

Tips for Unpaid or Earned Media Coverage in Communities

The goal of media coverage is to educate the community and build demand for health policy change. If your community is in an early stage of readiness, media coverage needs to be strictly educational and your coalition may want to 'fly under the radar.' Strategies and timelines are strictly internal and should remain confidential. Your decisions need to be based on your community's stage of readiness. Providing information without revealing your coalition strategy should be the goal.

- Consider the local newspaper
 - Look for reporters who cover health topics and/or events, and pitch a story to them; send a brief news item.
 - Send articles as embedded text, not as an attachment; those are often stripped off by spam filters.
 - Include contact information.
 - Make photos available whenever possible; they make a story more appealing.
 - Write a feature story; local newspapers will often publish your article in full.
 - Write press releases or media advisories and send them to local newspapers.
 - Write letters to the editor.
 - Write expert opinion articles. Become an expert on the subject, and reporters will come back to you for comment and for additional stories. You may want to select a well-known and well-respected local leader to author the piece. You may need to ghost write the piece.
 - Couple your expert article with letters to the editor and advertisements over a specific period of time for a higher impact.
 - Link your organization's events or activities to national events.
 - Place your event in community calendar listings.
 - Plan your ad, letter or press release for a time when a similar or related message is being promoted by another organization, such as the local hospital.
 - Hold a community press event to announce local data or important events; have a press kit ready to share with participants and send to those who do not attend in follow-up, including agenda, FAQs, reports, educational materials and a press release.
- Consider your local radio station
 - Send a very short public service announcement (PSA) to be read on air; it should be 15-20 seconds, maximum. Note that PSAs are often aired at down times (eg. 3:00AM). Complementing earned media with paid media during peak hours is optimal. Be sure to select an evidence-based ad.
 - Offer to be interviewed on-air or be a guest on a regular radio show.
 - Include your event or meeting in a community events radio bulletin or show.
 - Have materials ready to submit in follow-up, including FAQs, educational materials, contact information.
- Consider your local cable access channel
 - Send a short TV public service announcement (PSA) to the local cable access station.
 - Offer to be a guest on a local talk show.
- Consider church bulletins
- Consider other local publications
 - Shopper ad circulars?
 - Newsletters for professional organizations, club chapters or companies?
 - Free newspapers?
- Consider online resources
 - Chat rooms?
 - Blogs?
 - Websites?
 - Social networks?

Note. Unpaid/earned media can complement paid media. Consider duration and frequency of both paid and unpaid media. The more the public and policymakers hear and/or see the message, the more effective the message.

World Usability Day: Helpful Tips for Getting Local Media Coverage. Viewed 3 December 2008.

(<http://www.worldusabilityday.org/files/2008Helpful%20Tips%20for%20Getting%20Local%20Media%20Coverage.pdf>)

Mediatrust Online Guide to Generating Free Media Coverage. Viewed 3 December 2008.

(http://www.mediatrust.org/training-events/training-resources/online-guides-1/guide_generating-local-media-coverage)

For more information, contact the Kentucky Center for Smoke-free Policy University of Kentucky College of Nursing 859-323-4587 or www.kcsp.uky.edu.