

STEP BY STEP BUILDING MEDIA ENGAGEMENT:

Step 1: Lay of the Land

Look at what media outlets are in your community (daily/weekly newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, blogs).

- **Who has covered your issue** and how they've done it. Look at how similar community events have been covered.
 - **How are most people in your community getting information.** Do they read blogs or daily/weekly newspapers?
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Step 2: List Building

Get phone numbers and e-mail addresses for all relevant reporters and keep them in a well-organized spreadsheet. Don't be afraid to call the news desk and ask who covers events in your community. Be sure to include calendar editors. Update this list regularly.

Step 3: Tight Messaging

Know the messages you're trying to get across. ***Why should a reporter cover this event?*** Memorize **important lines for sound bites** and build a case in your head for the event's newsworthiness. Imagine yourself trying to convince a reporter to cover the event.

Step 4: Advisory

Write up a media Advisory. This document serves as the "**who, what, where, when**" for journalists in order to get the event on their radar. It is typically in the future tense. Briefly introduce the event in a paragraph announcement and then spell out the "who, what, where, when." Make it easy for a journalist to find the event's key stats (speakers, time, location, etc.) just by glancing at the sheet.

Step 5: Press Release

Write a press release. This document typically is distributed the day of the event and is often **included in a press kit at the event.** It is written in the past tense and **reads like a news article.** Make sure to put the piece of news in both the headline and the first sentence. **Include quotes from the speakers** at the event or the event's organizers.

Step 6: Letters to the Editor (LTE)

Encourage supporters to write short letters to the editor about your issue and the event. These are usually about 200 words, maximum, but you should check on each individual publication's requirements. Give the writers everything they need—talking points, the e-mail address and rules of submitting the letters, etc. Build from the message themes of your event. This allows you to control the messages going out.

Step 7: Op-Ed

Get your event speakers or organizers to write a longer piece calling attention to your issue. It is often helpful to call a newspaper and ask if they'd be interested in an Op-Ed written by your author about the issue and the topic your event will be covering. Op-Eds should not get to the point.

Step 8: Event Attractions

Think strategically. When planning your event, you can make choices that will help the press outreach, like compelling visuals for video and photo press or notable speakers that might attract media.

Step 9: Call the Presses

- **Send, then call.** E-mail the Advisory and follow up on it that day (within a few hours, if possible).
 - **Be brief.** News stories require succinct messages that can be made into short quotes or sound bites.
 - **Have a plan.** It is often effective to know what you're going to say before you get on the phone for the pitch.
 - **Confirm the reporter has received the Advisory.** (If not, make sure you have the right e-mail address and resend it.)
 - **Briefly describe the event.** This is your pitch, your chance to make the case of why this event is newsworthy.
 - **Confirm you're talking to the right reporter. Make sure that you are speaking with the reporter that would be most likely to cover your event.** Reporters have "beats," or areas that they are assigned to cover, such as education, crime, community, etc.
 - **Gauge the reporter's interest.** Sometimes, they'll say if they're interested, but most times it's easiest just to ask.
 - "Do you think this sounds like something you'd be interested in covering?"
 - **Know the outlet and tailor your pitch.** If it's a community paper, pump up the local angle. If it's TV, tell them about the visuals.
 - **Make it personal.** Journalists often look to humanize their articles and reports with real-life stories. Find the compelling stories and use them in your pitches, especially to the journalists who are interested or on the fence about covering it.
 - **Make the reporter's job easier.** Make spokespeople and the event's organizers available to be interviewed before and after the event. Just because a journalist can't make it to an event doesn't mean he or she can't cover it.
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Step 10: The Interview

Have you set up an interview with a reporter before or after the event? Research the interviewer and the outlet beforehand; develop 3 to 4 key messages. Develop facts, anecdotes, or examples that back up the key messages; anticipate difficult questions, but do not be intimidated. You don't always have to give them the answer they're looking for, just the message you're trying to convey.

- **Use every opportunity to bridge to your message.** "Bridging" is a rhetorical tool to get from a difficult question or line of conversation to the heart of your message, such as "But the point is...", "But the real question is...", "What is important is...", or "We have to remember that..."
- **Control the interview.** Remember that you are the expert. You can't control the questions, only the answers. Use the questions as platforms for your messages.
- **Hook the reporter.** Make reporters listen to your key points by using phrases such as "There are three things your readers/listeners/viewers should know...."
- **Tips for radio:** For radio interviews, voice quality and expression are critical. Try to picture your audience and speak to them.
- **Tips for TV:** Talk conversationally. Use short answers and avoid too much detail. Keep eyes on the interviewer, not on the camera. Natural hand movement is fine, as long as it's not excessive.
- **Tips for print and online:** Nothing is off the record—don't say anything you don't want to see in print. Speak in short, complete sentences. Give the sound bites you want to see quoted in the article.

TIMELINE for EVENT PRESS ENGAGEMENT:

Right now:

- Build your press lists.
- Develop your key message points for your event.
- Write your Letters to the Editor.
- Plan out your strategy for getting press to your event.

Two weeks away:

- Email the Advisory to target publication's community calendars (sometimes referred to as daybooks).
- Follow-up with a call to the outlets events coordinator to confirm.
- Send in Letters to the Editor.

One week away:

- Distribute the Advisory by email and make follow-up calls to the calendar editors and your key journalists.
You want to make sure it's on their radar and get them thinking about how they're going to cover it.
- To your top target outlets, pitch a story (e-mail and call) that would run in advance of the event—a profile on an interesting speaker or even just a preview of the event.
- Prepare an Op-Ed, if possible, to run in the days leading up to the event.
- Keep the Letters to the Editor coming.

Two to three business days before:

- Resend the Advisory to all journalists.
- Make follow-up calls to all journalists and ask if they plan to cover the event.
- Follow up, follow up, follow up!
Don't assume someone received your voice messages.

- Push for an outlet to publish an Op-Ed or a preview story to run in advance of the event.

The day of the event:

- Make one last round of calls to anyone you haven't gotten a solid answer from.
If the event is on a weekend, note that many smaller print outlets probably are not operating. Get your calls to them in earlier.
- Prepare a media sign-in sheet—with name, outlet, e-mail, and phone—to keep track of the journalists who come. (See the post-event media for how to work with those who didn't).
- Distribute the release immediately after, shortly before or—if possible—at the event.
If the event is at night, you might want to send it the next morning.