



LET COMMUNITIES DECIDE

Guide to working with local media

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1. Introduction

Engaging the media can feel a daunting prospect if you don't have much experience. But have no fear; the tips in this guide will set you up and set you off to get the local media coverage your campaign deserves!

2. Media Strategy

This is an overall plan for what you want to achieve, your approach, how you're going to go about it, what's going to need doing and when everything should happen. It doesn't need to be complicated. Read through the rest of this guide, think about your local event, area and context and then jot it all down. The media strategy can be a great help in orienting you as you go and helping you keep on track.

3. Messaging

At the heart of media work is messaging; the essence of what you want to convey to your audience and lodge in their hearts and minds. Establish what you want to say and get this down in a document somewhere. That way you always have it to refer to. Then ensure that all your communications contain and reflect these messages. They can then shape your media advisories, press releases and be used in interviews.

- Keep your key messages short, punchy and few in number: 2 - 5 key messages.
 - You will want to generate your own messages specific to your locality, but here are a couple of generic example key messages to give you an idea:
 - Local communities, who will be directly affected should have a say in whether exploratory drilling for shale gas takes place in their areas.
 - This government proposal is an outrageous affront to the principles of local democracy and community consultation.
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4. Preparation

Information gathering:

- Research, and produce a **media list** with all the relevant local outlets, and emails and phone numbers for the relevant journalists/editors/contacts,. Remember to include print and digital media, radio and TV.
- Find out who are the journalists who would cover this topic, either by checking out that media outlet or phoning the newspaper, radio station, etc and asking.

Building relationships with journalists:

The very best way of ensuring coverage for the campaign is to develop a relationship with relevant journalists in your area. Here are a few general tips for doing so:

- Remember journalists are human beings. They're generally as responsive as anyone else to normal friendly contact.
- Phone your journalist, even if you also communicate via email.
- Journalists are generally short of time for research and writing, and generally have a wide range of subjects. This means that if you can provide good stories and accurate information you can become a valuable resource for them, helping their work and saving them time.
- Be persistent, but don't be a pest. Be aware that journalists are busy and working to continuous deadlines
- If a journalist develops a sense of 'ownership' of a story, they may continue to cover it; especially if you update them regularly, and they trust you as a reliable source

Media contact before an event:

Just sending out a press release on the day of an event is often not enough on its own to get you media coverage. A few days, or even a week, before your event:

- Phone relevant journalists and editors on your media list to let them know the details of what is going to take place and why they'll want to cover it.
- You may also wish to send them a "**Media Advisory**". A media advisory can be thought of as a written invitation or advance notice for a journalist. It tees them up for the event, whets their appetite, and gets it in their minds and diaries in advance. Media advisory tips:
 - include the what, where, when, who and why of the story, along with the "hook" or selling point of the event.
 - Keep it short and succinct, one page max
 - follow up with a phone call to the journalist

Media roles:

Here are some roles you might want to fill if you are putting on an event like a media stunt that you're looking to secure media coverage for. You can combine roles, and leave out any you feel are unnecessary. You may of course also be looking to do media for something simpler like an announcement, a meeting, the release of some data, or a group visit to your MP, et. In which case you will be able to ditch some or many of these roles.

In advance:

- **Media coordinator.** Someone - and ideally two or more people - to coordinate all the media strategy from start to finish

On the day:

- **Media hub.** This will ideally be somebody back at home with a computer, who will send out the press release to your media list.
- **On-site media contact/coordinator.** Someone at the site of your event who can liaise with media journalists, etc, answer questions and help set up interviews or photos on the ground
- **Spokesperson.** Someone available for interviews who is happy to be recorded, filmed and photographed.
- **Photographer/videographer.** One or two people to record the event as appropriate with quality photos and/or video, for supply to local media and for social media, etc
- **Social media person.** If your groups has social media such as Facebook and twitter, someone to post on those platforms from and after your event

5. Press Releases

Press releases are what an ideal write up of your event would look like. The goal is to give reporters all the information they would need to write a story, even if they didn't show up.

