



Community Spokes Toolkit Appendix 2: Working with the Press

Some key points from the Alliance for Biking and Walking for advocates interacting with media:

- Be a reliable source
- Return reporters’ calls immediately
- Never exaggerate or lie
- Practice crafting good quotes and sound bites
- Identify members who have personal relationships with editors or reporters
- Read your local paper, including the columnists, regularly, so you know their interests and can provide information and angles that match their interests (see below for more information)

The following list is a summary of the many types of media an advocate may choose to try to incorporate into a campaign, and the pros and cons of each. Make sure you have a comprehensive communications strategy that makes use of all the most effective tactics. In almost all cases, advocates should plan at some point to use some letters to the editor and to get a local reporter to write a piece on their project.

Media Tactics	Pros and cons
Pitching news stories- Getting coverage in the regular news section	“Selling” your stories to reporters is one of the best ways to get people to notice your issue and take a side. But it’s also one of the most difficult. You need a truly newsworthy story. “Main Street is still unsafe” is not newsworthy. “Jane Doe died because Main Street is unsafe, and Mayor John Doe has agreed to make that street safer, but certain obstacles exist” might be a newsworthy. There’s a very short window to pitch a story. An upcoming vote is news (albeit rarely covered). Public reaction to a serious injury or death on a street is news, but only immediately after it happens.
Pitching a feature	Human-interest stories are a difficult pitch, but they don’t require timeliness
Press conferences	If you have something truly newsworthy, these can be effective. However, if you are working in a large media market, it is difficult to attract busy reporters. Make it worthwhile by promising a striking visual that will make a good picture.
Public-access TV	Inexpensive and relatively easy way to get coverage, but does it reach any of your targets?

Letters to the editor	One of the most-read sections of any newspaper. Learn how to write good letters. Like news stories, it helps to be timely, or to be reacting to a news article. There is no guarantee your letter will be printed.
Op-eds	These give you the opportunity to tell your story in as many as 500 words. But it is difficult to get placed, and a good OpEd piece takes time. Learn how to write a good OpEd, and stick to the word limit or you may fall victim to heavy editing!
Editorials	These are considered very authoritative, but you don't have control over the content. The editors do. Be very prepared and professional when you meet with the editorial board.
Columnists	Columnists are authoritative and provide a great way to raise the visibility of your campaign. Again, nurturing a positive relationship with the columnist is key. It helps to be a source for them, even if it's not directly related to your issue. That way, when you need them, they are more likely to help.
Radio talk shows	You don't need to write a report or plan a news conference; you just need to pick up the phone and dial (and re-dial, and re-dial). You probably have members who already listen to certain talk shows. Enlist their help in calling in. Expect backlash, and avoid shows that don't reach your target audience.
Press tours	Consider taking reporters on a tour of your issue, such as a dangerous street. Getting a reporter on a bike tends to lead to a positive story. Very time-consuming to produce.
Public Service Announcements	PSAs allow you to craft the perfect message, albeit in 30 seconds or less. They are fairly easy to place, but usually are played at times when only small audiences are listening. They are expensive to produce in a professional manner, and expensive to get on the air during "prime time" moments.
Online Web 2.0 Technology	Using technology such as content management systems, Facebook and Twitter, allows people to easily learn about your campaign. Use these networking sites to not just engage the media but also create awareness about your issue.