



MEDIA RELATIONS 101 | November 2016

## Media Relations 101

*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.*

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### 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 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.

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

## **WHAT MAKES A GOOD SPOKESPERSON?**

A good messenger is someone that has issue expertise, can represent your point of view, and has good standing with your target audience. They should be:

- Articulate—able to express themselves clearly and concisely in plain English
- Credible—respected by their peers and the community
- Knowledgeable—have facts and numbers at the ready
- Compelling—have a good story to tell, or a strong point of view
- Available—easily reached and responsive when reporters call, and
- Media trained or coachable—willing to take some message direction.

## **BEFORE YOU APPROACH MEDIA OUTLETS**

Before contacting reporters, identify your goals, audience and target outlets. You should also:

- Find what is newsworthy or relevant about your story: why should audiences care?
- Determine your key messages and anticipate questions.
- Recruit credible spokespeople.
- Identify and research target reporters: have they covered the issue before? If so, from what perspective?
- Prepare background materials.
- Plan your pitch: is it the right time? Is there any recent news about this subject?

## **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.

## **WHEN TALKING TO A REPORTER**

When a reporter calls, get their name, contact information, and deadline. To better understand the context for the interview, ask the reporter about their angle and plans for the story, including other people they plan to call. Consider the politics of the reporter and outlet. Also:

- Be prepared—know your subject and anticipate likely questions.
- Write down your key points, and stick to them.
- Be honest. If you don't know the answer to a question, offer to get back to them with an answer (and then do), or refer them to another resource.
- Keep in mind that you are never really "off the record."

## **CONCLUSION**

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. It also helps to:

- Do your homework—find the "news hook," identify your target, and plan your pitch.
- Pick the right vehicle or media outlet.
- Make it easy for reporters to cover your story by providing background information and reliable sources.
- Use plain English.