center on best parenting practices, prenatal care, old wives tales about baby care, male involvement, etc. Pre-decorate clothing to represent deceased infants known in your community. Use black clothespins to hang the clothing. (Black spray paint works well for painting clothespins.)

Baby Shoe Memorial

Shoes can be obtained through requests made to children's shoe stores, children's used clothing

stores, or the general public and consumers. Ideally, the more shoes you have, the more dramatic the visual impact. If you find that obtaining the shoes is too difficult or expensive, you can use paper cut outs of baby feet. Use pink and blue paper and number according to your local statistics. The Memorial includes signage stating that the shoes represent the number of babies in your community who died in the last year. Have the Memorial displayed in highly visible locations such as City Hall, your State capital or in the lobby of a collaborative partner. The Memorial can be moved around your community all month and used as an excellent backdrop for VIP statements supporting Healthy Start (e.g. your Mayor reading a Proclamation that September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month).

Rattle and Roll

Organize a community blitz targeting pediatric offices, businesses and restaurants. Purchase inexpensive baby rattles from party supply or dollar-type stores and decorate them with a black bow (attach your business card). Armed with rattles, posters and flyers, have your volunteers make personal visits asking for the materials to be displayed in a visible location.

Great Baby Chefs

Solicit 4-5 local chefs from upscale restaurants to participate in a gourmet baby food demonstration. This can take place at a cooking school or at a Cooperative Extension Center that has a home economics department. Either charge an entrance fee or collect baby items for entry. This event can be advertised in the chefs' restaurants and will attract a more affluent audience. Your policymakers and VIPs can also participate in this event by preparing their mothers' recipes.

Memorial Garden

Approach your city parks and recreation department about designating an existing garden as a memorial to the babies who died in your community. Have a sign designed that promotes your project (with contact info) and acknowledges the city's support. A local garden club might also want to get involved as well.

Bake and Candy Sale

This is a great activity for youth groups. Long stem "tootsie footsies lollipops" and other pregnancy-related fun items can be found at www.4showers.com and several baby-themed cookie cutters at www.coppergifts.com. The lollipops can be decorated with a black ribbon and the cookies with pink or blue icing. These can be sold outside grocery stores, church functions or community events (include marketing materials). You can also give these items as gifts to your local elected officials and other decision makers with whom you want to make an impression.

3 Advocacy

Advocacy is an on-going process to educate your elected officials and other policy and decision makers about the issues of infant mortality, prematurity, health and health care disparities and other issues. Advocacy can occur at various levels: local, state and national. All of the suggestions in this section can be adopted or modified to use with your local or state elected officials. Just be sure to make all the necessary changes to reflect the correct terminology.

Local Advocacy Groups

National Infant Mortality Awareness Month is a perfect time to start a local advocacy group, if your Project does not already have one. For Healthy Start to secure long-term funding and expand services, it is critical that we increase awareness and our support base. Starting an advocacy group is one way to achieve this.

When starting an advocacy group, there are several issues to be considered:

1. Before you begin planning the first meeting, a “wish list” needs to be created for your Project. Besides your number one wish for more money, jot down ideas for what would make your Project excel. More community awareness and outreach? Incentive items to increase consumer participation? Assistance with mailings or planning events? Once you have a list of how people can help, you are ready to begin recruitment.
2. The meeting time and location are essential. Picking a convenient time and location for meetings will be crucial for a successful group. Evenings, after work, or Saturday mornings work well. Some groups meet in members’ homes, with each member taking a turn. Hospitals, schools, community centers and libraries also work well.
3. Once you determine the time and place, advertising the meeting is the next step. Besides your local newspaper, distribute meeting announcements to hospitals, doctor’s offices, and libraries. Be inclusive of your community. Approach diverse groups such as the NAACP, American Indian and Hispanic cultural organizations, Junior Leagues, sororities and fraternities, religious groups, etc. There is a National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurses Association (NCEMNA) that might have local professionals who would be interested (www.ncsbn.org). Also, visit www.minoritynurse.com, a site where African American, Asian, Native American and Filipino nurses turn for the latest information on education on minority health issues.
4. How often the group meets is a decision that involves the members. Many groups meet once a

month for ease of scheduling (e.g. the first Tuesday of each month). Depending on your wish list and the members' available time, your group may meet more often or less. Each meeting should include a "mission moment" where members hear a consumer's testimonial. You may or may not choose to also have actual cases of infant deaths described. Such cases highlight the fact that we have a lot of work to do. Some groups have guest speakers or a particular discussion topic. Whatever you choose, the ultimate goal is to motivate and engage the group to become advocates for your Project.

