



SIECUS

State Profile

TENNESSEE

*Community-based organizations
in Tennessee received \$5,668,444 in federal funds for
abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in Fiscal Year 2008.¹*

Tennessee Sexuality Education Law and Policy

Tennessee Code forbids the teaching of any sexuality education class unless it has been approved by the state board of education and the local school board, and is taught by instructors deemed to be qualified by the local school board. Any course in sexuality education must “include presentations encouraging abstinence from sexual intercourse during the teen and pre-teen years.” Violation of this rule is considered a Class C misdemeanor.

The Code also protects sexuality education teachers:

With respect to sex education courses otherwise offered in accordance with the requirements of this subsection, no instructor shall be construed to be in violation of this section for answering in good faith any question, or series of questions, germane and material to the course, asked of the instructor and initiated by a student or students enrolled in the course.

The state code explains that if any county in Tennessee has pregnancy rates higher than 19.5 pregnancies per 1,000 females ages 15–17, then every school district in that county must implement family life education in accordance with curriculum guidelines provided by the state board of education. This education must emphasize abstinence until marriage and must include instruction in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Family life education must be taught for four years after the release of the initial teen pregnancy rates. If the school district fails to implement family life education, then the county must do so. If the school board does not implement family life education, the commissioner of education for the state is instructed to withhold state funding.

According to Tennessee Code, if a sexuality education program is developed in any school district, “in developing the plan, the state board shall consider such programs and materials as *Sex Respect*, *Teen-Aid*, and the *3-R Project* of the South Carolina departments of education and health.” The state also recommends a plan for curriculum development, which includes building community and parental support for family life education. Schools must hold at least one public hearing. If, upon implementation of family life education in a school district, more than 50 parents or guardians with children enrolled in the school district complain about the program, the state department of education must audit the school district “for the purpose of evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the plan of family life instruction.” The state department of education must then recommend how to make the instruction more effective and how to build parental and community support for the program.

School districts may use health care professionals and social workers to assist in family life education. Such instructors must be individuals “upright of character and of good public standing.”

According to Tennessee law, HIV/AIDS-prevention courses may not be required for graduation. In addition, all instruction and materials related to HIV/AIDS prevention must place “primary emphasis on abstinence from premarital intimacy and on the avoidance of drug abuse in controlling the spread of AIDS.”

Tennessee Code allows students to be removed from sexuality education classes upon written request from their parent or guardian. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

See Tennessee Code Sections 49-6-1005, 49-6-1008, 49-6-1301, 49-6-1302, and 49-6-1303.

Recent Legislation

Joint Resolution Commends Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Provider

First submitted in February 2008, Senate Joint Resolution 692 honors Sandie Hodges, Executive Director of Blount Health Educators, Inc., for the service of her organization in providing abstinence-only-until-marriage programming to students in Blount County. According to the resolution, such programming “showed the importance of remaining sexually abstinent until marriage in order to prevent unwanted teen pregnancies, teen abortions, teen sexually transmitted diseases, and long-lasting effects of guilt from teen sexual activity.” The resolution was signed by Governor Phil Bredesen (D) on February 29, 2008.

Tennessee Pregnant Women Support Act Introduced

The *Tennessee Pregnant Women Support Act*, Senate Bill 4131, was introduced in February 2008. The Act would have required the state department of health to apply for any available federal funds applicable to supporting pregnant women who may be considering an abortion, and to develop an information pamphlet to distribute to women who have had or are considering an abortion. The pamphlet would have provided listings for pregnancy and postnatal healthcare services, adoption resources, and health services assisting women with preventing future pregnancies. The bill was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee where it died.

Tennessee’s Youth: Statistical Information of Note²

- In 2007, 51% of female high school students and 58% of male high school students in Tennessee reported ever having had sexual intercourse compared to 46% of female high school students and 50% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 3% of female high school students and 12% of male high school students in Tennessee reported having had sexual intercourse before age 13 compared to 4% of female high school students and 10% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 11% of female high school students and 23% of male high school students in Tennessee reported having had four or more lifetime sexual partners compared to 12% of female high school students and 18% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 39% of female high school students and 41% of male high school students in Tennessee reported being currently sexually active (defined as having had sexual intercourse in the three months prior to the survey) compared to 36% of female high school students and 34% of male high school students nationwide.

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- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 56% of females and 66% of males in Tennessee reported having used condoms the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 55% of females and 69% of males nationwide.
- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 19% of females and 15% of males in Tennessee reported having used birth control pills the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 19% of females and 13% of males nationwide.
- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 14% of females and 25% of males in Tennessee reported having used alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 18% of females and 28% of males nationwide.
- In 2007, 89% of high school students in Tennessee reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school compared to 90% of high school students nationwide.

