



HOPE BASED SOLUTIONS ORIENTED

Guide for Advocates and Public Information Officers



Guide for Advocates and Public Information Officers on Hope-Based and Solutions-Oriented Journalism about Human Trafficking

Premise: Professional journalism in a democracy aims to contribute constructively to society by providing audiences with information necessary to make informed decisions about their lives, communities, and government. But some journalism on human trafficking (HT) has been damaging to survivors and efforts to combat HT. For this and other reasons, advocates feel a tension between wanting to protect survivors versus wanting to inform journalists about efforts to combat trafficking, the needs of survivors, exemplary service provision, and policy developments. Public information officers (PIOs) often have to engage conservatively with media in the interests of protecting first responders and law enforcement involved in operations, while preserving the privacy needed in a HT investigation. This resource provides recommendations for advocates and PIOs on ways to engage with journalists to catalyze hope-based and solutions-oriented journalism that benefits survivors and advances efforts to combat trafficking.

Advocates and PIOs can help catalyze hope-based and solutions-oriented journalism on HT through:

- ▶ Understanding the aims and constraints of journalists
- ▶ Leveraging professional expertise to educate journalists on the contexts and complexities of HT
- ▶ Pitching and framing survivor-respectful stories
- ▶ Co-participating in developing news reports on HT that are constructive for efforts to combat HT
- ▶ Facilitating a trauma-informed and culturally-responsive approach for survivors engaging with journalists

Guidance regarding each of these is provided below.

Understanding the aims and constraints of journalists

- Journalism in the United States operates independently from the government and is granted certain freedoms under the U.S. Constitution.
- [Journalism is a public service profession](#), and many journalists entered that profession to make a positive difference in the world. Information/media dynamics pressure journalists into producing sensationalist stories.

- Credible journalists aim to act ethically according to [these principles](#):
 - Seek truth and report it
 - Minimize harm
 - Act independently
 - Be accountable and transparent

Examples of tensions between principles:

- Journalists are trained to ask for details as part of their quest for truth. In order to minimize harm they should also respect boundaries that survivors articulate.
 - It is typical for journalists not to show their stories to interviewees before publication because that's a way for journalists to maintain their independence. But journalists must also be transparent, and thus should be willing to share which quotes they plan to use from an interview.
- Individual journalists have little choice in how long their final story will be and when it will be published, but they have a lot of authorial influence in how their reports are framed and focused.

Leveraging professional expertise to educate journalists on the contexts and complexities of HT

- Advocates and PIOs have a breadth and depth of knowledge about HT which, when shared diplomatically with journalists, can help ground and nuance the news reports they produce.
- Most journalists do not know the legal definition of HT, and need to be informed about the multiple forms of HT and distinctions between human smuggling and HT as well as sex work and HT. Use the opportunity to speak about labor exploitation and labor trafficking, which is often left out of the conversation by media.
- Often the intersectional issues that contribute to exploitation are not understood fully. Professionals in the movement can guide journalists regarding how issues are connected, such as immigration policies and trafficking, prostitution abatement efforts and trafficking, or intersections with domestic violence -- which is better understood.
- When journalists -- and through them the public -- learn about the needs of survivors as they recover, the services offered to them, and the resources needed to sustain and expand those services, it can help shape governmental and community responses.
- Education about cultural implications and/or guiding how to frame stories with cultural humility/competency is critical (perhaps including community-based organizations in the area that can provide services for survivors).

Pitching and framing survivor-respectful stories

- Regularly issue updates about survivors' accomplishments, successful operations to combat trafficking, exemplary service provision, community

mobilization, and effective collaboration against HT. Ensure you receive a survivor's consent for sharing such information.

- When you see a news report that represents HT accurately and constructively, send the reporter and their editor an appreciative message, add their contact info to your own list of trustworthy journalists to whom you send press releases.
- Occasionally send an idea for a particular HT-related news story directly and solely to one trustworthy journalist (and then to another one if the first does not pursue it, until it gets picked up).
- When journalists ask for introductions to survivors, respond with questions such as the following, both to ascertain the reporter's trustworthiness and help shape the reporter's mindset:
 - What does the reporter think is important for the public to know about HT?
 - What are the reporter's intended goals for this particular story? What questions do they want to ask the survivor?
 - What types of survivor-expertise would be useful for the story to accomplish those aims?
 - What does the reporter want to learn from the survivor in view of the aims of the story?
 - What is the reporter's deadline, i.e. how soon their story needs to be completed?
 - Does the reporter demonstrate an awareness that there can be a number of unexpected emotional challenges for survivors in the aftermath of sharing their story and consequently if they read or see themselves on TV?
 - Will the reporter share any quotes they are using before publication?
 - If a survivor requests anonymity, how will that request be honored? Will the reporter commit to masking any visible or auditory identifiers in the story (e.g. by distorting voice and/or not photographing or video-recording a survivor's face)?
- Educate or train on the harms of sensationalism and how previous portrayals of survivors contribute to this idea by providing an "emotional hook." For example, images of bound or gagged survivors are used as an emotional hook that is harmful to survivors.

