



MEDIA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

2011

How to Use the Media Advocacy Toolkit

ACSM will be conducting media outreach for the ACSM American Fitness Index™ across the country; however, the effort to improve health and fitness in your community can be greatly enhanced by you. This toolkit offers tips and collaterals to help you build awareness of the issues facing your community.

These tips and materials are merely starting points. We encourage you to customize these materials to fit you and your organization. These materials will also be available for download at www.AmericanFitnessIndex.org. If you have any questions, send an email to afi@acsm.org. Thank you for your help!

Items included in the toolkit:

1. Pitching and Media Relations Tips – Use these tips to help contact journalists, bloggers and other media outlets in your metro area.
2. Tips for Using Social Media – Use these tips to help you share the AFI message via social media sites like your blog, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter.
3. Customizable Letter to the Editor – This sample letter can be customized by you and is intended to help you share your opinion about the state of health and fitness in your metro area. You can also include information about what you, your organization or program is doing to make local improvements.
4. Sample Pitch Script – This script is intended to help you “pitch” your story to members of the media such as print journalists, television and radio news programs, bloggers and other online news outlets.
5. Customizable Local News Release – This sample release can be used in conjunction with your pitching efforts to succinctly share information about how your locale performed in the AFI data report.

Pitching and Media Relations Tips

Contacting a member of the media to get him/her to report on your story is called pitching. Think of it as a sales pitch for your story – you are trying to sell your story.

Pitching and media relations in general is a bit of an art; however, there are a few tips we can offer to help you get started if you would like to build awareness of the 2011 ACSM American Fitness Index™ (AFI) with your local media.

Every member of the media has their preferred method of contact, but the vast majority of journalists prefer pitches via e-mail. If you know your contact's preferred method, please use it appropriately; if not, use e-mail.

Included in this publicity toolkit is a sample pitch letter that you can tailor for your individual pitching and media relations efforts.

General tips:

- Be brief; journalists receive hundreds of pitches daily and want you to get to the point.
- If a journalist contacts you, be ready to get back to them quickly. If you have offered them the opportunity to interview you or a spokesperson at your organization, make sure that person is available and ready to participate in an interview.
- Most interviews take place by phone unless you are doing an interview with a TV journalist. If doing an interview by phone, it's best to use a landline for clarity.
- Don't ask a journalist, "Did you get my e-mail?" If you think your pitch may have been overlooked or didn't go through, feel free to send it one more time but generally no response from a journalist means "No thank you."
- ALWAYS keep the journalist's audience in mind when pitching your story. Does this story appeal to their audience, readers, listeners, viewers, etc.? Today's journalist may or may not have a "beat" – meaning they usually report on a particular topic such as health, politics, sports, etc. Try to pitch to members of the media who cover health, fitness or community affairs.
- During an interview, avoid asking if you can speak "off the record." The reality is whatever you say can be used in a story.
- When doing an interview, try to stick to the story you want to tell. Practice three to four key messages that you want to be heard in your interview and try to focus on making sure those messages are intertwined in your answers.

Television tips:

- If you are pitching to a TV journalist, remember that their story relies on visuals. Offer them an opportunity to shoot the interview in an interesting setting with good light. Also, they are looking for action – try to help them find a setting where people are being physically active.
- Be conscious of their schedule. Most TV news programs book their in-studio guests a few days to several weeks in advance.
 - Morning programs are best reached after the program has finished for that day.
 - Evening and nightly news programs are best reached in the morning. Many TV news programs have a programming meeting mid-morning to discuss what they will cover for that day and who is assigned to which story.

- Sixty to 90 minutes before the news program begins is a bad time to contact a TV journalist as they are preparing for their stories, writing scripts, etc.
- If you do not have a particular reporter to contact, the assignment desk for the newscasts or a producer for other types of programs are the best persons to contact.
- Dress professionally for your interview on camera. Avoid white or very light colors and busy patterns or prints – these don't look very good on camera.

Radio tips:

- If you are pitching to a radio station, be especially conscious to be brief and think in sound bites. A front-page story on the news may be summarized in 30 seconds or less on the radio.
- In-studio guests are usually booked several days to weeks in advance.
- Similar to TV, be conscious of programming schedules when contacting these members of the media.
- In general, the producer for a program is the best person to contact to pursue coverage on the radio.

