



# HOW TO Receive Positive Media Attention

Citizens' groups need media coverage of their stories to be effective.

A story at the top of the evening news or on the front page of the newspaper boost morale and can help a group win an issue its members care about.

A negative story or a hostile editorial can undermine a campaign.

Media coverage is one *tool*, a part of your strategy to win on issues and build your group. It is *not* an end in itself. Citizens' groups have fewer resources for public relations campaigns than do many of their opponents. If you focus only on media coverage, and neglect the other parts of running good issue campaigns and maintaining a strong organization, you're bound to lose in the end.

## WHY DO YOU WANT MEDIA COVERAGE

Before you spend a lot of your organization's time and resources on a major media campaign, stop and think about why you want media coverage. You want:

- the public to know arguments and facts that support your position on an issue.
- people to hear about and join your group.
- to pressure the governor, a company or some other decision maker to act.
- to publicize upcoming events or a fundraiser.

## WHY DO YOU NOT WANT MEDIA COVERAGE

There are also stories about your group that you *do not* want to be in the news:

- stories on an issue on which your group has no position or is divided.
- stories about conflicts within your group.
- stories about your losses.
- stories about internal strategy discussions.
- stories about sensitive negotiations with your opponents.

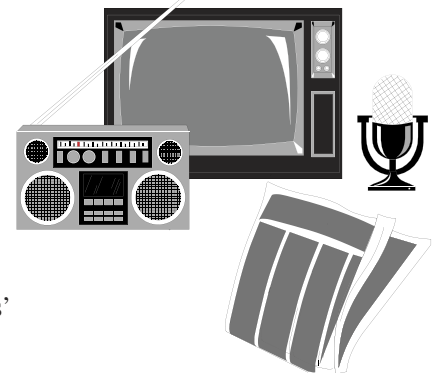
## WHO IS THE MEDIA

Many citizens' groups spend most of their time and effort to get reporters to cover their stories in their local daily newspaper. Stories in the daily paper will be read by a lot of people in your town, probably including most opinion makers, decision makers and your members. Newspaper clippings are useful to send out to donors and members to reinforce the feelings about your group.

Other places in the daily paper are read just as much, or more than the front page: editorials, opinion columns, and letters-to-the-editor are obvious examples, but don't forget calendars, the business page, photos and cartoons.

The daily paper is not the only source of print news. In many rural communities, almost everyone reads weekly papers, usually run by overworked people looking to fill space.

Specialty publications are important to the work of any citizens' group. For example, farmers and ranchers get a lot of their news from regional and national agricultural trade publications - as do



farm and ranch reporters from daily newspapers. Many government regulators, business people, and activists also read these publications.

There is less news on the radio today than 10 or 20 years ago, but there is still a lot of opportunity to get your message on the airwaves. Noncommercial (public) radio is supported in part by state and federal funds, and has an obligation to provide news coverage. Much of the in-depth reporting is found on National Public Radio programs, but most public stations have some local and regional coverage. The public radio audience is relatively small, but it includes decision makers, the well-educated and the affluent (so it's important if that's who you want to reach).

Many commercial radio stations today have just five minutes of news every couple of hours, if they have any at all, but other stations provide all news and talk formats. Radio talk shows are an important medium for citizens' groups. Local and regional shows need interesting guests and topics. If you can't get your spokesperson on a radio talk show, your members can call in with comments or questions.

Citizens' groups can get Public Service Announcements (PSA's) - free broadcast of a recorded or written message - on most commercial stations, especially if they concern an upcoming event, or an uncontroversial message. If you can't get free air time, radio, compared to TV, is an inexpensive place to buy advertising.

Television time is expensive because so many people are tuned in. We may think TV news is superficial or complain about how hard it is to get on TV news, but two-thirds of the news most people receive is through television and radio.

A typical nightly newscast has twelve minutes of news, after counting sports, weather, and advertising, time for at most, a dozen stories. But if you need to reach the general public, you need to get on TV.

