

Working with the Media

Working with the Media: Overview

The news media shape the agenda at every level of policymaking, and this is more true today than ever before. Unless your organization's issues are in the media, they might as well not exist to the general public. If your campaign fails to get favorable coverage in the media, it will often fail. On the bright side, getting your message out via the media can help your issue if enough people pay attention, are inundated with a repeated message, or take direct, immediate action. This section is designed to help activists and grassroots organizations work effectively with the media to champion their cause.

Successful media coverage ordinarily does not just *happen*. Good, sustained media coverage is a prized possession that usually can be achieved only through sophisticated strategies, including carefully crafted and targeted messages, cultivating relationships with reporters, monitoring the media even when your issues are not being covered, and committed resource allocation from the organization.

While environmental opponents fully utilize the power of the media to persuade the public, the environmental community has traditionally underplayed or ignored this need. Larger environmental non-profits have learned the hard way that a well-crafted media strategy is a must. Smaller organizations and individual activists, however, can learn from these strategies and implement them on a smaller, less costly scale.

How Do You Get the News?

Think for a moment about the various ways in which you get your information each day. Perhaps you:

- Read the local daily paper over breakfast.
- Listen to National Public Radio in the car on the way to work.
- Get informational emails from the conservation organizations of which you are a member.
- Check out the CNN website at lunch to see what's going on in the U.S. and beyond.
- Pick up a copy of your city's free weekly paper after work.
- Watch a local station's evening newscast on TV after dinner.
- Read a political magazine that you subscribe to, such as *TIME* or *Newsweek*, before going to bed.

If this scenario sounds anything like your typical day, then it is easy to see how much information we can receive from a wide variety of media sources. In today's mediafrenzied world, there are more opportunities for telling your story than ever before.

Identifying the Media in Your Community

In large metropolitan areas, the amount of media available to you is seemingly endless. There are multiple media contacts at daily and weekly newspapers, as well as community newspapers and radio and television stations. Smaller cities have fewer publications and television and radio stations and, therefore, fewer media contacts. All communities have some media outlets.

Here is a list of some possible media vehicles that you can contact to carry your message to various target audiences:

- State or city wire news services
- Daily newspapers, which include environment-oriented editors and reporters assigned to the local and business sections of the paper
- Weekly newspapers
- Specialized, ethnic, and minority newspapers
- Radio talk shows
- Radio news departments
- Television talk shows
- Television news departments
- Cable television programs
- Newsletters (clubs and organizations, corporate, etc.)
- College and university newspapers
- Association publications
- Cable access channels
- The Internet, including media outlets with Websites

Media Exercise

Brainstorm all of the media outlets available to you in your community. Then try and determine who some of the audiences are for the different types of media outlets. It's helpful to do this with other members of your organization.

It is vital that you know who the media are in your community and how they work. They can bring incredible attention to your cause or act as your opposition's biggest supporter, depending on how you work with them. The media wields a lot of power, especially in recent years as it has infiltrated into people's everyday lives. The media informs, enrages, and educates people and, in some cases, encourages them to take action.

The media also works quickly, getting its message out to a large audience in a short period of time. It is cost-effective and extremely beneficial to all types of groups, but most importantly to those groups with less money; big corporations, after all, can buy TV time and have huge staffs dedicated to their public relations.

Types of News and Myths About the Media

There are three general types of news:

1. **Hard News.** This is the breaking news, which is happening *right now*. The story is not only timely, but immediate. To get immediate coverage for this type of news, it pays to have some established relationships with reporters.

Example: Your organization files a lawsuit to appeal a development that will harm a salmon-bearing stream.

2. **Features.** Features are considered “soft news,” and timeliness is less important. These stories give background on current events. Features have longer lead times than hard news, so this is the type of news you will usually “pitch” to reporters. Many environmental causes target feature news for coverage of their issues, because features often focus on the “news behind the news.”

Example: An in-depth look at shade-grown coffee and its benefits to migratory birds that pass through the backyards of Puget Sound.

3. **Editorials.** Editorials are stories based on a particular opinion about the issue and are usually developed by an editorial staff. They include op-eds, which are written by an expert who is not on the media staff. The op-ed gives readers different sides of the issue, so they are better informed.

Example: An op-ed by your spokesperson on why voters should reject a road-building initiative that will be on the next ballot.

Myths About the Media

Free media is actually free.

This is definitely not true, which is why we now call it *earned* media. This includes things like op-eds, letters to the editor, and coverage for your issues in news stories. It takes a lot of time to arrange “free” media. In particular, organizations must invest time and resources to train spokespeople. However, free media has tangible benefits and is inexpensive compared to advertising.

