



Media Matters: The Complete Guide to Getting Positive Media Attention

About this Guide

Whether you're looking to get your organization's opinion considered in a public conversation, get press coverage of a new program or initiative that benefits the community in a creative way, or respond to an incident, it is crucial to exercise proper media protocol and courtesies that make it easier for press to cover your story. This guide is designed to help you understand the best ways to work with the media by providing a set of tips and templates that will help you build rapport and amplify your chances of getting good coverage.

Media can be a powerful way to get your message out. There are several options for communicating with the media. You can:

- Write a letter to the editor of your daily/weekly newspaper
- Write an op-ed for your daily/weekly newspaper or ask someone in your community to do so
- Respond to bloggers or online news
- Send out media advisories and press releases to all local media: print, radio, television, and internet
- Meet with newspaper editorial boards, online bloggers, or broadcast media to brief them on the issues
- Host a media event or press conference

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Types of Media

In the work you do, you will likely need to engage different types of media. Depending on the type of news you are sharing, you may not call upon all media at all times. Here's a primer on which outlets to engage and when.

Type of Outlet	When to Engage
Print media (newspapers and magazines)	Contact your <i>daily or weekly newspaper</i> nearly every time you have news to share. These outlets are traditionally good about publishing even your smallest news, such as calendar entries for events. Engage <i>trade print media</i> when you have significant news to share, such as study findings, data, or new programs that reflect national trends. Offer photography opportunities or charts and graphs whenever you have them.
Radio	Contact your local and state NPR stations when you have “bigger” news of local and state importance to share and have someone who can comment on it for the radio report. This is not the place for calendar entries for events. However, radio stations may take Public Service Announcements for your organization. Contact them for guidelines.
Television	Contact your local television stations when you have “bigger” news of local importance to share and have someone who can be interviewed on camera. It is a bonus if you have “B Roll” (extra footage that is visually interesting to the station’s viewers; this typically appears while a voiceover plays).
Digital Media	Digital media bring together many of the elements of print and broadcast. Contact <i>local digital media</i> as you would your daily or weekly newspaper. For <i>national digital media</i> , engage them as you would trade media. In both cases offer photos, charts, and graphs if you have them. Offer your spokesperson to be part of podcasts or to provide audio clips.

How to Choose the Right Method of Media Outreach

Using situationally appropriate media outreach activities is vital! There are many ways to communicate with the media, and maintaining good relationships with press hinges on your ability to use the right method to reach out to media for coverage. Keep in mind, the steps you take to identify the right outlet, frame your news, and hone your message are nearly the same for all types of media. It is the delivery method that is different.

For example, imagine a newspaper published a story about the need for more child care options for employees of area businesses. A child care center with close partnerships with local business might reach out to the reporter who wrote the story to gain recognition for filling a community need, relative to the discussion in the media. A press conference isn't necessarily the best way to respond to that reporter, but a letter to the editor and a personalized outreach to that reporter with the offer of a site tour might be beneficial. Use the table on page 3 as a guide for determining how you should reach out to media.

Type of Outreach	When to Use this Type of Outreach	Overview of Process (see detailed tips and steps on page 4-5)
Send out a press release.	Share news with your targeted media on a regular basis.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify news to share; 2. Get up to date on news coverage about your issue so you can frame it to be timely and to stand out; 3. Develop press list; 4. Draft release; 5. Record “B Roll” footage and share the audio or the footage, if available. 6. Distribute release to press list, share via social media, and post on your website; 7. Follow up with media to gauge interest.
Reach out to reporters.	Give reporters a head’s up on important news (such as when you know the governor’s budget is going to be released) or you have reaction to share on an issue (such as how the governor’s budget will cut funding to your program).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop relationships with print, broadcast and digital reporters; 2. Think through your messages beforehand; 3. Practice your message; 4. Target reporters based on their outlet’s interest in your issue; 5. Call media and offer your perspective “on the record”; 6. Position yourself as a resource for any interview shows, call-in programs, or podcasts they do on the issue.
Submit an op-ed.	Participate in a community conversation via a newspaper or publication.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check the op-ed word count limits and guidelines for a particular outlet; 2. Identify an appropriate messenger; 3. Write and submit op-ed using guidelines.
Submit a letter to the editor (LTE)	Respond to an article or conversation topic previously covered by media.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check the LTE word count limits and guidelines for a particular outlet; 2. Write and submit LTE using guidelines.
Invite press to an event that is occurring.	Invite a reporter to an event.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send out media advisory to all media outlets (print, TV, radio, bloggers); 2. Greet reporters at event; offer interview with event leadership and give attending press a press kit; 3. Offer opportunities for audio, video, and photography; 4. Send out press release to all media outlets after event.



