

Working With the Media

Part 1: Securing Media Stories for Your Station Area Plan Campaign

The Campaign's Media Goal: Secure feature stories and respond to news articles about what the Station Area Plan is for, e.g. desperately needed affordable housing, opportunities to create jobs and locate homes near access to jobs, the facts on traffic and parking impacts, myths and facts of compact development or economic development opportunities.

Primary Activity:

The primary impact advocates can have is to create a sense of urgency around the need for a High Quality Station Area Plan. While it may be tempting to address the politics of the campaign, such as polling results, the key is to focus those stories back on those who need a Station Area Plan. Do not engage in debates in the editorial pages, simply focus on the needs and benefits of the Station Area Plan being developed.

Develop a Local Media Plan:

1. Identify your local newspaper, local access cable channel, local radio station.
2. Find out who are the reporters that cover local government, development, housing, the economy, and real estate.
3. Develop a timeline for contacting the media outlet and pitching stories.
4. Develop your feature story idea (don't forget to line-up interviewees).
5. Adapt the media checklist for your plan.
6. Share your plan with members of the Great Community Collaborative.
7. Pitch the story.

Media Timeline:

Following is a rough timeline for media activities that you can be conducting:

- Month 1: prep your media plan, respond to related news stories
- Month 3: contact reporters with story ideas, meet with editorial boards to secure endorsements in local papers (major media outlets will be secured by state campaign)
- Month 4: follow-up with reporter on story, secure radio and/or TV news stories
- Month 5: (post-event or press conference): thank reporters for their coverage and report your results.

Create enthusiasm within your organization so that they can be your eyes and ears in finding stories that you can respond to with letters to the editor or calls to broadcast stations.

Aim for securing 1 to 3 stories. As you keep track of stories, email them to Ann Cheng at TALC (ann@transcoalition.org) so that we can keep track of them and report them to funders and other interested parties.

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Part 2: Getting Media Coverage – Moving your Advocacy Agenda

Working with the media doesn't have to be intimidating or time-consuming. The most important thing to remember is that reporters are busy too and their relationship with you counts for a lot. Here are a few tips and tricks to help make it fun and easy for you.

DO:

- Heart-string stories – successes about real people who were struggling with long commutes in traffic and now can save enough money to become home owners after moving within walking distance of transit
- Paint a picture of the outcome – have the reporter visit actual Great Communities that exemplify transit oriented developments.
- Mention targets – elected officials, voters, etc. who can contribute to supporting Great Communities near transit.
- Cut your issue with a hook - local, timely and attention-getting. For example, tie in with global warming, or a key local decision to be made by the City Council.

DON'T:

- Use technical program names, or toss off large dollar figures.
- Miss opportunities – read the newspaper, write letters to the editor in response to articles you've seen.

MORE MEDIA TIPS

1. What are the different kinds of media, and media coverage?

Print: News story, Feature story, Column, Editorial, Op-ed piece, Letter to the editor

Television News stories, consumer watch features, human interest, public affairs

Radio News stories, human interest, community calendars, listener perspectives

Ethnic and non-English speaking press

TIP: Try. Ask. Don't fear failure when dealing with the media. No one gets coverage every time they try. Even if they don't do your story, ask why they didn't and how they might. You'll get to know more media folks, how they think, and what they might cover in the future.

TIP: Follow the media with an eye to using it. When you see a story on your issue, or a related one, notice who the reporter is. They may cover your issue on a regular basis, or have a particular interest in it. Send them your next press release, in addition to sending it to the assignment desk, and call them.

TIP: Positive reinforcement helps. Write a letter to the editor praising a good story on your issue, and the writer. Letters to the editor are coverage too – and the third most read part of a paper.

TIP: Remember editorials (the position of the newspaper) and “op-ed” (the page across from the editorial page) pieces. Be bold – when you see an editorial on your issue area, call the paper, get the Editorial Department, and find out who wrote the editorial. Ask to speak to them. Tell them the issue you’d like the paper to endorse. Make it timely. Remember, if you don’t ask, you don’t get.

