

Communicating with the News Media

You have a story, and you know it is newsworthy, so what do you do now?

There are a variety of ways to communicate with members of the news media:

- Pitch a story, via letter or phone.
- Send a media advisory.
- Send a news release.
- Host a news conference or briefing.
- Organize a media event.

You can do all of those things without knowing a single reporter or editor. However, you will be more successful when you cultivate a relationship with news staffers.

BEGIN BY NEWS-WATCHING

Watch. Listen. Read. Take note of how issues are being dealt with, by whom, in what media. Identify the reporters and media outlets most likely to respond to your news. Become familiar with their approach and style. This background information is vital to successful contact with members of the media. It provides the basis for building your media list.

CREATE A MEDIA LIST

A media list is your essential news media tool. Putting it together takes some attention, but it can make your work with the media successful. Your list should also be updated constantly, as people change jobs.

Start by gathering names from by-lines and mastheads in the newspaper (editors, reporters, photographers, classified editors) and watch credits during newscasts (directors, producers, assignment editors). Call local stations and publications and ask who would be most interested in the news story you can offer.



Organize your list by categories of news outlets and by media market (audience). Some sample categories could be: daily papers; weekly papers; monthly/quarterly papers or magazines; television news; media public affairs; news and talk radio; music stations; news services (AP & UPI); and freelance journalists.

Your media list should include:

- Name/type of media outlet (TV station, newspaper, radio station, etc.).
- General contact information: address, telephone, fax number.
- Specific contact information: contact names, direct line numbers, email addresses of people such as editors, assignment desk directors, public affairs directors at radio and television stations, and reporters that cover a specific beat (for example: if your organization works to save forests, put the environmental reporter on your list.)

Update your list regularly to keep a record of every media contact you have: every telephone call, meeting, conference, interview, and most importantly coverage.

Use a tool like the Media Contact Sample Form to maintain media records.

