**Media Best Practices for International Prescribed Burn Training:**

Story description: The Nature Conservancy, Fire Learning Network and Santa Fe National Forest hosted an International Prescribed Burn Training in northern New Mexico. The fire training brought Spanish and bilingual forest experts together from Argentina, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the U.S. to share and learn about prescribed burns, fire management and conservation practices to take back to their home landscapes. They were scheduled to implement several prescribed burns. The fire exchange programs began in 2008 to help address the nation’s shortfall of qualified burners.

Placements: Secured eight placements from local newspapers and national outlets (E&E, NYT online) to Univision and radio (stories attached)

Reasons for success:

* Great story elements
	+ Topical (on heels of one of the worst wildfire seasons)
	+ Great visuals (fire on ground/forest)
	+ Heroes
	+ Critical work (protecting communities/water supplies, recreation)
	+ Global impact with experts participating from many countries
* Early planning
* Pitching persistence
* Great on-the-ground coordination

**3 months from training:**

Research topic/develop questions for leader

Meet with project leader to ask questions/assess media goals/logistics.

* Over the course of two weeks, this training was happening 1.5-2 hours from the metro media market and cell service would be spotty during the day
* Leader Jeremy Bailey clearly stated media was important to him and that he would take measures to ensure journalists could get on the ground/close to the action and fire experts would be prepped for interviews. Jeremy also communicated the importance of a 24-hour notice to ensure best possible story/safety

Gather assets (photos/video) that could be shared with media. I solicited head/field shots of Jeremy in case he was booked for a TV phone interview as Albuquerque (Metro media market) was 2 hours away.

Contact partners early to discuss media strategy/roles/deadlines. TNC took the lead on this project. We agreed I would keep Forest Service in the loop when we secured interest.

**1 month from training:**

Write and vet release through partners.

Build local targeted media list. Because fire experts were Spanish-speaking or bilingual we reached out to Spanish-language media.

Meet/Communicate with NA/WO media teams to discuss regional/national outreach ideas/determine roles. In this case, I was going to reach out to NYT, E&E while WO contacted national Univision.

**1 week from training:**

Email pitches/release with photos. I included a note that the training leaders requested 24-hours’ notice to ensure best possible story/safety

Follow up phone calls. Be persistent. Take notes and schedule return calls.

As soon as I secured interest, I connected the journalist with Mary Huffman who was managing on-the-ground media coordination. At that time, I reminded the journalists that the leaders requested 24 hours to set up interviews to ensure best possible story/on the ground with fire. (Managing expectations)

Mary & I tracked media hits and shared stories with key team players/partners/leadership. It was exciting to share the tremendous work on the ground through the creative media stories.

* In an effort to extend our reach, some of the story links were posted on Facebook sites (NM, FLN, WO)

**Lessons Learned**

Keep calling reporters until you connect live and in person. I was determined to get Univision to cover this story. I called 4 times before connecting live with a reporter. If you haven’t developed a relationship with a reporter inside a media shop, you may have to try a couple different ones (one at a time). One reporter may not get jazzed with your story, but his neighbor loves it. If I reach out to a second reporter in the same shop, I always mention I tried to connect with the other person but didn’t have success (full disclosure). I had success with Univision and KOAT (ABC) with this tactic.

Logistics were challenging. Fire experts were working long days in the woods where there was little or no cell service. In most cases, connections with media needed to be made early in the morning or in the evening. We realized this very early in the game. Mary Huffman stepped up to be our on-the-ground media coordinator. She responded as quickly as she could. She was thorough and ensured our media partners had everything they needed. The role Mary filled was critical to our success.