



**Sisterfire**  
**Media Documentation**  
**Packet**

By Third World Majority  
([www.cultureisaweapon.org](http://www.cultureisaweapon.org))

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osting, curating, and organizing a Sisterfire stop in your community is an incredibly important, glamorous, and kick-ass political commitment on the part of the women in your community and organization. It's an opportunity to host an event with a larger circle of your community members about the ways we survive the violence in our community with sadness, hope, joy, and renewal in true revolutionary divaship.

With this in mind, Sisterfire national had put together this packet to support both you media messaging and documenting needs to all of our local stops. Coming from a Media Justice perspective, we will aim to provide documentation and messaging training support that is inline with the development of what our vision for a truly just and self-determined alternative media can be when **we** build it from the grassroots up by the Sistas in our communities.

In this packet we will be offering the following training and support:

- ☀ Media Messaging training for delegates who want to know how to effectively represent their organizing goals to the press. With sample press releases, sound bytes, and press kit to personalize and use for you local stop press work.
- ☀ Documentation media trainings that will include how to cover rallies, workshops, performances, interviews and other situations you might encounter at your Sisterfire Event. With tips on how to use digital video, digital photography, audio, zines and more
- ☀ A Sisterfire Web journal where you can upload your pictures, video, audio, and text in real-time. This way, your folks and supporters at home can see you work and reflection as it happens.

## Media Justice Now!

As organizers working for global social justice, we must be mindful of the tools of technology that we use to disseminate the success of the work we do. We must strive to **not** perpetuate and replicate the legacies that film, video and photography have established against communities of color within the United States, youth, peoples of the "Third World," women and LGBT communities (e.g. surveillance, imperial anthropology, misrepresentation, etc.). At Third World Majority, we believe in creating media structures of self-determination where we control and dictate how we represent **ourselves** and tell **our** stories whether it is in the Mainstream Media, a local community radio station, or in our own Sisterfire produced media pieces.. In sharing your experiences during Sisterfire, it is important to respect the self-determination of all the people and voices that become part of your own media campaigning and documentary pieces.

In that spirit, check out the following guidelines.

### LAUNCHING A MEDIA/PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

#### THE "MEDIA" AS WE KNOW IT AND AS IT IS TODAY

With the current state of media consolidation, most of the information that we receive on the radio, television, in print, in the movie theatre, at home on cable and through the Internet is owned by the "Big Six" media conglomerates: **Bertelsmann AG, AOL Time Warner, Disney, Fox, Viacom, and Vivendi-Universal**. This concentration of information control in such few hands can create an intimidating and daunting task for grassroots organizers to get their messages across to the people who need to hear it the most: our communities.

In coordinating a strategic media/communications plan for the Sisterfire tour, it is important to both "know the rules" about messaging for mainstream media outlets and to also create and utilize local media outlets and existing networks to which organizers already have more readily available access.

#### SETTING YOUR MEDIA/PUBLICITY GOALS

Establishing basic goals for your media/publicity campaign will help in the logistical planning of how you execute it. Identify the **real audience** to you're your local Sisterfire organizing group wants to communicate with and mobilize. If the ultimate goal is to activate and empower women of color in your community membership to work to end violence against women, zone in on the media outlets

to which you think they access the most. This does not mean you should disregard getting media coverage to wider audiences—this will be key to building long-term support and exposure for the Sisterfire cause—but, be strong in who your roots and your communities are for whom the tour is being organized in the first place. For the Sisterfire tour, it is important to never lose site of the overall message that the tour represents: **Women of color organizers working to end systemic violence against women through the use and power of our cultural tools.** This should drive how you formulate the messages and “sound bites” you disseminate to the outside world about **what is Sisterfire.**

The following is a six-step process for making news. Every organization or individual seeking media attention should follow this process in the order presented to maximize their media potential. What is the secret to scoring good press that will create change for your community? Read on.

### **1. ESTABLISH YOUR GOALS**

Before embarking on a media campaign, clearly articulate your desired goals. The goals drive press efforts—not the other way around. Everything you do in the media is designed to help you attain your goals. The goals should also be realistic. Typical goals for you Sisterfire Local Stop might be:

1. Raise the visibility of women of color organizing around issues of violence in our local community.
2. Enhance the profile and visibility of the participating organization.s
3. Change misconceptions about who is the larger perpetrator of violence in our communities( the state).
4. Highlight the voices and stories of the women in your membership as leaders affecting change around violence.

### **2. TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE**

Any strategic media effort must target your audience. Many communication efforts fail because they target everyone. In reality, most outreach should target a specific group of people. Make sure you can define the allies you need so that you can focus message, resources and strategy where it counts.

