

Tips for Working with the Media

Reaching Out to the Media to Multiply Your Message

Want to reach out to as many as 250,000 people or more, letting them know about the effort to put “the common good” message back into the heart of our country’s political debate? Some sociologists say that each of us are part of “personal” networks that average, all together, about that many people—and that’s BEFORE you count the people you can reach through the daily print and broadcast media! *You can reach folks through publications that only you can alert to the story—because of the neighborhood where you live and the groups to which you already belong.* This works because folks in our culture like learning about these topics through stories told by people they are somehow connected to — like you!

We have provided tips in four areas:

1. **Media Outreach with the Daily Papers and Local Television and Radio Stations**
2. **Media Outreach with the Weekly/Neighborhood Papers and Broadcasting Stations**
3. **Media Outreach with Membership Publications**
4. **Miscellaneous Tips for Getting the Message Out Through the Media**

1. MEDIA OUTREACH WITH THE DAILY PAPERS AND LOCAL TELEVISION AND RADIO STATIONS

Identify a Spokesperson

- Identify a spokesperson from your group who is knowledgeable on the issue(s), articulate, available and comfortable with the media. Be prepared to give her or his phone number and email to media members.

News Releases

- Use a news release to announce coming events. News releases will often run if they get to the right person in time. Learn everyone’s deadline and to whom to address the release. Find out who covers the religion or politics beats, who has been covering specific campaigns or the upcoming election. Call or email the media outlet for information if you do not know.
- The best time to call reporters or editors is between 9 and 10am for newspapers. For TV news directors, send a short release about an event at least a week ahead of time. The day before or of the event, call again—as early as possible—and remind them of your event. Give the reporter or news director a quick run-down of the news item or event. If the individual seems interested, be prepared with background information (especially in writing) and offer them contacts.
- Always respond promptly when reporters request information and make sure your contact information is on any piece of paper or electronic document you use.

Press Conferences and Interviews

- If there is anything you can do to make the site visually interesting, it will help to draw TV coverage. Avoid the four-people-sitting-at-a-table-with-no-background set-up. Pick a site that ties into your issue. TV is usually only able to cover between 10am and 3pm so schedule accordingly. Try to feature a Web site for your group in the background.
- Be sure to have background materials, statements, contact information, etc., available in a press packets for reporters as soon as they arrive. Assign someone the responsibility of greeting and speaking with reporters.
- Give the individual being interviewed or presenting information some idea of what kind of questions to expect from reporters.
- Make sure that the spokesperson or person being interviewed mentions your group’s name and contact information, especially Web site, at least once and preferably more than once.
- Dress conservatively.
- If you’re being interviewed, look the interviewer in the eye. Speak to the interviewer not the camera.
- Tactfully correct inaccurate facts or misconceptions stated by the reporter. Don’t argue or appear hostile.
- Use short, concise answers and think before you speak.
- Flag important points: “The critical issues here is _____.”
- Give the same answer to repeated questions. Don’t get caught giving inconsistent answers. Repetition helps to make your point.
- Use sign-in sheets or otherwise make sure to get business cards and information about who covered your event.

Catholics Called to the Common Good

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Guidelines for Visiting Editors

- Find out the process for editorial development at your paper(s). Some papers have boards that review material; others assign editorial writers. Contact the editor's office to request a meeting. Arrange the visit in advance. Don't visit or call at deadline time. Mornings are usually best.
- Keep your visits short, 30-40 minutes maximum. Present your issue clearly and concisely.
- Present the local angle by tying your issue to local manifestations of that issue.
- Give them fact sheets, relevant background materials, and copies of other papers' editorials on your issue(s). Provide good contact information, including relevant Web sites, for any follow-up.
- Conclude your visit graciously. Thank them and offer to provide any additional information they may need.

2. MEDIA OUTREACH WITH THE WEEKLY/NEIGHBORHOOD PAPERS AND BROADCASTING STATIONS

This would include media outlets like college radio stations, diocesan papers, small town news, local Web sites, community radio, independent media, etc. These smaller media outlets are important to reach since right now they have a higher "per capita" readership rate than daily papers — AND they are easier to get to carry your story. Please remember that neighbors like reading about or hearing from other neighbors or people they know.

3. MEDIA OUTREACH WITH MEMBERSHIP PUBLICATIONS

This would include parish newsletters or bulletins, school papers, alumni publications, religious or professional organizations, or any media opportunity from an organization or association of which you are a member.

- You can send off a personalized press release to these personal networks, stressing your involvement with the issue.
- Follow up with a phone call—it's a good opportunity to ask if they want a speaker on the issue at their next function and for you to recommend yourself or another person.
- If it would be helpful, add a short cover note explaining that you are a member or former member of their organization and would like them to consider printing a story about your issue or event, etc.

MISCELLANEOUS TIPS FOR GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT THROUGH THE MEDIA

- Remember that, in a very important sense, you are doing them a favor by alerting them to an important story that they might otherwise miss—you're just helping them do their job.
- When you telephone or email to see if they got your press release, this is an opportunity to give a "pitch" about what you are doing and why it is important and interesting to both you and their readers. Give an example of how the readers are connected to the issue or the story.
- If the article does not appear at the time expected, call or email to find out when it might appear.
- Call, write or email a thank you to members of the media who cover you or show up for your event. Personal relationship make all the difference in getting media attention. This is a chance to build your media network and make contacts.