Tips for Working with All Media

1



Planning.

Working with the media should not be a one-off event. Instead develop a *communication plan* that has defined strategies for meeting your goals and clear messages that effectively get you there. Working with the media can be part of your communication approach.

2



Develop 3–5 messages.

Use Advocacy & Communication Solutions' messaging guides to help develop key messages.

3



Translate your message for real people.

Use the “brother-in-law test” to ensure that you avoid acronyms, jargon, rhetoric, mission-statement talk, and inside lingo. With the “brother-in-law test,” you test your message on people who have no prior knowledge of the industry or field. They should be able to understand your key concepts and takeaways. Statistics also go a long way to helping the reporter and lending credence to your cause.

4



Identify the best messenger.

Designate a spokesperson and a backup. Both should be able to articulate the essence of your organization, its policies, and what information is/is not confidential. These people should be poised, confident, and clear-spoken. If there is an opportunity for photography or video interview, ensure they know to dress the part and are polished and professional.

5



Practice, practice, practice.

Leave nothing to chance. You've gotten the right messages in hand; now make sure you can deliver them clearly and confidently.

6



Cultivate relationships with the press.

- a. Identify the people who cover the issues in which you are interested.
- b. Be a resource—return calls promptly. If you regularly are not responsive to media calls and requests, they will stop calling. Even if you do not know the answer to their questions, connect them with someone who does.
- c. Ask for media contacts' business cards and preferred methods of communication.
- d. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so.

7



Be honest.

Never lie or intentionally mislead reporters. Trust and integrity will help you build relationships with reporters and establish you as a credible source.

8



Make the media's jobs easier.

Provide what they need to get your news published or broadcast quickly. Plan ahead for audio, video, and photography opportunities, and tell the reporters ahead of time what they can expect to get from you. Have experts on hand and ready for interviews.



9

Distribute a press kit.

This packet of information should quickly tell reporters who you are, what you do, why it matters, and why other people will care about it. Consider adding brochures or one-page descriptions of your organization. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), fact sheets, or recent news coverage (press releases or articles written about you) can also help the reporter understand why what you do is newsworthy. Make sure you include contact information to tell reporters how to get in touch with you.

10

Use media attention to your advantage.

Use it as a hook so you can deliver your message, pivot, and reframe the conversation (if needed). Framing can guide the angle of the story and pivoting helps control your message

11

Have a purpose.

Communicate your purpose clearly and at the beginning of your correspondence.

12

Include quotes

from relevant people when you write letters to the editor, op-eds, media advisories, press releases, or respond to online media. These could be from community leaders or third-party validators. Let the quotes help tell your story.

13

Be clear and accurate.

- a. Check your written outreach (letters to the editor, op-eds, media advisories, press releases, or responses to online media) for clarity and accuracy.
- b. Check carefully for correct dates, spelling, facts, and phone numbers.
- c. Double check spellings of names and organizations.
- d. Avoid technical terms or jargon.
- e. Do not use acronyms to describe the organization, program, or legislation in the first reference.

14

Keep your comments short and simple.

