



Media Relations 101

Getting media coverage is a powerful way to gain traction on the issues you are organizing around.

- The more politicians hear about your issue the more they consider your ask
- Issues that get little or no coverage fall off the radar
- Stories that show the popularity of your issue make it easier for politicians to say yes

To make a case to reporters that they should cover your work, you need to show that your story is:

- **Significant:** that it matters
- **Interesting:** that it's different
- **Timely:** that it matters now

This media guide is separated into three sections: [Pitching a story](#), [Getting published](#) and [Interviews](#).

PITCHING A STORY

Know your audience: Knowing who you want to reach will determine where and how you pitch your story, and what angle and/or tone you will use.

Figure out your “hook”: Why should a reporter care? Organizing a rally isn't new, but Oakville's first-ever “Dog Lovers for Climate” march is a story!

Identify journalists who may be interested: They're more accessible than you think! Try the newsroom or morning show at a local CBC affiliate; try the city desk of local paper.

Write pitch, send to journalists, follow up: A week before your event, send journalist a brief (200-word max) email about what you're doing and why it's interesting. Ask them to cover it. Follow up in few days.

GETTING PUBLISHED

Opinion articles help shape public debate and put your issue on politicians' radar. News sites' opinion sections, especially letters to editor, are widely read. The main formats for opinion articles are *Letters to the editor* and *Op-eds*.

Letter to the editor

- 50-150 words
- **Keep it topical:** Tie to recent news item
- **Talk as yourself:** Editors publish distinctive voices, intriguing facts
- **Ignore rejection:** Turned down? Try smaller, less-competitive outlets.

Example: *Hill Times* ran an article on new transit funding. DSF climate expert send a letter saying they missed something: funding will be popular. Cited interesting facts from poll.

Op-eds

- 500-700 words
- Argumentative
- Topical
- New angle
- Weave in facts
- Try community papers; they're always looking for material!

Example: A *Toronto Star* opinion article on a DSF climate expert's decision to stop flying was topical (because of climate crisis), fresh (seemed extreme), included facts (e.g., flying's GHG footprint).

INTERVIEWS

The following information focuses on a traditional approach to media relations. It is not specific to social media campaigns nor does it get granular on strategies for methods (newsletters, podcasts) requiring a more customized approach.

Types

Newsprint/magazine/newsletters/online — usually done over the phone

- If it's an unexpected call and/or you need (more) time to prepare, don't hesitate to name a better time and promise to connect then.
- Never begin an interview if you haven't had a chance to prepare or don't feel fully prepared, even if it means calling a reporter back in 15 minutes after you've had a chance to take a few deep breaths and shuffle your notes.

Radio/podcast — live on air or pre-recorded

- You'll want to make sure you do the interview in a quiet room with no interruptions for the duration. Close the door. Put a sign on the outside of the door. Think about surrounding noise. Everything might be heard.
- Quite often, the production team may request a pre-interview between you and a producer or even the host. This is an opportunity to get a sense of the direction the interview and answers could follow.
- If it's live, you'll be on air. If it's pre-recorded, the segment will air later.
- During the interview, don't try to fill any pauses. It's not up to you to fill empty air.
- Once you've finished answering a question, just stop speaking and wait.
- Try smiling; it's the exact opposite of what you'd do in front of a TV camera and it's not only relaxing, it can warm up the sound of your voice.
- Remember to breathe.

TV/video — on camera

- Avoid wearing anything that's too "busy" or distracting (i.e., no patterns, stripes or logos).
- Try not to talk with your hands and arms too much.
- Try to relax. Let your shoulders soften.
- Root your feet firmly in one spot; avoid rocking back and forth.
- Your facial expressions and body language will reflect the mood of the topic, so don't smile unless it fully fits your story.

- Always avoid looking into the camera; look at the reporter instead. It's hard not to look at it, but never look directly into the lens.

Tips

Speak from the heart

- You're the expert. Believe it.
- A media interview is a chance to be warmly welcoming in inviting interest about a project that means a lot to you.

Unpack complexity with everyday examples

- Tangible examples and vivid analogies always help, especially ones that paint a quick picture that helps further people's understanding or conveys facts effectively.
- Example: "In its lifetime, an average fossil-fuel car burns the equivalent of a stack of oil barrels 25 stories high." (*As stated by an author of a new report covered in the Guardian, "Fossil fuel cars make 'hundreds of times' more waste than electric cars," March 1, 2021*)

Focus on three to five main things to convey

- Think about three to five points that you really want people to remember most of all.
- Write them down. Make sure they read like a script and are short, succinct and captivating if possible. They especially need to sound conversational. Practise reading your script aloud. Then, as you're speaking your way through it, adjust your script based on what you want people to hear.
- Once you've got your key messages, don't be afraid to repeat them through the interview.

Keep each of your answers to 10 to 15 seconds if at all possible

- Don't get too tangled in details. It's better to pique people's interest.
- Leave your audience with a compelling impression so they seek out more info, rather than trying to tell the whole story at once.
- And at least once, clearly say the name of your website or event/project.

Best of luck! If you require more support regarding media relations, please reach out to us via Future [Ground support hours](#).