Name your "Wish List". If you could convince 130 people to embrace your message today who would they be? Why? What can they do for you? What

do they think about your violence against women now? What are the key things they need to believe to help you? Focus on influencing this target audience

The target group for your message may include:

Your membership

Women of color

Opinion-makers

Community leaders

People of color and immigrant communities

People of faith

Youth

Gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders

College students

Retirees

### **3. IDENTIFY YOUR NEWS**

What facts, surveys research that come from the organizing your groups have already done that can produce and release a new perspective on violence against women of color? As women of color we so rarely get to shape the media about our reality so flip the script, and be creative with how you define your own factual assessment of violence in your community. If none of the groups in your local stop has had the resources to have traditional research completed there are other examples that you can use. Examples can include a report card on social services that your membership have completed or a survey that young women have done about the status of the schools in your district? You can also access national statistics about violence against women from the library and the internet and then partner that with personal stories about women in your membership who have turned their experiences into inspirations for organizing.

### **4. FRAME THE ISSUE**

For maximum media impact. Do you always find yourself on the defense with your opposition framing the news instead of you framing it? Brainstorm with your Sisterfire local media group how you feel the media frames the issues of violence against women in your community. Then think about how you would change the frame to empower your larger organizing goals. Once you have taken back how you want to determine your political frame you can go on to create the kick ass messages to get folks out and agitate for your Sisterfire local stop.

## 5. CRAFT YOUR MEDIA MESSAGES

Condense your complicated issue down to two or three main messages. Discipline the messages. For more information on how to create a winning message for your organization, check out the creating messages section of this packet.

### CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE MEDIA AND DOCUMENTATION COVERAGE

#### 1) SIX WEEKS TO ONE MONTH PRIOR TO EVENT

- ✓ **Establish media contact(s)/committee.** The contact(s) or committee should be able to work autonomously in order to streamline the messaging for your Sisterfire event. The contacts should be readily available on the day of the event to serve as the media spokesperson. Ideally, if there is a media contact at the event site, another media contact should have ready-access to any office equipment (phone, fax, etc.).
- ✓ **Establish Documentation crew to photograph and videotape the event.** Though getting exposure through established media outlets is important for your Sisterfire event, equally important will be the self-determined documentation and coverage of your own.
- ✓ **Identify the “message” and create news releases and sound bites that voice this message.** Below, you will find tips on how to write and distribute basic media pieces that will form a part of your publicity campaign for your local Sisterfire event.
- ✓ **Begin compiling a MEDIA DISTRIBUTION LIST:** Identify monthly and weekly printed publications and begin to read them to get a sense of what news events they cover and what regions they cover. Also, begin to get contact information for radio and TV contacts. Make sure you get a name (if possible), phone number, e-mail and fax number of possible news outlets you may target with your publicity materials.

You will more than likely send your news releases to the TV outlets the day before your Sisterfire event, but it is good to start researching WHO to contact. Media guides (e.g. Bacon’s News Media Guides) are available at the library, or if you are fortunate to have a budget for this, they can also be purchased (at \$50-\$60 to as much as several hundred dollars).

- **Be strategic about your distribution list.** You may not get on the national nightly news, but never underestimate the importance and reach of LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWS OUTLETS (smaller newspapers, community radio stations). These are oftentimes more read or more listened to because they are LOCALLY-SPECIFIC in the news that they cover.
  - **Utilize alternative news outlets.** Project Censored offers a published guide to “independent media and activism” that lists nationwide alternative media outlets and organizations working in print, radio, TV and the Web (available from Seven Stories Press, [www.sevenstories.com](http://www.sevenstories.com)).
  - **Don't forget the Internet.** The Internet can be one of the more cost-effective ways to get the word out and also archive your Sisterfire event's documentation. Consider setting up a Web blog, using free online services where organizers and artists can write about the Sisterfire experience while on the road or on the day of the event, or shortly after ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com), etc.).
  - **Gather up your e-mail listserv contacts.** E-mail listservs have been critical for grassroots organizers to disseminate information on upcoming actions and events. All the while that you target media outlets, you should always have a simultaneous outreach campaign for your own organizational allies and contacts.
- ✓ **Hit up your sister organizations or organizational allies.** To build a grassroots media campaign for a grassroots cultural/organizing tour like Sisterfire, this may be one of the most important aspects of getting the word out about your event.
  - ✓ **Contact media outlets to get your Sisterfire event on their CALENDAR LISTINGS.** You may not want to target the TV outlets, just yet, but do target MONTHLY, WEEKLY print publications and COMMUNITY RADIO stations that publicize calendar events.

## 2) TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO THE EVENT

- ✓ **Start hitting up TV contacts to highlight the VISUAL appeal of the Sisterfire event.** Work TV desks with your news releases that specifically announce the upcoming Sisterfire tour spot and mention significant performers or activists that will be featured at your tour stop. Sometimes (though, if they're busy it can be a longshot), you can contact a news editor and ask for specifics on whom you can contact that would be most likely to cover your story.

- ✓ **Pitch your story to media contacts you believe may be interested in covering your story.** Even if you can't get any print media contact to commit to a story, offer to provide photographs of the event. Media exposure at the level of just a photograph can say much to a news outlet's readership. Of course, the photograph you eventually send to news sources must encapsulate best the message and spirit of the Sisterfire tour.
- ✓ **Have the documentation committee gather its equipment and tape stock for the event.** With documentation its is important to have your gear ready before the event, so that if the committee does not have personal or organization equipment to use, then resources can be allocated early in camera, tripod, or audio equipment rental as well as in buying tape stock But before trying to rent equipment, see who in your network might lend their equipment or their expertise to you. Remember this is grassroots you maybe pleasantly surprise at how people-rich (as opposed to cash-poor) you really are.