Whether writing a response to an online blog or sending a press release, the reporter should be able to understand what is happening in the first sentence or two.

15

Offer to fact check a story.

Reporters are not under any obligation to send you a story before it goes to print to “approve” it. But you can offer to fact check it for them. They may send you one fact or they might send you a key section for review.



Seven Tips for Crafting a Compelling Letter to the Editor

Letters to the Editor can be a great way to get your issue in front of thousands of readers. Not only do you get to make your case—you also have the implicit nod from an editorial body that your message is worth consideration.

How do you help ensure that your letter is published, and is as compelling to readers as possible? Here are seven tips to keep in mind:

1

Own your opinion.

Newspapers will not publish unsigned letters, so make sure your letter has your name, as well as any other information requested (such as phone number, address, or email.) You can find guidelines for letter to the editor submissions on most newspaper websites.

2

Keep it short.

Most papers have restrictions on length, and under 200 words is usually best for keeping a reader's attention.

3

Start strong.

Compelling letters usually pull in the reader with a startling fact, a visceral image, or a strong statement.

4

Use your own words.

It's fine to use other sources or standard talking points as resources for your letter, but don't simply repeat what others have said or written. Give your letter your own voice.

5

Speak your truth.

Readers relate strongly to personal stories, so if you have something to share that illustrates the importance of your issue, add it to your letter.

6

Reinforce with facts.

Letters to the editor are opinions, and yours gains credibility when you clearly state facts (and sources) that support your point.

7

Ask for action.

Don't shy away from asking readers to support your cause, and give them a specific way to do so in your letter, such as visiting a website to learn more, attending an event, or changing a personal behavior (if appropriate).

Editor's Name
Editor's Address
Date

Dear Editor,

The opening paragraph should summarize your issue in a way that captures attention and containing a newsy or timely element, if applicable.

Explain your ties to the issue. In other words, why are you speaking up about this? The subsequent paragraphs should further explain your issue and why people should care about it. If you have data or statistics to bolster your argument, this is a good place to use them.

Follow your explanation with a call to action. What is at stake if no action is taken? What will happen if people respond with action?

Recap your point of view. If applicable, include any information how readers can get involved.

Sincerely,
Name
Organization
Email
Phone number



{PLACE LOGO HERE}

For Immediate Release
Month Day, Year

Contact: Full Name
Office #
Cell #
Email
Website

THE HEADLINE GOES HERE AND CAN BE UP TO TWO LINES LONG, BOLD, AND IN ALL CAPS. IT SHOULD CAPTURE THE FRAME OF THE NEWS AND HAVE A SENSE OF DRAMA.

The subhead can provide more context and be up to two lines long.

CITY, STATE—"The Lead" paragraph should serve as a summary paragraph that communicates the most important components and outlines the issue in a way that captures attention. This paragraph should not attempt to explain everything you want to share.

Each remaining paragraph should contain information in descending order of importance. The most riveting information should be provided at the top of the press release.

"ACS recommends that one or two quotes be included in the press release from key members of Council or relevant departments," said Rebecca Cohen, senior director, Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC.

The press release should contain a short paragraph that explains any relevant historical information that the press may need.

"The quotes should be direct, passionate, and emphasize the most important aspect of the news being shared in the release."

If the news identifies other organizations or individuals the final paragraph should briefly outline who they are and their role in the news.

###

(This indicates the conclusion of the press release)

Boilerplate language goes here. It is a general description of the organization or coalition should be included following the conclusion of the press release in *italics*. For example:

The COUNCIL is an 11-member body elected by the residents of our neighborhoods. The Council makes policy decisions for the effective functioning of County government, and is a link between government agencies and citizens. It has legislative and taxing authority for the County, and is a co-equal branch of the County government with the executive branch.

Editor's Note: Use this designation to state if you have audio, video or photography available and how the media can obtain it.



