When your Pony Club is ready to grow...

So your club is ready to grow! This is a very exciting time for your club and its members, as bringing in new members will have many positive impacts. It will increase:

- activity participation
- types of activities for members
- volunteer pool
- teaching opportunities for Upper Level members
- socialization for members with others who share the same interests and values

But where to start? There are many different avenues for your club to explore. Read through them and find the avenue or avenues that fit your club, its budget, and time availability.

How to Get Noticed in Your Community

Club Flyers
Make a flyer for your club! Flyers for the club should be eye-catching and include basic information about Pony Club and your club.

Example:

ABC Pony Club is Fun!
We learn to ride and take care of horses.
We do games/vault/foxhunt/polocrosse/fill in the blank with club activities.

ABC Pony Club is Friends!
We have members of all ages.
Our members love horses of all kinds.

We work together to learn and have fun!
Come ride with us!
For more information
Please contact: Sally Smith, phone number/email/club Web site

Try not to make the flyer too wordy, or it won’t grab people’s attention and it will be hard for people to absorb the information at a glance. Include photos or clip art on the flyer. If you can’t print in color, put the flyer on brightly colored paper. Hang these flyers up at local feed stores, vet’s office, grocery store, and any other appropriate place.

Another option is to order preprinted colored flyers from the National Office and include your club contact information on it. See the Resource List at the end of this Guide.
Place an Ad
Contact your local newspaper about placing an ad in the community or variety section of their paper. You will need to ask about ad size availability and price, deadlines and publication dates, and in what format to submit the ad. Also ask if the paper has a department that will help you format the ad – many papers do, make use of their expertise.

Just like with the flyer, keep the text simple and easy to read, hitting the highlights of your club and the Pony Club program. Don’t forget to include a contact name with phone number and/or email for interested people who want more information. If your club has a Web site, include the web address on the ad as well.

From an ad you could not only find potential new members, but perhaps also alert some Pony Club alumni in the area of your existence. You might find new volunteers!

Direct Contact
Contact the local barns in your area. Make the professionals aware of the opportunity and benefits for their clients joining Pony Club. Go to the barns prepared to introduce Pony Club to the instructors and owners. Bring an issue or two of Pony Club News, the USPC facts flyer, a copy of the Standards, a calendar of club activities, contact information for the club and the National Office, and any other materials you feel would be informative and helpful. Be prepared to talk about how Pony Club can supplement their clients’ current skills, and stress the emphasis Pony Club puts on teaching horsemanship skills. Leave USPC brochures or club flyers with them, making sure your club contact information is listed.

Public Demonstrations
Reach out to the schools, scout troops and other youth organizations in your area and offer to do an educational demonstration with your Pony Club members and a mount(s). First inform the organization of what Pony Club is and its commitment to safety and education. Second, find out what topics the organization feels would benefit the children and then tailor a program to suit their needs.

A public demonstration could talk about body language of horses, care of horses, the aids used to communicate with horses, exercise, and safety. Have handouts put together on the different topics covered in the demonstration, which includes your Pony Club’s name and membership contact information.

Community Involvement
Have your club members get involved in the community by doing volunteer projects, such as: cleaning a portion of highway, volunteering as a group at a animal shelter event, horse rescue farm, horse show, etc. In addition, find out about community events that your club could get involved in, such as: parades (mounted or unmounted), local celebrations, etc. Have members wear their Pony Club shirts, carry the club banner, and pass out club flyers!

Another way to reach out is to host a non-horsey event, like a doggy Easter bone hunt or a community Halloween event. Ask the members for input on what type of event to hold and what activities could be offered. Then break down the event into different responsibilities for the members. Have the members wear their Pony Club shirts and perform their duties under the
supervision of an adult. Have the club banner(s) visible during the event. By having the members plan and participate in the event they will show the public the confident, responsible, leaders that the Pony Club produces.

Have a club booth at a local Equine Affair and/or other public events, such as a local horse show or other "animal" event (i.e., dog show, equine trade fair). See the Resource List at the end of this Guide for available resources to put together a great booth!