Some other ideas/activities for the Advocacy group:

- Fundraise and solicit for in-kind donations
- Conduct tours
- Neighborhood canvassing
- Organizing activities to help create awareness or hosting baby showers
- Assist with mailings, answering phones and general office work

Not sure who your elected officials are?

Visit your county and city's website. To access the U.S. Government's official web portal, providing direct access to federal, state, local and tribal governments, visit www.USA.gov.com.

Other Key Websites:

House of Representatives	www.house.gov
Senate	www.senate.gov
Senate Calendar of Business	www.gpoaccess.gov/calendars/senate
Currently on the House floor	clerk.house.gov

Tips for Advocacy

- Schedule and Inform

Make an appointment in advance. Unannounced appointments usually don't work. Let the office know your issues when you call and the number of members and constituents in your organization. If applicable, make sure you share that you are a registered voter in his/her district.

- Be Flexible

Elected officials' schedules get juggled at a moment's notice. You may end up meeting in a lobby or walking with him or her to the Capital for a vote. Don't be disappointed if you have to meet with a staff person; they are usually extremely well-informed on the issues.

- Be Prepared

Get your point across in the fewest possible words. Do not use jargon or acronyms. Leave supporting documents behind. Bringing a local expert such as a community or business leader concerned with your issues reinforces your position. Group visits are particularly effective, especially when different organizations or constituencies (such as religion, labor and business) are represented. Politicians in general are less likely to skip meetings with groups than individuals.

- Be on Time

And be willing to wait. Delayed appointments can be very beneficial if they give you time to get to know the support staff. Keep in mind that meeting with staff can be as productive as seeing the politician personally.

- Pick a Spokesperson

When visiting as a group, one person should start the meeting and be the spokesperson. Before the meeting, decide on the key points that should be covered and who will raise which points. Don't be afraid to admit ignorance on a special point. This will give you an opportunity to find the answer and make contact again.

- Be Positive, Friendly and Brief

Stick to the issues and facts and don't overstay your welcome. Elected officials' offices are friendly places, but they are also places of intense activity. Give special recognition to those who are known to be supportive of Healthy Start and ask them for advice and help in reaching other decision makers.

- Get a Reaction

Ask for favorable consideration of your position, thus seeking the elected official's opinion. Give the official a chance to express his/her point of view. Be a good listener. Do not argue, name call or make threats. Leave that to the opposition.

- Send a Thank You

When you get home, write a thank you letter to the elected official and any other staff that you met with. Ask them to keep in touch with you on your issues.

Healthy Start: Three Steps for Summer and Fall

The summer months are critical for Healthy Start Projects around the country. Here are three steps you can take this summer to ensure that the U.S. Congress provides full funding for Healthy

Start:

1. Invite your House of Representative Member(s) and Senators to visit your program. During August, Members of Congress are on recess and will be back home in your area looking for events to attend and opportunities to meet members of your community. Now is the time to contact them and ask them to visit your program, especially if you have an upcoming special event for them to attend, such as an annual fundraising dinner or volunteer recognition event. Even if the Member of Congress cannot personally visit your program, perhaps their District Director will be able to do so.
2. Write a “Letter to the Editor” to a local newspaper highlighting the work of your program and applauding the support you have received from your Member of Congress (See sample letters). Even if your Member of Congress hasn’t actively supported your efforts, this is a good chance to start the relationship and also raise awareness about infant mortality and the impact of Healthy Start. Members of Congress will be interested in any federal program that is making a positive impact in their home state or community. If the letter is printed, please share a copy with NHSA so we can ensure that the appropriate Congressional office is aware of it.
3. If you see any of your Members of Congress at a parade or a town meeting and only have a brief moment with them, be sure you can quickly and effectively discuss the importance of your program and ask them to support Healthy Start.

If you have any questions regarding this information or would like assistance with any matter, such as making contact with your Member of Congress, please contact Jon Terry, NHSA’s government relations consultant, at 202-558-6582 or jon.terry@capitoloyouth.com.

