

Media Tips for Hosting Events

It is best to have a group of people or one person focusing solely only on media and publicity. Here are some tips that should help in producing widespread publicity. These are not just useful when organizing a candidate forum but apply to all types of event organization.

Media Team/Committee

- A solid media team includes a media coordinator, a writer, and a spokesperson as well as other individuals to aid in publicity efforts.
- The media coordinator should coordinate the efforts of the writer and spokesperson in addition to the media committee and its other publicity efforts. The coordinator should also organize the publicity aspect of the event, arrange for local celebrities, or other photo opportunities at the event.
- The spokesperson should handle media calls, maintain media contacts, and cultivate greater relationships with assignment desk personnel, news producers, and camera people.
- The writer should be responsible for news releases to the various local, state, or national news agencies.

The Event

- Find a way to make visible what you are trying to communicate. Choose a location for your event that delivers a message in line with your efforts. For example, choose a location central to the community you serve like a church or community center.
- The best visual is the one that requires the fewest words to explain. The more words that are required, the more obscure the message. Also, make sure that people who drive or walk by know what event is going on.
- Publicize the event in advance. This may include holding smaller events to increase focus on the main event. For example, have registration days, voter training sessions, and candidate volunteer days, in the buildup to a candidate forum.
- Interesting people, places, and subjects greatly increase the likelihood of good media coverage. Local or national celebrities and individuals affected by the policy you are out to change (the human interest story) attract a lot of media coverage. Again, choose a visible location that is central to the community, reflects your message, and is conveniently located.
- Timing of the event is critical. Be mindful of other events in the area.
- As a general rule, the best times for a news conference are Tuesday through Thursday from 10 a.m. until noon. Morning hours guarantee that deadlines are met and allow further development of the story. Make sure there are no other major news events scheduled at the time you are intending to have your conference.

The Media Contact List

- It is helpful to maintain two media lists: an e-mail list and a phone call list.
- The mailing list should contain the name of the publication, station, network, the publication's address, email address, and the names of people whom you know at each location.

- The phone call list will be considerably smaller but is essential. Always keep it handy. A call list should include the agency name, phone number, fax number, email, assignment desk names, reporter's names, special news areas the reporters cover, and individual cell and home phone numbers when available.
- Always keep the mailing/e-mailing and phone call lists up to date. Add new names as you meet new people. The media coordinator should take names of producers and reporters at media events and make sure those names get added to your lists.
- While it is important to e-mail releases to the assignment desk, it is also important to target reporters with whom you already have a relationship. Phone calls are much more successful in attracting media coverage.

The News Release

- Before you write your news release, sit down and list the points you wish to make. Do not ramble. While you need to include enough background information to educate, you do not need to say everything in the news release.
- The first paragraph should include the five W's – who, what, when, where, and why. The news release should be concise.
- All news releases should be followed up with a phone call. If you do not do a follow-up phone call, the reporters may not take notice of the press release.
- It is good to email/fax the news release out at least a week ahead of time to ensure its inclusion on calendars. Target the reporters and news people most likely to be interested in the event since it may be difficult to reach everyone on your list.
- A sample media advisory and sample press release are included at the end of this guide.

The Media Call

- Be thorough with your calls. Do not assume any member of the media is a "lost cause". In many ways the media calls you make are more important than the news release. Although you must have a written news statement that can be emailed or faxed upon request, you have the special opportunity during a media call to really sell your story and yourself.
- Start with the wire services like your local Associated Press since they can rapidly get the news out to other news organizations. Then call television stations since they have more staff to try to get to the location of your news event. Newspapers and radio stations should be called next.