



Tips for Working With the Media

TO PROMOTE EYE HEALTH PROGRAMS AND EVENTS



Media Guide

Tips for Working With the Media To Promote Eye Health Programs and Events

The media have an enormous influence on our society by shaping public opinion and even changing it. Thus, the media can play a vital role in educating Americans about ways to lead longer, healthier, and more productive lives.

This guide is filled with useful information that you can use to develop media materials to raise awareness about eye health in your community.

Healthy vision programs benefit when the media help deliver health-related messages to the public. As you carry out your own community-based program, you can develop positive working relationships with print and broadcast professionals and organizations in your community. These relationships will be important in making the media your ally, not your adversary.

The information that follows will help you generate news media coverage for your program. Three key steps are:

- Outline your program objectives
- Develop a media list
- Use the media to help implement your program

Be proactive. Most media outlets will not search you out—you need to go to the media. By being proactive, you can create more opportunities for yourself and your program to be featured in the media.

Outline Your Program Objectives

Always have clear objectives in mind before you approach members of the media to promote your program. Questions that may help you determine what you want to accomplish include:

- Do you want to change public attitudes?
- Do you want to find funding sources for your program?
- Do you want to influence local leaders?
- Do you want to get people to participate in an activity?

Your answers to these questions will determine your messages and the media avenues most effective in conveying them.

Follow a methodical approach as you create your plan for promoting your program on healthy vision. Imagine yourself being interviewed by a media representative who is reporting on your program.

Take time to think about what you want to change, the people with influence who may implement that change, and how you may get your message to the people who can make change happen. Your objective should be specific, measurable, and achievable. For example, consider the following questions and possible answers, and then write your own answers in the spaces provided in the next section.

What do I want to accomplish?

Thinking too general: I want every person in our community to have an eye exam every year, appropriate vision correction, comprehensive vision preservation treatment, and any and all resources needed to live comfortably with the best level to which his or her vision can be corrected.

Thinking too vague: I think people should be concerned about their vision.

Thinking just right: I want to raise awareness in our community about the importance of using regular professional eye health services appropriate to each person's age and other risk factors.

My thinking: I want to...

Whom do I need to reach with my message in order to accomplish my objectives?

Develop one message for each audience:

- **Service providers:** Eye care and other health professionals.
- **Decision makers:** Local business leaders, government officials, school administrators, teachers, and coaches.
- **Caregivers:** Parents, grandparents, and faith community members.
- **Recipients:** Parents, grandparents, children, and patients.

Where, when, and how can I reach my target audience with my message?

- **Television:** Local access and local news programs.
- **Radio:** Interview, public service announcement, and commentary.
- **Print:** Opinion editorial (op-ed), story, interview, and local angle.
- **Meetings:** Kiwanis, town council, and PTA.
- **Other:** Health fair or community event.

Regardless of what you want to promote, your answers to these simple questions will guide your activities toward making the media a partner.

Develop a Media List

Contacts To Consider

Use the Media Information Contact form on the next page to develop an up-to-date media list that includes:

- Local newspaper, television, and radio news reporters who cover health, community news, and other stories of interest for or about your target audience.
- Editors at associations, faith communities, and other newsletters/newspapers that target your audience.
- Hosts and producers of local television and radio news programs.
- Radio and television personalities.
- Public service and advertising directors at television and radio stations, newspapers, and magazines.
- Others who are interested in your message.

Tips for Creating Your List

- Ask people you know at local associations or advocacy groups for copies of their media mailing lists.
- Check your local library for the trade and community publications that list local and regional media.
- Compile a list of names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses for members of the media you wish to contact.

Making and Maintaining Contacts

- Begin making phone calls. Introduce yourself as a community leader taking a national program into your community.
- Mention that you will be sending out information about eye health events and news on a regular basis and would appreciate coverage. Invite the contacts to call you when they are working on stories about visual impairment.

- 
- Offer to provide background materials, additional statistics, interviews, and other interesting perspectives.
 - Follow up with a personal letter that includes your business card or contact information. Keep reminders on hand, such as keychain magnifying glasses or magnets, to send to people in appreciation for covering your program and to maintain awareness of healthy vision.
 - Keep a record of your media contacts.

Media Information Contact Form

Media Outlet	Contact Name and Title	Address/ E-mail	Phone and Fax	Next Steps	Notes

Use the Media To Help Implement Your Program

With a media plan, motivating messages, and an up-to-date media list, you are on your way.

Here are some tips on how to communicate successfully with the media:

Prepare Factsheets and Background Materials

Reporters will ask for factsheets or background materials on your program. Have these materials ready before you make the first contact.

Factsheets, brochures, and other sample materials may be used as handouts at community fairs, conferences, and briefings. The materials may also be included in information kits and mailings.

Check around your community in public buildings and with vendors for opportunities for events and areas to display sample materials (e.g., libraries, newspaper ads, bulletin boards, local restaurants, and community centers).

