

# RUN FOR SOMETHING

## Local Media 101

- I. Understanding Local News
- II. Making the First Contact
- III. Best Practices for Communicating
- IV. What to Expect from an Interview

**About the author:** this resource was compiled based on a workshop facilitated by **RFS Mentor Blane Skiles**, who works in local television news. The language may be more geared towards TV news, but the lessons are broadly applicable to print and digital journalism, as well.

***\*\*If, after reviewing this guide, you have additional questions, [sign up to talk to a Run for Something Mentor](#). Mentors can offer specific expertise regarding press relations, public speaking, media appearances, and more.\*\****

| What You Want   | What Stations Wants   | What Stations Don't Want   |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Get your message out to potential voters</li><li>2) Build support with the local community</li><li>3) Promote your campaign platform</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Good content that's engaging for their audience</li><li>2) Exclusive content that the audience can't get anywhere else</li><li>3) Compelling and newsworthy interviews</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) To give you free publicity</li><li>2) To make you look bad or good</li><li>3) Obviously canned answers that don't add anything to the story</li></ul> |

## I. Understanding Local TV

### Market Structure

- Most local television stations are owned by station groups (companies) that operate [network affiliated stations](#) in several markets
- Stations pay the networks to access and broadcast network content, but have independent local news operations
- You should know the DMAs (designated market areas) serving your voters and be aware of the stations in those markets

# RUN FOR SOMETHING

- Some districts will be covered by multiple markets
- You can look up your DMAs by Googling DMA map
- Understanding station ownership can be helpful, particularly in statewide race
  - It can be helpful to get coverage from a company that owns multiple stations in that area
  - Look up station ownership by Googling the call letters or station name

## Identifying Relevant News Staff

- *Reporters*
- *Assignment Editors* - the command center of the newsroom
- *Managers/Editors (News Director/Assistant News Directors)* - set editorial direction
- *Producers* - write almost everything the anchors read, decide which stories go in shows, book guests

## Jargon to Know

- *Newser/Presser* - news conference
- *B-Roll* - video (think: shots of a school before a segment, generic shots of a city)
- *Soundbite/sound* - edited part of an interview
- *Package* - a reporter's story, including b-roll and multiple sound bites

## II. Making the First Contact

### How to Get in Touch

- You have to introduce yourself, and sometimes re-introduce yourself to local newsrooms
- Don't be afraid to call! Talk to the assignment manager or another manager like the Assistant News Director
- Introduce yourself, share contact info, and follow up with an email
- Coverage of campaign announcements or campaign coverage months before Election Day is difficult to come by - don't give up!
  - Announcement post on Facebook or sending a press release is not sufficient, reach out to your stations by email and phone to let them know the announcement is coming
  - Often, local news isn't paying attention to local politics until within one to two months of the election - you will need to proactively reach out

→ Tip: If you aren't getting coverage, cast a smaller net. Find the journalists who seem most interested in races like yours and reach out to them (go to the

# RUN FOR SOMETHING

politics section of the website and figure out who's writing articles like that). Meet them in person and give them story ideas.

## Newsroom Timeline



## III. Best Practices for Communicating

### Building Authentic Relationships with Local Media

- *Build your contact list:* Keep a spreadsheet with every local news organization, find out the email addresses that go to each organization and reporter, get work cell numbers for key reporters/managers
- *Invite yourself over:* Ask if you can come by the station to meet the team. If you're open to a free-for-all interview, it can make it easier to come to them
- *Write news releases like news stories:* Don't make it harder than it has to be to find key information (who/what/when/where, quotes, etc.)
- *Be available:* Be transparent about your contact preferences and be responsive

### Media Kits: Make it Easy

- Send them the photo you want them to use (make sure the usage is cleared)
- Send your biography and facts that can be easily included in stories
- Keep in mind: What would a reporter be searching for?

# RUN FOR SOMETHING

## Press Releases and Emails: Timing & Content

- Send news releases well in advance
- Resend them closer to the event
  - Don't call and ask if a reporter will be coming
  - Don't call and ask if they received it - calling before sending the release to confirm contact information is better than calling afterwards to check
- Send news releases early in the morning or late in the afternoon

## Sending Statements: Be Aware

- Anticipate what stories might be covered that day/week/month
- Local reporters love to localize big stories
- Always send statements or make yourself available for comment

## What if the Press Does Not Attend Your Event?

- Send a follow-up email with pictures and/or video

## Things to Keep in Mind

- Newsrooms are understaffed; reporters are constantly asked to do more with less
- Breaking news takes up resources and changes plans
- Stories have to be visual (not a bunch of people sitting around)
- Balance and fairness is expected
- Always be clear about the ground rules (off or on the record, on background, etc.)

## IV. Interview Expectations

- Don't expect coverage if you don't want to go on-camera
- Understand reporter time constraints: if you aren't available until 3:00 PM, it's unlikely that you'll be on the 6:00 PM news
- You won't get a list of questions in advance, but you can prepare for likely topics
- Reporters want to get the facts, get your perspective, and get the story done
- Answer questions, be honest, and be prepared for tough/direct questions. Reporters don't want to give you a platform to lie to viewers
- Look at the reporter, not the camera
- The mic and camera are always hot. If it was recorded, it can be used.
- The reporter will pick out the soundbite(s) they want to use, so it's good to anticipate what might be used. That does *not* mean you have to talk in soundbites.

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- For additional guidance on answering media questions and going on camera, see [this video on Press Interview Do's and Dont's](#) with RFS Mentor Kathy Quattrone

## Summary:

- Try to stay on the minds of reporters and news managers with authentic communication that helps them achieve their goals.
- Don't give up: there is a news hole to fill every day, some days are lighter than others.
- Always send visuals after your event. Things that may not get covered on-air can still get covered online.