2. Importance of story – clients, actual projects – and the “hook”.

TIP: People are more interesting than facts and figures. Portray your issue through their stories. But...

TIP: Stories usually aren’t enough by themselves. You need a hook – something that makes the story timely and/or controversial, like the threat of new market rate development displacing local community members, an impending vote in Congress, or the fact that your Congressional rep is about to miss an opportunity to fund transit improvements that would improve transportation equity. Immediacy and controversy are especially important in trying to get editorial coverage.

TIP: Different stories may lead to different reporters. If funding was awarded at the state level, then you may get passed to a state reporter

3. How do we get media coverage?

TIP: Try to get media coverage.

TIP: Make relations with media people a priority. ALWAYS make the reporter or writer’s job easier for them and respond quickly to requests.

TIP: Gather interesting success stories.

TIP: Develop and maintain a personal relationship with a reporter or an editor.

TIP: Sometimes, no matter what you do, you won’t get coverage. If there’s a tornado in the town next door, or President Bush says something dumb, those stories may crowd you out, no matter how good your story is.

TIP: “Day of” coverage, especially in the morning paper, has extra power – to spur more turn out for an action, to raise the spirits of your members, or to put pressure on a target on the day of a key vote.

TIP: Don’t assume that your target – especially state wide staffers – will see your press release. Send it to them.

TIP: ALWAYS send a letter to the editor after you get a story or an editorial, especially if you can be positive. It’s additional, free coverage. CC the writer of your piece.

4. Press releases

TO WHOM: Specific reporters/writers, Assignments Editor/City Desk.

CONTENT: Who, what, when, why, where; contact people. Keep to one page. No kidding, keep to one page. They get lots of them. If they're interested, they'll ask for more information.

GOAL: Reasonable minimum of coverage – one all-news radio station, one paper, and one TV station. News radio and the morning paper define what's the 'news' for the day.

KEY: Follow up calls the day before and the day of. Then more follow up calls. Ask for a reporter you know, ask for the assignment desk, ask what time they arrive on the day of your event. Call, call, call, resend your release again and again. Be available all day long. Have your leaders/story tellers/experts available all day long.

THE EVENT: Stage an event – at a specific at-risk project, with residents who might lose their homes, or at the local office of an elected target that won't support you. The event, location and/or target should help to make it more newsworthy, and tell your story better.

5. The goal—an ideal, advocacy-oriented connection with the media

Having a respected and respectful relationship. Getting your calls returned and your stories considered. Becoming the source of story ideas for key reporters and editors. Being an "authority" on your issue – getting quoted in other people's stories, appearing on talk shows, etc.

This media guide was adapted from a guide by Buck Bagot, at Devine & Gong.

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Part 3: Media Campaign Checklist

Media Campaign Checklist

- Message**
 - Develop message.
 - Advance brief to key reporters to check story angle.
 - Leverage editorial board visits to pitch story.

- Messengers**
 - Identify spokespersons
 - Ensure they are briefed in advance of media work (primary, secondary, media coordinators)
 - Availability to speak with media on follow-up questions

- Media Kit (external distribution)**
 - Advance brief /pitch (for key print reporters)
 - Media advisory
 - Press release
 - Fact sheets on organizations
 - Visual elements (charts, maps, etc.)

- Media Action Kit (Internal distribution)**
 - Press release template
 - Talking points/FAQs
 - Media event briefing
 - Media advisory template
 - Op-ed template
 - Sample letters to the editor
 - Copies of all materials
 - Fact sheets on organizations
 - Media contact list/assignments
 - Media Calendar

Press Advisories and Press Releases

Press advisories and **press releases** are important tools for getting reporters' attention and for framing an issue with your messages. Outlined below is when to use them, tips on writing them and a template for formatting.

Press Advisory

A press advisory notifies the media for a press conference of a key event in your campaign. Make sure you want to have media at your event and that you'll be able to control the message of the event before sending out the advisory.

