

Advocacy and the Media

Whether you like it or not, the media has never been more influential than it is now. The media can make or break a campaign - so knowing how to deal with it is extremely important.

Getting started

The first step to take when running an advocacy campaign - and one of the biggest - is to generate awareness of the issue. More often than not the most significant barrier to your cause is the lack of understanding of your issue among the general public. An active engagement with the media should be part of any advocacy campaign.

You'll need to work on two different levels. The first is to raise awareness amongst your contacts. Most issues that gain media coverage start as a murmur amongst activist circles. The second level, of course, is direct engagement with the broader community through the media.

This can be done in a wide variety of ways.

Develop a Media Strategy

You need to develop a media strategy very early in your campaign. In doing so you're trying to devise a plan that will attract maximum media coverage for your issue. You need to think strategically about the long term, and your strategy needs to grow and evolve with time.

For detailed information on devising a media strategy, see Our Community's help sheets on [Preparing a Winning Strategy \(http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/marketing_article.jsp?articleId=1424\)](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/marketing_article.jsp?articleId=1424).

Press Release

A press release is the most obvious way of alerting journalists and the media to your campaign. Local media, in particular, can present a good opportunity to get your voice heard (particularly for local issues).

With media outlets increasingly under-resourced, go out of your way to present the best press release possible; you'll have a better chance of getting it printed.

When writing a press release, be concise. A press release should generally not be more than a page long. All the important points should be in the first two paragraphs, as this is probably as far as a journalist will read before deciding whether or not to run the story. These first two paragraphs should contain the who, what, where, when, and why of the campaign.

It's also a good idea to personalise your campaign. How will it affect particular people? Quotes are an ideal way of getting this information across. If you can provide pictures, better still.

For more details on writing a press release see Our Community's [Marketing & Communications Centre \(http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/marketing_article.jsp?articleId=1575\)](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/marketing_article.jsp?articleId=1575)

Media Contacts

Developing a relationship with a journalist (or, better still, a number of journalists) is one of the most useful things you can do as a campaigner. By doing so you can ensure that coverage of your organisation's campaigns is more likely to be positive and more likely to get a run. To maintain the

relationship, be as punctual and compliant as possible. Respond promptly and enthusiastically to any requests for an interview, pictures, or information.

It also never hurts to throw a story their way from time to time that doesn't involve you but that you know will make a good article.

The best possible outcome with regards to media contacts is to actually have a journalist as a member of your organisation, or better still, as part of your inner circle.

(<https://www.communitiesincontrol.com.au/cic/resource/?resourceId=2401>)

A Media Stunt - getting attention

To grab the attention of the public and the media, advocacy organisations will often stage a media stunt. Usually this comes in the form of some sort of direct action or public display.

Media stunts can be sit-ins, rallies, public performances, hunger strikes, people chaining themselves to something, or just generally making life difficult for those you're protesting against, or anything that will draw a crowd or a camera.

Beware, though, that any stunt you stage needs to be handled carefully. There may be legal ramifications, people may get hurt, people might get arrested or get sent to jail. If things go badly, media stunts can have the opposite effect to the one they want. Instead of drawing attention to the important issue at stake, media reports will talk instead about annoying protesters causing trouble and endangering others, whereas the public presentation of a petition or the opening of a building may be greeted with a little more sympathy. Pick your audience, and match the action to it.

It's also vital to make sure the media knows about your event so that they can be there when it happens. Make sure you put out a press release, or tip off a sympathetic journo so that they're on hand for an exclusive.

Spokesperson

It's important to have a spokesperson who will be the key contact for the media and to make public announcements on behalf of your group or coalition.

This position should either go to someone with a strong media background or to one of the more prominent, public and senior members of your group.

It's important that people know who the spokesperson is. Direct the media to this person; don't let just anyone answer the media's questions. This way you can be sure that your side of the story will come across well and a clear and consistent message will prevail.

Your media spokesperson should be particularly well briefed on the issues involved in your campaign and have a strong, concise message to make. You need to develop an 'elevator speech' for the campaign - a quick 30-second spiel that can be delivered in the time it takes an elevator to go three floors, and that sums up what it is you're doing and why.

Surviving the Media Storm

Sometimes things get ugly - we all make mistakes. Unfortunately, this is when you tend to start generating more media interest than you may have bargained for. If this happens, you need to react; the worst thing you can do is just bury your head in the sand.

Recognise that there's a problem and you're going to have to deal with it. "No comment" is not an appropriate response. You have to develop a strategy, and then try to stick to it. You're going to have to weather the storm, so don't start blaming the media for all your troubles. You need to take responsibility for your actions. This means staying calm and avoiding public outbursts.

Once you've acknowledged there's a problem, use the media to address the public. Speak in language that's easy to understand, and show genuine concern.

The final point here is to determine as quickly as possible what information you can legally release. Once you've established this, release as much of that information as quickly as you can to show you're being upfront about your problem and can be trusted. It's then important to stick to the facts - don't guess or speculate. If the information you're handling is incorrect, make sure you correct it.

More information about media relations and media campaigns, including dozens of free help sheets, can be found [here \(http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/marketing_main.jsp\)](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/marketing/marketing_main.jsp).