
HOW TO MAKE NEWS

Using media as a tool to advance your work:

Media is effective because it can directly impact policy—or at least that’s the hope. Media can create trends in conversations and in the overall narrative.

When using media, always think about your audience. Depending on that, you should tailor which outlets and reporters you reach out to.

Write letters to the editor and opinion pieces. LTEs and op-eds help contribute to the public discourse and can reshape the public debate. Make sure these pieces are timely, on topic, and from a notable/credible author.

Go on radio, local tv stations, podcasts and talk about what your issue.

Offer original material, personal stories, expert analysis, interesting events. Provide something nobody else has. Be unique, but be authentic.

Be timely. Connect your pitch to a current event. Also known as a “hook.”

Interview Tips:

1. **Only do an interview when you are prepared to speak.** It sometimes feels like there is pressure to respond to a reporter at the moment they contact you, but don’t give into that feeling. You want to make sure you know what you want to say before you say it.
2. **Determine and review your top points.** Decide what the 2 or 3 top points are for YOUR organization that you want to highlight in the interview. Remember – the key is to make your main point as many times as possible. Always pivot back to these.
3. **You don’t have to answer the question as it is asked.** If the reporter asks you a question that you think is a trap or is off-topic from what you want to discuss, pivot to what you want to talk about. But don’t be robotic in how you do this.
4. **Don’t feel pressure to keep talking just because the reporter hasn’t asked the next question.** Sometimes a reporter won’t know what their next question is so let them work that out. Sometimes they will be silent in the hopes that you’ll reveal more than you want to. Don’t talk yourself into saying more than you want or into saying something you don’t really want to just because the silence is awkward. It’s ok. The reporter will follow-up.
5. **Call to action.** Provide solutions or share how people can engage.

HOW TO MAKE NEWS

Establishing a relationship with media:

We've found that reporters are eager to learn more about subjects you are already an expert on. Become their reliable source. If time allows, try to establish a relationship when you're NOT pitching a specific story or they are crashing on deadline.

When the reporter calls, ask them when their deadline is, if you can call them back at a time that allows you to prepare, and then call them back at the arranged time. Don't be late. If they are up against a deadline, ask for 5 minutes, prepare what you want to say quickly, and call them back.

ALWAYS be responsive, even if it's to say you can't contribute to the story.

Know their language and make sure it is clear between both parties:

- On-the-record: When speaking "on-the-record" everything you say can be quoted and directly attributed to you by name. If you don't want this, specify.
- On background: If you prefer to speak to reporters without attribution by name, you can go "on background." This is used often when educating reporters on certain topics. When on background, a reporter can use the information and paraphrase it, but not directly attributed to you.
- Off-the-record: Speaking "off-the-record" means the reporter will not use anything said.

Even when on background or off the record, you should never say anything you would not feel comfortable saying on the record.

Press Releases

- Have a solid headline – short, but engaging.
- The "lede" should get right to the point, but lay the groundwork.
- Make it readable – always assume the reader isn't an expert on the issue.
- If including a quote, make it quotable, and include attribution.
- If you have evidence/statistics, include them, but briefly.
- Keep it short. Reporters get a lot of releases.
- Include contact information for follow up inquiries.
- Include links for more information, if applicable.
- Proofread. Then proofread it again.
- Distribute it to reporters that are likely to cover the story.