Memphis, Tennessee

- In 2007, 55% of female high school students and 72% of male high school students in Memphis, Tennessee reported ever having had sexual intercourse compared to 46% of female high school students and 50% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 5% of female high school students and 23% of male high school students in Memphis, Tennessee reported having had sexual intercourse before age 13 compared to 4% of female high school students and 10% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 14% of female high school students and 36% of male high school students in Memphis, Tennessee reported having had four or more lifetime sexual partners compared to 12% of female high school students and 18% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 39% of female high school students and 49% of male high school students in Memphis, Tennessee reported being currently sexually active (defined as having had sexual intercourse in the three months prior to the survey) compared to 36% of female high school students and 34% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 69% of females and 79% of males in Memphis, Tennessee reported having used condoms the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 55% of females and 69% of males nationwide.
- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 9% of females and 8% of males in Memphis, Tennessee reported having used birth control pills the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 19% of females and 13% of males nationwide.
- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 8% of females and 17% of males in Memphis, Tennessee reported having used alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 18% of females and 28% of males nationwide.

- In 2007, 86% of high school students in Memphis, Tennessee reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school compared to 90% of high school students nationwide.

Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding

- Tennessee was eligible for \$993,367 in federal Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage funding in Fiscal Year 2008.
- The Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage grant requires states to provide three state-raised dollars or the equivalent in services for every four federal dollars received. The state match may be provided in part or in full by local groups.
- Tennessee, however, did not apply for these funds due to the administrative requirements associated with the funding. Therefore, the state did not match funds nor did it have organizations supported by this type of federal money during this fiscal year.
- The Tennessee Department of Health submitted an application for Fiscal Year 2009 funding and plans to resume Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage programming.

Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) and Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) Grantees

- There are ten CBAE grantees in Tennessee: one health center (faith-based), three crisis pregnancy centers (including two faith-based), and six community-based organizations (including one faith-based).
- There is one AFLA grantee in Tennessee: Break the Cycle.

SIECUS has compiled some examples of the use of federal CBAE and AFLA funding in Tennessee:

Christ Community Health Services, \$599,400 (CBAE 2006–2011)

Christ Community Health Services is a health center that provides "...high quality health care to the underserved in the context of distinctively Christian service. We recognize that Jesus Christ is the true healer of individuals and their communities and the source of our ability to serve. We seek to know Jesus and to make Him known."³

Christ Community Health Services runs the "Choices" program in addition to other outreach programs, devoted to "helping teens reach the decision to save sexual activity until after marriage."⁴ "Choices" targets youth ages 12–15 in Memphis and Shelby County and strives to "point them toward choosing a wholesome and healthy lifestyle."⁵

Hope Resource Center, \$521,000 (CBAE 2006–2011)

Hope Resource Center is a crisis pregnancy center that operates in Knoxville and provides pregnancy services, STD testing, "abortion recovery," and educational services including "... other positive options besides taking immediate steps to end your pregnancy."⁶ Crisis pregnancy centers typically advertise as providing medical services and then use anti-abortion propaganda, misinformation, and fear and shame tactics to dissuade women facing unintended pregnancy from exercising their right to choose.

Hope Resource Center cites the Medical Institute and the abstinence-only-until-marriage program "JustWait" as sexual health resources.⁷ "JustWait" is a national media campaign that produces misleading, inaccurate, and fear-based television commercials, billboards, and print ads in order to promote sexual abstinence among youth. In one ad, a picture of a condom appears above the tagline "It's only 0.07 mm thick, you call that protection?"⁸ In its most recent television commercial, a female teenager with tear-

stained mascara on her cheeks talks about how she had sex for all the wrong reasons and says “sex makes things different, not better.”⁹

Hope Resource Center notes that “over one million women choose abortion each year. Immediately afterward a woman may feel a sense of relief. However, in the months and years following, most women will struggle with symptoms related to post abortion stress.”¹⁰ It defines post abortion stress as the “chronic inability to process the painful thoughts and emotions about an unplanned pregnancy and subsequent abortion(s), guilt, anger, and grief: the inability to grieve the loss that was incurred; and the inability to come to peace with God, yourself and others.”¹¹ Hope Resource Center describes its “abortion recovery” program as a process that “will lead you to freedom from the crippling effects of shame, will help you develop a deeper intimacy with God, and will move you out of despair into a life of peace and joy... through a twelve week Bible study specific to the issues of post abortion stress.”¹²

There is no sound scientific evidence linking abortion to subsequent mental health problems, termed “post-abortion stress syndrome” by anti-abortion groups. Neither the American Psychological Association nor the American Psychiatric Association recognize “post-abortion stress syndrome” as a legitimate medical condition.¹³ Nevertheless, abortion opponents often refer to studies that have been found to have severe methodological flaws or cite anecdotal evidence of this condition in an effort to scare women out of exercising their right to choose.