### 3) ONE WEEK PRIOR TO THE EVENT

- ✓ **Prepare press packets, draft and edit news releases and soundbites.** Different from preparing the earlier news releases that alerted the media of the upcoming Sisterfire event tour, save a news release to be released early morning the **day of the event** that will have a definitive feature or news highlight for the tour stop. If possible, include direct quotes from organizers and artists talking about the tour and the **message of the tour**. Contents of the press kit will be mentioned below.
- ✓ **Edit all media/publicity materials.** It helps to have someone not "in the know" of the Sisterfire goings-on to read and edit the news release and sound bites. Do they "get" the message and see a clear angle of what is newsworthy about the Sisterfire event?
- ✓ **Continue all media contacts.** Be sure that any Internet URL's to which you refer contacts "for more information" is up and running. Is your Sisterfire tour blog linked to the main Sisterfire Web site?
- ✓ **Create shot lists, scout out venues, and work out with other working committees when would be good times to document.** As the documentation committee it is you job to be proactive about your



vision for covering this event. So be prepared well in advance of the performance of the shots you want to take, interviews you want to secure, and where memorable events are bound to happen. Of course their will be bound to be tons of on-the-spot moments you can plan for, but checking in with the local programming and logistical committee about what their take is on important events can cut down the chance on you missing that once in a life time moment.

#### 4) ONE DAY BEFORE THE EVENT

- ✓ **Prepare press kits for the arrival of the media on the day of the event.**
- ✓ **If all your pitching pays off, contact the media that you feel will cover your Sisterfire event and make sure that they have all the information that they need to cover it.**
- ✓ **Rehearse and edit your soundbites.** Make sure that all members of your media committee or lead organizers are schooled in how to best communicate with the media. On the day of the event, there may be no way to no who exactly members of the press may hit up for a quote or impromptu interview; just make sure that those serving as media representatives and lead organizers are disseminating consistent messages about the tour.
- ✓ **Send out "embargoed releases" dated for early morning the next day.** You may choose to send out via facsimile your final news releases the night before the Sisterfire in the event that no one can send it out early morning that day. The sample news releases below will explain how to create the appropriate headers for such a release. Make sure the embargoed release has a clear date and time specified. Remember to call to confirm that they have received the releases.
- ✓ **Send out e-mail blasts to your e-mail listserv contact lists.** Encourage people to spread the word and attend your event. Having a strong turn-out on the day of the event can be another spin on which you can write up in a follow up in longer "report backs" written after the event.
- ✓ **Print out schedule of event and assign clear roles for documentation.** If you documentation committee is made up of 3-4 women, an effective way to make sure everything gets covered and all

the women get time on the camera is to chart out the events of the day and assign different women in rotating roles. In documentation different roles include: camera operator, interviewer, and audio person. Make sure everyone gets a chance to do each role and that there are no gaps in coverage.

**Once the roles have been set decide how you want to distinguish the documentation committee for other folks.** Whether its stickers, badges or armbands, this visibility both makes it easier for other Sisterfire volunteers to find if you if they need you as well as make your intentions transparent for folks who feel unsafe around documentation about who and what your are documenting for.

#### 5) THE DAY OF THE EVENT

- ✓ **Fax your news releases one last time to your main media contacts for print, TV and all the news radio.** Call to follow up that they no later than 8am that day.
- ✓ **Set up Media Check-in table at the event.** Have press badges and press kits available. Make sure this table is visible for easy recognition.
- ✓ **Set up Documentation Check-in table.** Having a secure spot for the documentation committee base of operation is a necessity. This place needs to be secure so that folks can stash, their belongings, additional equipment, tape stock, and recorded tapes safely and securely. Additionally make sure that one person has been assigned to take the table down and store the tapes after the event. After all that great work, I am sure you don't want to lose any of it!

## DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE

Some quick thoughts about developing a message. The messages you develop must answer the questions Why? Why care? Why act? A message must explain what's valued, and what's at risk, and it must align you with others who share your values and concerns. A message must be short, simple, and repeated to be heard. To be effective, a message must be included in every communication - written and oral - and used in all your free and paid media. A message must clearly state the issues and values of your Sisterfire Stop and support your local organizing needs.

**Rule 1:** Messages should be aimed at your target audience. The messages should create and reinforce the key beliefs that your target audience must adopt/believe if they are going to change behavior.

**Rule 2:** Messages are not necessarily sound bites, they are the ideas you are trying to communicate to the public. (Messages are reinforced by sound bites, phrases, statistics, anecdotes.)

**Rule 3:** Messages need to be repeated and retold until they clearly reach the target audience. Messages shouldn't change frequently. They must be repeated over and over again until the target audience can recognize and repeat them.