Advisories should be short and to the point, so that reporters can read it quickly and get the information they need. Make sure to include what is newsworthy about your event (see **How to hold a Press Conference** for ideas), to provide contact information and to use a punchy headline. When sending them out via email, paste the text into the body of the email and attach the file as a PDF.

Press Advisory Template

Press Advisory	
<u>For Immediate Release:</u> (Date)	
<u>Contact:</u> (Local organizer, local organization, phone number)	
Punchy Headline	
Who:	Nurses, Reverend Margaret from Congregation X, Councilperson X
What:	Press Conference
When:	10:00 am, Tuesday, March 1, 2007
Where:	In front of City Hall, (address).
Why:	(Your statement of the problem and how what you are demanding will deal with this problem and improve people's lives.)
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About Local Organization: Brief summary of mission. www.localorganization.org	

Press Release

A press release tells the media about a newsworthy event or occurrence, such as a key City Council meeting, important campaign actions, or the release of a new study. Press releases are your opportunity to frame the event in your messages and to present the issue from your perspective.

Press releases should be written as news stories, making it easier for reporters to write their stories. Sentences should be short and words should be active. Define any technical or policy terms you use. Press releases should be kept to 1 page, 2 pages maximum.

Write the first paragraph so that if nothing else is printed, people still get the point. It should include the who, what, when, where and why. Later paragraphs can give more details and facts. You should include 2-3 quotes from spokespeople.

Press Release Template

Press Release

For Immediate Release: (date)

Contact: (Local organizer, local organization, phone number)

Punchy Headline

Date-City-Today, Reverend Margaret from Congregation A joined a diverse coalition of community groups to call on the city council to do “xy and z”. “Xy and z” would benefit the community by. The City Council will discuss “xy and z” at their meeting on Thursday night.

“Xy and z would really help our community,” explained Reverend Margaret. “Another quote about why xy and z would be so good.”

Reverend Margaret was joined by nurses, business leaders and residents. “Our city needs xy and z to improve everyone’s lives,” said John Doe, a lifelong resident. “Many other cities are already doing this; we need to get on board, too.”

The City will hold a series of community meetings to discuss xy and z. Residents are encouraged to attend.

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How to Hold a Press Conference

A **press conference** is a voluntary presentation of information to the media. It is your opportunity to decide what information is presented, how it is presented and who presents it. In short, it is one way to get media attention and to control the message that is conveyed.

Press conferences can be great ways to publicize your news – but you must be strategic and well organized to get reporters to cover your press conference and to get good coverage for your issue. Press conferences should only be about 30 minutes long. Outlined below are the important steps in planning, preparing for and executing a press conference.

Planning a Press Conference

1. Define your goals for the press conference: What media outlets do you want to cover your event and why. Are you trying to influence a particular decision maker or body of decision makers? Are you trying to get the public’s attention so they join your cause? Are you trying to keep an issue in the public – and decision makers’ – eyes? Are you trying to develop your groups’ skills? Clearly define what the goal is for the press conference.

2. Define your message and messengers: Figure out what you want to convey and who you want it to reach. The entire press conference should focus on one clear primary message and 1-2 secondary messages. All the speakers should come back to these messages in their comments.

Choose messengers that are tied to the messages, well spoken and disciplined. Limit to only 3 speakers and have each of them represent a different interest. Each person should speak briefly – no longer than 10 minutes each. The messengers should be people the public have favorable opinions of, including public employees (nurses, firefighters, police officers), faith leaders, residents we can relate to and experts in the field.

3. Determine what “news” you have: Reporters don’t come to a press conference just because you think an issue is important, they need news to sell the story to their boss. Think about these

- Is an important study being released?
- Do you have someone with a personal story to share?
- Has your coalition grown to include unlikely allies?
- Is there a conflict or a controversy? (The City keeping information from the public.)
- Can you tie your issue to current dates or events (Mothers Day, Christmas, back to school)
- Is there an important decision happening (will the champion Councilmember join the press conference? Elected officials love the press and vice versa, but you have to keep them on message.)
- Do you have an exciting visual or a gag to draw TV and photographers? Make sure the gag is tied to the message and not distracting (a large crowd of people in matching shirts, workers in uniform, frozen turkeys at Thanksgiving, an oversized greeting card.)

