



Tips for getting good media coverage

Media coverage is important

The media can be a great friend of community organisations and minority groups. It can offer free and credible publicity that can reach and influence the opinion of a broad range of people and community leaders.

Some essential features of news

The most important element of attracting the media's attention is to have a story that will spark a journalist's interest. Sending media releases on any and every occurrence within your organisation will only annoy journalists and also condition them to almost automatically ignore your efforts.

In general, the media will apply the following questions when assessing the story:

- What is unique about the information?
- What is unique about those involved?
- How does it affect the general public and will people be interested?

Getting the media interested

What story?: If you have an event such as an opening, a function or a launch, the story is self evident. If it's the release of a report, a study or something along these lines then you may have to be a bit creative. To attract the media's interest, you will have to focus on the "highlight/s". These will be the "angles" which will serve as a suitable hook for those journalists who may cover your story.



Targeting your story: It is important to assess realistically the market for your story. How wide will interest in it be?

Determine what media is available to you i.e. the major, state-wide outlets (major newspapers, metropolitan TV and radio) local newspapers, and community radio stations.

You will need to have an understanding of the different sections of each medium (newspapers, television, radio and internet) and what type of stories they are running. Then target the particular sections or programs that are relevant to your story.

General media coverage: Sometimes it is best to use the “blanket” approach and inform all parts of the media.

This of course would be the approach if you feel that your story has wide general appeal.

Targeted approach: Sometimes it can be an advantage to give your story to a specific journalist who has demonstrated support for your organisation in the past. Giving them the “scoop” on a strong news story can often build that relationship and provide better coverage.

Making contacts: Contacting journalists, researchers or producers who you feel may be interested in your organisation’s activities is often worthwhile. Identify these people by simply paying attention to who writes, or produces stories on your area of activity or contacting the media outlet and asking for a recommendation of who to talk to. Arranging a meeting to give a journalist an insight into your organisation’s objectives and its range of activities is an excellent place to start. Don’t be shy, it’s a two-way thing and these people are usually very approachable. Journalists need contacts within their communities and are always looking for material to fill their pages and news bulletins, so ask how you can help in this regard. Keep in regular touch. The aim is to develop a healthy, trusting rapport: always keep in mind that this is a professional relationship as the journalist will always be mindful of their story needs.

Writing media releases

The most important point is to use clear, concise, simple language.

1. Don't use several words when one will do: "put in an appearance" is the same as "appeared".
2. Keep sentences brief; don't try to include too many ideas. Use 'active' language rather than 'passive' i.e. write "Jack hit Bill" instead of "Bill was hit by Jack"
3. Try to keep the release to one A4 page.
4. Use quotes from a spokesperson.
5. Put the most important points at the start of the media release.
6. Make sure that every important detail is included – try to answer: Who? What?, Why?, Where?, When? And How?
7. Include contact details (business and after hours) for more information.
8. Date the release.

Distributing the story: Send your media release to your targeted media outlets. It is often useful to phone first, especially if you have some contacts, to briefly describe your story to ascertain interest (this can also be a good way to make contacts). Phoning first just gives the personal touch and if there is interest, follow up by sending your media release. Send your release to the Chief-of-Staff or equivalent as well as the relevant staff journalist.

Holding a media event

A "media event" may be an opening, launch or function of some interest to the public and therefore the media. Early advice: Send out a Media Alert publicising your upcoming event, giving five or six days notice. This is not an official media release but merely advises the media of what they can expect when they attend.

Early advice to the media should include the following information:

- What the event is and how it will be conducted.



- When the event is being held and at what time.
- The location of the event.
- A brief background.
- A description of what vision is available for photographers and/or TV crews.

Logistics:

- Mid morning is often the best time for a media event as it allows all media plenty of time to process your story.
- Choose the most accessible location.
- On the day of the event call the media outlets you have invited to confirm they have received your media alert and assess the likelihood of their attendance.
- Send embargoed copies of your media release for broadcast or publication after your event to media outlets that are unable to attend.

Further information: There are many sources of further information from libraries and from the internet.

Some other sources on the web are:

www.internetnewsbureau.com/tips/

www.aboutpublicrelations.net/

Source: www.ofv.sa.gov.au, Humanitarian Crisis Hub