Print news tips:

- Daily newspapers have a tight turnover and deadlines. Newspaper reporters and editors are perhaps the most contacted of all journalists and therefore their time is in high demand. They are also doing more with fewer people. For the print publication, they are typically writing their stories in the mid-to-late afternoon and “put the story to bed” when you are finishing dinner at home.
- Weekly newspapers also have tough deadlines and typically appear on newsstands beginning Mondays. Their deadlines are usually on Wednesday or Thursday and these are the worst days to contact them.
- Magazines are usually working several months in advance (with the exception of large production weeklies). While they are more flexible, their story needs to be more “evergreen.” Typically, a local magazine will want to take a different approach than simply telling the news; they will want to go deeper with their story and try to paint a picture with words for their readers.

Online tips (news sites and bloggers):

- The newest journalist on the block is the blogger. The best bloggers to contact are those who have blogs that focus on the type of news you want to share. In this case, the best bloggers would be those who write about health, medicine, fitness, the built environment, public policy, and community affairs.
- Every blogger is different so there aren't as many “rules,” but they are perhaps most similar to newspaper journalists.
- Most newspaper journalists double as online news reporters too. They are always looking for new ways to differentiate their online content. They might be interested in including a short video clip alongside their story or recorded audio.
- Other news sites aren't much different except their news cycle is 24/7. Stick to the “general” tips and you'll do great!

If you have any questions about promoting AFI and working with the news media, send an email to afi@acsm.org.

Tips for Using Social Media

One of the easiest ways to help build awareness of the 2011 ACSM American Fitness Index™ (AFI) and how your community performed is by using online social media or networking sites. Social media includes blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace and a host of other online vehicles.

To get started, direct your web browser to the News page of the AFI web site at <http://www.americanfitnessindex.org/news>.

In the right-hand column, you will find a news post about the release of the AFI data report and rankings (dated May 23, 2011). At the end of the post is a green button called ShareThis. When you click this button, you are then given the opportunity to “share” this information with a variety of online social networks. Simply click on the icon of the social networking site you would like to use.

For example, if you have a Facebook page or a Facebook group page, you can use ShareThis to put a link to the AFI news post on your Facebook page. All you have to do is click the ShareThis button, locate the Facebook icon and follow the onscreen instructions.

You will then be directed to log in to your Facebook account and you’ll have the opportunity to add a comment alongside the post. You can write whatever you like, but we encourage you to be positive with your comments. For example, “I’m so excited to see that my city finished in the Top Ten of the 2011 ACSM American Fitness Index! We’ve made great strides in improving our community’s health and fitness in the past five years. To learn more about how my organization is helping, click (insert URL for your organization or program’s Web site).”

It’s that simple. You can do things similar on your own blog if you have one: send a Tweet, Digg the article, Add to Del.i.cious, etc. You can also use ShareThis for any news article you find on the AFI News page.

If you are using Facebook, you can “Like” the ACSM American Fitness Index™ by visiting www.facebook.com/AmericanFitnessIndex. On the AFI Facebook site, you will find additional information and updates about the AFI program and data report. Feel free to post to the Wall, make comments on the status updates, etc.

If you are using Twitter, you can follow AFI at www.twitter.com/ACSM_AFI. For the 2011 report, we would appreciate if you use #afi2011 when referencing the report in your tweets. Feel free to ReTweet AFI tweets or converse with AFI staff using the DM or reply features.

If you have any questions about promoting AFI using social networks, send an email to afi@acsm.org.

ACSM American Fitness Index™

Customizable Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Physical inactivity and obesity are at epidemic proportions in our country, resulting in an increase in the prevalence of chronic diseases, poor quality of life and premature deaths. Moreover, the health care expenditures associated with physical inactivity and obesity continue to escalate with increasingly catastrophic costs to our society.

In (insert name of metro area), XY percent are considered obese and only YZ percent are regularly physically active at least at moderate intensity, which several studies have shown to reduce the risk of illnesses such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease.

In order to increase physical activity in our community, we must understand the scope of the problem. This is the first step toward developing programs, initiatives and policies to increase physical activity and other health behaviors.

