



Leveraging the Media: Five Easy Steps

Getting your messages into local media is an effective strategy to reaching the public and elected officials. Below are five easy ways to increase the visibility of your organization and the issues important to it.

1. Get on a first name basis with local reporters, columnists, bloggers and producers.

Journalists have an important influence on policy and politics because of their reach to the public and elected officials. All human service organizations should be on a first name basis with their relevant local media reporters, columnists, bloggers and producers. It must be a relationship bound by mutual trust and mutual benefit.

An overture to a media staff person starts with an email or phone call to introduce yourself and begin a dialogue. You can offer to give the person a tour of your facility or provide them your staff or clients as contact-sources. This is all about being helpful to the local news-person. They can – in turn – be helpful to you by getting your perspective out to their audience.

2. Reach out to local opinion editors and/or editorial boards.

Many news outlets (in print and digital form) have a special team dedicated to formulating the publication's own opinions on vital issues of the day. These opinions (in the form of editorials) can be very influential to elected leaders. It starts with an email or phone call to the "opinion editor" or a full "editorial board" who takes the time to research and then craft editorials.

3. Submit your first-person commentary piece.

Local media are always thirsty for content. With dwindling numbers of newsroom staff, first-person commentary pieces are more sought after than ever. This provides an opportunity to develop our own original content and submit it for publication. Once published, the written piece can then be tweeted out over social media, linked to your website and sent to elected leaders. Best of all, when published, your letter will become searchable on Google News and other news search engines, allowing you to reach even greater numbers. Most news websites will have easy instructions for submitting your commentary.

4. Post your own commentary in media.

These days, there are often ways to avoid the middleman altogether and post unedited versions of your commentary on a media site. For example, Patch, a hyper local news site, has 66 local publications in Illinois and allows unedited contributions from the public. This will usually require you to sign-up as an official contributor or "blogger" but the pay-off is enormous. From then on, you will be able to post content regularly and seamlessly.

5. Drive message through your social media platforms.

If you have a Twitter or Facebook account, use it. This means two things: 1) Monitor the social media universe on the topics of interest; and 2) Post your own content and "retweet" the content of friends and allies.