Remind your members (and adult volunteers!) that at these events they are representing the club and to be sure to emulating the very best of Pony Club ideals and values. By meeting and working with new people, you can start the community talking about your club and spreading the news about Pony Club. Soon you’ll get calls from people who heard from a friend who heard from a friend that your club exists!

**Open “Clubhouse”**

Another way to reach the public is to invite them to an Open “Club” House! Pick a place, set a date, plan activities, spread the word, and then get ready. For an Open House, you will want to have it at a location that will be able to accommodate many people and where there will be room for different stations that will each tell a little bit about Pony Club.

Consider the following for station topics:

*(Very important tip – have a youth member at each station explaining the exhibit and answer questions. Pair them with an adult who can fill in the blanks. The best exhibit of what Pony Club is all about is our knowledgeable, passionate members!)*

- **Unmounted Meeting:** Display teaching items from unmounted lessons, such as, the visible horse, points of the horse chart, horse health care book, samples of grain and hay, a correctly completed stall card, etc.

- **Mounted Meetings:** Designate times to run a demonstration of a mounted lesson, exhibit and explain the use of grooming tools, illustrate how to clean a stall, demonstrate how to do a safety check, etc. Be sure to establish a safe distance between the horse(s) and the crowd.

- **Proper Attire:** Have one member in correct attire, one member in incorrect attire, and one member in formal inspection attire. Then explain the differences. This is also a great way to stress Pony Club safety around horses and the headgear and shoe requirements for members!

- **Ratings:** Bring in the flow charts! And have copies of the D Standards of Proficiency available for people to browse through and take home. Also, display the USPC Manuals of Horsemanship for parents and prospective members to look through, along with any other supplemental information you think would be helpful. Have someone on hand to talk about how ratings work and the expectations of the members during a test.

- **Rallies:** Display lots of pictures! Explain a rally – mounted team members, stable manger, no outside assistance, judging on both riding skills and horse management, the disciplines offered in your region’s rallies, and national championship opportunities!

- **Parental Involvement:** Put up lots of pictures of parents! This is an important station. This is where the club can inform prospective parents about the role that parents play in Pony Club and the specific expectations of your club.
• **Scrapbook:** Does your club have a scrapbook or photo album? Display it at this station along with many great pictures of your club’s past events. Have each of your current members make a “Member Sheet” and then either mount them on a large display board, or put them in a binder. To complete the “Member Sheet” have your members answer a few simple questions like, name, age, name of horse(s), other pets, best thing about horses, best Pony Club memory, and then let them decorate their page with drawings, photos, stickers, etc. Another great display for this station is the USPC History Book, A Story To Tell, available from the Bookstore, if it is not already in your club library. In addition, display the list of Olympian Pony Club graduates, available on the Web site on the Forms page, under “PR.”

• **Activities/Calendar:** Put together a big calendar display that shows all the planned activities for the club for the year and regional/national opportunities available to the members. Color code them: Unmounted meetings in green, mounted meetings in red, social events in purple, Sponsor/parent events in brown, regional events in orange, national events in blue, etc. This will show potential new parents and members how active your club is and what opportunities are available to them if they join.

• **Prospective Member Folder:** Now that you have “wowed” everyone with what your club has to offer, it’s time to let them know the nitty gritty of membership. Put together a GREAT prospective member folder.
  - Get folders in the club’s color(s)
  - Put your club’s name and a USPC Sticker on the front of the folder
  - Include the following items:
    - Pony Club informational brochures (see Resource List)
    - Club flyer
    - Club contact information – include officers, committee chairs, instructors
    - Club meeting locations and maps to location
    - Club calendar for the rest of the year
    - Club, regional, and national membership dues
    - Club’s Web site (if applicable)
    - Region’s Web site and calendar
    - National Organization’s Web site
    - Club’s Member In Good Standing Policy
    - Parental involvement expectations
    - D-Level Standards of Proficiency
    - Pony Club Pledge
    - Pony Club Mission Statement and Guiding Beliefs
    - Letter of introduction from the club
    - Anything else you think would be helpful
Other materials to have on hand would include past issues of USPC News, USPC Bookstore catalog, the Parent Answer Booklet, and the video Experience Something Special. The National Office often has over-runs on USPC News, and you can request back issues to use at your event. Experience Something Special should be in your club library, but if it has wandered off, a new one may be purchased through the USPC Bookstore.