Healthy Start Summer/Fall 2009 -- Talking Points

You can use these bullets as a “cheat sheet” to help direct your comments when speaking to members of Congress or local officials.

- Healthy Start is a federal program funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is making a dramatic impact on the high rates of infant mortality that are prevalent in many communities with large minority populations, high rates of unemployment and poverty, and limited access to safe housing and medical providers.
- Our community is home to one of only 102 Healthy Start Projects nationwide.
- We were chosen for funding because our area has a high rate of infant mortality, and we have a strong, community-based coalition working to address the problem. Some of our partners include: (list several of your key community partners).
- We have had great success. For example: (list 2 or 3 achievements of your program).
- Healthy Start is a proven, effective program that is making a real impact here and around the country and needs to be fully funded.

- September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month, and our local Healthy Start Project is hosting numerous activities throughout September, including [specify event] and we hope you can attend!

Testimonials

Dramatic stories about people battling overwhelming odds are memorable and persuasive. These kinds of stories create a common ground for the general public to understand unfamiliar or complicated issues such as ours. One of the best tools to help advocacy efforts are the personal stories or testimonials from the people you have helped. Sharing photos of your consumers or statements of support from members of your consortium and collaborative partners can also make a huge impact.

Testimonials and photos can be used in speeches, letter writing campaigns, brochures, newsletters, annual reports, and on display boards. Testimonials are critical to the success of the advocacy work being done by the National Healthy Start Association. Please submit your testimonials to info@nationalhealthystart.org.

The best way to obtain consumer testimonials from your Project's moms and dads is to conduct an interview. Be prepared with specific questions to avoid rambling and to help craft their stories. Some of your questions should pertain to family background, interests and hobbies, how they learned about Healthy Start, why they thought they needed the program and how Healthy Start helped them, the current status of their child, and why an elected official or potential donor should support Healthy Start.

To help assure confidentiality, only use first names unless the consumer feels differently. A Photo Release should be signed by the consumer agreeing to the use of their photo for marketing/advocacy purposes.

Sample Photo Release

I give Healthy Start my permission to take and use my picture and as parent/guardian of _____ . I give my permission to have his/her picture taken by and for the use of Healthy Start. I understand that my child(ren)'s picture may appear on different marketing tools used by Healthy Start that include, but are not limited to, newsletters, posters, brochures, flyers, and the website. My signature below gives Healthy Start the authorization to use my and/or my child(ren)'s picture(s).

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I am the (Position Title) of (Name of your Healthy Start Project or coalition), a community-based project/coalition making steady progress in reducing infant deaths in our area. I am writing to ensure that the entire community is aware of the issue of infant mortality and to thank our Congressperson, Representative (NAME OF CONGRESSPERSON), for his/her support of the local Healthy Start Project/coalition.

Healthy Start is a federal program funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that is making a dramatic impact on the high rates of infant mortality that are prevalent in many communities with large minority populations, high rates of unemployment and poverty and limited access to safe housing and medical providers. Our community is home to one of 102 Healthy Start Projects nationwide. We were chosen for funding because our area has a high infant death rate and we have a strong, community-based coalition working to address the problem. Some of our partners include: (list several of your key community partners).

Our program has had great success: (list two or three key achievements).

We are grateful that Congressperson XXX recognizes that investing in Healthy Start will reduce overall federal costs associated with the often expensive and frequent medical treatments that low birth weight infants require. Supporting community-based Healthy Start Projects now will prevent future spending on Medicaid, special education and a myriad of other social services that are needed for infants and children who are born with a low birth weight.

(Name of your program) is proud to partner with Congressperson (NAME OF CONGRESSPERSON) in helping our community's most disadvantaged children survive infancy and live longer, more productive lives. I can be reached at (phone number).

Sincerely,

Your name

Title

Contact Information

Sample Letter to House Member

To determine the contact information, go to www.congress.org and enter your Project's zip code. The site will provide a list of your Members of Congress along with contact information. You can also contact Jon Terry at jon.terry@capitoloyouth.com for assistance.

DATE

ADDRESS

Dear Congressman/Congresswoman XXX:

I am writing to invite you to visit our Healthy Start program in (name of city). Healthy Start is a federal program funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that is making a dramatic impact on the high rates of infant mortality that are prevalent in many communities with large minority populations, high rates of unemployment and poverty and limited access to safe housing and medical providers.

