
Working with the Media

What's the story?

Local media offer a good way of reaching people in your area with details of your work. But before you approach local newspapers, TV or radio, you should think through what it is you want to say. The first thing a news editor will ask his or her journalists when deciding what to put in print or to broadcast is: 'what's the story?' You need to be able to answer that question.

What makes the news?

Anything that affects people, presented with an interesting angle, has a chance of making it into the media. Here are six tips to help you obtain positive media coverage.

1. *Be proactive* – contact the media ahead of any activities you're planning to alert them to a possible story.
2. *Be available* – see the media as an opportunity, not a threat. You're the local expert, so be flexible enough to respond at short notice.
3. *Keep your promises* – if you say you'll provide someone for an interview, do it.
4. *Respect their deadlines* – if you don't, you'll lose credibility and your message may be damaged.
5. *Keep it short and simple* – journalists are busy people. They want to know who and what is involved, why, where and when, and, if appropriate, how. The rest is detail.
6. *Accept help* – if you're working with partners who have more experience with the media than you, use them to help sell your story. Your own organisation may also be able to provide support if you have a press office or communications lead.

By following these principles, you can help to get your work, and the issues being raised by the campaign, onto the local news agenda. It's a difficult and controversial area, but the media need well informed spokespeople to steer them in the right direction.

What media should I target?

You should focus on your local area and region, especially local newspapers, radio, TV and websites. Depending on who you work with and what you're trying to achieve, other less obvious examples could include:

- student newspapers, radio stations and websites
- local council newsletters/magazines/papers distributed to residents
- local listings magazines.

Why should I bother?

There's no doubt that the media have a bad press – and some of it is justified. Some publications and journalists have an agenda and there's not a lot you can do about that. However, editorial coverage in local media is one way of reaching a lot of people who otherwise wouldn't know anything about your work and the issues you are raising. Editorial coverage is also free and - believe it or not - is more believable than advertising. In addition, sometimes the media may take an interest in you whether you like it or not, so it's best to get on the front foot and be proactive.

The downside of editorial coverage is that you have no control over how, where or when the information is presented. In newspapers, for instance, the journalist who spoke to you doesn't even write the headline.

How can I get my story covered?

Press releases are the bread of butter of a lot of media work. A press release should include:

- who is involved (with contact details)
- what it is you're doing
- where any activity is taking place
- when it's happening
- where it's happening, and...
- why you're bothering – and why they should be bothered about it.

You'll need to think through who is going to be the spokesperson for your organisation or campaign, especially if you're involved in partnership work.

However, it takes more than sending out a press release and hoping for the best. You need to establish a relationship with your target media if you possibly can. Realistically, this may be speaking to a reporter on the telephone, but that's better than nothing. If you can make a journalist's life easier by providing good, timely stories, you could become very popular.

Here are ten tips for getting your story covered:

1. *Make it relevant* – provide facts, figures and information relevant to your area.
2. *Make it local* – what are you doing to support offenders, former offenders or their families? How are you working with local agencies on ethnicity and criminal justice?
3. *Make it personal* – try to relate what you're doing to people's lives. Working with real life case studies can help you to achieve this.
4. *Make it visual* – think about photo opportunities and even TV. A good picture demands attention and enhances your message.
5. *Make it interesting* – stage events that reach a lot of people.
6. *Piggyback* – use national stories – like the launch of Race for Justice – or provide a local angle on national research
7. *DIY* – offer to write a column or co-host a radio phone-in yourself. You're the expert – and if you don't ask you won't get.
8. *Make it important* – because it is! Don't underestimate or undersell the importance of what you're doing. It's all about fairness and equal treatment for all.
9. *Find an angle* – maybe you have a real life story, or a new set of figures; some new resources, a new partnership, an anniversary or special event.
10. *Follow-up* – don't give up. Sometimes your story may not be covered for all sorts of reasons. Follow a call with an email – then follow up again with a call later to check it's been received.

One other way of obtaining media coverage is by gaining the support of a local celebrity. However, you should think carefully before going down this path. Race for Justice covers quite a sensitive area, so you'll need to be sure that this person.

Keep in touch

If you achieve some success, don't put your feet up, follow-up. If you have proved your worth by providing a good story for your local media, they're likely to be warm to you in the future. Journalists like nothing more than someone who knows what they're talking about, is willing to talk to them about it and makes themselves available.

Letter writing

One way of getting the issues into the public domain is by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper/s. An example is shown below.

Dear Editor

Race for Justice is a campaign raising awareness about inequalities in the criminal justice system. Your readers may be interested to know that compared to the white population, people from black and ethnic minority groups are more likely to be stopped and searched, more likely to be charged than cautioned and more likely to be remanded in custody than bailed. One in four prisoners in England and Wales is from an ethnic minority, while ethnic minorities form just 11% of the population.

We're supporting Race for Justice in the local area.
<details here of your role>

People can sign up to support the campaign at www.raceforjustice.net

And remember

- Contact Clinks for further help and support.
- Sign up to the campaign on www.raceforjustice.net to ensure you receive regular campaign updates by email.