**Working with the Media**

Press Releases are wonderful things! They are to be short, sweet and specific about one fact or event, but be sure to always include general information about your club and USPC. They are a great tool to introduce your club to the media. At the back of this Guide is a wonderful article on how to put together and use press releases. Make use of its information.

The first step is to make a list of all the media outlets in the areas where your members live. You want to include newspapers, radio, local magazines, and television. On this list you want to include contact names, submission deadlines, submission preference (i.e., email, fax, mail), submission guidelines, and publication dates. Keep this list up-to-date!

The second step is to list the events and activities in which your club is involved. This list should include rating tests, team selection for rallies, placement(s) at rallies, team/members going to Championships, follow up from Championships, any regional achievement (member appointed to Junior Council, volunteer appointed to regional office, etc.) any national Pony Club achievement (i.e., awarded USPC scholarship, placed in Foxhunting writing contest, chosen for National Youth Congress, club awarded “Flash” award, etc.), any community activities that the club will or did participate in (i.e., volunteering at shelter, worked a horse show, participated in a parade, etc.), and any other news worthy item.

In addition to listing the events and activities your club is involved in, human-interest stories are always a good way to tempt the media into giving your club some coverage. Do you have a member with a great story? Someone who overcame a hardship, dealt with a problem, has a family member with a hardship and Pony Club is helping them through it? Or does a member have a great story to share about a horse or pony, i.e., rescue situation, etc.? If Pony Club plays a big part in a member’s life, this might make a great story for the media and can publicize your club.

On the USPC Web site you can find fill-in-the-blank press releases for your club to use and to pattern other club press releases after. Don’t get discouraged if at first information on your club does not get used right away. After time, the media will see that your club is here to stay and its importance to the youth it serves, and they will hopefully begin to take an interest in what you are doing and why your members are so active.

Don’t forget your local morning/noon/evening television news and radio shows. Many local stations like to do community interest stories on location. If your club is going to host a regional event, or a mini-rally, or some other type of event, contact your local television and radio stations about coming out and either shooting some coverage or doing a live on location coverage of your club and its event.

If you get the media to come out and visit your club, appoint “on air” adults and members to represent the club. They should be prepared to answer general questions about what Pony Club is, why they are involved, and what their club does – don’t forget to mention the USPC Web site, so viewers/readers can check Pony Club out in more detail!
Things that media would like to tape and/or discuss while being demonstrated:

- Grooming
- Stall Cleaning
- Tack Cleaning
- Safety Check
- Riding/Jumping

Most media people have great personalities and want to show your club and its members in the best possible light. So relax, let the answers and explanations come naturally and have a good time! But be respectful of their time constraints and deadlines.

**Keeping New Members**

Now that you have the interest, what do you do? Put together a plan to introduce prospective members to your club. Invite them to observe a mounted and/or unmounted lesson or two.* During these visits match up the perspective member with a current member of the same age who can explain what's going on. Match the parents up with other parents to talk about Pony Club and describe what the members are doing and learning. Give them the perspective member folder described previously. Bring items from the club library, so they can see the materials that will be used during meetings. Introduce the parents and child to an older Pony Club member who can talk about the impact Pony Club has had on their life.

Along those same lines, create a mentor system to match up new members with current members. Sometimes kids feel more comfortable asking questions of a peer than an adult. This will also help them integrate into the club.

Follow up and keep in touch with the parents. There is a lot of new "jargon" for them to learn and they may have questions to ask, but don't know to whom to address them. Sometimes just making a point to talk to them at a meeting will be more comfortable than a phone call.

The USPC Achievement Badges are a great way for new members to see the D level requirements broken down into achievable pieces and to build confidence going to their first rating. Instructor and Member booklets are downloadable from the Web site or available for purchase from the Bookstore. Badges are available from the Bookstore.

When you have a group of new members, the Jr. Pony Club program is wonderful way to commence their Pony Club experience. It is a 14-week lesson plan to introduce the basics of Pony Club to new and younger members. While it is geared to teach 4 to 6-year-olds, it may be easily adapted to teach older members. The Jr. Pony Club program is downloadable from the Web site or available for purchase from the Bookstore.