Press coverage just happens.

Occasionally press coverage does just happen, but your issue will derive more benefit from planned press coverage. If you do get a call from a reporter to participate in a story, it will still take time and thought to plan what you want to say, what image you want to project, etc. Unless you have planned for it, you might not be prepared, or you might not receive press coverage at all.

Want media coverage? Hold a press conference.

There are far too many press conferences for reporters to attend (for example, there are over 80 each day in Washington D.C. alone). Press conferences are best suited for breaking news, such as a reaction to a very important issue that deserves same-day press coverage or the release of a report with important findings. Don't hold a press conference if a press release will do just as well.

Choosing a Spokesperson

The most important media decision your organization will make is the selection of a spokesperson. It is best to have one individual as a spokesperson, who will communicate the message of your issue and other information in interviews with reporters, radio and television interviews and news coverage, press conferences, speaking engagements, debates, etc. Having an official spokesperson ensures that there will be uniformity in the information that is given out to the media and the public. This one person needs considerable practice and experience to become comfortable and effective with public speaking and dealing with the media.

The media should know who your spokesperson is and that he/she has the authority to speak for your organization. Even if you have a spokesperson, reporters often prefer to talk to the person in charge of an organization. For this reason, your executive director and/or others in top management positions should be trained and prepared for giving interviews as well. This will ensure that they deliver the same message to the media as your spokesperson and reflect well on the organization.

It is important to remember that working with the media is a team effort. A successful media strategy involves all of your organization's most creative people.

Here are some points to consider when selecting a spokesperson for your issue or organization.

- Are they comfortable doing press interviews and speaking in public?
- Do they have a thorough knowledge of, and experience with, your organization and its issues and message?
- Are they articulate? Can they communicate clearly and to the point?
- Do they possess an attractive, outgoing personality? Are they warm, personable, and relaxed in public situations?
- Do they have a clear and pleasant speaking voice?
- Are they willing to make the time this job will demand?
- Do they have the poise necessary to handle awkward or difficult questions in an interview situation?

Creating a Media Contact List

You need a media contact list if you want to generate media coverage. It should be expanded and updated regularly. At a minimum, your list should consist of all or most of the following:

- Two or three television stations
- One or two daily papers
- One alternative weekly
- A few radio programs, including a handful of talk-radio shows
- Local NPR station
- Community or neighborhood newspapers

Starting Your List

There are several ways to develop a good media list. If you are starting from scratch, begin with the phone book, or check your local library for media reference books. Read the newspapers, listen to radio shows, and watch the news to find reporters who interest you (e.g., those who cover environmental issues). Doing this media research will not only help you confirm the names of these reporters (as well as editors and publishers), but also give you an idea of the tone and content of coverage by the news sources in your area. You can also call the other organizations you work with and ask if they will share their media contact lists with you to get you started. Some statewide organizations (such as WEAVE) have media contact lists that they share with local groups and activists. If you get another organization's media list, be sure to tailor the list to your own needs and establish your own contacts.

Adding Detail to Your List

Now that you have done some research, here are some tips on adding detail to your list:

- **Contacts.** Make sure you have at least one contact name (a reporter or editor) for each news source, along with the fax number, phone number, and email address for that person.
- **Details.** Fill in information on the specific reporter(s) you know are most interested in your issue. (For example, what time of day do they prefer to be called).
- **Update.** Follow any changes in the reporters' beats, or news source's formats. Schedule updates of your media list so you don't end up approaching the wrong news source or inappropriate contacts!
- **Annotate.** Once you start working with a media contact, note any important information you find out about the news source and the reporters. Your notes should

include their deadlines, a reporter's personal likes and dislikes, articles the reporter has written about your organization's issues, etc.

Creating Categories for Your List

If you have a big media contact list, divide it into categories so that you can properly target a geographic area, type of reporter, or type of news source. Here are descriptions of some recommended categories:

Types of News Source

There are several different kinds of news outlets, but these are some of the most common:

- News (wire) service
- Newspaper syndicate (represents several regional/local papers)
- Daily newspapers
- Weekly newspapers
- Magazines/monthlies
- Newsletters
- Local television stations
- Television shows
- Online
- Local radio stations
- Radio shows

Types of News

- Regional/local/neighborhood
- National news
- Talk radio
- Alternative news
- Commentary



Media Kits

When you send a press release or pitch a story to get news coverage, it's a good idea to include a media kit to provide the appropriate background and supporting materials for your issue and your position on that issue. But most media kits end up only providing information, when it is important for them to convey *messages*. All of the materials in your kit (facts, statistics, quotes, etc.) should be organized in a clear and concise way that supports the key themes you want to highlight.

