



COMMUNIQUE 2:

Hiring PR Counsel



Hiring PR counsel can be a great way to support your planning efforts for College Goal Sunday. Before you start this process, we have several questions to ask to determine your needs for hiring outside counsel and tips to help you find the right PR firm for your needs.

Before You Hire PR Counsel

Before bringing PR counsel on board – or before re-hiring a firm for next year – look at the resources available to you. What and who do you already have in your corner?

- A task force with diverse talent *and* sufficient time/commitment to help with planning and implementation of a College Goal Sunday campaign.
- A partnership with a local community college or university that provides student assistance (e.g., student PR team working on College Goal Sunday for credit, or technical-school students available to produce ads for no or reduced cost).
- A detailed marketing plan in place (developed through www.collegegoalsundayusa.org or www.collegeaccessmarketing.org).

If your program is strong in one or more of these areas, you may not need to hire PR counsel. Consider tapping these resources first before deciding to spend your budget and time on outside counsel. Meet with your Outreach Strategies working group to determine the grassroots and marketing tasks that can be carried out by existing task force members. You have taken stock and determined that you will still benefit from more assistance with marketing efforts? Then the right PR firm can provide excellent support.

What a PR Firm Can Do for You

Depending on your needs, a PR firm can provide assistance on a range of planning and implementation activities for College Goal Sunday. Examples of tasks that can be delegated to PR counsel include:

- Developing a comprehensive marketing plan and timeline for the event;
- Conducting research on audience targets;

- Drafting messages and talking points;
- Designing, writing and printing materials, such as posters, flyers and brochures;
- Identifying and scheduling media opportunities, like radio/TV interviews and calendar placements;
- Developing and pitching public service announcements or ads;
- Building and maintaining a contact database; and
- Recruiting and coordinating a youth advisory group.

Select counsel by matching the assistance you need most with the specialties of the PR firm. For instance, some firms are full service, some may specialize in media outreach, others in Web work. Just be clear about what expertise you will benefit from most when you are at the hiring stage of this process to find the right fit for your program.

Setting Goals

To establish and maintain a good relationship with your PR counsel, set clear goals and lay out all expectations at the onset of the relationship. Provide PR counsel a good understanding of College Goal Sunday – making it clear that the campaign you seek to implement has clearly established goals that are centered around driving a certain number of low-income students to the event (be specific here about how many you would like to show up and who your target audiences are).

Be honest and realistic about what you want to accomplish. While your overarching goal will be set, work closely with your PR firm to narrowly target your audience and establish strong messages and outreach activities. By providing a potential PR firm with details about your campaign and your needs, you allow a potential PR firm to assess their own timeframe and resources, and give you a good proposal.

Challenges

At the summit and on the TA (Technical Assistance) calls, we heard questions on the hiring process for PR firms. Below are answers to these questions.

1. *What does a contract for PR work look like?*
Contracts include scope of work, timeline and protection language (for both the PR firm and you). These should cover clear information on fees and expenses, confidentiality and notation that your College Goal Sunday will own all deliverables. It is perfectly fine for PR counsel to draft the contract. Do feel empowered to revise and edit the contract until you are satisfied with it.
2. *How much should I allocate from my budget for PR counsel?*
NASFAA recommends that College Goal Sunday campaigns allocate no more than 30 percent of their budget for PR counsel; however, this percentage may increase if PR counsel also handles design and printing.
3. *How do you know if a PR firm's rates are reasonable?*
Once you determine your budget available for PR counsel, always consider proposals from at least three different firms to ensure you are receiving a competitive rate. Also, ask how the billing structure will work (i.e., hourly rates vs. flat fees) and how expenses are handled.

4. *What is the normal length of a PR contract?*

It is not an industry standard to sign long-term contracts. In order to give yourself the opportunity to reevaluate, College Goal Sunday programs should consider signing contracts for one year or less. You can always sign a contract for future work at the close of the year.

Interested in Learning More? Check Out These Resources

The College Access Marketing Toolkit created by Spitfire and NASFAA for the College Goal Sunday summit provides tips, resources and templates you can use throughout the planning process.

To learn more about hiring PR counsel, check out these tools under Tab #7.

- Guidelines and Tips – Provides details on how to pick the right firm and tips on budgeting and goal setting.
- Request for Proposals How-To – Gives you all the key components to include in an RFP.
- Request for Proposals Cover Letter – Outlines a sample with placeholders for you to fill in.
- Sample Request for Proposals – Provides the structure of an RFP with important information you can use and placeholders to drop in your specific needs.
- Key Criteria and Checklist – Lists questions to ask any potential PR firm.

If you don't already have the College Access Marketing Toolkit, visit the College Goal Sunday Web site (www.collegegoalsundayusa.org/support/presentations.asp) to download a copy.