

DEMOCRACY IS FOR PEOPLE



A Public Citizen project

Working with the media

Some of you may have had some dealings with reporters, which is great. If not, no worries. This information is meant to guide you through everything you need to do.

Why contact the media?

The media can be a great way to get your message out. It's a mutually beneficial thing: Reporters are looking for good stories in their communities, and you have a message you need lots of other people in your community to hear. By giving reporters what they need – an interesting, timely and provocative event – you will be helping them and yourself at the same time.

What are reporters looking for?

The media is really short-staffed these days, so the more information you can provide – and the more complete it is – the better. A few reminders:

- Be sure in your media advisory to include the basics: who, what, where, when, why, how and how much.
- Ensure your information is accurate. Check the spellings of people's names, the names of buildings or places (is there a hyphen? is the word "the" part of the name?), the address of the event and so forth. The accuracy of your information reflects on your credibility. Reporters will not be happy if they get it wrong because you got it wrong.

Getting in touch with reporters

Do you need to invite reporters to your event. How can you find them?

- 1) First, you need to identify the media outlets you want to reach out to. You probably already know what newspapers, radio stations and TV stations are in your area. But if you want to check and see what else is out there, just Google your city and the word "media." You should find links to newspapers, radio stations and television stations.
- 2) Start building a list. If you know how to use Excel, create a list in Excel. The categories you'll need: Name of outlet, name of contact, title of contact, phone number, email address and notes field. If you don't know Excel, don't worry – you can put the same information into a Word doc or even just jot it down on paper.
- 3) Go to the websites of the outlets you have identified. Look for the Contact Us link. This likely will take you to a page that will tell you how to notify the outlet of a



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- potential story. Hopefully there will be an email address and phone number in there. Put whatever information you can find into your spreadsheet or other document. If the website has a form for you to fill in, by all means do it when you have your final advisory ready. But you'll want to get the name of a human being and their email address, so you'll need to keep going with that particular outlet.
- 4) If there is no page with the name, email address and number of the person to send potential story information to, call the newspaper's main number and ask for the newsroom. Explain that you are holding an event – a protest, rally, demonstration, whatever it may be, and tell them that it is related to the anniversary of the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision. Tell them you would like to send them information about and invite them to cover it. Hopefully they will provide the name and email address of an assignment editor and or a reporter. Once they do, ask if they have a direct number for those people.
 - 5) Put all this information into your spreadsheet.
 - 6) For TV and radio stations, all you really need is information for the assignment desk. For newspapers, in addition to the assignment editor, you might want to ask who covers politics and get their information as well.

Bloggers

It's a good idea to invite progressive bloggers as well. You may already know them. Go to their blogs and search around for how to contact them. Add them to your media list. If you need help identifying who they are, check out <http://www.leftyblogs.com/>.

Invite the media

At this point, you should have a rockin' list of assignment editors, reporters and bloggers. Here's what to do next:

- 1) Write your media advisory (the template we have provided should be a good guide).
- 2) Read it aloud to make sure it makes sense. Have someone else read it and look for any grammatical errors, spelling issues or punctuation problems.
- 3) Once you have a final advisory, copy and paste it into the body of your email.
- 4) Write a short and snappy subject line. You'll want to avoid words that will cause the email to be tagged as spam. To do that, you can run your subject line through this subject line checker:
<http://www.localnews.biz/subjectLine/ValidateSubjectLine.asp>. Aim for all green



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boxes – the more red and yellow boxes you have, the more likely people on the other end will never get it.

- 5) Put the email addresses of the media into the BCC field.
- 6) Make sure your contact information is in the email before you hit send.
- 7) Send away!

Timing of the advisory

It's best to send the advisory out twice. The first time should be four or five business days before the event. This is to give you an opportunity to do follow-up calls and make sure the media outlets got it. The second time should be the day before your event as a final reminder.

Follow-up calls

You need to make sure that the media outlets saw your invitation and you'll want to encourage them to attend. This is where those phone numbers you gathered come in. Call through your list and say that you sent information about your protest/demonstration/rally and you wanted to make sure they received it. You can use the notes field to write notes about what they said. This is helpful if you want to keep track of who said they are coming and who is a maybe. And if you left a message, note that and call them again later.

Note: Do not call the media after about 4 p.m. In the late afternoon, deadlines are getting closer. The newscast is about to air and people are less relaxed. They will not want to spend time talking to you and may be very short on the phone.

That's it! It's pretty easy! Just remember, reporters are people. They are just trying to do a job. If you are honest and open, and it's clear you are trying to help them, they will recognize and appreciate that. At the same time, be careful when you are talking to the media. Know that everything you say can be quoted. Inflammatory statements are usually the statements that are quoted. That can work to your advantage – but think in advance of what you want to say.

If you know TV or radio reporters are coming, it's best to write down some short, snappy sentences that encapsulate your key points and practice them. Not only will that make you more comfortable, but you will be less likely to forget a key point. Have fun!



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