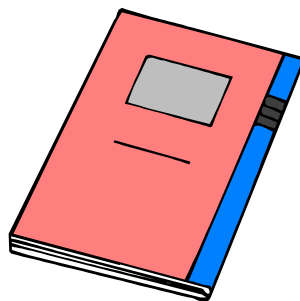
Primarily, media kits are used to provide concise background information to the reporters who interview you. But you can also distribute them at press conferences and hand them out at editorial board meetings (i.e., any time you meet the media.)

Your media kit might include:

- A press release or media advisory
- A fact sheet that describes in greater detail what the problem is and what's the best solution. A question-and-answer format works well for fact sheets.
- Visuals, such as a map of the site you are protecting, photos (glossy black-and-white is best), photos on a disk, or reproducible charts and graphs
- Carefully selected newspaper clippings related to the issue
- A few quotes. It is good to include quotes from people who are not affiliated with your organization, such as experts, local celebrities, or "real" people who share your concerns and can help amplify your message.
- Speaker biographies, which are one- or two-sentence blurbs for each speaker at your event or press conference, including their name, association, area of expertise, and all contact information. These bios give reporters some background on the speakers so they can quote them or arrange interviews with them.
- An invitation for a tour of the site you are working to protect.

Media Kit Tip

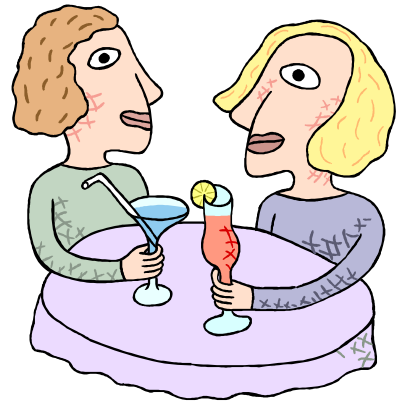
Reporters will respond most positively to a media kit that is professionally presented, focused, and organized. Avoid overwhelming them with too much or unnecessary information.



Establishing Relationships with Reporters

Cultivating personal relationships with your local reporters is crucial to receiving regular, favorable press coverage. Some organizations don't even bother with press releases; they just call reporters, tell them what's happening, and the reporters write stories. The reporters know from past experience that these organizations are credible sources of interesting news that is worth covering.

Beat reporters cover a specific topic for the daily and weekly papers, TV stations, radio stations, or wire services. Choose to establish relationships with reporters whose beats are related to your issue (environment, outdoor recreation, natural resources, etc.). Beat reporters change assignments frequently, so you need to update their information on your media contact list on a regular basis.



You don't need to have a hot story to pitch to the reporter the first time you meet with them. The idea is to establish a genuine relationship with the reporter and educate them by giving them compelling background on your organization's key issues and its position on those issues.

Steps for Successful Relationships

1. Start by calling a reporter and scheduling an appointment to brief him/her on your issue. Ask for no more than half an hour of their time. If you give them plenty of advance notice, they will probably be happy to oblige.
2. Be aware of the schedules and deadlines that newsrooms have *before* you call them. For example:
 - Morning newspapers often have a noon deadline for the next day's paper, so don't call an hour before at 11AM and expect to talk to someone.
 - Radio newsrooms are busiest during the morning and afternoon rush hours (6AM-9AM and 3PM-6PM). A great time to call almost any newsroom is about 9:30 in the morning.
 - Television newsrooms are extremely busy during the two hours right before a newscast.
3. The best place to meet is a site relevant to your issue, such as a natural habitat area or salmon-bearing stream, so the reporter can begin to get a firsthand understanding of the issues.

4. If the reporter tells you he/she is extremely busy and cannot meet at your suggested location, be ready and willing to meet them at their office or a nearby coffee shop.
5. During your initial meeting with a reporter, give him/her a snapshot of the issue you are working on and a preview of any upcoming milestones (such as a court appeal) or events your organization is sponsoring. Ask the reporter for advice on getting press coverage for your issue.
6. Credibility is the key to developing and maintaining your relationship with a reporter. To maintain credibility with the reporter, always know your facts and don't call unless you have a good story.

Pitching Stories to Reporters

The following tips are primarily for soliciting coverage from reporters for breaking news, but much of this advice applies to building relationships with reporters as well.