Studies have shown that the cost of care for low birth weight babies has an estimated annual economic impact of \$13 billion. While intensive neonatal care is an effective means to decrease infant mortality, a more cost-effective approach is to increase a pregnant woman's participation in early prenatal care. Since 1998, Healthy Start projects across the country have successfully increased that rate of participation during the first trimester of prenatal care from 41.8% to over 70%. This success directly saves the lives of many vulnerable infants.

Our community is home to one of 102 Healthy Start projects nationwide. We were chosen for funding because our area has a high rate of infant mortality and we have a strong, community-based coalition working to address the problem. Some of our partners include: (list several of your key community partners).

I would like you to visit our program so you can see first-hand the impact we are having in (name of city). You can meet some of our staff, supporters, board members and, most importantly, some of the beautiful, healthy babies that are a living testament to the success of our efforts. We would also like to use the visit to personally thank you and your colleagues in the House for your support for the Healthy Start program in the House version of the Labor/HHS/Education funding bill. This funding is appreciated and provides enormous hope for the continued success and scope of our program here in (name of city).

I can be reached directly at (phone number). I will follow-up with your district staff next week in order to find a time that works best for your schedule. Thank you for your service and for considering this request. I look forward to your visit.

Sincerely,

Your name

Title

Contact Information

4 Working with the Media

Media Contacts

Media contact lists can be easily created with a little research and time. Contact information is listed on websites or in the actual publications or can be obtained through phone calls. Libraries can be a good source and so can your local public relations society. It is wise to spend the time to annually update media lists due to the high turnover in the industry.

For print media, it is important to note what area a publisher or journalist covers. For instance, some journalists only cover general news, so your press release would be written with the general public in mind. Other journalists cover a niche audience, such as health and health care, so your press releases would be more specifically targeted, containing language and terminology to suit the readers.

Make yourself familiar with the publications to which you are submitting. Notice how their stories are written and try to write press releases that fit their theme. Media sources to consider:

- Local and regional newspapers
- Magazines that specialize in an area of interest such as Baby and Me and Parenting
- Local television, cable and radio stations
- Collaborative partners' websites or newsletters
- Newsletters for high schools, colleges, hospitals, local banks, Chambers of Commerce
- Bulletins for religious organizations
- Other resources your board/consortia members have through their companies and affiliations

What is a Press Release?

A press release is a story or announcement written for distribution to news publishers such as newspapers, television, radio, websites, etc. A press release can be thought of as a news story with an agenda. While the story itself should be genuinely newsworthy, it should be carefully crafted to promote a particular event or point of view.

Journalists like press releases because it makes their jobs easier. If you can provide stories that

are basically ready to publish, you are doing the journalists a huge favor. Any aspect of your press release that is last minute or requires the journalist to do extra work, such as fixing mistakes or doing additional research, lessens the story's appeal.

If your press release involves an event, create it as an “advisory” that lists the name of the event and the fact that your Healthy Start Project is hosting it, what it is, when and where it will be and contact information. Also include a brief description of the event, including notable guests and the great photo opportunities that will be available. There will be times when a photojournalist will cover your event, if the opportunities are enticing. Most newspapers have Community Calendars that will include your special events. Send your press release announcing your events at least two weeks in advance of the time you would like it published.

Writing a Press Release

Before you begin writing your press release, ask yourself a few questions:

- Is this the first, last, least or most of anything?
- Is it part of a trend?
- Is there a local angle to a national story or event?
- Is it timely?
- Is there a human-interest angle?
- Is there a strong visual element? (A good photo opportunity can be your back door to the front page.)

Writing a press release isn't particularly difficult, it just takes practice. A good news story follows specific guidelines that answer the questions:

Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Begin your story with the news headlines and main facts. Most journalists use an inverted pyramid writing style. This places the most important facts at the beginning and works down from there. Ideally, the first paragraph should contain enough information to give the reader a good overview of the entire story. The rest of the article explains and expands on the beginning.

A good approach is to assume that the story might be cut off at any point due to space limitations. Your story should work if the editor decides to use only the first two paragraphs. A standard technique is to present your story with a particular angle or slant. It can help make the purpose of the story clear and give it focus. News stories are all about how people are affected. Keep a human touch at all times, using quotes at least once in your story.