Co-participating in developing news reports on HT that are constructive for efforts to combat trafficking

- It is understandable why advocates and PIOs may have a somewhat wary or defensive stance toward journalists, but proactive and positive-toned engagement is likely to be more beneficial over time.
- Look for opportunities to frame press releases and story pitches in hope-based and solutions-oriented ways, e.g. survivors' resilience, positive developments in policy or community engagement, innovative services and counter-HT strategies, milestones reached, and effective collaboration.

- Maintain a list of key talking points to convey in every interaction with journalists, such as [...]
 - Collaboration between law enforcement and service providers
 - The importance of reporting from a survivor-centered and trauma-informed approach
 - Key language to use and avoid – survivor vs. prostitute, recovery vs. rescue

- Examples of ways to redirect a reporter’s focus and reshape a narrative:
 - When contacted for details about a law enforcement operation, provide basic facts about the operation AND express commendation for the coordination between law enforcement agencies, partnerships with community-based service providers, etc.
 - When a journalist requests introductions to survivors for the purpose of getting accounts of exploitation, suggest the journalist also ask survivors about what’s been empowering and hope-restoring and why that is important.
 - When asked to provide an example of a “typical case” of HT, respond that although there is no typical case, there are core messages that victims need to hear, ways they can reach out for help using the resources and communication tools they can access, and actions that they may be able to take to get themselves to safety.
 - When a particular case deals with a specific community, take the opportunity to impart the importance of culturally responsive engagement with survivors in identification and services. But also ensure to prevent a journalist from framing a story that pathologizes a community or makes it appear that trafficking is somehow “cultural,” by redirecting and providing examples of ways that trafficking occurs in every community, in every socio- economic level.

Facilitating a trauma-informed, culturally-responsive approach for survivors engaging with journalists

- When journalists may be present at anti-trafficking events or conferences, consider making survivors aware of their potential presence prior to the event, and/or announcing to the audience the necessity of advance permission for photographs or interviews during the event and provide journalists with contact info for a designated person who will facilitate permission from survivors.

- Journalists working for different types of news organizations may have different approaches to interviewing, writing, audio recording, and photography. When approached for an interview, ask whether the article is for print, television, radio, and/or social media and whether audio or visuals will be included, and share that info with survivors when inviting them to be interviewed.

- Since there may be a sense of obligation imparted on a survivor if they have received services from an agency, ensure the survivor understands that participation is entirely voluntary and there is no obligation to speak to a journalist.

- Treat the interview as you would case management or an interview with law enforcement in terms of ensuring a comfortable or neutral environment, tools to manage stress, mental health support, and a list of available resources the survivor may want to access following the interview.
- Be sure to clarify expectations with the survivor with regards to engaging with journalists. For example, there may be key components of their story they want included, the story may not get published.
- Ask the survivor what they need to feel safer about the interview, e.g. whether they want the journalist to use a pseudonym for them, distort their voice in any audio-recording, not have their face photographed or video-recorded, etc.
- Ask the journalist ahead of time to review any quotes prior to publication.
- When an interpreter is needed, check that the interpreter speaks the language and/or dialect with which the survivor is most comfortable. Verify also that the interpreter is trauma-informed, has experience with interpreting in similar cases before, and is familiar with nuanced phrases respective to human trafficking.
- Share the name of the proposed interpreter with the survivor prior to the interview and ask for the survivor's approval. Prior to the interview, have a secret signal or safety word for the survivor to communicate that they are uncomfortable with the interpreter, to help the survivor end the interview and exit the situation gracefully.
- Prior to the interview, have a secret signal or safety word for the survivor to communicate to you if they feel uncomfortable with the interpreter or journalist, so that you can help the survivor end the interview and exit the situation gracefully.
- When survivors consent to interviews, you have a chance to help guide the journalist's focus and frame, shape the narrative, and thereby influence the public's understanding of and attitudes toward HT.
- Write out for yourself in advance of an interview the key points that you want to make to shape the news story, and note for yourself the specific parts of your story that you are and are not willing to share
 - You can decide to share parts of your experience that reinforce the key points you want to convey. For example, if you want to support more funding for services for survivors, you could share how you were helped by services, or harmed by the lack of services.
- Tell the journalist about your overarching reason(s) for doing the interview, e.g. "As a survivor, I want others to know that..."
- When you see a news story that represents HT accurately and constructively, take a few minutes to help disseminate it, contribute validating comments about it, and/or write a short message/letter to the editor affirming it.

Authorship, copyright, and citation:

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