- Before calling a reporter, write out what you are going to say and practice it on someone who is not a member of your organization to see if they understand what you are saying and think it is interesting.
- Ask yourself, “Why should this reporter be interested?” Your pitch should answer the question. You can make it more interesting by including any local or regional angle to your issue or by highlighting the economic or scientific angle instead of doing a straight “environmental” pitch.
- Reporters are attracted to bad news. Your pitch should point out how your issue affects *people*, such as their health, income levels, or personal lives.
- If you don't have a relationship with the reporter, you will need to get his/her attention in about 30 seconds, so cut to the chase.
- Your pitch should be simple, interesting, short, and clear. However, your background knowledge of the issue must be extensive, so that you can answer their questions once you have solicited their interest.
- Be prepared. Have your talking points and any pertinent information in front of you, including statistics and spokesperson information, so you don't sound disorganized.
- Be specific. Don't say, “We are doing really interesting things that I want to tell you about.” Instead say, “We have a new program that reaches out to inner-city teenagers to teach them how to be advocates for the environment.”
- Be timely. Tie your pitch to something that is already in the news, if possible.
- Be courteous. If you catch the reporter at a bad time and he/she can't talk, be respectful—don't start in on your pitch. Save it for later when you have their full attention. Ask them if there is a good time to call them back.
- Don't speak off the cuff. Pitch calls are not “off the record.” If you don't know the answer to a question, just say so and offer to call them back with the answer.
- If your conversation goes well, offer to provide additional information and background materials, or to escort them on a tour of the site you are working to protect. Reporters like exclusives; if you offer an exclusive, don't talk to other reporters about it!

Doing Interviews with Reporters

If you send out a really good press release and/or pitch a compelling story to a reporter, they will probably want to do an interview. This is when all your hard work can really pay off. If this makes you squirm, you are not alone. Some people start pouring sweat at the thought of being interviewed! The bottom line is that successful interviews come from practice.

Know Your Message Inside and Out

Successful interviews are message-driven. Your spokesperson will need to know what your key messages are. Experts and others you arrange to be interviewed for the story will need to know these key messages as well.

To have successful interviews, you need to answer questions in a way that supports your messages. One of your goals is to have the quotes included in the published story support your main messages. If they don't, then you are "off message," and the interview may be wasted, or worse, the wrong message might get transmitted. Interviews are one of the best opportunities to get your message out, so be prepared!

Messages themselves are not necessarily sound bites, but rather ideas you are trying to get across. However, messages should be reinforced in an interview by sound bites, pithy phrases, statistics, and anecdotes. *See the "Message Development" section of this Toolkit for more information on crafting your message.*

Preparing for the Interview

Get answers to these questions *before* the interview so you are better prepared:

1. What type of news source is conducting the interview—print, TV, or radio?
2. Does the news source tend to have a liberal or conservative viewpoint? This might be particularly relevant for radio talk shows or alternative newspapers.
3. What is the interview about? Is your issue the main focus?
4. Who else is being interviewed for the story?
5. Will the story reach your target audience? You shouldn't necessarily turn down an interview if it doesn't, but you don't have to make it a priority.
6. What is the interview format—is it one-on-one, panel, debate, or another format?
7. If it is a broadcast interview, will it be live, edited on tape, or is it a call-in?
8. Where will the interview take place?

9. How long will the interview last?

Interviewing Tips

- **Practice!** Do a “mock interview” with a friend or co-worker. Try to anticipate the reporter’s questions prior to the interview. Practice staying on message.
- **Don’t wear white to a TV interview.** Blue or green works best. Also avoid patterns and stripes. If the interview is taking place in a natural setting, dress appropriately.
- **Smile** when you’re on camera!
- **At the beginning of the interview, take it from the top.** Even though you will have sent advance materials, don’t expect that the reporter has read them thoroughly or really knows that much about your organization/campaign.
- **Don’t wait for the reporter to ask the right questions.** You know more about your issue than he/she does, so you should have your own agenda for getting your message out. If they aren’t asking the right questions to get to the heart of your story, then volunteer the information.
- **Don’t make things up.** Don’t ever lie to a reporter! If you don’t know the answer to a question, say you don’t know. If possible, tell the reporter you will get back to him/her with the information.
- **Anticipate tough questions.** Try to imagine what people who are skeptical of your viewpoint will ask or say and prepare appropriate answers.
- **Speak in plain language.** Never use jargon or acronyms. Your language should be both sophisticated and understandable.
- **Know your opponents' viewpoints** and have counterpoints ready. It is rare for the media to only report one side of the story. Your opponents are probably being interviewed, too, so dismantle their arguments in your talking points.
- **Speak in complete sentences.** This is very important for TV and radio interviews. The reporter is looking for sound bites that will stand on their own. For example, if the reporter asks, “Why do you support this tax levy?” don’t say, “Because our parks need more funding.” Say instead, “We support this tax levy because our parks need more funding.”
- **Pause briefly between sentences**, so editors can pull quotes from your interview.
- **Don’t answer personal questions.** Just say, “That’s personal,” and move on.
- **Don’t say “no comment,”** because it implies you are guilty of something.