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{PLACE LOGO HERE}

Media Advisory
Month Day, Year

Contact: Full Name
Office #
Cell #
Email
Website

THE HEADLINE GOES HERE AND CAN BE UP TO FOUR LINES LONG, BOLD, ALL CAPS IT SHOULD CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF THE READER

Sub-title may be used for additional context

CITY, STATE—A media advisory is used to invite reporters to cover some kind of event, such as a press conference, forum, or rally. Your goal is to make the event sound interesting and newsworthy and make it easy for reporters to quickly figure out the details. Send the advisory out one-two days before the event.

The first paragraph should capture the reporter's attention and provide enough context so the reporter understands the importance of the issue. Include important details such as what will be covered at the event, important speakers, and why the event is significant.

What: Name of event

Who: Name, role, and organization of speakers or important attendees

When: Date and time

Where: Location and address

Leave a contact email and phone if the reporter wants additional information.

A short paragraph may be included to describe the mission of the organization(s) or coalition involved.

###

(This indicates the conclusion of the media advisory.)

A general description of the organization or coalition should be included following the conclusion of the press release in *italics*. For example:

The COUNCIL is an 11-member body elected by the residents of our neighborhoods. The Council makes policy decisions for the effective functioning of County government, and is a link between government agencies and citizens. It has legislative and taxing authority for the County, and is a co-equal branch of the County government with the executive branch.



Tips for Hosting a Press Conference

Press conferences are more formal and controlled than media events. They are often called to respond to a news development, such as a releasing a report or making a newsworthy announcement.

1 —————> **Decide if you need a media event.**

Hold a media event only when you have major news that is best delivered by being shared in an open forum and will lend itself to visuals or question and answers.

2 —————> **Identify your target audience.**

The audience will determine the kind of event you stage (speakers, location, communication materials, decoration) and what media is invited.

3 —————> **Timing is everything.**

Date and time should be considered. Time your event so it does not compete with other news events. Mondays are typically difficult because offices are closed over the weekend and it may be difficult to get a hold of reporters. If you hold the event on Friday, it will be published in Saturday's news, with fewer people likely to see it. Schedule your event earlier in the day so that reporters are more likely to be able to attend and so that TV and radio can air it on the same day. Major holidays and Fridays leading into holiday weekends should be avoided.

4 —————> **Develop a press kit for reporters.**

The press kit should include the press release, a report if applicable, statements from allied groups on their letterhead, fact sheets, and contact information.

5 —————> **Keep the event short.**

The program should be about 30–45 minutes.

6 —————> **Find a convenient location.**

While the location should be appropriate to the issue, keep it convenient. Bring the story to reporters by using photography. In addition to convenience, make sure that you have access to the necessary a/v equipment, Wi-Fi, seating, and parking.

7 —————> **Set your lineup.**

Limit the speakers to three or four people. Make sure they are diverse (age, gender, race, position, etc.) and represent the issue.

8 —————> **Write a media advisory.**

Send it out three days before the event.

9 —————> **Reach out to media.**

Before the event, email and call media to ensure they know about the event.

10



Cordon off a special press area.

Have reporters sign in so you can keep track of who attends and provide them with press kits. If it is a large media event, inform media ahead of time of where the press area is. Consider placing signage at the event for media. This area should have controlled access, and may include refreshments.

11



Prepare messages.

Identify key messages and answers to critical questions. Prepare remarks for each speaker.

12



Prepare your speakers.

Choose speakers that are key to the issue. Typical speakers might include an executive director or board member, a person representing the issue, a public official, or an expert on the issue. Time out the agenda. Practice your event the day before if possible.

13



Hold questions at the end of the press conference.

Have the key host take questions. When they are finished, end the press conference and thank reporters for coming.

14



Follow-up.

Check the list of reports that attended. Follow-up with no-shows, send them a press kit, and ask if they would still like an interview.

15



Send out press release.

Develop a press release about the event and send it out after the event.

16



Monitor coverage.

Re-post any media coverage of the event on your website and through social media.