**Rule 4:** Messages can be tailored for specific audiences, while still remaining constant.

**Rule 5:** Consistent messages should permeate all of your communications efforts, not just contact with the media.

**Rule 6:** Messages must be simple. They are ideas that can be explained in a sentence or two - if it requires a paragraph or two, keep working.

**Rule 7:** Messages take time to create. Don't rush the process.

A sample message might include: Violence against women affects us all, with the Sisterfire tour, women of color are stepping up and speaking about their survival in the face of this violence and naming the cost to our society we all face when the State is unchecked as the larger perpetrator of violence in our community.

## NEWS RELEASE

In getting the “word out” to media outlets about your upcoming Sisterfire event, you will need to write a **news release** that is **your** version and your **spin** of what is **newsworthy** about your event. The news release is **news** and must be written to contain **news of interest**. The release must answer the the **six basic questions**:

### **WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? WHY? and HOW?**

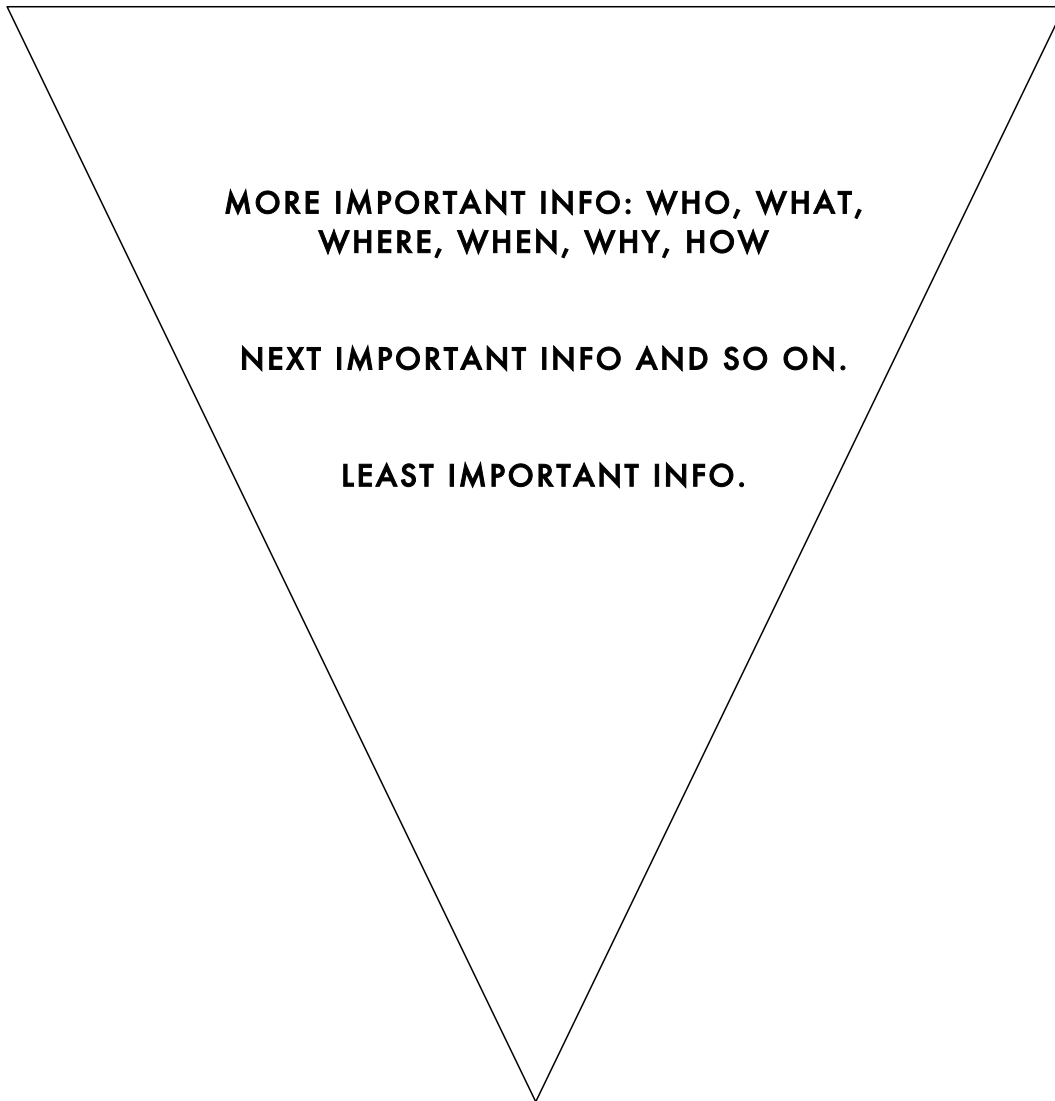
All media receive on a daily basis such a large volume of material for possible news coverage that it requires them to make very superficial and sometimes unfair decisions on the spot as to whether your story is “news,” “newsworthy” or not. This decision-making process oftentimes occurs on the spot, with the need for your news release to be clear, concise and readily understandable.