Knoxville Leadership Foundation, \$354,236 (CBAE 2005–2008)

Currently in its last year of funding, Knoxville Leadership Foundation is a community-based organization that runs an abstinence-only-until-marriage program called the “Abstinence Initiative.” The initiative is broken into three components: a school assembly program, “The Crew,” and the “Silver Ring Thing” program.

Knoxville Leadership Foundation describes its school assembly program as a dynamic multi-media presentation where “students are challenged to consider their choices with regard to the opposite sex, and learn the facts about the risks of not remaining abstinent.”¹⁴ The Crew is a student-run program that puts on “high-tech, high-energy shows for fellow teenagers about sex.”¹⁵ Students who would like to join must have made or make a virginity pledge.

The Silver Ring Thing is a national, faith-based program aimed at getting young people to sign a covenant with God to remain abstinent until marriage. Graduates of the program purchase silver rings inscribed with the Bible passage from 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, which states, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable.”¹⁶

The Knoxville Leadership Foundation’s website mentions that the school assembly program and the non-religious activities of The Crew are funded by the Department of Health and Human Services while the Silver Ring Thing is not.

Virginity pledges like the one students in The Crew and the Silver Ring Thing are asked to take have become increasingly popular in recent years. Research found that 88 percent of young people who took a virginity pledge ultimately had sexual intercourse before marriage. Under certain conditions these pledges may help some adolescents delay sexual intercourse. When they work, pledges help this select group of adolescents delay the onset of sexual intercourse for an average of 18 months—far short of marriage. Researchers found that pledges only worked when taken by a small group of students. Pledges taken by a whole class were ineffective. More importantly, the studies also found that those young people who took a pledge were one-third less likely to use contraception when they did become sexually active than their peers who had not pledged. These teens are therefore more vulnerable to the risks of unprotected sexual activity such as unintended pregnancy and STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Further research has confirmed that although some students who take pledges delay intercourse, ultimately they are equally as likely to contract an STD as their non-pledging peers. The study also found that STD rates were higher in

communities where a significant proportion (over 20 percent) of the young people had taken virginity pledges.¹⁷

Life Choices Pregnancy Support Center, Inc., \$556,402 (CBAE 2006-2011)

The Life Choices Pregnancy Support Center, Inc. is a crisis pregnancy center that runs the abstinence-only-until-marriage program “Rights Choices of West Tennessee.”

“Right Choices” uses the *Why kNOW* curriculum in grades six through nine and the *Soul Mate* curriculum, published by *Choosing the Best*, in grades 10–12. SIECUS reviewed *Why kNOW* and found that it offers limited information about important topics in human sexuality such as puberty, anatomy, and human reproduction, and no information about sexual orientation and gender identity. The information that is included is outdated, inaccurate, and misleading. In addition, *Why kNOW* relies on negative messages, distorts information, and presents biased views on gender, marriage, family structure, sexual orientation, and pregnancy options. For example, the curriculum tells students that the tradition of lifting the veil shows that “the groom [is] the only man allowed to uncover the bride,” and demonstrates “her respect for him by illustrating that she [has] not allowed any other man to lay claim to her.”¹⁸

The *Choosing the Best* series is one of the more popular abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in the country. The series is comprised of a number of curricula for students from sixth grade through high school: *Choosing the Best WAY*, *Choosing the Best PATH*, *Choosing the Best LIFE*, *Choosing the Best JOURNEY*, and *Choosing the Best SOULMATE*. The series has been recently revised and the information about STDs is now medically accurate. However, *Choosing the Best* curricula continue to promote heterosexual marriage, rely on messages of fear and shame, and include biases about gender, sexual orientation, and pregnancy options. For example, *Choosing the Best PATH* asks students to brainstorm the “emotional consequences” of premarital sex. Suggested answers include “guilt, feeling scared, ruined relationships, broken emotional bonds.”¹⁹

The “Right Choices” program also includes trainings for parents in order to help them “effectively communicate the abstinence message to their teens.”²⁰ Trainings are based on *The Big Talk Book* authored by Bruce Cook who is the president and CEO of Choosing the Best.