There are opportunities besides the nightly news, although the audiences are smaller: interviews on the noon news, special news talk shows (local versions of *Face the Nation*), PSA's, and community service announcements. There are opportunities on Public Television as well. Most cable systems have local access channels, which give your group an opportunity to produce and broadcast its own show.

Today millions of people get all kinds of information through the internet. The potential is huge, but at the same time, it is almost impossible to make sure that any of your targeted audience will see the message you put out. And, if you need to reach people who don't have regular access to computers, the internet is not much help.

## GETTING STARTED

To get your message covered in the media, your strategy must be based on an understanding of the media sources you are targeting. Spend time reading newspapers, listening to radio stations and watching the television programs you want to cover your story. Ask yourself these questions:

- What kinds of stories do they run?
- What are the formats of the stories they run?
- Who owns the media outlets in your community?
- Who are the reporters?

If you can answer these questions and build relationships with the people who report and package the news, you are ready to develop your strategy for getting heard in the media.

Remember that newspapers, radio and television stations are businesses. Reporters, editors, and news directors are all as busy as you are. They may get hundreds of press releases in a day. A good media strategy makes it easy for them to run your story, by providing credible, clear, newsworthy and professional material.

## CREATE YOUR MESSAGE

Begin developing your message and your media plan by answering these questions:

### 1. WHAT IS THE GOAL OF YOUR CAMPAIGN? WHAT DO WE WANT TO HAPPEN?

At the start of your media campaign, clearly define the goals of your issue campaign and organization. These goals drive your media work. A typical goal could be to pass a certain bill or to enhance your group's visibility. You should also set media goals, such as placing an opinion editorial in the daily paper and getting your spokesperson on a certain local radio talk show.

### 2. WHO IS OUR AUDIENCE?

Determine who you have to activate to help you achieve your goal. Your campaign may need to motivate many audiences or just one specific audience. Plan media to reach each target audience.

---

### 3. WHY SHOULD THE AUDIENCE CARE ABOUT YOUR CAMPAIGN GOAL?

Consider why the audience should care about and are affected by the issue and how they would benefit when you reach your goal.

### 4. WHAT VALUES RELATE TO YOUR CAMPAIGN GOAL?

Review the values shared by members of the audience.

Primary values are responsibility to care for one's family, responsibility to care for oneself, personal liberty, work, spirituality, honesty and integrity, and fairness and equality.

Secondary values are responsibility to care for others, personal fulfillment, respect for authority, and love of country or culture.

### 5. WHAT IS OUR OVER-ARCHING MESSAGE?

The over-arching message is the main point of your message. For example, one over-arching message is, "You (the audience) should call the governor and tell him to sign the Clean Air Bill to improve the health of our children by limiting toxic emissions."

When your campaign targets more than one audience, the over-arching message should appeal to values everyone in those audiences can agree on.

### 6. WHAT IMAGES WILL WE USE?

Choose photographs and images that help tell your story by illustrating your frame, message, and values.

### 7. ANECDOTE?

Collect and use personal stories to add a human touch to your campaign issue. Anecdotes may focus on how a problem affects people.

### 8. SPECIFIC FACTS?

Gather the facts supporting your position, but don't overwhelm people with too many facts.

### 9. ARE YOU PROMOTING A SPECIFIC ACTION?

Ask the audience to help reach the goal by taking part of an action, such as calling the governor, writing a letter, attending a rally, or joining your organization.

## FRAMING THE NEWS

The frame of the story is its boundaries, its borders, its defining limits, its impact. The frame is a mental structure that shapes the way we see the world.

For example, the official frame on welfare is something like this: "This country was founded on individualism. Every individual - not our society - needs to pick herself up by her bootstraps and take care of herself. No more welfare cheats."

### 10. WHO IS OUR MESSENGER?

Select and train your spokesperson(s). The messenger is as important as the message. Pick a messenger that can easily relate to the target audience.

