
Chapter 7:

TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

Engaging with media outlets is one tactic to consider in your engagement strategy. Media exposure can help bring awareness to your causes and start public dialogue and collaboration among community members. This chapter highlights tips provided by CCVO's trusted contacts in media, that can help make your outreach to media more effective.

Understand the news cycle and newsrooms.

Mainstream media – major television networks and newspapers – have been significantly impacted by the advent of social media channels and continue to lay off staff as their revenues plummet. Because of this, most newsrooms have limited staff on the weekends. If you want to hold a press conference on a Saturday or Sunday, make sure to give the newsrooms several days' notice so they can plan accordingly. If you want to increase your chances of getting coverage, time the release for Monday to Thursday when more reporters are on-shift and can more easily gain attention from public officials and other interested parties.

Before sending out your press release, understand the constraints all newsrooms face: tight deadlines, shrinking staff levels, and reporters who are increasingly inexperienced and lacking institutional knowledge – all with the expectation to file multiple stories a day. Knowing this, craft a press release with a clear "hook" and in plain language (imagine you're explaining the issue to an eight-year-old).

Put a face to your issue.

While your staff spokesperson will likely be replying to most media requests, your issue might also benefit from real people sharing their stories. To bring your story to life, confirm availability for someone impacted by the issue to speak to reporters the day you issue the press release. You will save reporters' time to track down a subject for the story and by having someone readily available who can comment. Saving this time increases the odds your story will make the news that day. If you are having people share their stories—ideally while you are present, you should determine in advance if they are comfortable to have their name and every detail of their story included, or if they want to remain anonymous and/or have certain details omitted.

Don't shy away from conflict.

Editors love conflict, so play this up when possible. This does not mean you have to overly criticize the current government (nonprofits are in a difficult position because funding often comes from public sources and being diplomatic may be more prudent). Instead, frame the issue in a way that editors and reporters, and by extension the public, will understand how this issue would impact them.

For example, a lack of affordable housing leads to more people living on the street, which means more money will be needed for police and other public services to keep people off the streets, which leads to tax increases – avoidable expenditures if affordable housing units were just built initially. To further validate your point in your press release, you might also highlight how fiscally conservative policies, such as cuts to affordable housing support, can be contradictory when considering the unintended cost increases that come as a result.

Find a slow news day.

Your press release will be more likely get attention if there is less going on in the newsroom. If you are not promoting a specific event, or are tied to a certain day, consider what else is happening and avoid major local, provincial, and national events. For example, carefully reconsider sending out a release when the Prime Minister is in town, unless your issue is federally related.

Block off a day for media with your staff spokesperson.

If you are going to send out a press release, be prepared for a response. You might need to respond to a full day of interview requests across a variety of mediums, and have your nonprofit's spokesperson available for phone and in-person interviews for print, online, radio, and television. For small nonprofits, it is likely that your CEO will have hands-on knowledge and experience to handle all media interviews. However, if your nonprofit is larger, you should consider identifying the thought leadership of other team members to be spokespeople as well.

Make trusted media contacts and nurture those relationships.

Spend time getting to know media contacts and become a valuable resource for them. You do not always have to be on record, sometimes journalists need background information and news tips from reliable sources they can count on. In turn, they can be valuable resources for your nonprofit – just remember to respect their time.

Contact information for journalists is usually readily available – do a little research and find journalists who are writing about topics related to the issues you want to highlight, get in touch and even consider taking them for coffee to discuss mutual interests.

Don't be afraid to try media engagement!

One news story may go a long way towards maximizing your impact and advancing your advocacy efforts.

[CLICK TO DOWNLOAD PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE](#)

[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)