

Talking to Reporters

Tips for getting your perspective in the news

THE JOURNALIST: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Positioning yourself as a trusted source of information is key to establishing and maintaining good relationships with reporters. They are usually crunched for time (especially in this era of shrinking newsrooms) so it's important to be targeted in your outreach. Reporters and editors are always looking for news. You can make their jobs easier by developing and packaging story ideas. Be mindful of their tight deadlines and need for balanced stories.

What Do Reporters Need?

- Stories that are newsworthy, interesting and relevant to their audience
- Accurate and timely information
- Access to credible spokespeople or sources
- Advance notice (particularly for magazine writers and TV reporters)
- Good audio and visual opportunities (for radio and TV reporters, respectively)

What do Reporters Want?

- Something new: Reporters need a news “hook.” You can offer a new perspective or an anecdote that illustrates a policy or other issue.
- Something relatable: Talk about your story as it impacts others and/or think about why other people would care.
- Something surprising: Reporters already know what some spokespeople will think – environmentalists, energy industry representatives, political parties, etc. Illustrate a unique background and story.
- Something easy to understand: This doesn't mean you should “dumb down” or simplify your comments – just keep your remarks focused on one or two main points.
- Something that moves them: Spokespeople should have a good story to tell and let their passion show when telling a story.
- Great visuals: Sometimes a great visual—either live and in person or captured on film, is all that's needed to get the media's interest.

What Makes a Good Story?

A news story should have one or more of the following elements: timeliness, relevance, proximity, prominence, human interest/oddity, and conflict. Local outlets are interested primarily in local news, while regional, statewide or national outlets are looking for stories with broader appeal and impact.

Facts are a necessary part of a news story, but they're not everything. Effective stories also:

- Tap into core values, address things people care about
- Have human interest, are relatable

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- Have a problem/villain, solution/hero, or a call to action
- Include good messengers or characters
- In the case of TV and radio, offer good visual and sound opportunities

Pre-Pitch Checklist

- Find what is newsworthy or relevant about your story: why should audiences care?
- Determine your key messages and anticipate questions
- Recruit additional interviewees to direct the reporter to
- Identify and research target reporters: have they covered the issue before? If so, from what perspective?
- Prepare background materials: Make it easy for reporters to cover your story by providing background information and reliable sources
- Plan your pitch: is it the right time? Do you have a rain garden success story to tell? Remember the potential for negative stories discussed in the *Lessons Learned* memo.

Pitching Etiquette for TV and Radio

While many print reporters have “beats” or particular topics they specialize in, TV and radio reporters usually cover more than one beat. To contact broadcast stations:

- Email your story idea to an Assignment Editor (for TV), or a News Director or Producer (for radio), and, ideally, also to a reporter who has covered the issue
- Send a media advisory to TV assignment desks at least two days before your event and a press release the day of. For breaking news, you can contact them anytime.

How to Position Yourself as an Expert/Source of Information

- Volunteer information—share a colorful story, interesting fact or breaking news
- Be transparent about your role in the process, or relationship to the issue
- Get prepared—have informational materials handy
- Refer reporters to other useful sources
- Speak plain English

FINDING REPORTERS IN YOUR AREA

The best way to find reporters in your area that might be interested in a rain garden story is to be an active part of their audience: read, listen, watch. There is simply no substitute. Getting contact info for reporters can sometimes be tricky, but outlets in smaller media markets tend to post direct phone and email information on their websites. If you are stumped, don’t hesitate to ask us – Resource Media can help.