The Life Choices Pregnancy Support Center reports that “77% of the students in grades 6 - 9 who received the Right Choices of West Tennessee program pledged abstinence!” in 2007.²¹ It cites information and research from the Abstinence Clearinghouse and the Heritage Foundation as evidence that virginity pledges are proven to work. The Abstinence Clearinghouse, a leader in the abstinence-only-until-marriage industry, was founded by Leslee Unruh who is also the president and founder of the Alpha Center, a crisis pregnancy center. Founded in 1973, The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute—a think tank—whose mission is “to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.”²² The Heritage Foundation frequently produces research that attempts to link premarital sexual activity and out-of-wedlock childbearing to a host of social and emotional problems including suicide and poverty. This research is not subject to peer review.

Life Choices Pregnancy also promotes the book *Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children*, co-authored by Dr. Joe S. McIlhaney Jr., the founder of The Medical Institute (formerly the Medical Institute for Sexual Health) which describes itself as a “medical, educational, and research organization” founded “to confront the global epidemics of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).”²³ It is a national organization that provides assistance to abstinence-only-until-marriage educators and providers.

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Federal and State Funding for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs in FY 2008

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee Length of Grant	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, AFLA, and other funds)
Boys and Girls Club of Tennessee Valley 2006–2011 www.bgctnv.org	\$410,850	CBAE
Boys to Men, Inc. “Right for Me Program” 2005–2008 DUAL GRANTEE 2008–2013 www.boys-to-men.org	\$454,046 \$498,140	CBAE CBAE
Break the Cycle 2006–2011 DUAL GRANTEE 2003–2008 www.discoveret.org/bkcycle	\$526,223 \$175,000	CBAE AFLA
Christ Community Health Services 2006–2011 www.christcommunityhealth.org	\$599,400	CBAE

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Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee Length of Grant	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, AFLA, and other funds)
Douglas Cherokee Economic Authority, Inc. 2008–2013 www.douglascherokee.org/DC EA	\$582,822	CBAE
Hope Resource Center 2006–2011 www.hoperc.org	\$521,000	CBAE
Knoxville Leadership Foundation 2005–2008 www.klf.org	\$354,236	CBAE
Life Choices Pregnancy Support Center, Inc. 2006–2011 www.rightchoicestn.com	\$556,402	CBAE
Why kNOw Abstinence Education 2007–2012 www.whyknow.org	\$597,785	CBAE
Women’s Care Center of Rhea County, Inc. 2008–2013 www.rheaofhope.org	\$392,540	CBAE

Adolescent Health Contact²⁴

Yvette Mack
Tennessee Department of Health
Maternal and Child Health Section
5th Floor, Cordell Hull Building
425 5th Avenue, North
Nashville, TN 37243
Phone: (615) 741-7353

Tennessee Organizations that Support Comprehensive Sexuality Education

ACLU of Tennessee
P.O. Box 120160
Nashville, TN 37212
Phone: (615) 320-7142
www.aclu-tn.org

Knoxville Chapter of the National
Organization for Women
P.O. Box 5332
Knoxville, TN 37928
Phone: (865) 281-8075
www.knoxvillenow.org

Planned Parenthood Greater Memphis Region
1407 Union, Suite 300
Memphis, TN 38104
Phone: (901) 725-1717
www.plannedparenthood.org/memphis

Planned Parenthood of Middle and East
Tennessee
50 Vantage Way, #102
Nashville, TN 37228
Phone: (615) 345-0952
www.plannedparenthood.org/mid-east-tennessee

Tennessee Organizations that Oppose Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Center for Bio-Ethical Reform
P.O. Box 20115
Knoxville, TN 37940
Phone: (865) 609-9033
www.abortionno.org/CBRsoutheast

Tennessee Right to Life
State Central Office
P.O. Box 110765
4802 Charlotte Avenue
Nashville, TN 37209
Phone: (877) 246-6735
www.tennesseerighttolife.org

Newspapers in Tennessee²⁵

Chattanooga Times & Free Press
Newsroom
400 E. 11th Street
Chattanooga, TN 37403
Phone: (423) 757-6357
www.timesfreepress.com

The City Paper
Newsroom
624 Grassmere Park, Suite 28
Nashville, TN 37211
Phone: (615) 298-9833
www.nashvillecitypaper.com

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The Memphis Daily News
 Newsroom
 193 Jefferson Avenue
 Memphis, TN 38103
 Phone: (901) 523-1561
www.memphisdailynews.com