In writing a news release it is important to make it as easily digestible as possible:

- **Always use double (or at least 1.5) spacing.** A single-spaced release is unlikely to be read.
- **Always use accessible fonts** (script, complicated, or flashy typefaces don’t work). Stick fonts like Times New Roman or Times, etc.
- **Pages with limited content are better than those packed with text**
- **Use official letterhead.** For a Sisterfire tour stop, use the lead organization’s letterhead.
- **Clear release time.** For print media to have your story first, set the release time as “AM”; “PM” if your target is for TV first. Regardless, **always include the date of release.**
- **Always have contact information where a reporter can reach you.** It is important that whatever information you leave on your release, there is a **live person** available to receive any media inquiries.
- **All listed media representatives should be prepared with: 1) sound bites, 2) news material about your event, 3) fact lists regarding details of the event if they are to be the**
- **Using the model of the inverted pyramid (see below), write your news release with the most useful information making up the first paragraph.** Imagine that you only have 60 words or less to tell the world what the Sisterfire tour is about. Within these 60 words, you will need to answer the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY and

HOW questions. In this first paragraph (which in the context of printed newspapers is the equivalent of ONE SENTENCE) is where THE STORY lies.

## **Press Release Diagram of the Flow of Information**



 **SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE**

Here, you can also state: "Embargoed Release: (Date & Time)"

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (DATE OF THE EVENT)  
FURTHER INFORMATION: (NAME OF CONTACT, PHONE, E-MAIL,  
URL)**

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Use "action" verbs in your headline

**ARTISTS AND ACTIVISTS LAUNCH  
NATIONAL TOUR TO END VIOLENCE**

Sisterfire Tour Kicks Off 15-City Tour to Stop Violence Against Women

[PORTLAND] The 15-city cultural arts tour, Sisterfire, stages its kick-off, today at 3:00 p.m. at the Portland City Stadium in order to organize activists and community members aimed at ending systemic violence against women. This project, developed by the national Incite Women of Color Against Violence organization and its allies, is a traveling arts and activism tour featuring women of color musicians, poets, and "artists" over the next six months.

An estimated 600 attendees are expected at the Sisterfire tour opening today at the City Stadium. Over 30 information booths representing various grassroots organizations from around Portland and the rest of the state are also present at the event. The event, features well-known musical artists like Tracy Chapman, as well as activist and performance artist, Mantra Ray—best known for her outspoken views against the Bush Administration and her eclectic on-stage sculpting.

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Addressing a wide-range of issues from the War in Iraq to police harassment against women of color in working class neighborhoods, the Sisterfire organizers and activists intend the tour to be a "wake up call" to the country about the current state of political organizing in the country today.

"With schools and families suffering from budget cuts, unemployment and lack of health care and other social services, we thought it was important that 2004 be a year that we build a public presence and face in protest of an Administration bent on wasting billions of dollars to kill people in countries abroad, while our own are dying from severe cuts in healthcare," says Vida Palomar, a political organizer from Eugene.

The tour's next stop will be in San Francisco on April 10. From there, it will continue on to 13 other strategic stops until it ends on 9 September in New York.

**FURTHER INFORMATION: (NAME OF CONTACT, PHONE, E-MAIL, URL)**

###

If your news release runs more than one page (max 3 pages), each page should say "[MORE]", expect the final page.

## WRITING SOUNDBITES

In addition to writing news releases to disseminate information on your Sisterfire event, it is important for members of your media committee to write and rehearse **SHORT, CONCISE, MESSAGES** that can be used for either **INTERVIEWS, PITCHING TO MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA, or OUTREACH** campaigns. These **ONE-SENTENCE** messages should best represent the **KEY MESSAGES** or **INFORMATION BITS** that you want people to take away from either knowing about the Sisterfire tour or attending a Sisterfire event. Make sure that all materials and messages (from your news release, flyers, and soundbites) all contain uniform messaging.

### **Examples:**

“Sisterfire is an event that organizes around the link between systemic, state and inter-personal violence against women.”

“War abroad creates war at home.”

“Services not criminalization”

“Alternatives not incarceration”

Not only will these soundbites help get your message to the media **QUICKLY**, but it can also help sister organizers become more unified in articulating the key messages and issues around which you are all organizing.

## 5 GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW WITH THE PRSS

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### **1. Prepare**

Ask yourself, 'What is my goal with this interview?' Know the one, two or three (max) key points you want to make; have your messages, simple facts and figures ready to support those points. Use every opportunity to answer questions and then reiterate one of your main points.

### **2. Use the Three C's**

#### **Concise.**

Typically, your comments will be edited to about 5 to 15 seconds or a short sentence. Focus on getting your points across efficiently. Avoid long words and



lengthy sentences. Also, it is better to pause to gather your thoughts than to rely on fillers like "uh-uh-uh," "like," or "you know."

### ***Conversational***

Avoid insider jargon at all costs. Avoid policy-laden language; use words and descriptions that a 8th gradethe average reader/viewer will understand. When you must use jargon, explain it - briefly.