The Press Release

A press release is the best way get media coverage in many cases, but there are many cases when it is not. If you send too many press releases that are not newsworthy, then your releases may be ignored. On the other hand, never miss a legitimate opportunity for press attention and be prepared to move quickly when the time comes. As with all media coverage, timeliness is key.

Do write a press release to:

- Respond to a recent development with your issue, or to announce a reaction or position
- Release new data on a conservation issue
- Expose a controversial element of a current piece of legislation
- Provide context or background for breaking news
- Announce a newsworthy event and invite the press to cover it. (But remember, not all of your organization's events are newsworthy.)
- Release polling data which shows strong support for your position
- Give a local perspective on a national issue, including quotes from local activists
- Highlight an important event for your issue, such as a public hearing
- Announce a lawsuit your organization has filed

Don't write a press release in these cases:

- To announce your organization's monthly membership meeting
- To get news coverage on a "feature" issue or soft news; it's better to send a media advisory or pitch the story to a reporter
- When your organization receives a grant to fund a program
- When your organization gets a new president/board member/staff person
- To launch your new website or newsletter; it's better to send a postcard
- Because you haven't sent one in awhile

How to Write a Press Release

Press releases should be written like a news story. In other words, they should tell not sound biased or editorialized. Do not include your opinions or viewpoints unless they are in quotation marks. Use a catchy headline to hook reporters and include all the facts a reporter will need to write the story.

If the press release is going to get coverage, the reporter will probably call you for additional information, so be prepared. Include a quote or two; one from your spokesperson and possibly one from a source outside your organization that provides a different angle or more credibility with your target audience. Anyone who is quoted in the press release should know they are being quoted, and the release should include their contact information on it.

Write in the inverted pyramid format. This means starting with the compelling conclusion and a pithy quote, followed by facts that support the conclusion. End with the least important information. At the end of your press release, include a sentence or two about your organization and a reference, such as a website, for more information.

There is a standard format for a press release, and it's wise to stick to it. Releases should be sent on your organization's letterhead with the date of release and contact person's name and phone number at the top. *See the sample press release in this section.*

Send your press release to a specific reporter whenever possible. If you don't have a relationship with a reporter, send it to the beat reporter assigned to the relevant issue (such as the environment). If you don't know who that is, study the paper's coverage of environmental issues and note who the authors are. The most widely-accepted method for sending press releases is via fax, but you may also hand-deliver or email a press release if it is okay with the reporter. Follow up with a morning phone call to the reporter (remember to practice your follow-up message before calling).

[Press Release Example]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Tuesday, August 15, 2000

CONTACT: Jane Landers, Media Services
(206) 555-1212, ext. 28

Advocates for Threatened Migratory Birds Praise Starbucks for Pledge to Offer of Shade-Grown Coffee

Point to New Study That Affirms Role of Shade Coffee Farms as Critical Refuge for Migratory Birds

Seattle – Today advocates for migratory birds praised the announcement by Starbucks of the company’s intention to sell a brand of coffee that is grown in the shade in Mexico, specifically, from the El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve in Chiapas.

“Rewarding coffee farms that have retained their forest canopy by buying their beans is the best thing Starbucks and millions of American coffee consumers can do to protect our endangered migratory songbirds,” said Helen Ross, Conservation Coordinator for the Audubon Society’s Seattle Chapter and a leader of the Northwest Shade Coffee Campaign.

According to ornithological experts, migratory songbirds are today threatened by the destruction of their summer habitat here in North America, and their winter habitat in Central and South America. Their numbers are declining rapidly, and some species have gone extinct.

A peer-reviewed study published in the July 2000 Quarterly Journal of Ornithology, *The Auk*, affirmed the role shade coffee farms can play in providing critical refuge to threatened populations of migratory birds. The study found that shade coffee plantations, even if they were fragmented and provided smaller than typical winter home ranges, provided high quality habitat for birds. In addition, the researchers found that birds competed intensively for this habitat, further evidence that shade coffee plantations contain enough food for birds to maintain their body condition up to the time of spring migration.

According to Russell Greenberg of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, a growing list of studies indicate that shade coffee plantations provide critical refuge for birds, and the habitat in these plantations is ripe with abundant food sources, nectar, fruit and insects supplied by shade trees. This is important for conservation biology because shade coffee farms are disappearing rapidly, yielding to sun coffee mono-cultures, which need large amounts of pesticides and fertilizer.