- Get the most important news at the top, keep it succinct, and paste it into the body of an email - with pictures attached if possible.
- Limit your press release to one page (one side!). Notes to editors can go on a second page if needed
- Local media are usually under-resourced and overstretched; a journalist should be able to recycle the press release into an article without much extra work.
- Look for a "hook" in your story; the compelling information/selling point that makes your story newsworthy
- Don't use jargon, technical terms or acronyms without explaining them

Below is a **template for a typical press release**. Follow it to make yours look professional.

PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

GROUP LOGO (if you have one) / **NAME**

'FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE' (either next to or just below your logo)

DATE

CONTACT: [name], [role if relevant], [email address], [mobile phone number]

TITLE [concise, informative title, written in the style of a news headline. Make it eye-catching but don't try and be too clever - it needs to be clear what it is about]

SUBTITLE (optional): brief description on what is different now-how whatever is in this release has changed things

OPENING PARAGRAPH. 2 or 3 sentences. should be a slightly more detailed explanation of what happened than the title/subtitle. Short, with a hook. Explain who did what, when, where, and why.

SECOND PARAGRAPH. More detail on the above. It should include a **quote** from your key spokesperson: pack in your most interesting information, the punchline, and your most compelling story (as concise as possible) to influence the feelings of readers. Remember that a quote is an opportunity to get across specific points and messages you want to convey - don't just repeat the story in a quote.

BODY TEXT. Things then get a bit more freeform. Use further paragraph/s to flesh out the story further and provide background on the issue and campaign. Give enough info for journalists who may not have followed the campaign. You may give general background information. If it was a meeting or an event, explain who was involved, and what role they played.

Include a second quote, which could be from another organiser of your event or campaign lead, or another person significant to the event and/or issue locally. This quote should summarise the purpose, impact and importance this occurrence had with more forward-looking information in terms of where this work is headed.

This final paragraph should speak to any next steps happening. It should explain how this action, event, meeting, etc changed the circumstance of your previous standing.

'ENDS' (indicates the end of the press release)

Notes to the editor:

- If you have additional quotes, photos, information or links you would like to share with the media you can put it here.
 - Connect the dots -- explain how the contents of this release impact the bigger picture.
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Sending and following up your press release:

- Send your press release on the day of the event, once it is under way. Early morning 8 - 9.30am is often a good time to catch journalists, as is 11.30 - 12.30.
 - Give your media outlet enough time to receive and read it, then follow up with a phone call. If you don't follow up the press release it may just get lost in the inbox amongst all the others. If your event is e.g. a public meeting held in the evening, you'll be better off
 - In the follow up call, ask if they have read your press release, and point them to it if not. Communicate the essential information about the event along with the hook. Ask if they are interested to cover the story, if they need any further information, and offer interviews and further images if available.
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6. Interviews

In advance:

- Prepare your key messages. Remember and rehearse them.
- Practice saying what you want to say out loud.
- Do practice interviews with a friend as 'interviewer'. Include any tricky or challenging questions you anticipate may come up and practice your responses.
- Learn and practice the 'ABC' response to irrelevant or provocative questions to get you from the question to what you want to say:
 - **acknowledge** the question
 - **bridge** away from it in order to...
 - **communicate** your key messages
 - An example of this is would be "that's an issue but what the public are most concerned about is..."

- Practice eliminating umms, ahhs and errs from your delivery; speak in short complete sentences.

Before the interview:

- Think about what you want to say and practice it out loud.
- Warm up your voice and do some relaxation exercises e.g. deep breathing.
- Ask the interviewer what questions they are going to ask you, how long the interview will be and whether it will be live or recorded.

During the interview:

- Get your key messages in early and repeat them throughout.
- Speak in short complete sentences that encapsulate your key messages; remember that as little as 10 seconds of your interview may actually be broadcast or reproduced.
- Relax your posture, speak slowly and take pauses.
- Use everyday language, avoid jargon.
- Be specific; avoid generalised waffle.

Finally....want to learn more? The following resources offer further information, insight and guidance:

- <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/local-groups/creating-media-strategy>
- <https://trainings.350.org/resource/media-advisories-and-press-releases/>
- <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/local-groups/writing-press-release>
- https://trainings.350.org/resource/giving_media_interviews/

Good luck, and go get 'em!