### ***Catchy***

The reporter is looking for the catchy phrase or soundbite. To ensure your main points are included, say them in a clever fashion. If you just presented a key point in an unclear or rambling way, stop for a second and make your point again. The reporter needs the quote to make sense.

## **3. Say What You Want to Say: Avoid 5 Common Traps**

### ***Don't Repeat the Reporter's Words.***

At times a reporter will use language in a question that is confusing or even negative. Sometimes the goal is to bait you into a certain type of answer. The question won't appear in the final version, but your answer will, so don't repeat it.

### ***Don't Lose Your Cool.***

A reporter may play devil's advocate just to get a colorful response. Don't give an angry or defensive response – simply redirect your answer to one of your main points. Reporters get the last word, so don't get into a verbal tussle.

### ***There is No Such Thing as "Off the Record."***

If you don't want something reported, don't tell the reporter.

### ***Don't Be Led Into Hypothetical Situations.***

If the reporter says, "Assume that..." or "What if..." and you don't like the direction being taken, respond with something like: "I can't speculate on the unknown, however..." and restate one of your main points.

### ***Don't Fill (Awkward) Silent Pauses.***

Often a reporter will pause after you have responded to a question, waiting for you to elaborate. Don't feel the need to fill in the silent pauses (sometimes reporters are using this awkward pause to get you to say something you otherwise wouldn't); simply wait for the next question and insert one of your key points.

#### **4. Be Friendly, Honest, and Yourself**

Never lie. If you don't know the answer, say so, and then say you'll try to find out the information and get it to the reporter as soon as possible. Never respond to a question with "no comment." It sounds like you're hiding something. Rather, generously describe why you cannot specifically answer that question and direct the conversation back to one of your main points.

#### **5. You Have More Control Than You Think**

Remember, reporters are conduits, they are not your ultimate audience. Their audience is your audience, so address your points to the public. Use every opportunity to answer a question and bridge back to one of your main points. You have more control than you think.



#### **PRESS PACKET CHECKLIST**

- ✓ Copy of news release
- ✓ Sisterfire outreach flyers
- ✓ Information sheets (stats, lists of participating organizations)
- ✓ Artist list and bios
- ✓ Organizer/organizational list and bios
- ✓ BUSINESS CARD of MEDIA CONTACT or sheet containing CONTACT INFO



#### **POST EVENT FOLLOW-UP**

Be sure to research and archive any media exposure that you receive from the Sisterfire event (newspaper clippings, photographs, dates of radio show airings, etc.). Keep a documentation archive with these clippings. You may also ask the media outlets that do cover you for additional copies of their materials for your historical archives. Sometimes, you may try and get some print publications to do follow-up stories. You can do that by contacting those that do cover your story and suggesting possible story ideas for extended coverage.

#### **WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR MEDIA CLIPPINGS**

With the media exposure that your Sisterfire generates, you can use these materials for a variety of things: ORGANIZATIONAL REPORT BACKS, FUNDER REPORTS, BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT BACKS, etc.

You may want to keep these files in a 3-ring binder using clear plastic sheet protectors. You can use these materials to further extend the impact of the Sisterfire tour.

Finally please send an original and a copy of local media clippings to the Sisterfire National Office. The address is XXXXXX . That way National can also keep track of what a kickass impact you made with your work.

### OTHER RESOURCES

If you are looking for other resources around media messaging check out the following links.

[www.thirdworldmajority.org](http://www.thirdworldmajority.org) Third World Majority is a new media training and production resource center run by a collective of young women of color and our allies dedicated to media justice.

[www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org) (**Strategic Press Information Network**) provides media technical assistance to nonprofit public-interest organizations across the nation who want to influence debate, shape public opinion and garner positive media attention.

[www.youthmediacouncil.org](http://www.youthmediacouncil.org) Youth Media Council is a youth organizing, leadership development, media capacity-building and watchdog project dedicated to amplifying the public voice of marginalized youth and their communities.

<http://www.greenmediatoolshed.org/> A mainstream environmental media blog there are some concise great media tips you can adapt for your local efforts.

# DOCUMENTATION

## Digital Photography Tips

### Tried and True Photograph Composition Tips



#### **Simplify**

Move in close

Have a strong center of interest, colorful subject

Choose a simple background



#### **Control the placement of subject within the frame**

Have subject off center

Use lines to lead viewer to subject

Use foreground to frame subject and add depth

Try unusual camera angles



#### **Add energy and depth**

Use dramatic lighting, early and late in the day, sidelight and backlight - strong shadows

Diagonal lines and patterns can fill an image with energy

Use foreground to build depth and perspective



#### **Look your subject in the eye.**

### A Few Web Composition Tips



Crop even tighter than usual to keep file size small



Keep pictures small



Use tables with borders to create an HTML "picture frame"



Horizontal photos load faster



Crop images to the shape that best displays the subject



Consider using a fine border around images to offset from the background.

