

# WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

# Driven to Action

## A CITIZEN'S TOOLKIT

### MAKING NEWS: YOU HAVE TO MAKE NEWS TO BE NEWS

**G**etting media attention is a do-it-yourself job. Follow these steps to increase the chances that your issue will be covered and your message heard.

To make the news you have to beat out others for the spotlight.

### KNOW THE MEDIA

You need a list of reporters and shows that might be interested in your viewpoint. Watch, listen and read to find people and programs that fit the bill. Check the editorial pages of your local paper to find out how to submit an opinion piece, guest column, or letter to the editor. Write letters to the editor and participate in phone-in radio and TV shows. Update your media list regularly with names, phone, cell and fax numbers.

#### Get Known by the Media

When a chance to introduce yourself comes up take it. Attend public meetings and press events and speak up – offer a comment. Carry a card with your contact information including an evening/weekend number and a cell phone if you use one. Use the same statistics over and over again and try to connect your issues to each other – keep to your message by discussing only your issue.

#### potential media targets

- TV: news, talk shows, community cable
- RADIO: news, morning and evening rush hour shows, noon show, weekend shows
- PRINT: news, guest column, opinion piece, editorial, letter to the editor, features, columnists. List dailies, community, multi-lingual - new sections, lifestyle, city, automotive, business section
- OTHER: newsletters, e-bulletins, websites, flyer
- MEDIA PEOPLE: news reporters, columnists, editorial boards, provincial legislative reporters, city issues reporters, columnists, assignment editors, producers

### Make Headlines

There are never any guarantees that your story will make the news, but there are some general guidelines that increase the likelihood of coverage.

- **It should be interesting and understandable.** Reporters may cover many different subjects and have a broad general understanding of topical issues, but they usually aren't technical experts. If you get the chance to talk to a reporter take the time to explain your issue.
- **It should be timely.** By paying attention to the media, you begin to notice that news has a "cycle." Things that are really important on one day, tend to diminish in importance over a week. If your issue can relate to the news cycle, you increase your potential coverage. For example, during a smog alert reporters tend to do stories about traffic and sprawl.
- **Think like a journalist.** What is the problem? What do you want? Who do you want it from? Who cares? There is no rule for how often you can release a story, but make sure you have a story. The media get impatient if you keep calling them to come out but don't deliver a story they can cover.

#### make your own news

- Release your own reports
- React to government reports
- Hold a large community meeting against a development proposal
- Bring in a dynamic planner to meet Councillors and then the press
- Hand-out "more transit" flyers at bus stops
- Bring reporters to a natural area damaged by sprawl
- Give reporters your written City Hall deputation or letter sent to the province

### news release ideas

- Planned development of 10,000 homes will destroy farmland
- Province announces new money for highways - locals to oppose, say money needed for transit
- Childhood obesity rising - worse in the suburbs
- Group cries foul after developer caught bulldozing wetland - asks city to halt construction
- Rare salamander threatened by proposed mega-shopping center
- Locals vow to fight new fare hike
- Group says city's official plan is building expensive bedrooms not communities
- Suburban residents call for 500 trees to be planted in neighbourhood
- Citizens fight new drive-through, say it will bring traffic and pollution to street
- Local group releases report that shows traffic accidents worse in suburbs
- Group releases report that shows ridership on transit is dropping

### press conference tip sheet

- Hold the press event between 10:00-11:00 am so press can meet deadlines.
- If you don't call the press to see if they are coming, don't expect them to show up. If there is a low turnout do follow-up calls to potentially interested reporters. They may have missed your event due to competing news stories.
- Have two or three people talk at the event.
- Remember who covered your story and talk to them every once in a while.
- Keep learning: ask an observer how you did. Bring in a group that is always in the press to give a workshop.

### react to events: hold a news conference

**You have a story to tell and you need to invite the press. Decide on one or two key messages only. Don't hold a conference about 10 different issues.**

- **BE CLEAR.** Find simple, clear language for those messages. If no one understands the story you won't get covered. For TV you may have 15 seconds or less.
- **FIND A LOCATION THAT IS CONVENIENT TO REPORTERS.** City Hall or a provincial legislature is good if your story is directed at them. A damaged/threatened farm field is also good but may be too far away. Instead, bring pictures or videos to the press
- **PREPARE AHEAD.** Send out a media advisory a few days before your event.
- **CALL.** Ensure the advisory was received. If not, send again. Ask to whom it should be sent.
- **CIRCULATE A PRESS RELEASE EARLY ON THE DAY OF THE EVENT.** Call to make sure it was received. Bring background information to event.
- **STAY ON MESSAGE.** A rehearsal with prepared questions and answers can help inexperienced spokespeople overcome stage fright.
- **BE AVAILABLE.** The media may call later that day needing more facts.

Clip and record your press. It will tell a great story about your campaign. Hand out press articles at community meetings and events.

If your news coverage is not to your liking, analyze the story and try to improve your message. Don't assume that if a reporter is friendly they will present your story from your perspective only. As professionals they try to find different opinions and present a diversity of views. The bottom line is whether or not your message is clearly presented in the story.

**SAMPLE: MEDIA ADVISORY**

[YOUR LOGO]

**Media Advisory****Short Headline – Four Words**

A Small Slightly more Descriptive Sub-Head

A description of the event: news conference, special event that gives a very brief description of what the event is about. This is not the place to make an argument or give away your main messages. It is simply for the purposes of notification.

*Place:* Where (including how to get there)

*Date/time:* When

Any special information

Who will be present? Mention a photo opportunity or other feature.

For further information:

[Full contact information]

**SAMPLE: MEDIA RELEASE**

[YOUR LOGO]

**Media Release****For immediate release****Date****Time and Place****A Short Headline**

A slightly longer subhead line

(City) – Today, somebody did something important – always written in the past tense. It was important because ... Perhaps one more sentence, but stick to facts, not opinion.

Another short paragraph that provides any necessary context for a reporter who might not be familiar with your issue.

“I want to state my main message,” said main spokesperson for the event. “I will say it succinctly and memorably.”

A paragraph or two can be provided here to fill in any detail not captured in the headline, the opening paragraph or the first quotation.

“I have something to say too,” said a second spokesperson.

Final statement. Altogether the release was kept to one page.

-30- [This means end of story]

For more information:

[Full contact information]

## SAMPLE: PRESS RELEASE

[YOUR LOGO]

**Press Release**

January 10, 2004

**Rally**

11:00-noon

Jan. 10, 2004

City Hall Square

**Citizens Rally Against Proposed Housing Development**

Land should be conserved, important watershed protected

(City) – Today, citizens converged on city hall to rally against a proposed new development that would pave over 1500 hectares of a natural area at the top of the city. The city’s planning committee is meeting today to decide if the development should proceed.

Residents making deputations to the committee warned that 700 trees would be cut down to make way for the new homes and construction would pollute groundwater that supplies clean drinking water to 500,000 residents downstream.

“This is development of the worst kind,” said main spokesperson for the event. “It’s more sprawl that is going to hurt this city financially and pollute our air, water and land.”

Last month, the resident group released a report on the damaging effects that sprawl has already had on their community. The report states that sprawling communities can be unhealthy, increasing traffic accidents, obesity levels and air pollution. Infrastructure in sprawling communities also costs more for municipalities to maintain.

“If new homes have to be built, we want them built here, downtown. Not on land that should be preserved for beauty, health and recreation,” said a second spokesperson.

Approval for the development will go to Council next month. If approval is given, residents vow to bring their fight to the province.

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For more information contact: spokespeople with phone numbers

Full contact information:



David  
Suzuki  
Foundation

SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR NATURE

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