Format

There is a fairly standard format for creating press releases. It will help your credibility and chances of being published if you present your materials this way. Every press release should include the following (See sample press release):

1. **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** [Date] These words should appear at the top left of the page, in upper case. If you don't want the story to be made public yet, write - **'HOLD FOR RELEASE UNTIL...'** instead.
2. Contact Information – Include the contact person, Project name, phone/fax, email and physical/postal address.
3. Headline – Just like a headline in a newspaper, make sure it describes the content of the story.
4. City, State, Body - This is where the actual story goes. There should be more than one paragraph and each paragraph no more than a few sentences. If there is more than one page, write “-more-” on the bottom of the page.
5. Type a solid line under the body indicating that background on your organization will follow.
6. In a smaller font, include any background information about Healthy Start and your Project.
7. End with ##### - This indicates the end of the press release.

Follow Up

After you send your press release, follow up with a phone call. Take no more than a minute or two to share your story and why it is unique. It helps to have some talking points prepared in advance. If you reach only voicemail, leave a detailed, but short message and follow up the call with an email that includes story details.

If you are asked to do an interview, find out when the deadline is and then promptly set up an interview with your spokesperson. When your story is published or aired, send a thank you letter to the reporter with a “Cc” to his or her editor or news director. The key to good media coverage is establishing relationships with assignment editors, reporters, and journalists.

Sample Press Release

Print on Project's letterhead (or press release stationary)

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Project Spokesperson
Contact Phone, Fax, or Email
Your Healthy Start Name
Address City Zip

For Immediate Release: Date

[NAME OF YOUR PROJECT] PROMOTES INFANT MORTALITY AWARENESS MONTH

Your Town, Your State: Last year, 248 babies in our community never celebrated their first birthday. The majority of those babies were African American, Hispanic and American Indian. September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month, a campaign sponsored by the National Healthy Start Association. On September 1st our town's Healthy Start Project is kicking off a month-long campaign to increase the awareness of the high rate of infant mortality in our community.

"Forty countries have a lower infant mortality rate than the United States," said Mayor Brown. "I am personally challenging the residents of our town to become involved in the local Healthy Start Project. Senator Jones will be joining me and other concerned citizens Sunday, September 15, 2009 at 1:00 p.m. on the steps of City Hall. Personal testimonials will be given by families that our Project has helped."

Our local Healthy Start Project is a member of the National Healthy Start Association. The NHSA promotes community-based maternal and child health programs that focus on the reduction of infant mortality, racial disparities and low birth weight. Our local Healthy Start Project is one of almost 100 Projects nationwide, supported through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Our local Healthy Start Project is hosting numerous activities throughout September including open houses, stroller-thon, poster contests, a neighborhood health fair and advocacy trips to the State capital. For more information and times, please call, [your name], Healthy Start Project Director at xxx-xxxx.

The federal Healthy Start Initiative receives \$102,000,000 in funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Health Resources and Services Administration. Established in 1991, Healthy Start is comprised of 102 community-based programs that respond to the medical, social, cultural and social service needs of women and their infants. Your town's Healthy Start Project is a member of the National Healthy Start Association (NHSA). For more information, go to [insert your project's website address]. The NHSA supports the expansion of efforts that are rooted in the community and actively involve community members in their design and implementation. For information, visit www.healthystartassoc.org or contact the NHSA at 202-296-2195.

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Letters to the Editor

A letter to the editor is a briefly stated opinion generally written in response to a current issue or a previously published article. Focus your letter on one point or subject. If you are commenting on a specific story, mention the headline and date. Cite the specific reference and sum it up in one sentence to refresh readers' memories. Then point out facts that were left out, or refute or support facts that were stated. Be clear and concise. If appropriate, mention your motivation or expertise in writing. For example, "as a Project Manager at Healthy Start, I believe..." or, "it has been my experience..."

Always include your name, address and daytime number (See sample Letter to the Editor in Advocacy section). If you use email, include exactly one address in the "To" field. Don't send letters to the editor via "Cc" or "Bcc." Send your letter in the body of the email message, not as an attachment. If your letter gets printed, get a print version with the front-page banner of the paper's name. Send it to your legislators and keep copies for future advocacy and education efforts. Also send it to NHSA.