*Note: Prospective member(s) can only observe the meeting/lesson; they may not ride or participate in any "hands on" way, unless additional daily insurance is secured.

**Children are not members until the National Office has RECEIVED the membership report form and payment!!**
Media Relations and Writing a Press Release

by Walter D. Patterson, Public Relations, Otter Creek Pony Club

Developing media relations will allow any business or organization to obtain free coverage of events and activities. This is your chance to get your theme and message across to interested reporters and eventually the public. A good press release will answer all the questions a reporter would want to ask, and be interesting enough that they will want to do a story. However, most organizations often overlook or underutilize this very important media relations’ tool. Successful press releases get your organization’s name and event in print. In this article, I will offer several tips on how your Pony Club can improve its media relations and press coverage.

Attracting media coverage has a lot to do with whether or not your event is newsworthy, but it is also about form and function of the press release. A well-written press release is typed, easy to read, and provides the necessary information (who, what, where, when, why?). The aesthetics are as important as the story, but are often overlooked by an inexperienced person’s effort at public relations.

You will never understand the importance of public relations and the media until you realize that conversations disappear as soon as the words are spoken. This brings us to the essence of publicity. Unless you are there to tell people, they will forget the message. Managing media coverage for your organization means everything you do, including what you say, and how you say it.

Even the way you present yourself should reflect your organization’s goals. Effective use of media relations advances and assists in achieving your organizational goals and has the ability to educate and influence public opinion. Pony Clubs can use effective media relations to assist the organization in gaining community support, fundraising efforts, publicizing an event, recognizing individual or group achievement, such as placing at equestrian competitions. Successful media relations can even help you increase membership and interest in Pony Club.

A media relation’s plan should have two goals. The first goal is to clearly manage the media coverage for your organization. This coverage can play an integral part of promoting Pony Club and providing recognition for equestrian sports. The second goal is to develop a solid media relations’ plan. This takes time to implement because it involves establishing relationships with real people. It is not as simple as writing the press release and faxing it to every newspaper or radio station in your area. Over time, if you are truly committed, you will build a strong relationship with people who are the decision-makers in your local, state or national media markets.

In order to be prepared, you should evaluate the media markets in your area or region and develop a database of newspapers, television and radio stations that provide services to the market area. Vital information for the database should include business name, address, contact person, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address. Additional information should include deadlines for submission of articles. For example, a weekly newspaper may have a Tuesday deadline for their Thursday publishing date. An important part of being prepared is to keep your database updated. The media database I have developed is computerized. However, 3x5 note cards also work very well.
When you are writing a media release or developing a media plan, it is important to determine whom you want to reach, and what areas or regions you want to reach. For most organizations, media lists run along a local and regional path. Next, how does each media outlet conduct business? What are their deadlines to which you must adhere if you want your story to run the next day or the next week? I would like to suggest sending each media contact person a media kit that provides information about your group and organizational goals. The press kit could include a fact sheet about your organization, photographs with captions attached, a calendar of events, biographies of key individuals and brochures. This information can be kept on file and used by the reporter when necessary. Additionally, your group is more likely to receive media coverage if your contact person already has all of the vital information about your group. Always remember that your job in managing media coverage is to make the reporter’s job as easy as possible.

Finding out the information reporters need and providing it to them in a well written, standard format is critical to successful media coverage. Finally, what about after the story appears in the newspaper? I would like to suggest saving newspaper articles, and keeping a written log of radio and television coverage.

When you are writing a press release, think about the following question; what would you want a newspaper reader to pick up in the paper in the morning? An example of this concept is found in the film industry. Take a look at any one-page advertisement for a new movie. An action packed movie might have the Siskel and Ebert “Two thumbs up!” or “A rip roaring roller coaster ride!”

These quotes are examples of what public relations professionals in the film industry might use to promote a movie. I do not advocate using these types of quotes to promote your Pony Club or event. However, these quotes do give you an idea of how important it is to get the audience’s attention. Additionally, you should keep in mind your organizational goals and how your story fits in with those goals.

