



**Ontario AIDS Network**

### ***Community Engagement Tool-Kit***

#### ***Key Public Relations Tools of organizing a debate in your community***

##### **Partnership Development**

- Engage your local academic institution (university, college, etc.) in creating a partnership for a debate surrounding the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure or another politically charged or advocacy focused issue surrounding HIV/AIDS. E.G. (access to treatment, employment equity)
- Many Universities across Ontario have debate clubs or debate committees. Such committees are prominent in Universities that have faculties of Law and also offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in Political Science, International Relations, Criminology and Sociology.
- The rules of engagement of debates can be modified if already 'organized' clubs do not exist within a smaller community. Local colleges that offer nursing programs or courses in social work may be interested in such non-traditional programming or curriculum. Furthermore, Schools of Medicine or Faculties of Biology with specialized Bioethics courses may be interested in an 'adapted debate' template in creating a partnership with a community-based agency given the subject matter.
- Engaging academic institutions allows AIDS Service Organizations to promote HIV prevention messages and services to a wider community audience.

##### **Event Promotion**

- Social Networking websites are a cost-effective means of promoting an academic debate. Group and individual Facebook and Twitter pages are examples.
- Create an eye-catching graphic that can be used to promote the event. Designed graphic allows both hosts to legitimately brand the event. The graphic should be of high quality and adaptable for a number of various mediums such as posters, e-mail signatures, social networking websites, and of course your agency website.
- If your agency doesn't have a graphic designer on staff, there may be an opportunity to search for the skills needed within your network of PHAs who may have graphic design skills and are willing to work for a paid honourarium. Alternatively, there are many

graphic design students looking for experience for their portfolios that would be willing to work at a lowered or even pro-bono rate. Craigslist is a great website to advertise for a student graphic designer.

- University and colleges often have their own e-mail listservs that serve as a 'greener' method of disseminating posters or flyers etc.
- If budget allows purchase a print advertisement in your local community newspaper.
- Many local media will also have a 'community calendar' section that will promote local events for free. \*Be aware of deadlines and timelines for submitting a posting or a paid advertisement. Many publications, if they are weekly in circulation, will need to be submitted a week prior.
- Campus newspapers may also be willing to run an advertisement for free if they have space to fill.

### **Further Community Engagement**

- Strategic media relations will allow your agency to effectively communicate issues related to the criminalization of HIV exposure that will help to inform public opinion.
- Draft a media release on the event and circulate the release to all local publications and media outlets that you would like to publish a story. (*\*See attached media release sample*)
- Do not e-mail or fax your press release blindly. Conduct online research to see which journalists cover HIV related-issues in your community. For an academic debate on the criminalization of HIV exposure it would be worth contacting journalists/reporters who cover health, legal or human rights issues. (*Tip: Foster a working relationship with local media contacts will only strengthen the capacity of your agency to effectively use the media as an awareness mechanism.*)
- Send the media release to social media sites. There are many active PHAs in Ontario who write online blogs and webs journals that are widely read. Also social media do not have to adhere to the biases of mainstream media.
- Groom a media spokesperson from your agency who can speak effectively and stay "on message" about the debate.