



Center for Progressive Leadership Action Network

National Media Impact Training – Thursday, January 17th

Frequently Asked Questions: Earned Media

What suggestions do you have for planning events that will draw coverage from conservative newspapers in a rural area?

Dealing with conservative papers is like anything else - it's all about the relationships you can build. Even the most conservative papers still have reporters who still have a deadline - and if you can build a relationship with them and provide them - quickly and easily - with UNBIASED information that they can use they are more likely to include you in a favorable light.

When political journalists depend on their access and relationships with government officials, how can we get them to cover the dissenting issues that the officials do not want covered?

Although political journalists depend on relationships and access with government officials, more importantly they depend on having a good story and in being unbiased and impartial. It's important when working on an issue that you feel is not getting covered properly, to take a step and reexamine your approach. Are you giving reporters a timely hook? Are you presenting your information in an interesting and informative way? Are there larger stories that are simply taking place right now, so it is better to readjust the timing of your pitch? If you genuinely feel that a reporter is not covering your issue due to their relationships with other sources, it might make sense to approach the reporters' editor. Be careful that you have actual proof that the reporter is not covering your story due to their relationships, and is just not writing on your issue because it isn't "news" right now.

How do you try to get new coverage about an old, persistent, yet important issue? Health insurance for instance.

As for old issues - it's all about finding a new hook - especially new LOCAL information that a paper can use. They might be tired of hearing about uninsured as a national issue but if you can show them the effect of uninsured on business in the local community or a new report that shows that the local hospital is hurting because too many uninsured rely on it for primary care or any other "new" information you can then attach a broader story to that hook.

How do you make the attempt to develop a relationship with local reporters genuine, especially when they are overwhelmed by others?

Find the truly compelling story in your campaign. The issues most of us are working on can appeal to individuals from many political strains. If you engage diverse constituencies in marketing your work and focus on communicating the value of your organization's core capacities, you will likely have something of importance to say even to conservatives. Conducting research on the types of stories being written by local reporters will help you identify those who are interested in the work you are doing and are sympathetic to your cause.

Is it really necessary to apply for a permit to rally?

The necessity of obtaining a permit for an event depends on the location you want to have it. Contact the Mayor's Office or the department in charge of the facility to determine whether you need a permit for the space you are planning on using. It is important to check to ensure good relations with the office in charge of the space and to make sure that nobody else is planning on using that space at the same time as you.

How do you get media to cover issues that are critical of the media?

Journalists thrive on stories. If you have a good story that is critical of the media, even perhaps their own media outlet, they may be interested in it. Make sure that like in any pitch, you have a timely, interesting, and informative story. Also, make sure that you are going to reporters with the right beat. If it is a very local story, don't approach a national reporter and vice versa.

How do we get to be a guest on Talk Shows if we have something important we want to discuss or share?

A quick way to make sure you are covered on talk shows (particularly when breaking news occurs) is to make sure that talk show producers and bookers know who you are, what your area of expertise is, and how to reach you. Build a list of contact information for talk shows, including contact info for bookers and producers, and send them a short email introducing your self, your issue expertise, and leaving them your contact information. It is especially important that you leave numbers, for instance cell numbers, that you can be reached on quickly. This is a good way to get in bookers rolodexes - often when stories break they need to book a guest quickly and will turn to their contacts. If a producer calls you to appear on a talk show, especially on a breaking news story, make sure to return their call promptly, even if you cannot be a guest on their program. If a story breaks where your organization has expertise, call the talk show, explain how you are and why you would be a good guest to comment on issue X. Make sure that when you are looking for talk shows to pitch you consider their angle - some are neutral, others lean right, and others lean left. Also, remember that for many talk shows, they thrive on guests who can provide both quick sound bites and are willing to mix it up with other guests.

How do we get more coverage for health issues?

At the end of the day there is no silver bullet or one size fits all direction for getting earned media - its really just about knowing your target, building relationships and persistence on your issue(s). Keep the hits coming, because while they might ignore one press release or event, they will eventually acknowledge that you are active on the issue and when something big happens -- or they just decide to do a story for whatever reason - - you are already in their minds as being someone to talk to about whatever it is.

How do you issue a press release?

There are two things to issue when you have an event. First is a media advisory that goes out before you have an event. After your event, send out your press release. Don't send it out before the event because reporters are not likely to go to an event if they have all the information they need about it beforehand.

A press release should be written like your ideal version of how the news story would be written. Put the release in the press packet you are handing out at your event. After the event, either fax or e-mail your press release to the media outlets that did not attend. Make sure to ask reporters how they like to receive press releases. While many will prefer e-mail, some prefer a fax because they get too many e-mails.

What about media strategies that do not involve events?

There are a lot of different tactics that you can use besides events. Events are one specific way to get media, but only if you meet the requirements necessary for holding a good event.

If you have many more media contacts than you can reasonably reach how do you prioritize?

There are two things that you want to emphasize when deciding which media you prioritize. The first is to focus on media that reaches the audience you want to reach. However, in the electronic age, everyone should get a media advisory. The second step is to ensure that your event is in the wire service day book. Early every morning, the day books publish a list for reporters of media events happening. To ensure you are in the day book, contact the editor. Usually people in the newsroom rotate in that role, so the editor may not always be the same person.

How do we know who the friendly reporters are?

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What is meant by an "earned" media event? Is it a media event that "earns" media coverage when the media (a reporter) deems it worth covering?

Events are called "earned media" events because you have to work to get coverage. Sometimes "earned media" is called "free media" because you do not specifically pay for the coverage, like you would if you bought an ad. However, many people prefer the term "earned media" because there is a lot of work involved in actually receiving the coverage.