## Camera Checklist

- Batteries charged
- Clean camera lens / Lens paper
- New videotapes cued to 1st minute
- Tapes in progress cued to blank
- Microphone and extra mic battery
- Rain protection for camera
- Headphones
- Food, water and appropriate clothing for camera person
- Tripod
- Lights
- Power pack and power cord (w/ extension cord)
- Battery charger accessible /AC power inverter
- Assistant / Tape runner
- Plan for the shoot
- Press pass
- Notebook and pen for detailed shot list and labeling tapes
- Interview Questions
- Camera Log Sheet

## Digital Video Tips

### BEFORE YOU TAPE:

BATTERIES & TAPE - Ask yourself what you are going to need for your shoot - ahead of time! See the [checklist](#), grab your [interview questions](#), prep your camera/accessory bag and charge the batteries - the night before, if possible.

### GETTING STARTED:

☀ DATE & TIME / ENDS OF TAPE- At the beginning of each taping situation, have the date and time appear for 3 seconds and then get rid of it. Don't leave the date/time on for much longer or it will make the footage less valuable for use later in making videos or using on the news. Another way to establish important facts quickly (without having to press any buttons) is by simply speaking into the camera's microphone (e.g. "so-and-so is interviewing in-front of Sisterfire Venue for xxx, it is Friday, January 17, 1 p.m.), then go back to being quiet and letting the camera record what is happening.

☀ Allow 1 minute to run at the beginning of a new tape before you start recording. Know that the tape at the very beginning and end of your cassette will have more glitches and sound and color irregularities. If you are near the end of your tape, and you like what you are recording - get a new tape.

☀ Actually turning the camera off and removing the battery will keep your batteries going a lot longer than having the camera on standby or off with the battery attached.

☀ Carry lens paper and clean your lens frequently.

☀ FRAME UP AND ESTABLISH - As an action, bust-scenario, or any shooting situation gets underway, scan the scene for shots that will establish for viewers where you are, what the issue is, etc. Is there a sign or building or tree or vehicle or tripod, etc. that indicates where you are or what the issue is? Frame up on subjects (i.e. banners, people) so that nothing is cut-off and so that there is not too much empty space. Hold still. Get a good, long shot - 10 seconds or more on each important shot. Video editors and journalists will love you if you give them enough

to work with and allow them to edit it. Get good stills (shots that don't zoom or pan).

☀️ Focus on identifying features and pan from them to the action (e.g. the sign near the government building where people are protesting). When you pan across a scene or from one subject to another, move slow and steady, with a consistent panning speed. Take time to start the pan where you want to, and to end where you want to also, without over-shooting your ending subject and having to move the camera back. Practice your pan with the camera in the standby mode - maybe pan twice at different speeds, but don't pan too much.

☀️ The same goes for zooming in and out. Going from a good wide shot of an action area and zooming in (at a steady pace) to a tighter shot of an arrest happening etc. can be a good way to place the smaller scene in context for viewers. But again, don't zoom too frequently. It is easier to find things quickly and your footage will be more stable, if your camera is open wide and not left in a zoom position. Get close to your subjects and let the camera be an objective eye, getting good images without putting the focus on the act of filming itself. And remember, TV viewers aren't browsing over snapshots and they won't have the benefit of the real context. You must establish that for them.

#### **DURING YOUR SHOOT:**

☀️ **TELL A STORY** - If you are filming an opening performance you would want to get the MC's introduction of the performer, close-up and wide shots of the dance itself, audience shots during the performance, and audience/artist reactions to the performance afterwards. Now your visual images will tell a story and a skilled editor will be able to set it to music or add narration.

Ideally, you will have both video and audio that will tell the story on their own. A recommendation we like to make is to set up before a Sisterfire event a shot list of all the kinds of events you can imagine happening at your Sisterfire Stop (this could include, artist welcome, press conference, performances, interviews, groups, etc. ) This way you can get a sense of what are some of the components of your "story" that is developing, you can always add other images that come to mind later, but this you have the frame of what you will cover.

☀️ **DOCUMENT EFFECTIVELY** - Every action and shooting situation is different; be ready to move fast or to stay still, to let authorities know that they are being filmed or to stay hidden. Consider all your options. If you cannot get close, keep the subject/action framed as tightly and aesthetically as possible by filling the

screen. Zooming in is often necessary, but increases the chances of shaking and an "artificial" look. Take steps to ensure that you are able to stay on site and document what occurs. Dress appropriately. If the Sisterfire venue is outside this might mean warm clothes, rain gear, layers or shorts and t-shirts.. In other situations this might entail "setting up a blind" - a place where you can film the action area and still be discrete and respectful to the performers.

☀️ **DISCRETION AND COURTESY-** There are some things you simply should not tape. Just as your documentation is an act of self-determination for you, your interview subject has the right to determine their frame, content, and usage of their image. Be clear and transparent about your intentions for the interview and exchange contact information with your subject in the event he or she would like to have copies for his or her own organization. If documenting groups, please announce to everyone that you have a camera and would like to start taping. When in doubt, ask; don't take it personally if people are suspicious or hostile to the camera - sometimes people are shy, other times they have very good reasons for not being videotaped. Distinguish between what is important for the action itself and what is nice to have for other purposes (like a documentary).