Create a News Release

A news release, also known as a press release, is a short news story sent to print and broadcast reporters. It alerts reporters about something noteworthy so they can produce a story for local news, cable news, or the radio.

Localizing the content of a news release is important. The more relevant a story is to an audience the more interesting it will be.

Whenever possible, use words that convey the newsworthiness of your event, such as biggest, longest, and first—but always remember to be honest. Keep sentences short, with no more than two ideas per sentence.

Think of ways to include a local celebrity in your program or event, such as by asking him or her to serve as guest host for the event or receive an award. Mention this person in your lead paragraph to attract people to read on.

Consider bringing in a spokesperson for your program. This might be someone who has had a personal experience with vision loss that makes a compelling story and relates to the vision objective your program addresses. For example, this could be a worker who lost his or her sight to an accident, a person who was affected by eye disease, a person with a family member who was affected by eye disease, or a person who discovered low vision rehabilitation services.

Don't forget to think about what will make a great picture in the paper. For example, a celebrity reading a large-print book to a child could be a captivating photo.

You can use the guidelines that follow to create your own news release or use the sample news release on page 11.

Lead Paragraph

For this initial paragraph, aim to answer all of the following questions in one or two sentences:

- Who is sponsoring your event or story?
- What do the events mean to the reader?
- When and where will your event take place, or when was or will this information be made public?

- How can the reader participate?
- Why is this event or information newsworthy?

Subsequent paragraphs should build on the lead paragraph. For each, be sure to stick to the point and keep it short. There should be no more than five short paragraphs following the lead and it should total less than two pages. The information that follows briefly describes what you want to accomplish with each paragraph and how you can accomplish it.

Second Paragraph

Why is your program or event important? Expand on the lead paragraph by giving more specific details.

Third Paragraph

What are you trying to publicize, demonstrate, or accomplish with your story or activity? A quote from an organization spokesperson or supportive celebrity fits well here, as it personalizes the story and conveys excitement.

Fourth Paragraph

How does your event fit with your organization's mission? Include authoritative information, statistics, data, or research that supports your story.

Fifth Paragraph

Wrap up with where and how to obtain more information, get tickets, or sign up to participate.

Sample News Release

Note: A news release may also be referred to as a press release.

For Immediate Release

[Date]

Contact:

Organization Name:

Telephone:

Email:

[*HEADLINE—Newsworthy Event*]

[*SUBHEADLINE—Reason this is important in your community.*]

[*Your organization*] is [*provide a brief outline of your activities/events or outreach effort*] on [*date*] to educate residents about [*use the program objective that your event addresses*]. Activities will include [*add more specific time and length of event*].

[*State*] has [*use local statistics to explain why this issue is important in your community*]. This problem is likely to become a major public health concern in [*State*] as the baby boom generation ages. [*Your organization's name and/or event*] is aimed at informing [*community's or State's*] residents about who is at higher risk for [*state how this event will help to address the program objective that concerns you*].

"The need for eye health education programs in [*community or State*] is urgent," said [*spokesperson*] of [*your organization*]. "Through our [*event*] we hope to make people aware of how early detection and treatment can prevent vision loss."

The leading causes of [*this program objective*] are [*state what the causes are*]. Currently, large numbers of [*target population*] Americans are affected by [*this problem*], and these numbers are likely to increase in the next three decades.

This event supports the Healthy Vision Program, the national prevention initiative sponsored by the National Eye Institute (NEI) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to reduce visual impairment among all people in our Nation during this decade.

[*Your organization, if applicable*] is a member of the National Eye Health Education Program, a Partnership established by NEI to conduct eye health education programs throughout the country. [*Insert information about activities being undertaken by your organization and/or resources available to people in your community who may want to have an eye exam.*]

###

Send a Media Advisory

A media advisory is a one-page announcement of an upcoming event sent to reporters a few days before the event. It is shorter than a news release. The objective is to get on the schedule of stories to be covered the day of the event. Like a news release, a media advisory will answer the questions who, what, when, where, how, and why. A sample media advisory template is available on page 14.

After you have sent the media advisory to reporters:

- Follow up 2 days in advance with a phone call to the assignment desk at each media organization to be sure the advisory has been received.
- Ask if anyone has been assigned to cover your event.
- Ask whether more information is needed or whether an interview is desired.
- Know which spokespeople are available for interviews.
- Set aside an aesthetically pleasing area of the event where reporters can conduct interviews.
- Know the time that visually interesting activities will take place, such as an award ceremony or keynote speaker's presentation.
- Know exactly where the reporters can park to get into and out of the event quickly.
- Know what equipment will be available for the media at the event, including electrical outlets, audio feeds from the podium, and lighting.
- Call the media early on the morning of the event to see whether your story is on the assignment schedule for that day.
- Ask what time the reporter(s) will be there.
- Let the media know that you will have someone available to greet them, take them to the media area, and assist them with setting up.

