

Working with the Media and Ethnic Minority Groups

Green Space of the Month - Guidance Paper No.7

Working with the media, nationally and locally is an important part of connecting ethnic minority groups to green spaces. When working with ethnic minority groups, one must be aware that there are many vulnerable groups and individuals who maybe sensitive to public exposure. Steps must be taken to protect their interests and to therefore ensure an ongoing positive relationship with them.

1. Identifying sympathetic media personnel

When reading newspapers, magazines and viewing different media, take note of sympathetic presentations of ethnic minorities by the media, and make contact with relevant personnel to develop a working relationship which you can use on appropriate occasions. Consult local ethnic minority groups to tap into their connections and their views of media, especially locally.

2. Identifying opportunities

Look at your programme of work and activities and identify if there are opportunities to publicise aspects of it which are of particular interest to ethnic minority groups.

Consult relevant groups to talk about your ideas and the opportunities you have spotted. Ask them for their views and assistance, e.g. you may get a first visit by a group of young children and their parents and there is for example a falconry display. Talk to the group leader to see if he or she can talk to particular parents to get their permission for their children to be photographed, with the aim of putting the photo into local organisations' newsletters.

3. Making a decision on media presence

- a. A group may be vulnerable and not wish to have the presence of the media. Sometimes a group may make the wrong decision about itself, and the final decision should also include the judgement of the organising organisation, e.g. BEN or HHA, assessing whether their presence might be detrimental to the process of engagement which it wishes to happen.
- b. The suggestion may be varied to give the group choices in how they engage with the media, e.g. instead of a constant presence throughout the activities, it may be arranged that the journalist or photographer is present only at the end of the visit so that the process of engagement is not interrupted.
- c. The organising organisation should be present, and at their discretion stop inappropriate questions. Only particular more confident members of the group will answer questions or pose for photos. Not all of them need to do it.

4. Briefing community groups

Talk to their representative about:

- a. the purpose for the media presence, e.g. to promote the project to other organisations and community groups, and that their consent to share their experience is a contribution to the opening up of activities to others.
- b. how and where the photos will be used, one-off or to be used again in the future. Children under 16 need their parents to consent to use of photos.
- c. whether they want their details as a group published. Sometimes groups prefer to be anonymous so they cannot be identified by location. Other groups see acknowledgement of group name etc. as a kind of recognition of their input.
- d. the fact that they do not have to answer questions they are unhappy about, that they can designate only particular members of the group to answer questions or have photos taken. They can stop any of the media activities at any time if they are unhappy about it.

- e. they can comment on the setting or the way photographers want to pose them and have their input as to what they want and see as important to show.
- f. whether he or she has actually consulted the people to be involved. The community group must be happy about the arrangements you wish to make.
- g. the details of the arrangement. Times and dates must be written down. Even if it is given over the phone, you must write to re-confirm. If you are making efforts towards an arrangement such as a photo opportunity, you must double check that they will be turning up in the right place at the right time.

5. Briefing journalists and photographers etc.

- a. Photos which are portrait-like are not acceptable. Groups should never look straight into the camera. The focus must be the activity. Focus on settings which point to issues or subject matter which are important to highlight.
- b. Brief them on the purpose of the project and get them on side to assist us in getting the right messages across. Give them a written brief outline of the aims of the project and the process we are taking the organisations and groups through. Include any notes on particular cultural sensitivities in relation to different ethnic groups.
- c. If there is time, the community groups would like to see and comment on the text and photos.
- d. Ask for copies of whatever is published.

6. Dealing with problems

Whatever you do, sometimes there will be unforeseen upsets and problems. Remember that if you have an ongoing positive relationship with an ethnic group, things can always be sorted out. Groups understand that it is not possible to know everything - mistakes may be made on either side and everyone will learn for the future. Groups can get it wrong too, e.g. they may get dates or times wrong and not turn up when you have made great efforts to arrange for a photo opportunity.

When dealing with problems:

- a. arrange to see them face to face. Do not try to sort things out from a distance.
- b. agree any remedial steps, listening carefully to their wishes and checking back that you have understood what they have expressed correctly. e.g. there may be an apology in a local newsletter, or a letter written directly to the offended party by someone high up in your own organisation.
- c. continue to work with the group, making regular contact like you always have. Do not shy away because there has been a problem. Look to the future.
- d. realise that sometimes problems arise because we simply cannot control what happens with the media altogether. And, even sympathetic media personnel can also get it wrong. They may not have time to always check back before their own tight deadlines.

In such cases it is important to empathise with the ethnic community group, showing clearly that you understand what has happened and that you are on their side.

Do what you can, e.g. contact the media personnel who have caused the problem and explain clearly what has happened. Try to get them to write to apologise even if no more can be done. Often, sympathetic media people who have made a mistake will try harder to do something to support ethnic minority groups. It may result in more publicity.

7. Last of all - make it all fun !

Everyone likes good publicity that celebrates their presence, their culture or their contribution, or which gives new information and promotes opportunities to be involved. It is fun for ethnic minority groups to work with the media when everything goes well. It is the way it should be.