

Strategic Tactic Guide: Hosting an Earned Media Event

STRATEGIC VALUE: Hosting earned media events — press conferences, rallies and similar public actions that organically garner coverage from press — **gives us a bigger platform to lift up the personal stories of our members and publicly call on our elected officials to take action.**

Broadcasting in this way allows our message to reach many more people than it would have otherwise, connecting others in the community facing the same problems with our positive message. Additionally, media events require a lot of work to put together — planning, prepping, hosting, speaking and follow-up. Members with all different strengths can be called on to step up and take on additional responsibilities in the planning and execution of our media events.

LOGISTICS: Consider the following items when planning to host an earned media event:

- **Message**

Decide in advance what the central message of your event will be, making sure to keep it clear, succinct and easily translatable — an ideal message serves as the title of your event and as the central idea you want to convey to members of the media covering your event. For example, “Hands off Medicaid” or “Don’t Turn the Clock Back on Voting Rights” Prepare short talking points in advance about the issue and any relevant local stories or statistics that support your message, and share these with speakers prior to the event to ensure everyone stays “on message.” Lastly, **make sure your message is timely — that it fits somehow into the news of the day — to increase the likelihood of garnering attention for your issue.**

- **Planning**

You can help control the narrative of your event (and how reporters cover it) by planning properly. One effective way to do this is to try envisioning the ideal outcome for your media event, and then planning backward to produce your desired results. For instance:

- **How do you want the story to look?** Think about the event space. Make sure there’s a podium and chairs (if necessary) for your speakers, and that you have plenty of homemade and branded signage for members to hold during the event. Mark out where you want the podium to go, as well as where you want reporters to sit and news cameras to set up. Place additional signage in unavoidable locations throughout the space to ensure it gets captured by the news cameras. Lastly, make sure you have plenty of team members and allies attending to emphasize the community support for your issue.
- **How do you want the story to sound?** Plan to keep the program for your event as compact and concise as possible (optimally no more than 25 minutes), and decide in advance if you plan to have speakers take questions from reporters. **Pro tip: Tape a copy of the talking points and agenda on the podium for your speakers to reference during the event, in case they need a reminder.**
- **How do you want the event to flow?** Know the order of speakers and events, and make sure everyone involved is on the same page about the message and event order.
- **How is the story going to get out?** One of the most important parts of holding an earned media event is making sure media is there to report on your issue! Prepare a press list in advance of reporters to invite, and make sure they are added to the distribution list for your media advisory and press release. You can also pick up the phone to call them and pitch your story! (See “Garnering Press for your Earned Media Event.”)
- **What elements should you have available to produce the ideal story?** For instance, having a sign-in sheet and nametags for event participants can help identify reporters and keep track of who is covering the event (including which reporters need a follow-up). Likewise, providing reporters with a packet of background information about your event — such as short bios for the event’s speakers, a brochure about Working America, your contact information, a copy of the press release and a fact sheet on the issue — can help fill out the story and answer many journalists’ basic questions.
- **How do you plan to manage the event?** Most importantly, assign roles ahead of time to ensure your event is smoothly executed. Have assigned point persons to liaise with event speakers and the press, as well as one person to oversee the entire event and ensure that it is well-facilitated.

- **Speakers**

Decide in advance who will speak at the event and for how long (for optimum effect, limit remarks to two to three minutes per speaker). **Recruit a diverse group of speakers, reflecting the various ways people are affected by the same issues, and ensure they are prepped with the appropriate talking points about the issue and why it matters to them.** Remember that the most effective speakers will be prepared to tell their own story and link their personal experiences to the bigger picture, while also being able to explain what Working America is and why it was important to them to become a member. Also, consider inviting allies to speak who can offer specific facts on policy — rather than sharing personal stories — to help round out your message.

HOW TO: When planning your earned media event, follow these steps:

Prior to event

- The ideal time for your earned media event is between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on either Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday — reporters are less likely to attend events on a busy Monday, and news that is made on Friday but reported on Saturday usually flies under the radar, since fewer people read the Saturday paper.
- Recruit event speakers and work with them to develop an outline of their remarks, making sure they align with the central message and keep within the allotted time frame.
- Prepare all supplemental documents you'll need for the day, including talking points, agendas and sign-in sheets, and compile all materials and signage for the event.
- Begin outreach to press, including distributing a media advisory and pitching reporters directly by phone or via email. You should also have your post-event press release prepared to issue on the day of your event.
- Review your event plan, and assign roles and responsibilities for various tasks to your team.

During event

- Plan to arrive early (before reporters are scheduled to arrive) to secure your event space and begin setup.
- Erect a sign-in table at the event entry, and make sure everyone, especially reporters, signs — this will be helpful if you need to follow up with a reporter, or verify the number of participants.
- Take LOTS of pictures, and post updates about your event to social media to help amplify your action.

FOLLOW UP: After your successful earned media event, follow these additional tips to help encourage the most favorable press coverage possible:

- Celebrate with your team members who attended the event. Earned media events are a lot of work! Go get bagels or pizza and celebrate taking action.
- Follow up with reporters who attended (and those who said they would) to see if and when they plan to write about the event.
- Write up your own post-event press release, including your photos from the event, to share with local press.
- After your event, monitor the news closely to catch any hits about your event.
- If you read a story about the event you particularly like, reach out and personally thank the reporter who wrote the article. For extra points, stay in contact with those reporters and keep them updated on your work.
- Send any photos, press releases and published stories to the staff at Working America.
- Post about your event on social media.