

A GUIDE TO GETTING MEDIA COVERAGE THAT MOVES YOUR ADVOCACY AGENDA

DO: **Tell stories – successes, about real people who got and stay off the street.**
Visit projects – actual beautiful developments.
Mention targets – members of Congress that can save these peoples’ homes and projects.
Cut your issue with a hook - local, timely and attention-getting.

DON’T: **Use technical program names, or toss off large dollar figures.**

MOST IMPORTANT TIP (from Tip):

The first rule of politics, according to the late Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tip O’Neil, applies to media coverage too – “If you don’t ask, you don’t get.”

1. What are the different kinds of media, and media coverage?

Print: News story, Feature story, Column, Editorial, Op-ed piece, Letter to the editor.

Television

Radio

Ethnic and non-English speaking press

TIP: Try. Ask. Don’t fear failure when dealing with the media. No one gets coverage every time they try. Even if they don’t do your story, ask why they didn’t and how they might. You’ll get to know more media folks, how they think, and what they might cover in the future.

TIP: Follow the media with an eye to using it. When you see a story on your issue, or a related one, notice who the reporter is. They may cover your issue on a regular basis, or have a particular interest in it. Send them your next press release, in addition to sending it to the assignment desk, and call them. The same is true for columns, and even editorials. Call and find out who wrote the editorial on your issue.

TIP: Positive reinforcement helps. Write a letter to the editor praising a good story on your issue, and the writer. Letters to the editor are coverage too – and the third most read part of a paper.

TIP: Remember editorials (the position of the newspaper) and “op ed” (the page across from the editorial page) pieces. Be bold – when you see an editorial on your issue area, call the paper, get the Editorial Department, and find out who wrote the editorial. Ask to speak to them. Tell them the issue you’d like the paper to endorse. Make it timely. Remember, if you don’t ask, you don’t get.

2. Importance of story – clients, actual projects – and the “hook”.

TIP: People are more interesting than facts and figures. Portray your issue through their stories. But...

TIP: All politics – and press – are local. Illustrate the local impact of your story.

TIP: Stories usually aren’t enough by themselves. You need a hook – something that makes the story timely and/or controversial, like the threat of folks losing their homes, an impending vote in Congress, or the fact that your Congressional rep is prepared to let folks lose their homes. Immediacy and controversy are especially important in trying to get editorial coverage.

TIP: Different stories may lead to different reporters. A vote in Congress may lead to a conversation with a paper’s DC reporter.

3. How do we get media coverage?

TIP: Try to get media coverage.

TIP: Make relations with and responsiveness to media people a priority. ALWAYS make the reporter or writer's job easier for them.

TIP: Gather interesting success stories.

TIP: Develop and maintain a personal relationship with a reporter or an editor.

TIP: Sometimes, no matter what you do, you won't get coverage. If there's a tornado in the town next door, or President Bush says something dumb, those stories may crowd you out, no matter how good your story is.

TIP: "Day of" coverage, especially in the morning paper, has extra power – to spur more turn out for an action, to raise the spirits of your members, or to put pressure on a target on the day of a key vote.

TIP: Don't assume that your target – especially DC staffers – will see your coverage. Send it to them.

TIP: ALWAYS send a letter to the editor after you get a story or an editorial, especially if you can be positive. It's additional, free coverage. CC the writer of your piece.

4. Press releases

TO WHOM: Specific reporters/writers, assignments editor/city desk.

CONTENT: Who, what, when, why, where; contact people. Keep to one page. No kidding, keep to one page. They get lots of them. If they're interested, they'll ask for more information.

GOAL: Reasonable minimum – one all news radio station; one paper; one TV station. The media are like sheep - news radio and the morning paper define what's the 'news' for the day.

KEY: Follow up calls the day before and the day of. Then more follow up calls. Ask for a reporter you know, ask for the assignment desk, ask what time they arrive on the day of your event. Call, call, call, resend your release again and again. Be available all day long. Have your leaders/story tellers/experts available all day long.

THE EVENT: Stage an event – at a specific project at risk, with residents who might lose their homes, or at the local office of a Congressional target that won't support you. The event, location and/or target should help to make it more newsworthy, and tell your story better.

5. The goal—an ideal, advocacy-oriented connection with the media

Having a respected and respectful relationship. Getting your calls returned and your stories considered. Becoming the source of story ideas for key reporters and editors. Being an "authority" on your issue – getting quoted in other people's stories; appearing on talk shows, etc.

For more info, call Buck Bagot at 415/385-0389, or buckb@devinegong.com.