The latest report from the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), the 2011 ACSM American Fitness Index™ (AFI), lays out the scope of our situation very clearly. The report measures the state of health and fitness in the 50 largest metropolitan areas. (Insert name of metro area) ranked ## with a score of ###.

(You may want to use the AFI data report to outline areas of strengths/advantages and opportunities/challenges in your community, which are listed on each metro area's page.)

With this understanding, we must motivate our fellow citizens to get moving (or if your community fares well in the rankings: Even with our successes, there is still more we can do.) We need to rally around initiatives to provide an environment that promotes physical activity and makes healthy food choices available. Finally, we must vocalize to our elected officials that we want policies that encourage physical activity and healthier lifestyles.

(You may want to also mention efforts or programs with which you are involved that are working to address increased physical activity, good nutrition and healthy lifestyles.)

With our country facing mounting health care challenges, now is the time for us to work together and build a healthier (insert city name).

Sincerely,
Name
Address
Phone Number

XY = "Percent Obese" listed on your metro area's page under Personal Health Indicators

YZ = "Percent physically active at least moderately" listed on your metro area's page under Personal Health Indicators

= Metro area ranking located on Page 8 of the AFI data report

= Metro area score located on Page 8 of the AFI data report

ACSM American Fitness Index™

Sample Pitch Script

Dear (insert name),

(Insert metro area name) finished (insert ranking) with a score of (insert score) in a new report from the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), the 2011 ACSM American Fitness Index™ (AFI). This report measures the state of health and fitness in the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States.

A few of the things that make AFI unique from other health rankings include:

- 1) Personal health indicators, as well as community and environmental indicators, are included;
- 2) Cities are defined by Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), better representing where residents live and work; and
- 3) The data inputs are from reputable sources, and scientific methodology devised by some of country's foremost experts on physical activity, sports medicine and exercise science was implemented.

Organizations and programs such as (insert name of your organization or program) are trying to improve health and fitness in (insert city or metro area name) and this report helps us better understand our community's areas of strengths and weaknesses.

The findings for (insert name of metro area) need to be shared with the community in order to continue building awareness of the issues we all face, and I hope you will help us in that effort. Please feel free to contact me if you are interested in speaking with (insert name and title of spokesperson for your organization or program) to offer a local context and commentary on this report.

Thank you for your consideration,

(Insert name)

(Insert name of organization or program)

ACSM American Fitness Index™

Customizable Local News Release

(May 23), 2011

For more information contact:

Insert Name at insert phone number or insert email address

Insert name of organization

CITY NAME RANKS OVERALL RANKING IN ACSM AMERICAN FITNESS INDEX™

**Report Provides a Snapshot of the State of Health and Fitness
in the 50 Largest U.S. Metro Areas**

INSERT NAME OF CITY OF RELEASE – City name ranked insert overall ranking in the American College of Sports Medicine’s (ACSM) American Fitness Index™ (AFI) data report, which evaluates the 50 most populous U.S. metropolitan areas to determine the healthiest and fittest to live in the United States.

Based on figures related to healthy lifestyles and physical activity, the Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) of insert MSA name scored insert overall score in the 2011 AFI data report.

City name ranked insert personal health ranking on personal health indicators related to health behaviors, chronic health problems and health care. The area ranked insert community/environmental rating on community/environmental indicators related to the built environment, recreational facilities, park-related expenditures, physical education requirements and primary health care providers. For a complete list of City name’s strengths and challenges plus a breakdown of the components that helped make up its score, please visit the AFI web page and download the City name report at www.americanfitnessindex.org/report.htm.

Minneapolis-St. Paul edged out previous winner Washington, D.C. for the top spot this year with a score of 77.2 (out of 100 possible points). For a complete list of the metropolitan rankings included in the report, please visit www.americanfitnessindex.org.

The AFI data report reflects a composite of preventive health behaviors, levels of chronic disease conditions, health care access, as well as community resources and policies that support physical activity.

(Insert quote from your spokesperson if desired – Sample: “The data evaluated in this report helps us identify our local strengths and challenges,” said John Doe, executive director of XYZ. “This research helps us better understand the health and fitness status and the scope of our problems. To that end, we can develop programs, initiative and policies that will help increase physical activity in our community.”)

(You may want to include additional analysis of your city’s ranking or comparisons of other cities in your state, region or of similar population.)