
Tip Sheet: Generating Media for your Campaign

Overview

Generating media allows you to reach tens of thousands of people with your message. While Exxon Mobil can fund think tanks by the dozen and buy full-page ads in the New York Times, the type of media that grassroots campaigns have access to is called “earned” or “free” media. Unfortunately, news coverage doesn’t happen spontaneously; it comes to those campaigns that work to attract, maintain, and control the attention of the press. You can get earned media by pitching a story to reporters, or submitting letters to the editor, or opinion editorials.

Step 1: Develop a Media List

Ask other like-minded groups for their media lists, pick up newsletters and newspapers. Some groups may not share their lists. No problem. You’ll make your own.

Elements of a media list

- Name: first and last
- Beat: the subject that a reporter usually covers
- Address: at their outlet in case you want to mail them something
- Phone number: both office and mobile
- Fax number: when appropriate
- Deadlines: reporters usually have different deadlines. Just ask them.
- Comments: anything else you think is helpful

Step 2: Think Like a Journalist

The best way to get coverage is to think like a journalist. In many ways, they’re just like you: they need an angle, they have deadlines, and they are dedicated to their job. You should continually scrutinize how you interact with journalists and strive to improve, sharpening your public relations skills.

Most activists like to read the newspaper and hide out in the soothing sounds of NPR. Don’t be like that. The only way to understand what journalists want is to take in everything, everywhere you see it. Once you know what’s being reported, then you can match what you’re publicizing with what the media might bite on.

Step 3: Pitch Your Story to the Media

The first steps in getting a news story printed or aired is deciding on a spokesperson and pitching the story or event to a reporter. This short pitch, generally over the phone, will determine whether a reporter covers your story or attends your event.

When pitching a story:

- First, introduce yourself, your organization, and say why you are calling.
- If they bite, offer to email some background information. This makes it even more likely they will write the story.
- If they say “no thank you” don’t argue. Spend your time on the next news outlet.
- Follow up. Follow Up. Follow Up. Check in to make sure they don’t need more information and keep them updated on your actions



Sample Pitch:

- Reporter: Hello.
- You: Hi Kelly. This is Steve from Greenpeace. I'm calling to let you know that next Thursday we are rallying outside of Rep. Smith's office to bring attention to his inaction on global warming. We're expecting over 100 supporters. Are you interested in finding out more?
- Reporter: Sure. Can you send me a press release?
- You: Absolutely. I'll send you a release and some fact sheets on global warming. Is your email still kelly.smith@nytimes.com?
- Reporter: Yes. I'll look for it.
- You: Great. I hope to speak with you soon.

Step 4: Submit Press Releases and Advisories

Besides an in-person meeting or over the phone pitch, you can also use press releases and advisories to get media coverage. Find out how journalists want to receive news releases and other information. Most reporters, especially at print outlets, like email best, but fax is still preferred by many radio and TV journalists. You should submit an advisory two weeks before your event and a press release the day of the event.

Be sure to write an eye-popping subject line and a great first paragraph. Often, this is as far as a journalist will read before deciding whether to go after your story. Personalize as many emails as possible and paste your news release into the email.

How to write a media advisory

A media advisory is used to notify the media about an event. It functions just like a media release but it's shorter and lacks its details. Media advisories are particularly helpful for photo departments and community calendars, where they just want the basics about an event.

Advisories should be sent as soon as possible, but try to give the media at least two weeks notice before an event. Just like a news release, be sure to follow up with whomever you are sending it to the next day and again before the event. See a sample media advisory on page 4.

How to write a news release

A news release is the vehicle for alerting your local media to your event, a briefing document, or an organizational statement. Keep them brief, to the point, and always follow up on them by phone or personal contact. Be prepared with more information like fact sheets, coalition partners' contact information, and other relevant facts.

For an event, send the release at least two weeks before it occurs. Follow up the next day. Send the release again the day before the event, especially if it's the weekend. Don't forget: Newspapers commonly have different or inexperienced staff on the weekends. See a sample news release on page 5.

Tips

- Try to keep it to one page.
- In the top left corner type "For Immediate Release"
- Under this write the date
- In the top right corner type names and phone numbers of two contacts, with your name first
- For an emailed release, put the contact info at the bottom. That way the reporter will see the headline first and not your name
- Use a larger font for the headline
- Type two headlines: One big to capture the event and one small italicized to explain it further
- Your release should answer who, what, where and how
- Try one sentence per paragraph; at most three
- Write it like a news story with important information in descending order
- Use short sentences and no jargon
- Use quotes, including your own, a policy expert, or a volunteer's when appropriate

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- If your event has good visuals, describe them. If you have pictures of what will be used, paste them at the bottom
- Type --30-- or ### at the end

Follow-up

You can have the best event, write the world's best news release, and be the leading expert on global warming in your area, but if you don't follow up with reporters, it could be all for nothing.

Tips for an effective call

- Don't trust voicemail. Reach a person.
- ID yourself and ask if your news release has been received.
- If it has, ask if they have any questions.
- Don't give up. Be persistent.

Also: Write Letters to the Editor

Get to know the procedures for your local paper

Most newspapers state their policies for submitting LTEs in the paper (usually on the opinion page). Make sure you follow their procedures exactly.

Decide on the strategy for who will sign the letter

Someone from your organization, another group, a local official, or an average citizen can submit a letter to the editor for your campaign. Sometimes you'll want the letter to be signed by a person from your organization if you're making an official response to something, but frequently you'll want letters to be signed by average citizens. It's also effective to send in letters from several people on the same issue. This makes more likely the paper will print one of them.