“While human-managed farmland can never replace reserves of native and old-growth forest habitats on which many species depend for survival, shade coffee plantations have the unusual ability to

(more)

provide both work and subsistence for local people, and habitat that supports a diversity of species including threatened migratory birds,” said Greenberg.

Many coffee shops across the country have been selling shade grown coffee for several years. Seattle Audubon’s Ross commented again, “Clearly there’s a huge opportunity for coffee companies and consumers to help protect endangered birds and support sustainable farming practices. Dozens of companies have already made a strong commitment to shade grown coffee and believe that decision is good for business.”

Christopher London of the Consumer’s Choice Council said that developing certification standards for shade coffee is a complicated endeavor, but will go a long way toward helping assure companies and consumers who buy shade coffee that it does in fact provide a conservation benefit. London also praised Starbucks for its move to source beans that help protect the El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve by rewarding sustainable farming practices, “Because of their high profile worldwide, Starbucks can have significant influence in expanding the market for shade coffee.”

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For additional information about shade coffee, market trends, certification, and coffee’s link to migratory songbirds, contact the following experts:

**Helen Ross, Conservation Coordinator,
Seattle Audubon Society 206-523-8243 x.13
www.seattleaudubon.org/coffee**

**Dr Russell Greenberg, Head, Migratory Bird Center,
Smithsonian Institution, National Zoological Park
202-673-4908
<http://web2.si.edu.smbc/coffee.htm>**

**Christopher London
Sustainable Coffee Program Director, Consumer Choice Council
202-785-1950
www.consumerscouncil.org**

The Media Advisory

When you want to announce an event that you would like the media to attend, such as a press conference or field trip, send a media advisory instead of a press release. Your media advisory should give basic information about the event—who, what, where, when, and why. Unlike a press release, which gives the reporter all the detailed information they need to write a story, a media advisory shouldn't give too much away or the reporter won't need to attend!

Tips for Creating a Media Advisory

- Keep the advisory to one page only.
- Include a headline. This will make or break the advisory—include the most important information in the headline and make it punchy.
- Write a short description of the issue and the event. If the event will include visuals, creating a photo opportunity for the media, tell them about it. For example, “Citizens and life-size puppets of spotted owls will carry large signs as they march to the steps of the Capitol Building.”
- Faxing your media advisory to the newsroom is still the best way to send it to the media. Be sure to include the name and title of the reporter you are trying to reach. Send it out on your organization's letterhead.
- List the speakers who will attend the event.
- Use the following format for the advisory:
 - ◇ In the top left corner, type “Media Advisory.”
 - ◇ Beneath “Media Advisory,” type the date.
 - ◇ List the names and numbers of two contacts for your organization in the top right corner.
 - ◇ Type “###,” centered, at the end of the advisory
- Send it out 3-5 days before the event.

An example of a media advisory is included in this section.

[Media Advisory Example]

MEDIA ALERT:
Tuesday, November 21, 2000

CONTACT: Barbara Smith, Media Services
(206) 555-1212, ext 20

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES A YEAR MAKE?

Northwest and National Experts Weigh in on Environmental Progress and Challenges at One Year Anniversary of Seattle WTO Protests

One year after the WTO Ministerial meeting in Seattle provoked historic protests and raised public awareness of the relationship between traded goods and the environment, many businesses are making changes in the way they produce and market their products, rising to meet consumer demand for environmentally friendly “eco-labeled” products. Some in the private sector are responding more quickly than government to calls by the public for increased accountability, social and environmental responsibility. Experts on trade and the environment believe that the WTO and current trade rules still threaten this trend, and our ability to commit to producing, marketing and consuming environmentally-sound goods. Schedule an on-site or phone interview with one of the following experts to address these issues.

MEDIA AVAILABILITY

WHEN: Tuesday, November 21, 2000 until Friday, December 1, 2000.

WHO: Local
John Ross, EarthCare
WTO legal and environmental issues
Helen Dutchess, West Coast Audubon Society
Consumer labeling
Bob DeWayne, EcoAlliance
Wood product certification and Northwest forests

National
John Reynolds, Sierra Club
WTO, trade and environmental issues
Eileen Douglas, TradePartners
Fair-trade supporters
Ronda Williams, Trees of the Pacific
Trade and forests

To set up an in-person or phone interview with any of the listed experts or local eco-friendly retailers, please contact Barbara Smith at Media Services, (206) 555-1212, ext 20. WTO-related background materials and fact sheets are available on the [Media Services website](#).

