

Strategic Tactic Guide: Garnering Coverage of Your Earned Media Event

STRATEGIC VALUE: One of the most important parts of holding an earned media event is making sure the media is there to share your story with the public. **Once you've decided to host an earned media event, it's important to notify the media to make sure they can attend and report on your issue.**

LOGISTICS:

- The first step in effective media outreach is building your PRESS LIST, a database of all the media you want to inform about your issue and invite to your earned media event. Your press list should include at least a phone number and email address for each reporter so that you can reach out to them directly. Contact information for individual reporters should be listed on your local paper's website. If they're not, call the newsroom and ask. Ideally, your press list will be comprised of:
 - *Local reporters and newsrooms* that cover general news in your area (i.e.: local/neighborhood newspaper, local TV affiliates)
 - *Regional and niche reporters* who cover the issue, geography or impacted constituency being highlighted by your event (i.e.: state newspapers, regional magazines, issue-specific print and web outlets)
 - *National beat reporters and others* who have a vested interest in your story because they report on a specific subject, or beat, related to your earned media event (i.e.: national wire services, national newspapers, national subject-specific print and web outlets)
- Use a MEDIA ADVISORY to inform the media *prior* to your event or announcement, and invite them to cover the story.
- Use a PRESS RELEASE to share details about your event with reporters *after* it has occurred.
- In addition to sending advisories or releases to share information about your event with reporters, you should also plan to contact them via email or by phone — a practice known as PITCHING — to share information about your event directly and ask reporters to cover it.
- **Remember, the key to effective media outreach is persistence** — don't be surprised if your calls and emails to reporters go unanswered, or they can't immediately commit to covering your event. Your job is to make sure they have the information necessary to participate and to follow up as often as necessary to confirm if they plan to attend.

HOW TO:

- *Send a Media Advisory*

A media advisory should be short and sweet. **Your goal is to make the event sound interesting and newsworthy and make it easy for reporters to quickly figure out the details.** Give some thought to the visuals that could make it more appealing for a television reporter or news photographer to cover — and spell them out. You can use a media advisory to let people know about a formal event, like a news conference, or something less formal, like campaign activists working the crowd at a street fair or community event. A few additional points to consider:

 - Distribute to your press list two to seven days before your event takes place.
 - Follow up IMMEDIATELY with pitch calls and emails to reporters to ensure they received the advisory, and confirm if they will be able to cover the event.
 - On the day of the event, make another round of pitch calls and emails to your list of reporters (esp. those who said yes or maybe) to confirm their attendance.
- *Send a Press Release*

A press release typically has more content than a media advisory. **Your goal is to convey to reporters the value of your event (why it's newsworthy) and share all of the details necessary for them to report about your event.**

- Make sure to include an attention-grabbing headline — reporters receive dozens, even hundreds, of releases each day, and a catchy headline/subject line can help steer their eyes toward your event.
- Include quotes from your speakers and members in the release to help convey information and add a human element to the story.
- **Distribute your release to your press list on the MORNING of your event, even if it's before the actual event takes place** — having your report ready for reporters and sitting in their inboxes can also help guide the direction of the story.

- *Pitch the Media*

When calling or emailing reporters about your earned media event, remember the following:

- The goal of your call (or email) is to confirm that the reporter received your press materials (a media advisory or press release) and determine if they will be able to cover your earned media event. If appropriate, feel free to share details about the event or issue to encourage the reporter to attend and report on the event.
- **If you don't have a phone number or email address for a specific reporter, call the news desk at their outlet and make your pitch to them. All reputable news organizations have a dedicated news desk or phone line (or both) to receive news tips.**
- Again, remember to be persistent — if you don't get a definite answer, follow up with the reporter again. If you don't get a response to your email, try making a phone call (usually the most effective method of reaching busy journalists).

EXAMPLE:

Template for MEDIA ADVISORY and PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Month Date, 20XX

CONTACT: Name

Phone Number

Email Address

[The name and info of your point person liaising with reporters goes here]

EVENT TITLE/HEADLINE

[Your main message goes here]

Sub-headline

[You can add additional attention-grabbing details that support your main message here]

CITY, STATE ABBREVIATION — Start the body of your release here, making sure to include all relevant quotes and details about the event, including context for what makes your earned media event newsworthy.

If you're writing a media advisory, after writing an introductory statement about your event, you can use the following template:

What:

Who:

When:

Where:

Why:

For more information, contact NAME at PHONE NUMBER.

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Boilerplate language

[One to two sentences briefly identifying the organization issuing the release]

EXAMPLE: *Since 2003, Working America has organized working people in urban, suburban and rural communities, bridging our country's divides by uniting working people around a shared economic agenda. As the 3-million-member community affiliate of the AFL-CIO, Working America gives people who don't have the benefit of a union on the job the information and opportunity they need to fight for good jobs and a fair economy for all.*