



Tips for Working with the Media

Working with the media is an excellent way to promote your participation in Volunteer to Serve, highlight the ongoing work of your organization, draw attention to pressing community needs, and recruit new volunteers for your service activities. Below are some quick tips for generating media coverage of your Volunteer to Serve project.

Tips for Getting Started

Develop a Time Line

The timing of your outreach effort depends in large part on the results you want to achieve. For inclusion in a community calendar, two to four weeks is necessary. TV and radio stations usually need several weeks' lead-time to schedule an appearance on a talk show. One week's advance notice typically is sufficient if you're asking a reporter to cover the event itself. Be sure to check with the media outlets themselves to find out their deadlines.

Compile a Media Contact List

You will need complete contact information for local media outlets, including phone number, email address and fax number. You may want to email or fax a media advisory to the main news desk and then make a follow up call to a specific reporter. If you're in a large community or city, you may want to check your library for media directories like the Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media or Bacon's Publicity Checker.

- **Large media outlets:** When working with local television stations or large newspapers you should ask for the news or assignment desk.
- **Community newspapers:** Local residents are more likely to read and trust their community newspaper than larger regional papers. Take advantage of community calendars and residential newsletters to recruit volunteers, submit photos and spread the word about your efforts.

Your list may include:

- Wire services (Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters)
- Local and regional newspapers (daily and weekly)
- Local television news and talk shows
- Local radio news and talk shows
- Community newspapers
- Special interest media, such as ethnic publications, college newspapers and radio stations, church bulletins, and corporate newsletters (especially if local businesses are participating in your event)



Come Up with a Pitch:

Choose a "pitch" – one sentence that describes why your story is interesting, timely, and newsworthy. Your “pitch” is how you sell your story to the media and should be reinforced in your media advisory, press release and any interviews you give. Reporters often find a story newsworthy if it incorporates one of the following aspects:

- **Local Interest** – You have a better chance of making the news if you can show that your project will be of interest to local readers and viewers. For example, will your project improve a playground that's been an eyesore? Will it provide a safer place for children to learn? Will you meet some other need that people in your neighborhood are concerned about?
- **Widespread Appeal** – Across the nation residents are responding to the call to service by rolling up their sleeves and improving their communities. Emphasize the fact that your project is part of this larger story.
- **Timely Tie-Ins --** Connect your Volunteer to Serve project to recent events in your community or on the national level. For example, highlight how your project addresses a recent community issue or tackles a social need that is more acute in the summer, such as summer reading loss. Piggyback on national news, such as studies or breaking stories highlighting the importance of your issue, or recent developments in the service and nonprofit sector.
- **Unusual Alliances** – One of the goals of Volunteer to Serve is to bring people together from all walks of life toward a common purpose. If your efforts involve an unusual alliance – perhaps young and old serving side by side or people from different political persuasions or interfaith groups – be sure to let the media know.
- **Well-known People** – You might get more media attention if you involve well-known people from your community in your kick-off event and ongoing service activities. Possibilities include local athletes, news anchors, local elected officials, and business people.



- **Interesting Visuals** – For a TV reporter or newspaper photographer, what your project looks like is very important. If you are promoting a gardening service project, be sure that you invite reporters to film people gardening. If your project is about child literacy, include children reading books at the press event.

Write a Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Radio PSAs, which run at no cost to you, are a great way to recruit volunteers and to get the word out about your event. The message should be short but complete, and include a phone number to call for more information. Send the announcement to the radio station's public service director and allow plenty of lead-time.

Send a Media Advisory

Five to seven days before the event, you should fax/email a media advisory to everyone on your press list. Keep it short and specific, including key information about the event –who, what, where, when, and why – and contact information. Be sure to fax the advisory to wire service "daybooks," which are the daily calendars of events that reporters use to plan their day. Click [here](#) for a sample media advisory.

Write a Press Release

A press release gives a reporter a base for writing a story on your event. It's like a news article - except you write it. Press releases can be written before the event to attract advance notice or attention, or they can be written after the event to inform the media about the day's accomplishments. Include quotes from organizers and participants, details of the project's goals and activities, background about your organization and your contact information. Click [here](#) for a sample press release.

Write an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

The editorial page is always looking for material and is one of the most widely read parts of a newspaper. An opinion column or letter to the editor should explain how your project ties in with the call to service and how the public can get involved.

Work the Phones

Follow up on public service announcements, media advisories, and press releases with telephone calls to remind reporters and editors of your event. When you call newspapers, ask for the city desk; when calling radio and TV stations, ask for an assignment editor in the newsroom. Point out "photo opportunities" – times when photographers would be able to find lively scenes to shoot – and suggest interesting volunteers whom reporters could interview. Do a final round of calls the morning of the event.

Select a Spokesperson

Identify one or two individuals to articulate your message to the press. Condense your message and get it down cold. Think sound bites: you probably will be on the air for a matter of seconds, so make the most of it.

**Greet the Press**

Have a sign-in table for reporters and other members of the media at your event. Also, make sure that a representative of your group is on hand to greet the press and to introduce reporters to the project's spokesperson or director.

Say Thanks

Be sure to thank reporters for good coverage. Like all of us, news people appreciate kudos for a job well done.