

Using the Media



Whether you are campaigning to raise awareness of an issue, educate your community about an issue, or advocating for change, media provides the best opportunity to get your message in front of the most people. Consequently, you will want to include a media plan in your advocacy campaign.

Using Different Types of Media

Each media platform has its advantages and disadvantages. You will want to spread your media efforts across as many platforms as possible, since they often reach different audiences.

- **Daily/Weekly Newspapers:** Local newspapers can be a great way to get your message in front of your community. Daily papers can be useful through letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, articles by reporters, and meeting with the editorial board. Weekly papers often have a very local focus, and may even run a press release word for word as an article.
- **Radio:** There are very few locally-focused radio news stations, but some local stations may have call-in talk shows that can be a good way to get your issue out to the public.
- **Television:** TV news will tend to focus more on visual-oriented stories, so think of ways to present your issue visually if you are looking for TV coverage. Some options might be a walk-through of a school (with district and principal permission) to illustrate needs, since most community members may not have been in the schools for years. Keep in mind that while a TV reporter may interview you for five or ten minutes for a story, they are likely to only use 30 seconds of it in the story, so make sure you are bringing every question around to one or two of your key points.
- **Social Media:** Social media can be a blessing and a curse. It provides an opportunity to reach a broad audience, engage people in your advocacy, and energize younger groups that might not see any other media. However, it is also possible to have a strong backlash on social media, often from people not in your community, if someone with a large following shares your post. Going viral can cut both ways. Make sure your social media messages have a consistent and easy-to-use hashtag and a consistent graphic identity (posts with graphics see much more engagement than text-only posts). Be prepared to engage with some replies to your posts, but remember: don't feed the trolls. The mute and block tools are there for a reason, and don't be afraid to use them.

Activities that Generate Media Interest

Media coverage can be a long-term effort. Learn who covers education issues at the local paper, radio station, or TV station. Follow them on social media and see what type of stories they are covering (most reporters tweet out links to their latest story). That tells you not only what they are reporting on but also what types of stories their editors are printing or airing.

When pitching stories, be sure to emphasize the local angle and the importance of the issue to your community. Think about the potential visual aspects of the story (e.g., kids doing an activity at a PTA

event), as even getting just a picture and caption in the newspaper can help with your advocacy campaign.

Here are some activities that may generate media interest:

- School board or other candidate forums
- PTA events that involve kids getting doing something related to your campaign (e.g., an arts event if you are trying to get more arts curriculum in your school)
- Press conference (if you have actual news), ideally in front of an example of what you are advocating about. The best time for press conferences are Tuesday through Thursday between 10am and 2pm, which allow reporters to get their story ready of evening news programs.
- Picketing with educational handouts

Inform the media of the event several days in advance through a press release. See *How to Write a Press Release* for details.