VIDEO B-ROLL footage of forests, sea turtles, and shade coffee farms is also available upon request from Media Services.

The Press Conference

Press conferences are generally held to respond to breaking news or to issue a report. A media consultant once said, “Do not hold a press conference unless you are either naked or on fire.” He was being facetious, of course, but the underlying sentiment in his statement is true: Don’t hold a press conference if other media techniques, such as a media advisory, press release, or pitch to a reporter, will get your issue covered. That said, here is how to effectively hold a press conference:

- To allow reporters time to meet their deadlines, hold your press conference between 10AM and 3PM (the earlier the better). The best days are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.
- If you are holding a press conference to react to a breaking story, do it right away to avoid becoming “yesterday’s news.”
- Alert the press to your conference by sending out a media advisory that briefly describes the event and provides general information about it—who, what, when, where, and why. Also include a name they can contact for more information. Follow up with phone calls so you know who and how many to expect.
- Try holding your press conference at a location that provides a relevant backdrop to the story. For example, if your press conference is about the loss of urban habitat, hold it in a city park. Make sure there will be minimum noise from cars, trains, or airplanes at your location.
- Choose a location with ample parking that is convenient for the media.
- The location should have access to three-pronged electrical outlets and enough room for the press to set up lights, cameras, microphones, etc. Make sure you know where the outlets are.
- Know who is coming so you can provide the right number of chairs (you don’t want too many empty chairs).
- Leave space between the podium and the first row of chairs. There should be two or three rows of chairs beyond what is required for reporters.
- Pack the extra chairs with supporters and friends. This will make the room look full and your issue look interesting. Have your supporters identify themselves with buttons in support of your issue.
- Put the podium or table against a plain background (or one that is not too busy). Or, use a simple banner with your logo. Anything too distracting will draw attention away from the speakers.
- Have three speakers at the most. Your full presentation should last no more than 10-15 minutes, with time for reporters’ questions afterwards, so limit speaking times accordingly. Designate one person to moderate.
- Provide refreshments for the attendees, such as shade-grown coffee, juice, and cookies.
- Set up a table at the entrance to the event. Ask all members of the press to sign in and give them all media kits. Include materials in the kit that will interest reporters and help them write stories, such as press releases, photographs, copies of speakers’ statements, fact sheets, reports, or brochures.
- Seclude speakers from the press until the conference begins. Interviews should be conducted after the presentation.
- Have someone from your organization take pictures of the presenters and the audience during the press conference. You can use the pictures later on in your own publications.
- If possible, videotape the conference so you can critique the presentation later.

Writing and Publishing an Op-Ed

Opinion/editorials, called “op-eds,” are articles that appear opposite a newspaper’s editorial page. Some op-eds are written by the paper’s own columnists or syndicated columnists, but many are written by local citizens, policymakers, experts, community leaders, and other people like you. Writing an op-ed gives you the opportunity to communicate your message and viewpoints in greater detail than you can in a letter to the editor. Op-eds also have more credibility. They are good tools for influencing local decision-makers and getting a message out to a large portion of the general public.

Creating a Successful Op-Ed

Do Your Homework

If you haven’t written an op-ed before, you can get started by reading them on a regular basis. Notice what makes op-eds controversial, provocative, compelling, and current. Does your issue have these qualities? Decide which newspaper you want to approach for your piece (choose one that will best reach your audience). Read its opinion section frequently to get to know the editorial direction of the paper. Call the paper to confirm the name of the editorial page editor and find out what the criteria are for submissions. Find out whether or not it publishes guest op-eds, how frequently, on what subjects, and by what types of authors. Also find out how they prefer op-eds be submitted.

Be Timely

Timing is the most important factor in deciding to submit an op-ed. Your piece should be tied to a current event, such as an upcoming controversial vote in the state legislature, the release of a report, a holiday or anniversary, an event in your community, etc. Given the long lag-time between the submission of an op-ed and its publication, submit your op-ed immediately if, for example, you are expecting the county council to vote on an issue in four weeks.

Follow Some Writing Guidelines

- Your piece should be between 600-750 words long (800 is the absolute maximum). Newspaper editors will reject it if it is too long.
- Write about only *one issue* and make *no more than four* key points.
- Begin with a surprising fact or a story—something that will catch the attention of both the editor and the readers. The first paragraph should introduce what you are going to cover in the rest of the piece.
- Make the piece personal—include some of your own experiences and relate the issue back to the reader.

