

MEET THE PRESS

GETTING MEDIA COVERAGE

Want some attention for your community activity or important environmental issue? Let the media help. Local newspapers, radio, and television can generate free publicity and increased community support for your efforts. Reporters and broadcasters are simply people doing their jobs – educating the public about current events and issues, and they’re not as intimidating as you might think. To do their job, they need your help.

The Message: To get the attention of editors or reporters, you need to offer them something newsworthy. Information is newsworthy if it is unusual or surprising, involves change, is timely and local, involves conflict, or affects the entire community.



Simply put, if you want media coverage, you must be doing something. There are many ways to create newsworthy events. For example, organize a neighborhood clean-up, hold a contest, or present an award.

Making Contact: Once you have something to publicize, make a list of all local newspapers and magazines (daily, weekly, and monthly), as well as television and radio stations. Next, take note of the editorial page writers, local news broadcasters, or reporters who regularly cover the outdoors, the environment, or community events.

What Journalists Want: Legitimate, substantive news holds journalists’ attention. Be clear about why your event matters and why it is important to the community. A local angle is key unless a reporter is writing for a national publication or network.

News should also be timely. Reporters aren’t interested in activities from three weeks ago. Be sure that you’re publicizing an upcoming event or issue.

Deadlines are important. Weekly newspapers want information several days,

if not weeks, in advance. Monthly publications work as much as two or three months ahead of time. Be aware of this and avoid calling reporters about something new when they are on deadline. Be flexible and meet them at their convenience.

Press Releases: If your group is trying to publicize an activity or accomplishment, a press release often is the best way to alert the media. It is important to communicate all the necessary information clearly and concisely. Reporters are too busy to browse through unimportant material. Keep your message short and straightforward – no longer than one page front and back, double-spaced. You may attach a fact sheet with additional information, but be sure the key information is in the press release itself.



Izaak Walton League of America

Writing a Press Release

If available, type the press release on letterhead. In the top left corner, type "DATE: (Month, Day, Year)" and "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE."

Below the dateline, type "CONTACT: (Name, title, phone number, and e-mail address of two contact people)." Be sure one of the contacts is always available. If a reporter needs a quote or more information, he or she must be able to reach someone quickly.

Skip a line, then type a one-line headline that summarizes your release. Center it and type in boldface. For example: "Porter County Izaak Walton Chapter Organizes Sustainability Workshop." Skip another line and begin the first, and most important, paragraph. At the beginning of the paragraph, type the dateline – the city (in all capital letters) and the state abbreviation. For instance: "GAITHERSBURG, Md – The Izaak Walton League released a new study yesterday ..."

Your lead paragraph should cover all the basics: What is happening, who is doing it, when and where it is happening, and why it is important to the community. Subsequent paragraphs should expand on the first, including interesting information and quotes. The final paragraph should give readers the name and phone number of someone to call for more information.

At the end of the completed release, mark either ### or -30- to let reporters know they have reached the end. Skip a line and write a sentence or two identifying your organization and its goals. For example, "The Izaak Walton League of America was established in 1922. Its members work to protect soil, air, woods, water, and wildlife."

Preparing for an Interview

Congratulations! Your press release worked and several reporters want to cover your event. You now want to be prepared to talk to the reporters. Have all of your facts and information ready before any interviews. Reporters want specifics. Be ready to answer all of their questions, including who, what, where, when, how, and why.

To prepare for an interview, develop a brief statement of your organization's position on the topic you will address or the purpose of your event. Stick to the facts and illustrate your points with examples or anecdotes. Clearly state your views in short sentences backed up by facts.

Your biggest challenge in dealing with the media, particularly broadcast, is time. Decide before an interview on a few concise, catchy sentences that best summarize your views.

Remember, an interview with a reporter is not a normal conversation. You don't have to answer their particular questions, especially on broadcast. Have bridging sentences ready that will bring you back to the few points that you want to get across. During non-broadcast interviews, if you don't know the answer to a question, tell the reporter you will get back to him or her with the information if time permits. Or use your bridging sentences to drive your message home.

Never repeat the negative. If a reporter asks a negatively phrased question, answer with a positive response. Focus on your group's solution to the problem, not the problem itself.

The more you work with the press, the easier it becomes. For more help, contact the Izaak Walton League of America. Our staff is happy to help you figure out ways to get more media coverage and find background information on issues, including contacts in your community who might be able to help.