Opinion Articles or "Op-eds"

Op-ed articles are opinion articles published opposite a newspaper's editorial page. They are longer and more influential letters to the editor, and therefore more difficult to publish. Timing is key. An op-ed should be submitted when an issue is hot. In general, an op-ed is written in 500 – 800 words, double-spaced. Usually, they are written in a five-paragraph/three-talking points format.

The first paragraph should include a news-hook, perhaps referring to a recent event in the news. Make sure your point is well stated and concise. The next three body paragraphs should pinpoint the three most important parts of your argument. The conclusion should be captivating and brief to make the last paragraph powerful.

It is a good idea to have the main points of your op-ed already drafted, before news breaks on your issue. This way, when your issue comes up in the news, all your article needs is the news-hook in the first paragraph and it is ready to send to the editor. Make sure you have experience on the subject and include a brief bio-line at the end of the article.

Send your article to just one of the major newspapers in your community. Include a cover letter when submitting an op-ed to an editor and assure him or her that the article has not been sent to a competing newspaper. It will help get your op-ed article published.

Public Service Announcements

Public Service Announcements, or PSAs, are short messages that can be written or presented in audio or visual form. To produce an audio or visual PSA, you will need some technical and financial resources, as well as production time. For your immediate needs, we recommend submitting

your PSA in a written format.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires radio and television stations to donate a certain amount of airtime to serve the public and community. Most public radio and TV stations have a community calendar on which they will announce events to the public. Some stations will have a maximum length allowed, so it's a good idea to find out in advance what their guidelines are. It's generally a lot easier to get a PSA aired on radio than on television.

The length of a PSA can be written to last 10, 15, 20, 30 or 60 seconds. Most stations prefer 30 seconds. If you're writing for a television PSA, you'll want to cut your announcers copy by three (3) seconds. Television stations run on a much tighter and rigid schedule than radio stations. Many times a 30-second PSA will be cut off before the end.

Target your audience. What type of people are you hoping to reach through your PSA? Survey your radio stations and determine who their listening audience is. For instance, if you're writing a PSA targeting teens, you'll want to send it to stations that cater to their age group. Because you only have a few seconds to reach your audience, the language should be very simple and your message clear. Take the time to make every word count. Have saying or phrases that grab attention. Your PSA should request a specific action, such as calling Healthy Start for more information. The purpose of a PSA is to motivate listeners to do something as a result of having heard it.

PSA Format:

Your copy should be double/triple spaced. You can put more than one spot per page for the shorter ones, but 30 or 60 second PSAs should go on separate pages. Writing a PSA is similar to writing a Press Release. Instead of putting "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" on the top left hand side of the page, put "PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT" at the top middle of the page, followed by a few spaces and how long you want your announcement to air. Next, you include:

- Length of the PSA
- Name of your Project and contact information
- Catchy title of the PSA
- Your announcement

The bottom of the sheet should be marked with #####, the standard ending used in releases to the media indicating that there are no further pages.

Length of PSAs:

- 10 seconds -20 – 25 words
- 15 seconds -30 - 35 words
- 20 seconds -40 - 45 words
- 30 seconds -60 - 75 words
- 60 seconds -120 - 150 words

*Sample 30-second PSA**Project's Letterhead (or Press Release Stationary)***Public Service Announcement****Please air September 1 – 30, 2009****30 Seconds****Healthy Start Project Name****Contact: Project Director Name and Number****Tiny Shoes Tell a Big Story**

A mountainous pile of baby shoes has been growing on the steps of City Hall this week. Each shoe represents the untimely death of a baby in our community. Healthy Start (of our town) is working hard to keep our babies alive. Mayor Blank and Senator Blank will be hosting a community forum to raise awareness about the local increase in infant mortality. The forum will be held in City Hall on September 30th at 3 pm. Call Healthy Start for more information at 555.555.5555.

Local Television News

There are two speeds in local television newsrooms – too slow and too fast. In a daily morning meeting, managers, producers and assignment editors make story decisions. Some ideas originate with wire stories from the Associated Press or are generated by news department staff and others come from press releases. A typical newsroom will receive literally hundreds of press releases each day. Some are placed in daily planning folders and others are simply tossed out. The most important way to be sure that your press release isn't tossed is to have a relationship with an assignment editor.

