



Communication Tips – Working with the Media

Before you contact the media, decide exactly what information you want to get out to the general public. Then stick to your agenda. Too much information may obscure your message. Take care to simplify your language. If you don't, the reporter will.

Crafting Your Message: What Makes It News?

Timeliness and local activity make a story appealing to regional media. Stress community involvement—local people making a difference internationally. Invite members of city/town boards, local business people, etc. to attend your events. Then let media know you've done so.

Hint: Be specific about who's involved in your event or program: the mayor, the superintendent of schools, over 40 local high school students, etc.

Avoid: Presuming that regional media's main interest is the larger international issue rather than what the community they cover is doing about it.

Defining Your Audience: Reaching All the Media

In addition to major outlets, contact smaller community dailies and weeklies, local talk radio, city magazines, area cable stations, and alternative press. Would local ethnic press or cable programs or college media be interested in your story?

You can identify smaller newspapers by calling each town's Chamber of Commerce or by looking in a local "media directory" at your public library. Identify college outlets by calling the university's student activities or student programming department.

Hint: These outlets are often understaffed and have limited resources. Provide written background material on the issue, the participants, and UNA.

Avoid: Bombarding outlets with press releases. Sending information often and indiscriminately can devalue your press material. Select outlets suitable for each story and contact them accordingly.

Getting the Word Out: Press Releases and Media Alerts

Press Releases

Very rarely should a press release be more than 1 page. You are not writing an article, just trying to interest someone in your story. A good release leads with the timeliness of the story and/or notable names. Date, time, and location should be clear in the first paragraph. If speakers will be



available for questions, include that information. Send releases 1 week prior to an event.

Hint: Send the release to a specific person. Check the mastheads of your local papers or call and ask someone in the news department who would be most interested. Even better, see if any of your members have media contacts to send material to.

Avoid: "Burying" the news. Notable names, innovative actions, etc. go up top.

Media Alert

When the importance of an event "speaks for itself," consider sending a media alert. It is a simple "who, what, when, where" inviting reporters to attend.

Hint: Use the actual words Who: What: When: Where: and just fill in the blanks. When you get to "Who," make sure to list participants/speakers in order of name recognition.

Avoid: Giving too much detail. You should prepare a more extensive press release to distribute at the event so that reporters can literally take the information away with them.

Opinion Pieces: Op-eds and Letters to the Editor

Op-eds

Op-Eds should be submitted about a week prior to your event as a way to promote it, or immediately following a news event on which you wish to comment. Educate readers with specific data as you try to persuade them. Such information strengthens your argument and makes your op-ed more valuable to the editors. Op-eds should be no more than 500 words.

Hint: Localize the issue as much as possible.

Avoid: Being repetitive in your argument. Make 3 or 4 points and back them with facts.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are often easier to get printed than op-eds and still have impact. Respond immediately if a relevant article appears in your newspaper.

Hint: This is the time to express a strong opinion.

Avoid: Simply offering a different opinion from the one expressed. Explain why the author's reasoning is faulty, or point out inaccuracies in the author's information. Then supply the facts.