- Emphasize the issue's significance to the reader. Use local statistics.
- Mix short and long sentences, but use mostly short sentences. Paragraphs should be 2-4 sentences in length.
- Use plain language, omitting all jargon and acronyms, or people won't know what you're talking about.
- Avoid the passive voice. For example, instead of "The Growth Management Act will be violated by this development," write, "This development violates the Growth Management Act."
- Double-space your piece and remove any fancy formatting.
- Give it a title (though it might not be used) and include your name, a short bio, the date, and a word count at the top (under the title).

Submitting Your Op-Ed

Once the piece is written, send it off with a cover memo to the correct person (the opinion editor or op-ed editor). The cover memo is short and should include the author's name and contact information, as well as the significance and timeliness of the piece. Send it overnight express and/or fax or email it (depending on what the paper prefers).

You must follow up your submission with a phone call, no more than two mornings later. Editors are even busier than you are, so keep your call short and to the point. Ask if they have received the piece and whether or not it is under consideration. If they reject the piece, don't get defensive. You can take your piece to another paper. If their response is good, suggest a meeting, or ask if there is a reporter who should get a copy as background on the issue.

Another way to submit an op-ed is to pitch it to the editor first. Explain what you want to write, tying it to a current issue or a piece that the paper has recently published. When pitching op-eds, you might get a positive response, so be prepared to fax, hand deliver, or e-mail the op-ed to him/her right away. As always with the media, timing is everything.

Letters to the Editor

The “Letters to the Editor” is one of the most widely-read sections of your local newspaper. The LTE column presents an ideal forum for reaching and educating a large number of people about your conservation issues. In addition, decision-makers and elected officials often read the LTE sections of local papers to gauge their constituents’ opinions on a wide variety of issues. Getting letters published is easy, if you follow a few simple guidelines.



Tips for Effective Letter-Writing

- Know the paper’s policy on letters to the editor. Find out where and how to submit your letter by calling or looking up the guidelines on the newspaper’s Website.
- Be as clear and concise as possible. Letters are usually limited to between 200-250 words in length, though some papers will publish longer letters.
- Always include your name, address, and phone number. The newspaper will verify that you wrote the letter before publishing it.
- Type or legibly write your letter on only one side of the paper—double spaced is best.
- Discuss only one topic per letter; try to keep it to 3-4 paragraphs.
- Be timely. Connect it to a specific article, editorial, or another letter, or tie your letter in to a current event or anniversary. In your letter, name the article you are writing about and the date it appeared in the newspaper.
- Be prompt. Don’t wait two weeks to respond to a story—write your letter right away. You can respond to an article the very day it was published using email or fax.
- Use local statistics in your letter and let the readers know how the issue impacts them and their quality of life.
- Write with conviction. Use common-sense language that people can understand.
- State relevant facts, but also include humor, wit, irony, or passion in your letters.
- Unless you are an organization leader writing on its behalf, your letter will carry more weight if you do not identify yourself with an organization. In fact, the paper will not print letters if they suspect they are part of a manufactured campaign.
- Include people in your letter by using personal stories. If you are a parent concerned about safe drinking water, say so.
- Engage readers by asking direct questions that will force them to examine their own opinions.

- Ask readers to take action in the same way that you do when writing to legislators.
- Don't send the same letter to multiple papers.
- Your letter needs to be well-written in order to get published *and* to reflect positively on your viewpoints. If you are not comfortable with your writing ability, have someone critique and proofread your letter.
- If your letter doesn't get printed, don't get discouraged and don't give up. You can tweak the letter and re-submit it later when the issue comes up again.

[Letter to the Editor Example]

SOUND TRANSIT

Elevating the traffic is a workable solution

The headlong stampede of light-rail "tunnel vision" has slowed. If you're breathing a sigh of relief, don't.

Election-year mentality (vote for one only) infected transit planning in 2000. Replacing light rail with a freeway-only or bus-only agenda would be equally disastrous. A multifaceted system is essential.

We do need bottleneck relief on freeways, more park-and-ride centers, minibus routes to more neighborhoods, increased frequency of bus runs rather than bigger buses and transit schedules that coordinate local, regional and rapid transit. Perhaps we need segments of light rail.

Experts insist elevated transit is the only solution. Whether elevated rail, bus or monorail, any elevated system would be unfettered by stoplights, rush hours, traffic jams and accidents.

Monorail's advantages seem overwhelming: quieter, safer, more automated, less right-of-way expense, a tourist attraction, vistas, ease of travel and parking. Hmmm. Tourists paying for a system we all can use.

Fine-tune the system with rewards for use of public transit; add creative advertising and you've got a transit system as unique as our region's topography and people. Monorail: Remind our region's planners that we voted for it.

Bob Smythe
Bellevue