Assignment editors are always looking for a local angle on a story that is mainly taking place elsewhere. Put together a press kit that contains information about Healthy Start nationally and locally with a list of experts from your various program areas. Call the assignment editor and ask for an appointment to introduce yourself and your Project. Leave the press kit with the editor. If you can't get an appointment, drop off the kit with a note stating that you would be happy to assist with a local angle on infant mortality, health care disparities or the importance of prenatal care.

Once you establish yourself and your Project as credible local sources, assignment editors will be sure to read your press releases rather than toss them. Keep abreast of what's in the news, always looking for Healthy Start angles. When you find one, first line up your expert and then call the assignment editor. Call the station and introduce yourself and your Project, and then state "I have a local angle on the xyz event." Newsrooms are usually chaotic and the editor might not immediately jump on your story. But, if you leave your contact info with reference to "a local angle on xyz," you will probably get a call back.

Note: Make sure your experts represent the image you want to portray of your Project.

5 Public Relations and Marketing Tips

Mailing Labels

Easy...Easy...Easy! Have labels printed that read *September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month* and place on every mailing piece that goes out of your office from now until October 1st. Ask members of your consortium, consumers and collaborative partners to do the same.

Federal Guidelines

Presentations, publications (e.g. brochures, newsletters, journal articles, reports, books, teaching guides, software), audiovisuals (e.g. posters, flyers, slides, videotapes, film) or other materials that you produce should indicate that your Project is funded by DHHS and HRSA. Oral reports should acknowledge support by the federal MCHB. For printed materials, the following wording is recommended:

“Supported in part by project (grant number) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act.)” [This should say Supported by” or “Supported in part by” depending on your funding situation.]

Also, grant recipients are not permitted to use either logo for the DHHS or HRSA without the expressed and written consent of the appropriate officials at DHHS and HRSA.

Speakers Bureau

Utilize your “experts” – your Project’s moms and dads, volunteers and staff – to form a Speakers Bureau. Creating a standard list of talking points is a good idea, so that a consistent message is given throughout the community. Talking points should include brief statistics, how your services address those statistics in a cost-effective way, a personal story and a call to action (See Healthy Start Summer/Fall 2009 -- Talking Points in Advocacy section).

Chambers of Commerce are great target audiences, as well as the numerous service clubs that need luncheon speakers. Libraries are a good source for a complete listing of service clubs. Write a letter to the club’s program coordinator informing them that you have an exciting and informative presentation. Be sure to bring your marketing materials to distribute.

A good way to collect contact information from your audience is to have a “business card drawing.” The inexpensive prize can be a pocket size book on inspirational quotes for philanthropy. (Be sure your Project’s phone number is written on the inside cover). Follow up with a thank you letter, not only to the program coordinator who invited you to speak, but to those new contacts you collected. Invite them all for a tour or to your next special event.

Newsletters

Writing a newsletter is another way to keep your Project’s name at the front of people’s minds. This can be online or offline. Both can contain valuable information about your successes, consumer testimonials from both moms and dads, plenty of great photography, upcoming events, or a letter from your Executive Director and/or Board president, requesting financial support. Your newsletter can be as large or small as you like, but should be sent out on a regular basis, usually quarterly. E-letters are actually emails to your permission-based database.

Outdoor Advertising

Outdoor advertising can include billboards, transit shelter displays, subway displays and mall displays. Each outdoor advertising company has different guidelines depending on your local codes. It can be a rather expensive way to market unless the company has a philanthropic philosophy. Use the Internet to research who your local company is.

Reader boards are easier to access. A reader board is a type of sign that has interchangeable letters, allowing the message to change. Religious organizations and banks use them quite a bit. Survey your Board, volunteers, and consumers to determine the location of reader boards in your community. Ask them to make inquiries as to how to go about getting your message on them.

Marketing Kits/Press Kits

A marketing kit is a folder containing information tailored to entice the reader to support your project. It can be used for the media press kit, and you can also leave behind these materials after meetings with elected officials, potential funders or, other public figures.

The folders usually have a double pocket, die-cut for business cards. You should create a label with your Project’s name and the nature of the event (e.g. “Prepared Specifically for _____” or “National Infant Mortality Awareness Month”). In general, the folder contains an introductory or personal letter explaining the purpose of the kit. A fact sheet or Project brochure and a statistical sheet substantiating your work are standard.