The press release should generally be no more than one 8-1/2 x 11-inch page and should be on organizational letterhead. The press release should include the following information: The upper left corner should have your name and telephone number, while the upper right corner should have the words “For Immediate Release”: with the date set just below it. At the end of the text center the symbols ###. This is an age-old method used to tell reporters that the release is completed and there are no further pages to follow.

Media releases should be current, concise and complete. They should be printed double –spaced and include the name of a contact person in case the reporter needs additional information or wants to conduct a follow up. A headline should be set in bolder and larger type just above the body of the press release. Media releases should have the who, what, where, when and why close to the beginning and be kept to a single page whenever possible. Imagine that the reporter will read only the first three lines before deciding whether or not to trash it. What would you say and what is the most important information? Check and double-check all of your facts. There is nothing worse than announcing a Saturday event when it is really on Friday. Always have someone else read your press release for grammatical errors and content before it is sent.

The most important thing to remember is to make your news newsworthy. If you are writing press releases for every little thing, they will be reviewed and placed in the circular file for a while. Fax or mail press releases to the appropriate media outlet. Some stories are designed and only
appropriate for print, while others may be appropriate for print, television and radio. For example, a press release on an upcoming event may only be printed in the calendar section of the newspaper or the radio, but would rarely be announced on the six o’clock news. As always, it depends on what the event is and who will be there.

While I have primarily focused on newspaper (print media) in this article, it is important to utilize other types of media coverage as well. Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are non-paid commercials on a non-profit organization’s upcoming event or its on going services which many television and radio stations will run free of charge. Contact the station’s Public Service director to find out the station requirements. Usually, this will require a written script for a 10-, 15- or 30-second spot (typed, double-spaced in caps), or a pre-recorded spot, which you must produce on your own. Some stations will record the spot for you in their studios and free of charge.

Finally, do not be discouraged if you get minimal or no interest in a particular story. It is extremely rare for 100% of the media you contact to be interested in a given story. Even if the reporter is interested, sometimes he or she just may not be available at the right time. Reporters do file releases for future use in “roundup” stories (those, which include the activities of a number of organizations). If you cannot sell a particular story or event to the media, you still have made a valuable media contact and have improved your chances for the next time. Always remember to say please and thank you when interacting with the media.
Marketing/Promotional Resources

For special events where large quantities of flyers or brochures are needed, please contact the Members Services department.

**Brochures:** Tri-fold brochure giving an overview of Pony Club and includes a spot for your club/center contact information. Clubs/Centers may order 50 brochures per year free of charge, or more for special events.

**Riding Center Brochure:** Tri-fold brochure to be used by facilities with a Riding Center program to encourage clients or visitors to inquire about joining Pony Club. Centers may order 50 brochures per year free of charge.

**Pony Club Facts Sheet:** A flyer that talks about Pony Club and what it’s all about. Another great handout for public events or as part of a Prospective Member Folder! Downloadable from Web site.

**Pony Club News:** Published quarterly, this is the official magazine of USPC and covers national and regional events and includes stories and other contributions from youth members. There are often overruns, which are available to be used for marketing events. Contact the Communications Department directly.

**Alumni Olympian List:** This document lists current and former Olympians who are graduates of Pony Club. The list gives the Olympian’s name, graduating club, region, rating, and the year(s) of Olympic participation and any medals won. A great little “did you know” note to share with the public! Downloadable from the Web site.

**Activity Sheet:** Colorful double-sided sheet filled with equine related fun and games. A great handout for public events or as part of a Prospective Member Folder! Downloadable from Web site.

**Pony Club Press Releases:** Keep your club or center in the media’s eye and make your community aware of your activities. Pony Club has designed different press releases for clubs and centers to fill in the blanks and send off to their local media outlets. Downloadable from the Web site.

**How to Build A Display:** This “how to” article will walk your club or center through designing and setting up a display to promote Pony Club. Downloadable from the Web site. Pictures are also available to be downloaded and used in the display.

**Promoting Pony Club:** For those planning on attending a trade fair, this article covers how to invite the public into your display booth area and talk about Pony Club. Downloadable from the Web site.

**Parent Answer Booklet:** This handy pocket sized booklet answers some of the burning questions prospective new member parents have – like cost, time involved, materials needed, etc. Downloadable from the Web site or may be purchased from the Bookstore – $2.