

MEDIA OUTREACH

One of the quickest ways to spread the word about your attendance campaign is through newspaper and broadcast reports. Here are some strategies for reaching the media:

- A **pitch note** offers an idea for a feature story with a human interest angle.
- A **press release** covers basic facts, is brief and accurate, reads like a news story, is free of jargon and clichés, and contains provocative, colorful quotes. Lead off with the information that you would like to see as the focus of any media coverage.
- A **media advisory** is similar but is used to alert reporters to an event you would like them to cover. Reporters may use content verbatim from press releases and advisories.
- A **letter to the editor** responds to news articles or events.
- An **op-ed** is an opinion piece to express a position on a topic.
- An **editorial board meeting** is used to tell the paper about a problem/seek an editorial.

WRITING A PITCH NOTE

- Have a specific reporter or editor in mind, and send the note to that person. If possible, look at past stories on related topics and refer to one of them. (“Loved your piece on school readiness....”)
- In the first paragraph succinctly explain why the story would be of interest and provide the essential information.
- Note if you are offering this reporter the first chance at this story.
- Provide all contact information.
- Follow up via email or phone call.

ISSUING A NEWS RELEASE OR MEDIA ADVISORY

- Create a media list. Look online and/or call your local newspaper, radio and TV stations and ask who covers education, who covers community news and events, and who is the education editor. Get names, e-mails and phone numbers.
- E-mail these key contacts your press release or media advisory. Be sure to provide enough notice for editors and producers to plan.
- News is active and staffs are small – be sure to follow up. Call mid-morning, and be prepared to offer to call back if the reporter is busy working on a deadline.
- Consider the calendar. Newsrooms are often lightly staffed and looking for stories right after holiday weekends and in early August. So time your releases accordingly.
- Prepare in advance and practice your pitch message. Get to the point quickly with a straightforward message. Keep it to no more than three points. Use clear, concise language.

MANAGING MEDIA AT AN EVENT

- Be sensitive to deadlines, return calls promptly.
- Have material on hand to help tell the story – press kits with copies of the release, brochures, key statistics, etc.
- Be prepared in advance with the right students, staff and parents who can be interviewed. Review talking points in advance. (Get releases signed in advance by parents.)
- Anticipate difficult questions that might be asked and practice concise answers.
- Be candid and honest. Don't say, "No comment." Don't argue with reporters.
- Assume everything you say is on the record.

WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- Search your local paper for guidelines on submitting letters to the editor.
- Look for opportunities to respond to stories on education, youth, and attendance in your community.
- Respond quickly, if possible the same day the article appears.
- Reference the title, date and author of the original piece in the opening sentence of your letter.
- Stay brief (typically 150 words) and put the most important information up front. Suggest what the writer should have said.
- Include your full contact information.
- Avoid bashing the reporter or editorial writer (even if he/she deserves it).

WRITING AN OP-ED

- Search your local paper for guidelines on submitting op-eds.
- Lead with your main point, be creative but succinct.
- Include recommendations for solving the problem.
- Include a real story about a school that's beating the odds.
- Include data that helps tell the story.
- Have a strong close and a specific, clear ask or call to action.
- Include contact information at the end, including phone number or email address.

ARRANGING AN EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING

- Call your newspaper and ask for the individual in charge of scheduling editorial board meetings. (In a big city, you may be put in touch with the education editor or writer.)
- Bring a small number of people (2-3) to the meeting.
- Prepare a few key talking points and know the latest news around your issue, particularly if the paper has covered it. Think about what you'd like an editorial to say, and then plan your conversation around those points. Don't be surprised to be pulled off course, though.
- Have a specific ask and make sure that is very clear.
- At the end of the meeting ask whether the board intends to write on the issue. If not, ask why, and offer assistance if they choose to write in the future.

For information on releasing your data, see our [Managing the Media handout](#).