



LOCAL MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDELINES

These guidelines can be used to prepare for media outreach and build local media relations, helping you to successfully act as an informed spokesperson for your program and the Meals on Wheels network.

DEVELOPING A MEDIA RESPONSE PLAN

No matter how big or small your organization, a media response plan should be put into place long before you need it.

BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING

- Develop evergreen talking points about your program (seniors served, meals served, history) and key concerns and/or priorities (such as stats around senior hunger and isolation or current legislative issues that affect your program).
- Identify a program spokesperson who knows a lot about your program and is comfortable speaking to press. Depending on your program, this could be the head communications staff person, executive director or board chair. There should always be a backup in case the main spokesperson is out of the office or unavailable.
- Make sure the staff and volunteers in the office who typically answer the phones or respond to emails in the general inbox know how to direct a call or inquiry from the media. Anything they say could be quoted, so it's important they not weigh in on the nature of the inquiry and simply direct the inquiry appropriately and add that your spokesperson will get back to them as soon as possible for comment.
- Identify volunteers or clients who could speak about the value your program delivers or the needs of the community in case the media would like to hear their perspective.

RESPONDING TO MEDIA INQUIRIES

If you are approached by the media for a statement, quote or interview, we have outlined a few steps you can take to help you prepare and respond with confidence.

APPROACHED FOR A RESPONSE ON THE SPOT

- In addition to your own evergreen talking points, reference our [key messages and talking points](#)
- If you're asked a question to which you do not know the answer, be honest, and assure the media that you'll get back to them as soon as you know more.
- Make sure you take notes on who the reporter is and what outlet they're reporting for, so that you can follow up if necessary. It's always good to keep a list of reporters you've talked to so that when you want to reach out to them proactively, you already have their contact information, and it's not just a cold call.

APPROACHED FOR AN UPCOMING INTERVIEW

- Research the media outlet and reporter ahead of time.
- Before the interview, ask the interviewer any questions you may have:
 - What is the anticipated length of the interview?
 - Who is the audience for the story?
 - What angle will the story take?
 - Are you the only person being interviewed/quoted for this story?
 - When will the story run?
 - Can you see the questions that will be asked in advance?
- Know and practice the answers to some important questions before your interview. The media will want to know things like how many clients you serve, why senior hunger and isolation need the community's attention and how your program is impacted by federal funding. Try to include specifics and personal accounts where you can.
- Following the interview, ask if you can review the story before it is made public. While writers and reporters do not always allow you to see the full story, they may be willing to share the quotes they will be using from you.

GETTING THE MEDIA TO COVER YOUR STORY

Armed with some basics, even a program with little media experience can effectively get the coverage it needs. Below, we have outlined what makes a story appealing to the media, how to prepare your story pitch and how to make your final pitch to the media.

APPEALING TO THE MEDIA

Before pitching a story, make sure your story is newsworthy and relevant to your target media outlet's audiences. People want to read about things that affect their lives and are unique or new. The more people affected by the story or event, the more interesting it will be to journalists and their audiences. How can you make sure your story is newsworthy?

- **Be aware of timeliness.** Journalists want to report on news that has recently happened or is about to happen. The more time that passes after an event, the less newsworthy it becomes.
- **Offer a human-interest angle.** Try to arrange for media to interview a volunteer or someone who receives meals from your program. When lining up these spokespeople, aim to select individuals who are articulate and comfortable speaking to your program and services.
- **Provide sound bites and headlines.** Create powerful, short descriptions and brief headlines to describe your program and activities that will grab the audience's attention. These powerful sound bites can be a great way to build support and motivate action.

PREPARING FOR THE PITCH

- Familiarize yourself with which local media outlets (television, radio, magazine, newspaper and Internet) in your community would be a good fit for your story.
- Create a list of those outlets in which you would most like coverage, and compile the appropriate contact information for editors, reporters or writers. Phone numbers and/or email addresses can often be gathered on publications' websites.
- Brainstorm internally, and identify components of your organization and operations that may interest the media.
 - Some outlets will accept guest writer submissions. Consider having complete content ready to share if requested. If an outlet is cutting it close to a deadline and needs to fill space, they may be appreciative of your readily available content.

MAKING THE PITCH

- Send your story to outlets on your media list, making sure to follow each outlet's submission specifications. This information is often available in print or online.
 - Most journalists prefer email, but it can be helpful to follow up on the phone, as well.
 - Make each interaction as personal as possible.
 - If pitching to a specific author, try to reference some of their previous work.
 - When possible, try to pitch to the specific department most related to your story.
 - Keep publication deadlines in mind. Weekly publications have a deadline day (usually the day before they go to print); daily publications have a time of day (usually toward the end of the previous day).
- Maintain a record of your media placements and repurpose them.
 - Keep copies or links of all print clips and recordings of all radio and television pieces.
 - Post media coverage on your website, include them in your newsletters and link to them on social media.

Questions? Reach out to the Communications Team:

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