After you decide on your message, audience, and messenger, you're ready to complete the media plan. By the way, you should create the media plan at the same time you create your campaign plan.

## FINISH MEDIA PLAN

To complete the media plan, you should consider these key components:

- Frame your issue and identify your news. Reporters need real news. The frame of a story is its boundaries, borders, defining limits, and impact. The frame is the mental structure shaping the way you and your group view the world.
- Target reporters and media outlets.
- Produce deliverables, such as press kits, media advisories, press releases, fact sheets, photographs, reports and other handouts.
- Pitch reporters to cover the story.
- Conduct media briefings for key reporters.
- Stage media events.
- Place opinion editorials and letters to the editor in key outlets.
- Place your spokesperson on radio and TV shows.
- Incorporate the internet into media plan, including online media outlets, blogs, and your group's website.

One thing to remember is to develop a media plan that is bold and ambitious, but realistic in terms of your group's ability to fulfill the plan.

## A MODEL FOR YOUR MESSAGES

Your key messages should communicate in a succinct way the most crucial components of your issue. Do not try to explain everything, instead condense your issue down into the following three media messages.

### MESSAGE 1: THE PROBLEM

What is the problem you are working to address? Keep it simple and compelling.

### MESSAGE 2: THE SOLUTION

You will be in danger of sounding like a whiner unless you move on to the solution. Use it to communicate a sense of your values.

### MESSAGE 3: A CALL TO ACTION

You've defined the problem and offered a solution. Now what do you need to do to get to the solution? The action will be different depending on your targeted audience and the stage of your campaign.

---

The following have generously allowed WORC to incorporate their material in this publication: The SPIN Project, SPIN Works! by Robert Bray, and the research and communications firm of Belden, Russonello & Stewart.

The SPIN Project strengthens nonprofit social justice organizations, small and large, to communicate effectively for themselves. Published in 2000, SPIN Works! covers all aspects of strategic communications for community organizations.

The SPIN Project  
149 Natoma Street, 3rd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
415.227.4200

Belden, Russonello & Stewart conducts survey and focus group research and provides research-based message development and communications consulting.

Belden Russonello & Stewart  
1320 19th Street, N.W., Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
202.822.6090  
brspoll@brspoll.com



WORC is a network of grassroots organizations from seven states that include 9,700 members and 44 local community groups. WORC helps its members succeed by providing training and by coordinating regional issue campaigns.

#### WORC Member Groups:

Dakota Resource Council  
Dakota Rural Action  
Idaho Rural Council  
Northern Plains Resource Council  
Oregon Rural Action  
Powder River Basin Resource Council  
Western Colorado Congress

#### WORC Billings Office

220 South 27th Street, Suite B  
Billings, MT 59101  
(406)252-9672  
billings@worc.org  
www.worc.org

#### WORC Washington, D.C. Office

110 Maryland Ave., NE, #307  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202)547-7040  
dc@worc.org

#### WORC Montrose, CO Office

60584 Horizon Drive  
Montrose, CO 81401  
(970)323-6849  
montrose@worc.org

#### WORC Lemmon, SD Office

2307 5th Avenue, NE  
Lemmon, SD 57638  
(701)376-7077  
jerilyn@worc.org

#### FOR MORE ON HOW TO TITLE:

**Principles of Community Organizing** training sessions are held twice a year by WORC. **Advanced Leadership and Staff Development** training sessions are also held by WORC.

**How to Run a Good Meeting** and **How to Speak in Public** are other topics available in this series of guides to community organizing.

#### MORE HOW TO GUIDES:

WORC has produced a series of How To's, practical guides to assist members, staff, leaders and citizens to build strong organizations and effective issue campaigns. The series covers **Media, Building Organizations and Winning Issues.**

Topics are listed on our website – [www.worc.org](http://www.worc.org). These publications can be downloaded from the website as PDFs or ordered for \$2 each. Contact WORC regarding bulk orders or about training sessions on topics in this series.