Write the Letter!

Tips on content of the letter:

- a. Make one clear point in your letter. After you pick your main point, stick to it!
- b. Convey your outrage, but avoid exaggeration. With LTEs, it is fine to express feelings of anger or of frustration but avoid overstatement, hyperbole, and hysteria.
- c. Use your personal experience. Express your concern about the issue in your own way (student worried about future generations, farmer in Iowa, etc).
- d. Your Letter is more likely to get printed if it is localized and/or it is in response to something that the paper has already printed (timely). I would get in a routine of picking up the paper ever morning, flipping to LTE page, and having a quick look.
- e. Sample outline:
 - a. State the problem/topic (why you personally are concerned).
 - b. Describe the problem in a way that makes it more real for the reader.
 - c. State the solution, both generally and specifically.
 - d. Wrap it up with the final why-again, the more personal the better. A single well-written sentence can win over your audience.

Send the Letter

Follow up with the opinion editor to be sure she or he received your letter, that it meets their requirements and to ask when they are planning to print it.

Tips on follow up calls to opinion editors

1. Call as soon as possible after the editor would have received the material.
2. Use pleasant persistence to speak with the right person. Don't stop at the receptionist or secretary. Create enough urgency about your letter that you get through to the specific reporter or editor who will decide whether or not to print your piece.
3. Provide the editor with specific local info and urgency. And have a few choice sound bites ready. In addition to giving them context for the problem and our campaign, focus your conversation on why this issue is relevant to their readers.
4. Get specific feedback and or a specific commitment from the reporter. If s/he doesn't want to print the letter, find out why and what adjustments to make to get it printed.
5. If they agree to print it, find out when you can expect to see it in the paper.



Take notes on your conversation and update your media tracking forms- the reporter/editors interests aren't likely to change in the near future.

SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release
May 27, 2007

Daniel Kessler 202.111.3333
Steve Smith 202.222.1111

Thousands March Globally With Greenpeace for Whale Protection
Celebrities Join Anchorage March as International Whaling Commission Meeting Begins

What: Thousands of people in dozens of countries will march today to call for whale protection as the International Whaling Commission (IWC) starts its annual meeting.

Where: 1 Anchorage Square
Anchorage, AK

When: 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM Press Availability
1:00 PM to 4:00 PM Event
4:00 PM to 5:00 PM Aerial Art Exhibition

Featuring: "Heroes" star Hayden Panettiere, Stephen Colletti, host of MTV's "Total Request Live," Esai Morales of "NYPD Blue" and the Save the Whales Again campaign, Australian surfer Dave Rastovich and artist Howie Cooke.

Vision, video, photos, report information
Dkessle@greenpeace.org.

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Greenpeace is the leading independent campaigning organization that uses peaceful direct action and creative communication to expose global environmental problems and to promote solutions that are essential to a green and peaceful future.



SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Date of release

For Immediate Release
May 27, 2007

Contact name and cellphone

Daniel Kessler 202.111.3333
Steve Smith 202.222.1111

Headline in bold. Strong action verbs. No acronyms.

Sub-header in italics

Thousands March Globally With Greenpeace For Whale Protection
Celebrities Join Anchorage March as International Whaling Commission Meeting Begins

Lead paragraph tells you what happened. Most important info is up front. Simple and clear

Anchorage – Thousands of people in dozens of countries marched today to call for whale protection as the International Whaling Commission (IWC) starts its annual meeting, part of Greenpeace’s “Big Blue March” taking place in over 50 cities.

Second paragraph is the lead quote. Punchy, concise, contains your frame. Short and sweet.

“The fact that so many people across the globe have come together in a common cause is a loud and clear warning to the Commissioners in Alaska that they must not fail the whales.” Greenpeace International Executive Director, Gerd Leipold commented from the Buenos Aires march in Argentina.

In Anchorage, venue for the IWC meeting, the parade was led by whale campaigners, “Heroes” star Hayden Panettiere, Stephen Colletti, host of MTV’s “Total Request Live,” Esai Morales of “NYPD” Blue and the Save the Whales Again campaign, Australian surfer Dave Rastovich and artist Howie Cooke.

The March ended with a human aerial art event in downtown Anchorage, the culmination of a series of art events, which began in Mexico last week.

More background info and quotes. Note that each quote could be understood by an 8th grader—No jargon!

Caught in nets, hit by ships, choked on plastic bags, poisoned by pollution and starved because of changes in food supply due to the impacts of global warming – hundreds of thousands of whales die every year in the oceans. Over the coming week, IWC delegates from more than seventy nations will spend only a couple of hours discussing these threats, and the rest of the meeting debating how, where and why to hunt whales, whether under the guise of science or simply against the regulations of the Commission.

“With so many other factors impacting whale populations worldwide, it is incredible that the IWC is still entertaining the idea of debating commercial whaling,” said Karen Sac, Greenpeace USA whales project leader, who is attending the IWC meeting. “The IWC delegates need to make a commitment this year to modernize the Commission, seriously address the increasing range of threats to whales, and become a body that works for the whales and not the whalers.”

Gives reporters a heads-up on the next step in the drumbeat. Shows that this is an on-going story.

The IWC meeting runs from May 28th-31st.

Vision, video, photos, report information
Dkessle@greenpeace.org.

The ### sign shows that this is the end of the release

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Greenpeace is the leading independent campaigning organization that uses peaceful direct action and creative communication to expose global environmental problems and to promote solutions that are essential to a green and peaceful future.

Mission Statement to identify the organization.