4. Set the date, time and location: Consider reporters deadlines. Early in the day is better if you want print coverage the next morning. Later in the afternoon may get you coverage on the evening television news, if you have good visuals. Tuesday through Thursday are the best days to get news coverage. Check to see if there are any competing events that will steal the media.

Pick a location that is easy to get to, is meaningful for the issue and provides a good visual backdrop. Also, consider if the location is public or if you need permission. If you plan to do the press conference outside, consider how wind, traffic and other noises may affect the quality of TV and radio coverage.

Preparing for the Press Conference

5. Build a list of media contacts: If you haven't gotten media coverage before, research the local outlets to see who would likely cover your issue. Most newspapers have their reporters and their areas listed on their website. When you do see a story that touches on your issue, contact the reporter to say thanks and to build a relationship with them.

6. Write a press advisory and a press release: A press advisory is short, giving the who, what, when, where, why of your event, and is released at least a week in advance. A press release is written like a news story and is released the day before or day of an event. See **Press Advisories and Press Releases** for more tips.

7. Invite the media: After you send out the press advisory, call reporters to make sure they received it and to see if they will cover the event. Remember to explain how this is "news" so that they can easily see the story that they would write. Call them all again the day before the press conference or the day of to remind them to come.

8. Build a crowd: A crowd of people shows public interest and can be a media draw. Divide up lists of members and allies. Call them a week before to let them know about the press conference. Call them the day before to remind them. This is a good task for volunteers to help with and to divide up among coalition partners.

9. Prepare your spokespeople: Help spokespeople prepare their talking points and review what they will say at the press conference. Some people will prefer that you prepare their talking points, so be ready to offer that. It's a good idea to rehearse a few days in advance to make sure they are comfortable. With new spokespeople, it's good to rehearse the day of the press conference. Make sure all the spokespeople have a document with the basic messages and the answers to tough questions. Rehearse the tough questions.

10. Prepare your moderator: In addition to the spokespeople, you will need a moderator to welcome everyone, introduce the speakers and keep the press conference moving. This person should be very comfortable with public speaking and should be able to politely move speakers along if they talk too long. When rehearsing with your moderator, make sure they know how to pronounce the speaker's and organization's names.

11. Prepare the visuals: Prepare charts, maps, signs, pictures, stickers or any "gag" visuals you're using in advance. This is a good task to delegate to volunteers and that can be done before the last minute. Consider how far away you expect the signs to be from the audience.

12. Prepare a press kit: A press kit includes the press release and other background materials for the reporters. Include factsheets, maps, contact information, report summary and/or text of statements. You can put these in a folder or just staple it together.

13. Decide and review roles for the day of the press conference: Besides the speakers and the moderator, you will need people to:

- greet the media
- pass out press kits
- welcome members and allies
- hold signs
- keep time
- make sure speakers are ready
- answer questions from the media

Decide who is doing what, and do a dry run if possible. Think about what unexpected events could occur (opponents show up, a speaker doesn't show up, someone forgets the visuals) and how you will deal with them.

Executing a Press Conference

14. Arrive early: Instruct community members and allies to arrive 15- 20 minutes early to make sure you have a crowd there when reporters arrive. TV reporters usually arrive early to set up. Greet the reporters when they arrive and give them press kits.

15. Start on time and keep it short: Reporters don't have much time. Start on time and keep your presentation to 30 minutes total. Take questions afterward. Keep your answers short and on message. Have the moderator prepared to wrap it up and thank everyone for coming.

16. Follow up with reporters who did not attend: Send press releases and call reporters who did not attend. Ask them if they were covering something else. Ask them what kinds of stories they like to cover.

17. Debrief: Once the coverage is out, discuss what worked and what didn't with press conference team, including speakers. How many reporters came? Was the news coverage on your message? Did you meet your goal? Did you start on time? How did the speakers do? How big was the crowd? Make notes and remember the lessons learned for next time.