The Jackson Sun
 Newsroom
 P.O. Box 1059
 Jackson, TN 38302
 Phone: (731) 427-3333
www.jacksonsun.com

Knoxville News Sentinel
 Newsroom
 2332 News Sentinel Drive
 Knoxville, TN 37921
 Phone: (865) 523-3131
www.knownews.com

The Leaf-Chronicle
 Newsroom
 200 Commerce Street
 Clarksville, TN 37040
 Phone: (931) 552-1808
www.theleafchronicle.com

The Tennessean
 Newsroom
 1100 Broadway
 Nashville, TN 37203
 Phone: (615) 259-8000
www.tennessean.com

¹ This refers to the federal government's fiscal year, which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The fiscal year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends; for example, Fiscal Year 2008 began on October 1, 2007 and ended on September 30, 2008.

² Unless otherwise cited, all statistical information comes from: Danice K. Eaton, et al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005," *Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 55, no. SS-5 (9 June 2006): 1-108, accessed 26 January 2007, <<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>>.

³ "Mission Statement," Christ Community Health Services, accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://www.christcommunityhealth.org/mission.htm>>.

⁴ "Choices," Christ Community Health Services, accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://www.christcommunityhealth.org/choices/index.html>>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Am I Pregnant?," Hope Resource Center, (2006), accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://hoperc.org/pregnant/index.php?id=45>>.

⁷ "Links," Hope Resource Center, (2006), accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://hoperc.org/links/>>.

⁸ "Print," JustWait, accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://www.justwait.com/media/index.php?id=19>>.

⁹ *Things Are Different, Not Better*, JustWait, accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://www.youtube.com/marrbestsexiage>>.

¹⁰ "After Abortion," Hope Resource Center, (2006), accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://hoperc.org/abortion/>>.

¹¹ "Post-Abortion Stress," Restoring Hearts Ministry, Hope Resource Center, (2002), accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://www.restoringhearts.org/postabortion.htm>>.

¹² "Are You Ready to Begin Healing?," Restoring Hearts Ministry, Hope Resource Center, (2002), accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://www.restoringhearts.org/healing.htm>>.

¹³ Brenda Major et al, "Report of the APA Task Force on Mental Health and Abortion," *American Psychological Association*, (13 August 2008) accessed 8 October 2008, <<http://www.apa.org/releases/abortion-report.pdf>>.

¹⁴ "Abstinence Initiative: Meeting the Epidemic of STDs and Teen Pregnancy," Knoxville Leadership Foundation, accessed 16 October 2008, <http://www.klf.org/index.php/programs/abstinence_initiative/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "What Is It?," Silver Ring Thing, accessed 16 October 2008, <<http://www.silverringthing.com/shopcategory.asp?catID=14>>.

¹⁷ Peter Bearman and Hannah Brückner "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and the Transition to First Intercourse." *American Journal of Sociology* 106.4 (2001): 859-912; Peter Bearman and Hannah Brückner, "After the promise: The STD consequences of adolescent virginity pledges," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 36.4 (2005): 271-278.

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¹⁸ Kris Frainie, *Why kNOW Abstinence Education Program Teacher's Manual*, (Chattanooga, TN: Why kNow Abstinence Education Programs, A Division of AAA Women's Services, 2002). For more information, see SIECUS' review of *Why kNOW* at <http://www.communityactionkit.org/reviews/WhyKnow.html>.

¹⁹ Bruce Cook, *Choosing the Best* (Marietta, GA: Choosing the Best, Inc., 2001-2007).

²⁰ "About Us," Right Choices of West Tennessee, (2008), accessed 16 October 2008, <http://www.rightchoicestn.com/about.html>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² About the Heritage Foundation, The Heritage Foundation, accessed 19 January 2005, <http://www.heritage.org/about>.

²³ "About Us: What is the Medical Institute?" Medical Institute for Sexual Health, (2007), accessed 4 April 2008, <http://www.medinstitute.org/content.php?name=aboutmi>.

²⁴ SIECUS has identified this person as a state-based contact for information on adolescent health and if applicable, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

²⁵ This section is a list of major newspapers in your state with contact information for their newsrooms. This list is by no means exhaustive and does not contain the local level newspapers which are integral to getting your message out to your community. SIECUS strongly urges you to follow stories about the issues that concern you on the national, state, and local level by using an internet news alert service such as [Google alerts](#), becoming an avid reader of your local papers, and establishing relationships with reporters who cover your issues. For more information on how to achieve your media goals visit the SIECUS [Community Action Kit](#).