



Tips for Working with Media

As with other forms of advocacy, the key to success with media relations centers on the relationships you have built. The relationship between your organization and the local media is an important aspect of the broader communications umbrella. Building an ongoing relationship with your local media takes place over time and requires ongoing commitment. It's important for you to proactively reach out to the media and respond when they reach out to you. This will pay off when you will need to promote an issue within the community.

If a professional relationship with local media contacts already exists, you are ahead of the game. Just remember, as with all relationships, it requires ongoing attention and care. With that said, here are some very basic pointers to assist with media relations in your community.

1. **Develop an internal policy** for how your organization will respond to calls from the media and familiarize all staff and volunteers with the policy.
2. **Identify and prepare a media contact and spokesperson.** Sometimes this is the same person, but either way, the spokesperson must be well-versed on the subject and available to speak with the reporter on the reporter's schedule and deadline. Post the contact information in all of your media materials and, where appropriate, on your website. Make it easy for the media to reach you.
3. **Be protective of parents.** When it comes to putting reporters in touch with parents who have experience with hospice and palliative care, make sure you speak with the parents prior to offering them to any reporter. You might want to identify and prepare a couple families in your community who feel comfortable speaking with reporters and offer to sit in on the interviews — they can use you as a buffer and you can step in if for some reason the parent becomes uncomfortable.
4. **Do your research.** Conduct Internet research on the reporter, know what they do and what topics they cover. See if they have a blog and connect on a personal level if you can. Also, call at the right time — watch their deadlines.
5. **Focus on a few key points when communicating with the media.** Keep it simple and clear and avoid jargon and acronyms.
6. **Emphasize the local angle or hook.** The media are concerned with issues that affect their readers, viewers, or listeners. You should be able to clearly answer the question that news editor always ask: *Why should I care?*
7. **Use your resources.** Make sure key reporters have the information they need to tell your story — a press release, fact sheet, brochure, etc.
8. **Be clear about the story you're pitching.** Make sure that what you tell the reporter is what you want to see in a story. If you are unhappy with the way you have phrased something, stop and rephrase or clarify your original statement..
9. **But don't waste the time of local media if there isn't any news value in an issue.** However, the work of your organization is important to the community so make sure you keep the media informed of important activities when they do occur. The ability to judge what's important and what's not is critical to successful media relations.

Some Do's and Don'ts to Keep in Mind:

- ☞ DO make sure your story is newsworthy and relevant to the reporter and/or outlet. Tailor your pitch to the specific reporter and publication.
- ☞ DO prepare carefully before contacting the media about an issue — know the facts about an issue and use your key messages and materials to shape the discussion..
- ☞ DO be on time and brief, using short words and simple, declarative sentences.
- ☞ DO have a list of questions and answers prepared in advance — this can help you in responding to possible questions from a reporter.
- ☞ DO decide in advance the questions you cannot answer — remember, you don't have to answer every question a reporter asks. Should this happen, steer the reporter back to one of your key messages.
- ☞ DO ask for clarification if you do not understand a question.
- ☞ DO remember that reporters cover a wide range of issues and might not recognize the importance of the issue at hand — it's your job to help explain this.
- ☞ DO be prepared to offer additional materials such as pictures, background information, and sources which they may need to complete a story.
- ☞ DO feel free to discreetly stop an interview if the parent becomes distressed. Any reporter would understand the need to do this.
- ☞ DO keep a record in your media database of what stories you pitch and to whom. This will provide you with a log of reporter interests and particular requirements that may aid in working with the reporter in the future.
- ☞ DO retry, re-pitch but DO NOT harass a reporter. However, you should consider different angles which strike different interest if one method is not working. If you come up with a new angle or development, feel free to pitch the story to the reporter again.
- ☞ DO offer feedback when appropriate. If a story contains a major error (not simply a phrasing that you might not particularly like but that is accurate) bring it to the attention of the reporter.
- ☞ DO be careful about being overly effusive with a reporter, but if you like a story they covered, send a short thank you note.
- ☒ DON'T speak "off the record."
- ☒ DON'T ask to review a reporter's story prior to publication.
- ☒ DON'T mislead reporters with false information.
- ☒ DON'T answer a question with "no comment." There's always a way to refocus on one of your key talking points.
- ☒ DON'T try to answer hypothetical questions.
- ☒ DON'T be afraid to say you do not know the answer, but do say you will try to find out.
- ☒ DON'T schedule a press conference unless you have breaking news that merits coverage.