Editorials, Opinion Editorials and Letters to the Editor

Editorials, Opinion Editorials and Letters to the Editor express specific opinions in newspapers. They are tools for you to get your opinions expressed more directly than through news stories. The audience for these tools is usually decision makers who pay attention to what the opinion pages say. Outlined below is when to use them and tips on writing or obtaining them.

Editorials

Editorials are columns that express the newspaper's point of view. You cannot write an editorial for a newspaper, but you can ask the editorial board to publish an editorial supporting your position.

Generally, newspapers won't publish an editorial on an issue unless there is a vote happening or decision being made. Newspapers like to influence decisions and to be current, so consider that when you are deciding when to contact the editorial board.

When you decide to ask for an editorial, you make an appointment with the editorial board. Think through who from your group should be in this meeting. It should be a small group (two to four people) and everyone should know the facts and know what they contribute to the meeting. If someone from your coalition has a relationship with the editorial board, ask that person to ask for the meeting.

During the meeting with the editorial board, present your position clearly and concisely. Paint a picture of why this issue matters to the community, why your solution is the right one to benefit the community and why now is the right time to move forward. Use well-researched facts to support your case. Explain how soon the decision is being made, and how hot this issue is. Be prepared to answer questions. Before ending the meeting, ask how and when you can follow up with them. Thank them for their time.

Opinion Editorials

Opinion editorials – or op-eds – are columns that express the point of view of a newspaper staff writer, a syndicated columnist, or a national or community leader. The op-ed page is usually next to the editorial page. Op-eds are set up as an individual's opinion on an issue.

Although most newspapers keep an open mind in deciding on op-eds, some papers may be more open to your coalition's issue than others. Research the newspaper to understand what kinds of editorials it publishes and what issues their news stories cover. Also research the paper's word limit and how often they print op-eds (every day, once a week, etc.).

As with editorials, newspapers generally will not print an op-ed if there is not a relevant decision to influence. Remember, it needs to be news-related and it needs to be current.

When your coalition decides to write an op-ed, think about who the best signer would be and what message would they deliver. Is there a respected business leader, a well-known faith leader or community leader that should be the author? Once that is figured out, contact the opinion

page editor – or have the author contact them. You can either meet them in person or share your idea for an op-ed over the phone. If you set up a meeting, think about who the right messenger is and make sure all who attend understand their role in the meeting.

Once the paper agrees to publish your op-ed, make sure you get the details on length and deadlines. Newspaper deadlines are serious – don't miss them! If the op-ed does get published, write a thank you note to the editor and keep in touch with them as the campaign moves forward.

When writing the op-ed, consider these tips:

1. **Give a concise but thorough background on the issue or campaign.** Remember, most people reading the story may not have an understanding of the issue. Give a thoughtful, yet brief, background on the issue and why it matters to most people.
2. **Use a message to ensure broad appeal.** Keep your target audience in mind while writing the piece. Your target audience is people – residents and elected officials - that are open to the solutions you are proposing. You want to convince them this solution can improve their lives and their community and to show elected officials that leaders feel strongly about this issue. Don't focus on your opposition and don't worry about trying to convince people that are totally opposed.
3. **Keep it local.** The readers will want to know how your solution will improve their community and their lives. Refer to developments, neighborhoods and streets that people are familiar with. Give specific examples of how building new homes and shops near transit will make their lives more convenient and allow them to get around without a car.

Letters to the Editor

A letter to the editor is a short response to an article in the paper. In some smaller communities, letters to the editor can also be in response to events that have happened. Letters to the editor should generally be 200 words or less. If it is in response to an article, the title and date of the article should be included.

A good campaign strategy is to ask many people to send in letters to the editor. You can develop one or two samples and ask people to personalize them and send them into the editor. When newspapers receive multiple letters on one issue, they are more likely to publish some of them. If your volunteers send them in via email, ask them to NOT copy you on the email. Rather, they should just send you a separate email of their letter. The person submitting the letter should include their full name and phone number.