Each kit should be individualized for your target audience. If the kit is being prepared for the media attending a special event, it should include a press release, bios, and copies of any speeches or testimonials that will be given. A press kit should include information that will help editors

construct a story about your event or Project. If you are using the kit as a “leave behind” after a meeting with an elected official, a potential funder or policymaker, it can contain newsletters, annual reports, testimonials, substantiating statistics, copies of news articles and photographs of your Project’s moms, dads, and beautiful, healthy babies. (Be sure to have release forms for all consumers and children photos.) This type of kit should contain materials and information that motivate the individual to support your Project.

Proclamations

Proclamations are a great way to make a public announcement. Mayors, council members or local government administrators write proclamations to commend people or announce upcoming events.

Contact your Mayor’s office as early as possible to request a proclamation announcing September as National Infant Mortality Awareness Month in your city/town/state. Send a follow up letter including the points you would like covered in the proclamation. Often, you are asked to write the actual proclamation (See sample proclamation below).

The proclamation can be read at a City Council meeting with representatives from your Project present. Be prepared to make a few comments to the Council, including thanking them for their support. The proclamation can also be read by the Mayor at any of your planned activities, including a Board meeting. Be sure to have a camera handy, as the photo will be excellent to use in advertising.

Sample Proclamation

Whereas,

The National Infant Mortality Awareness Month campaign has been designed to increase people's awareness of the high rates of infant deaths, and is led by the National Healthy Start Association; and,

Whereas,

September 1– 30, 2009, marks the second annual National Infant Mortality Awareness Month campaign; and,

Whereas,

The Healthy Start Project in (your town) is one of 102 Healthy Start projects nationwide; and,

Whereas,

Since 1991, the Healthy Start program has been dedicated to reducing the incidence of infant mortality that is prevalent in many communities with large minority populations, high rates of unemployment and poverty and limited access to safe housing and medical providers; and,

Whereas,

Our Healthy Start Project in (your town) has made a dramatic impact on the high rates of infant mortality that are prevalent in our community, providing critical services to (x number) of women and their infants; and,

Whereas;

The National Infant Mortality Awareness Month campaign provides opportunities for our community to get involved and support Healthy Start in (your town);

NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved that I/We the Mayor of (your town), do hereby proclaim September 2009 as National Infant Mortality Awareness Month in (your town).

Signed this ____ day of the month of September in the year 2009.

Signature

Flyers

Flyers can be created to announce each of your activities or you can create one flyer with a calendar of events for the entire month. Keep the flyer simple. Use one or two graphics and include your “who, what, when, where, why and how” information. Be sure to include your website and a contact name with phone number for more information (List all collaborative partners or major donors).

The NHSA’s logo should also be on the flyer, with this statement: National Infant Mortality Awareness Month is an activity of the National Healthy Start Association, www.healthystartassoc.org. Email info@nationalhealthystart.org for the NHSA’s logo.

Websites

Websites are a wonderful way to direct prospective supporters and donors to your Project. An inexpensive way to have a website designed is to contact a local high school or technical school. Often, students are required to complete a class project, such as designing a website and/or community service. Another way is write a press release with a call for web designers.

National Healthy Start Association Brochure

The NHSA has a brochure that describes the Healthy Start Initiative and also can be used to promote Healthy Start and the Association at the local level. Go to www.healthystartassoc.org and click the link for the brochure to download it and print.

Poster Publication

The NHSA creates a signature poster each year for NIMAM. Each Healthy Start community can disseminate and display it to symbolize National Infant Mortality Awareness Month and the work of the local projects.

6 In Closing

For the month of September, the goal of the National Healthy Start Association is to empower individuals and communities to promote healthy infants, mothers and families; thereby, building a stronger Nation. By using the information given in this toolkit, you will continue to help us achieve our mission by reducing infant mortality and perinatal disparities. You are free to use your expertise and creativity to put these practices into action, but we hope that this has given you a framework to effectively promote Infant Mortality Awareness in your communities. We have also provided a host of examples (e.g. events, letters, and proclamations) within this toolkit that you can use as your guides. Make sure that you stay up-to-date on all the infant mortality news throughout the nation and continue to modify your toolkit accordingly.

If you have any questions about NHSA National Infant Mortality Awareness Month activities, please contact Phyllis George, Program Manager at pgeorge@nationalhealthystart.org or 202-296-2195.



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