- Provide a media package containing the news release and materials, such as photos of key people, speeches, and attendance information. In short, make covering your event as easy as possible.

Even if a bigger story breaks the day of your event, you can still encourage the media to cover your story by:

- Dropping off the media package or sending it by courier.
- Faxing or e-mailing key information about the event.
- Having your spokesperson available after the event for phone interviews.

Sample Media Advisory Template

Contact:

Organization Name:

Telephone:

Email:

For Immediate Release

[Date]

News Advisory

[Headline/Title]

What: Describe what is taking place.

Why: Describe why this is important.

When: Provide the date and time.

Where: Provide the address/location of event.

Contact: Give contact information for the person in charge or a website address where additional information can be found.

Event Highlights: List any specific events or highlights taking place, including the date, time, and location.

###

Hold a News Conference

The same principles for developing a news release and getting the media to cover your program apply to holding a news conference, conducting an editorial board meeting, or writing an op-ed or a letter to the editor.

Keep in mind that media representatives are very busy. Only hold a news conference if you have a good reason, such as:

- You have something truly newsworthy to announce, such as a new program, an important achievement, new statistics or research, or other information important to many people in your area.
- A local official or celebrity will be at the event to help make the announcement.

Get on an Editorial Board Meeting Agenda

An editorial board is a group of staff writers and editors who meet regularly to discuss important issues in the community. You have likely read newspaper editorials in which a publication endorses candidates running for public office. The decision to endorse a politician is generally made after the editorial board has met with all of the major candidates.

If your issue is important to the community and has public policy implications, you may arrange a meeting with the board to talk about your concerns. Perhaps the board will write a supportive editorial. The newspaper's op-eds usually appear on the left side of the editorial page, next to the guest op-eds from community leaders and letters to the editor.

When you meet with the board:

- Be prepared to tell the board what you want as briefly as possible.
- Bring media kits, such as the ones you develop for an event or story.
- Create talking points based on a speaker's guide or write some of your own.
- Bring one or more people with you who can speak about the issue from different perspectives.
- Prepare a draft op-ed article to leave with the board as a suggestion of what you are trying to say.

Write an Opinion Editorial (Op-ed)

Op-eds tend to focus on issues that are of great importance to the broader community, such as community health and safety, pending legislation, and public policy concerns.

Guest op-eds from community leaders or experts on a particular issue appear on editorial pages, usually positioned to the right of the editorials written by the newspaper.

Prominent community leaders sometimes have their own op-eds published. You may be able to work with an eye care professional to draft an op-ed that will appear in his or her name.

When you write an op-ed, stick to the rules for news releases:

- Build on the lead. Stick to the point and keep it short—no more than five short paragraphs following the lead, which is about 1.5 to 2 pages, double-spaced.
- Answer the who, what, when, where, how, and why of your position up front.
- Use statistics, data, or research that supports your position.

- Use quotes from published stories that support your opinion (be sure to give appropriate credit to the author and publication).
- Close with a call to action, something specific that people can do to support your position, such as voting for pending legislation, calling their representative, getting a comprehensive dilated eye exam, or helping someone else get one.

Send a Letter to the Editor

Many letters are written to the editors of newspapers every day, but few are published.

To increase the chances that your letter appears:

- Determine the newspaper's policy about letters to the editor.
- Follow the rules for writing an op-ed—make your point, stick to the point, and keep it short.
- Tie-in with something current that will make your letter newsworthy, such as a story that was recently in their paper.
- Keep it relevant—a current hot topic or local issue may stimulate more interest.
- Use facts to support your position.
- Offer a solution or action that can help.
- Make sure you are available and prepared to answer questions if an editor calls.
- Identify yourself. If you must ask for anonymity, explain why.

Take Advantage of the Internet

Create an Internet marketing plan. Minimally, this plan should include a clear description of your program or event, identify the target audience, and describe how you will promote what you are trying to do. Here are some ideas:

- Use your own website. Be sure to include descriptive keywords that search engines and directories use to match your site with people who are looking for information that you can provide. For community organizations without websites or technical support, many Internet service providers offer free web hosting and even have online programs that help you put up a simple website.
- Submit your site to search engines and directories such as Google, MSN, and Yahoo.
- Engage in viral marketing. This approach facilitates and encourages people to pass along a message. You can do this by:
 - ❖ Posting to friendly listservs and developing your own listserv where you can include a Tell-a-Friend button on all pages.
 - ❖ Using social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.
 - ❖ Adding a signature file on all outgoing e-mails.
- Make sure to list your website address in all conventional marketing efforts, such as community calendars and flyers.
- Suggest link exchanges with like-minded sites, including sites to which your target audience already links.
- Think about online advertising by using online discussion sites, such as Internet forums, newsgroups, web rings, and message boards.
- Add your event to all online community calendars.
- Ask friendly sites to list your event.
- Post to e-mail lists and newsgroups.
- Use other organizations' websites, if you can, to promote your program or event. Remember to include your contact name, phone number, and e-mail address.