

Quick Tips for Working with the Media

Media Advisory: A media advisory is a one-page sheet that alerts reporters to an upcoming news event. It is sent out a few days before the event and is followed up with a phone call.

Keep it short. List the event, its participants, the date and location. Be sure to include the name and phone number of a contact person for the press. Briefly spell out the purpose of the event. Let broadcasters know if you'll have video or a live feed.

Offer a compelling preview. Write a strong headline and lead sentence that will pique a reporter's interest. Don't reveal the news you'll be releasing, but do you provide a glimpse that gives them a reason to attend.

Send it to journalists. Email your advisory to reporters who cover your issue, to editors, news directors, bureau chiefs and TV/radio producers. The League can assist you in connecting with your media market, if needed.

Follow up with a phone call. Give the essential details of your event – make sure your pitch is tight and persuasive. Leave a message if the journalist doesn't answer or isn't currently available.

Press release: A press release announces breaking news and is written like a news story.

Put the most important information first. Your headline should grab the reporter's attention, and your lead sentence should summarize what's most newsworthy. Next comes supporting facts and quotes from spokespeople or experts to illustrate and liven your data. At the end of the release, include a one-paragraph mission statement from the sponsoring organization.

Include all the facts necessary for a reporter to file a story. Write in a fluent, newsy style that conveys authority and fully covers the issue, so that reporters rely on your release as they write their stories.

Send it to the journalists who also received the media advisory. In addition, put together a press kit to distribute at the event. The press kit should contain the press release, along with other relevant materials, such as fact sheets, news clips, statements from supporting groups... whatever helps the press understand your issue and write their story.

If reporters need substantial time to prepare a story, send an *embargoed* release ahead of the release date. Make it clear that the story *cannot* be published before the date specified on the release. Be aware of the risk. A reporter might break the embargo and publish the news ahead of schedule, diminishing your press conference and media strategy.

A few technical tips. Be sure to put the name and phone number of a contact person at the top of the release. Send out the press release on letterhead stationery of the sponsoring group. Keep it to one page or at the most, two. State *-more-* at the bottom of each page, except the last page where you put a ### sign.

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Op-Ed: An Op-Ed is a column or guest essay published in the opinion section of the newspaper, opposite the Editorial page.

Op-eds should be timely, lively and present strong arguments. Editors want readers to say, "Wow, did you see that piece today?" They are looking for an unusual or provocative opinion on a current issue, a call to arms on a neglected topic, or an expert take on a pressing concern. Op-ed page editors are not looking for event announcements or generic ideas, but it is OK to link to a newly-released report or relevant upcoming event.

Figure out what you want to say and who best to say it. Be able to summarize your point in a single, clear sentence. Ensure the column's byline is well-respected in the community and considered knowledgeable on the topic.

Make your points compelling. The first sentence should grab the reader's attention and everything that follows should keep it. Illustrate your case with vivid examples and memorable facts. Defend it with a few strong arguments. Be short and specific. Don't bog the reader down with jargon or too many statistics.

Make it short. Aim for a first draft of less than 1,000 words. Then, eliminate unnecessary words, repetitious or stray thoughts. Trim words, not ideas. Restate your key argument at the end. The final draft should be no more than 750 words.

Submit the piece and wait. Email a known contact. Include a short cover letter with your name and title, affiliation, address, email and phone numbers. Once it's been sent, don't call the newspaper or magazine repeatedly. If they're going to publish the piece, they'll call you.

Don't be discouraged. If your article is rejected, don't be disheartened. Often it is just a matter of your op-ed being at the right place at the right time.

Leverage your success. If your piece does get published, share it. Utilize social media, newsletters, email groups and more. An op-ed can serve as a springboard to a host of other opportunities.

Letters to the editor: Letters to the editor allow you to offer a short rebuttal to an article or commentary, or add a crucial missing perspective.

Keep it short. Respond quickly to the article you've read, noting the headline and date the article ran. Make your points short and specific. Most letters are 150-250 words. Send it in the body of an email, not as an attachment.

Be factual but not dull. State important facts that back up your point. Humor helps.

Choose your messenger wisely. Sometimes a well-known person connected to the cause is actually better than an elected official to sign the byline. Identify the author's expertise and/or affiliation. Include full contact information, including day and evening phone numbers.