

Working with the Media

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Getting good media coverage is not as hard as it might look – as long as you are willing to take the initiative and do some ground work. Below are ten tips for better communication through the media.

1. Know your local media.

Develop a list of the local media, the reporters who cover certain stories and their phone and fax numbers.

2. Develop relationships.

Organizing better media coverage is no different than organizing any other constituency – it's built upon relationships. The chances of having your point of view covered goes up dramatically when the reporter knows and trusts you. This means when that when a reporter calls you, you must call them back right away.

3. Establish trust.

Trust and credibility are the keys to getting better coverage. If a reporter knows you can be trusted to give accurate information you are more likely to get your message conveyed.

4. Remember that reporters are busy as well.

Organizers spend too much time resenting reporters for “not doing their jobs.” Make it easy for them to do their job. Most reporters are not “lazy.” Reporters are pestered by editors, scramble under deadlines, and work way too hard for way too little pay.

5. Develop press materials.

For your press event, create a press packet of information that contains relevant background material, press statements, and/or your press release. Keep it focused and easy to read. Reporters will not want to wade through piles of unorganized materials.

6. Notify the press in advance and remind them.

Before your event send a press advisory giving the press notice of your event. A press advisory is different from a press release. It contains the five “W’s” — who, what, where, when and why — of the event. If possible schedule your event at times that are convenient for the media. (E.g. not before 9 a.m. in the morning and not after 3 p.m. for television) On the morning of the event call the media to remind them of the event.

7. Think of what you want your message to be.

Take the time before any event to think through what main thought you want the public to take away from the event. Remember that even in the newspaper, complex ideas must be conveyed broadly in understandable terms.

8. Prepare speakers to convey a clear message.

Speakers should prepare their remarks so they are brief and focused on the message you wish to convey. Speakers should stick “on message” during their remarks and during questions.

9. The reporter's job is not to tell only your story.

That is the work of a publicist. Newspaper reporters will try to find out the other sides to a story. Anticipate this and prepare your remarks to address contrary or other claims.

10. Not everything you do is news.

Not every event is a news story. Take time to evaluate what is newsworthy about the event – why is it important? What makes it significant or different? An organizer should be able to convey an event's newsworthiness, but do not over-promise or exaggerate or you will lose your credibility the next time.

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Basics of a Press Release:

- **Make it easy to read.**

A press release should pass the “glance test” and should be easy to understand and read on the run. A reporter should be able to glance at the release and get the most important information. Try to double space and use 12 point type.

- **Contacts.**

Put the name, number and title (if applicable) for the person(s) the press should contact for more information.

- **Make the press release simple.**

One page is better than two. Three pages is at least one page too many.

- **Answer the 5 “W’s” in the first paragraphs.**

The reporter should understand the important information at the very beginning.

- **Number the pages and indicate the end.**

If the release is more than one page, have page numbers. When the release is done end it with either -30- or ### or -End-, centered at the bottom of the page.

- **Proofread carefully.**

A messy release or one filled with typos erodes credibility.

- **Distribution.**

Find out how a reporter would like to receive the release – by fax or email. If by email, you probably will have to put the release into the text of the email, often reporters can’t open attachments.