



Media relations 101

Reporters and editors are always looking for news. Develop and package your story ideas, and prepare your messengers, for a better chance of grabbing their attention

What do reporters need?

- Stories that generate clicks by being newsworthy and relevant to their audience
- Accurate and timely information
- Access to trustworthy 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 be:

- about something happening now, or very soon
- grounded in the place the news outlet covers
- where there's a conflict or "live" issue
- featuring people who are participating in that issue

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

Effective stories also:

- Tap into core/shared values, address things people care about like health, safety, and justice
- Have human interest, are relatable
- Have a problem/villain, solution/hero, or a call to action
- In the case of a TV and radio, respectively, offer good visual and sound opportunities

Who makes a good spokesperson?

A strong messenger is someone who has issue expertise, can represent your point of view, and is in good standing (or at least not in bad standing) with your target audience. They should be:

- **Credible**—respected by their peers and the community
- **Knowledgeable**—can draw from relevant anecdotes, facts, and statistics when needed
- **Compelling**—have a unique story to tell, or a strong point of view
- **Available**—easily reached and responsive when reporters call
- **Media-trained or coachable**—willing to take some message direction



Note: people on the front lines of your issue are credible experts, and their firsthand knowledge represents their “credentials.” Being a Ph.D. is not necessary, but knowing about the issue is. Who you select as a spokesperson or op-ed author is an opportunity to address the fact that journalists routinely underreport the stories and experiences of low-income people, women, and communities of color.

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 and prepare them for interviews
- Identify and research target reporters. Have they covered the issue before? If so, from what perspective?
- Make your most important talking points into your most memorable sound bites. Use human-scale numbers and comparisons, and tap metaphors and sensory language to make abstract concepts real. Consider wrapping a number or statistic with a story to make it more tangible.
- Plan your pitch: is it the right time? Is there any recent news about this subject?

How to position yourself as an expert

- Volunteer information—share a colorful story, interesting fact, or breaking news.
- Be transparent about your role in the process or relationship to the issue.
- Engage them on Twitter by following them and responding when appropriate.
- Get prepared—have informational materials handy.
- Refer reporters to other useful sources.
- Use clear, understandable words rather than overly technical language.



When talking to a reporter

When a reporter calls, get their name, contact information, and deadline. Then prepare for the conversation before calling them back. 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. Bridge or pivot back to your points if the reporter tries to distract you, and use verbal cues to flag the most important takeaways for the reporter.
- Do not help the opposition by repeating their arguments, even to refute 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.”



**And lastly, enjoy the experience!
Storytelling is about so many things —
healing, joy, advocacy, connection — but
most importantly, it's about growth, for
yourself and your audience.**