

Tool 1: How to Secure Media Coverage

Media relations is a strategy that many organizations use to advance their cause. In this document we have provided some tactics and tips for how to effectively work with the media to secure the coverage you want.

Media's Needs

Different kinds of media have different needs from sources, and to help them tell stories. Remember to consider the type of media you are working with before shaping a story idea, or responding to their query for information.

Media Type	Content needs	Timeframes	Unique needs
Newspapers	Breaking news, features, op-eds and letters to the editor	6-8 hour deadline for news; 2-3 weeks for features; op-eds need to tie to breaking news and letters to the editor must connect to their previous coverage	Exclusives: newspapers like to be the first or only outlet to cover a story; all have guidelines that prevent them from running
Magazines	News and feature stories that fit their issue area focus (health, parenting, food, etc.)	Long lead times: up to 3 months for monthly magazines; a month for news and features (except breaking news)	
Television/Cable News	Breaking news and features	Immediate for breaking news to a month for features	On-camera and in-studio interview sources available nearby their headquarters or bureaus; B-Roll and sound bites
Online media	Breaking news and features	2-3 hour deadlines with new stories posted around the clock	Photo galleries multiple videos
Radio	Breaking news with some features	Immediate with news updates every 15 minutes	Nat sound; sound bites; sources by phone or in-studio

Making a Pitch

When you make a pitch, do it via email and then follow up with a phone call.

Example of email pitch:

Dear (Reporter's Name):

Recently the U.S. Surgeon General made an announcement about the critical need for everyone to walk or roll more. (Include a link) In (YOUR CITY) we have been working with local officials to create safe walking spaces for people to walk together to connect with each other, and to get and stay healthy. The problem is that little action has been taken.

I'd like to talk to you more about this issue, and if time and interest allow, take you on a brief walking tour to show what we mean by creating a more "walkable" city. I'll follow up by phone on Monday, and in the meantime, you can reach me at (CONTACT INFO).

Example of follow up phone call:

Ask if this is a good time to talk for a few minutes, to follow up on the story idea you offered, then make your pitch:

I'll keep this brief. Last week, I sent you an email detailing how (YOUR WALKING GROUP) is working to implement the Surgeon General's call to action on walking. I'm not sure if you've received it, but in essence we have launched a local call to action to create more safe sidewalks, crosswalks and bike lanes. We know that walking is critical for all kinds of reasons, including our health, making social connections and keeping communities vibrant. Unfortunately, our community does not have enough safe spaces for walking.

I'd like to invite you on a short walking tour to show you how the community could be made more walkable. Can you tell me about your interest in this topic?

Taking Reporters' Calls

Taking calls from the media is a two-step process.

Step 1: When a reporter calls you, interview them:

- Find out the deadline.
- Establish the purpose of the call—what information are they looking for?
- Find out to whom else they're speaking.
- Clearly establish the limits of your authority—if you are not authorized to be quoted on behalf of your organization, tell the reporter and identify the correct spokesperson.
- Ask if you can take 30 minutes to gather the information, and call them back. If they are on an immediate deadline, ask for five minutes to give yourself time to prepare. Establish a time to call back.
- Get the correct spelling of the reporter's name, their phone number and the media organization he or she represents.

Step 2: Call the reporter back:

- Honor your commitment—call when you said you would.
- If you are not the best spokesperson, find out who is, brief them and have them call back with you.
- Have all the information on hand. If they ask more questions that you cannot answer, gather more information and call back again.

Tips for Becoming a Resource for the Media

- One of the best ways to have a reporter respond to your calls and pitches is to create a relationship first.
- Introduce yourself. Initiate contact with your target media by providing background information on your organization. Let them know whom you are, what your organization is about and where and how to reach you (including after hours).
- Develop a sense of the kinds of stories that interest your contacts. In doing so, you will develop a rapport with your contacts and will feel more comfortable approaching them. Your contacts will also become more comfortable accepting your calls knowing you have good information for them.
- Know the rules. You increase your value to reporters when you are familiar with their deadlines and the amount of work that goes into meeting those deadlines. If you agree to get back to a reporter, do so in a timely manner even if you do not have all the promised information.
- Make yourself readily available. Once you are identified as a source, prepare to be called upon to provide comments, insights and possible additional resources when your topics hit the news.
- Be dependable. A source is an expert the media contacts for their knowledge on a subject. A resource is someone who consistently demonstrates all the qualities listed above, which sets him or her apart from other sources available to reporters.