☀️ **GET GOOD AUDIO** - Sound is so important in good video and typically underestimated in non-professional documentation. If you have some time, get samples of police radio, support people talking to authorities, authorities issuing commands, etc. Think of the video camera as a tape recorder also. Editors can sometimes do wonders with just the audio. And, radio shows are often dying for good audio to use.

☀️ Two types of microphones are going to greatly enhance the quality of your audio: 1) Unidirectional Microphone - this type of mic Can be pointed at the source of sound that you are aiming for and filter out the sounds you don't want. This type of mic Will also allow an audio monitor to sample violent epithets, comments and conversations that authorities and/or workers might not say with a camera up close. 2) Wireless - Remote/Clip-On Microphone - Primary support people, peace keepers, activists who go inside government buildings, etc. can get precious sound samples and the authorities may never even know that they are being recorded by a camera that is 200 feet away. The clip-on mic plugs into a small transmitter - the receiver plugs into the camera's mic jack.

☀️ Monitor audio with headphones to be sure things are okay. Buzzing and even radio interference can occur with external microphones (be careful not to cross headphone wires with microphone wires / also try to keep the mic away from the running/moving parts of your camera).



☀ Built-in mics aren't great. But if you only have your camera mic, get close (real close) to your audio subjects. You have the option of forfeiting the visual all together and placing the camera mic near your speaker's mouth. You can also shoot from the bottom of their head - (trying to frame-up a nice upward shot while keeping the mic close).

☀ INTERVIEWS- When you have some free time, try to interview people as much as possible. People are often reluctant at first, but they soon get used to it and they themselves are usually glad to see it later. Interviews can be a great source of narration or "voice over" material. Get the camera microphone close to their mouth or use a directional mic.

☀ GET CUTAWAYS (VISUALS) LATER - When your subject is talking about something, and points to the object they are describing or commenting on, keep the camera on their face as they talk. When they finish, take a few moments to get a clear shot of what they were talking about.

☀ KEEP YOUR TAPES ORGANIZED - Keep a list of what you record and label your tapes promptly. Do it. Make sure you label the date, location, camera person, brief description and tape's number if there is more than one. Keep extra blank tapes on you and ready to use. Keep sensitive (e.g. "The Bust") material separate from other tapes in case they are confiscated or subpoenaed. Try to use professional quality tapes and always keep your tapes clean, dry, cool and away from the sun or extreme heat. Videotapes are extremely fragile things and should be treated delicately.

☀ SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS- It is always important to have your interview questions ahead of an interview. Here is a sample starter set you can ask delegates to bring back to your organizations a scope of the movmenets represented. Don't forget that after framing your subject that you flip the screen to get consent for the shot:

- 1) State your name, organization, and where you are from for the camera.
- 2) What are issues facing the women in our community today?
- 3) What are you organizing strategies you use to deal with these issues?
- 4) Why do you feel it was important for your organization or women to come together at events likes Sisterfire?
- 5) What would you like from allies to help end violence against our communities.
- 6) Please Sisterfire in your own language.

- 7) Are there any questions you would like to ask me?
- 8) Thank you.

## AFTER YOUR SHOOT:

☀ TAKE CARE OF SOURCE TAPES - Now that you've got the great footage - keep it usable! Play it through a clean camera - one time - while making VHS view tapes through a VCR - then put it away. Is an extra effort required to preserve your footage (esp. if it's regular 8mm or VHS-C) by transferring the best clips to SVHS? Are tapes labeled and organized? - This can be very important. Some groups have actually had all of their tapes subpoenaed because they couldn't find exactly what the authorities asked for, so they just took them all. If you must make copies for people, copy from your VHS copy using two VCR's. Save your source tapes for editing with later. Glitches are the videographer's nightmare and they mostly come from the source tapes that have been played & rewound too much, or banged around, etc. . .

☀ PREPARE FOR WHAT'S NEXT - Do you need to prepare the equipment for the next shoot, or for someone else? Drain and recharge your batteries. Remove completed tapes from the camera and cue the next one up. You might need to remove the battery from your microphone for long term storage. Follow through on any contacts you may have made at the shoot (e.g. media, legal support, other activists... ) Review and evaluate the quality of your footage.

## OTHER RESOURCES

If you are looking for other resources around documentation check out the following links.

[www.thirdworldmajority.org](http://www.thirdworldmajority.org) Third World Majority is a new media training and production resource center run by a collective of young women of color and our allies dedicated to media justice.

<http://www.videomachete.org> VIDEO MACHETE is a Chicago-based, inter-generational, collective of cultural workers. We are activists, students, media artists- both youth and adult- who are all committed to cultivating images, ideas, and words that transform our communities, raise consciousness, and generate collective analysis and action.

<http://www.videoactivism.org/> The VAN is an informal association of activists and politically conscious artists using video to support social, economic and environmental justice campaigns