



MEDIA ADVOCACY

# POWER PRISM

A TOOL FOR ADVOCACY PLANNING, EXECUTION & EVALUATION



## What is Media Advocacy?

Media advocacy is a way to influence decision-makers through the media outlets that matter to them, such as newspapers, radio, television, newsletters, journals, magazines, and even the newer social media, like blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. Good media advocacy is very effective and often, it's free!

Our job is to get our point-of-view across through media coverage that exposes a problem we seek to fix; spotlights a solution we seek to implement; celebrates one of our advocacy allies – while tying into our advocacy goals; or challenges one of our opposing forces.

Media advocacy rarely feels like a “big hug”. Sometimes, when done well, it makes people really uncomfortable! It highlights a controversy and should prompt decision-makers to think (and act) differently about an issue that is important to you.

Media advocacy is not about getting your name or your organization's name into the press. It's about getting your issue into the press in a way that provokes new or different thinking. And, it's about getting that issue into the press that is read, watched, and listened to by your target decision-makers.

This toolkit will provide you with the essential “how-to's” for adding power to your campaign through effective media advocacy. If media advocacy makes you nervous – it should! The media is not generally there to make you look good. They exist to tell (and sell) a story and to report what is newsworthy and interesting to their consumers. Expect the media to also present opposing viewpoints, and – *whenever possible* – be prepared to re-frame those opposition arguments. Doing good media advocacy takes practice and a good dash of courage. Having the right tools helps. Enjoy!

### **Our Media Advocacy Toolkit includes guidelines and tips on:**

- Writing letters to the editor
- Writing press releases
- Writing media advisories and media statements
- Writing and placing op-eds
- Conducting successful editorial board meetings
- Contacting the media
- Interview do's and don't's and dressing for success on TV

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## Tips for Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are a powerful and FREE way to communicate with decision-makers and your community. In New England, lawmakers are very interested in what voters are saying in the local press, so don't be shy about submitting a letter to the editor to praise their actions, challenge their actions, or simply to draw attention to the fact the people in their community care about the arts and design sectors and they should too!

- Check the paper's guidelines for writing letters, which should be stated on the editorial page.
- Include your name, address and daytime telephone number—include title if pertinent.
- Letter should generally be 200 words or less, but check specific newspaper's policy. (Letters are usually subject to condensation by newspaper.)
- Some newspapers have online submission features, i.e. you can copy and paste your letter directly into a text box and click "submit". In other cases, you will need to email your letter to the newspaper.
- If you are emailing a letter to the editor to a newspaper, paste the letter directly into the body of your email. Many reporters will not open attachments.
- Write letters about current issues, and respond promptly to stories and editorials.
- Include all relevant information about the issue—most importantly, why it's important to you personally. Papers may print letters to the editor each day or once weekly. Letters to the editor may be published right away, can take weeks or may never appear in print.
- If you receive a phone call from the newspaper, return the call! Newspapers often phone letter writers to confirm the submission.

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## Tips for Writing a Press Release

A press release is used to announce new information, new facts or milestone accomplishments of your program/agenda. Press releases can be used to respond to something that has happened externally that affects you. If you're submitting it to a local media outlet, it is critical that the information be locally focused with a local spokesperson quoted, if possible. Press releases can provide "hero opportunities" to your legislative allies, so invite them to submit a quote for inclusion.

- Use letterhead, double space and leave ample margins.
- Include contact name/position/telephone number in upper right hand corner.
- Under contact name, put release date: (For Immediate Release: Date)
- Your headline should be short, catchy and in bold letters. If you use a sub-headline, it should be in upper and lower case and underlined.
- Include all pertinent information. If you're talking about an event, include specifics.
- Include quotes from relevant parties. Make sure quote is approved by speaker.
- Don't use too many quotes! Every coalition partner does not need to be quoted in every release. Spread the glory around over time!
- Signal the end of the release with three pound signs. (###)
- After emailing/faxing press release, follow up with reporters for coverage.

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## Tips for Writing a Media Advisory & Media Statement

**Media Advisory** -- A media advisory is used to alert the media to an upcoming special event or press conference and conveys some urgency. It's sent 3 or 4 days prior to the event and includes only the "teasers" of the event: Who, What, When, Where, and Why.

- Use letterhead, double space the advisory, and leave ample margins.
- Keep to one page.
- Include contact name/position/telephone number in upper right hand corner.
- Under contact name, put release date.
- If information is sent out in advance and event must be kept confidential, include "Embargoed until (date of event)".
- Use a short, catchy headline, in bold letters. If you use a sub-headline, it should be in upper and lower case and underlined.
- Include who, what, when, where, why.
- Include information about any specific photo opportunities.
- Signal the end of the release with three pound signs (###).

**Written Statement** -- *A written statement is a prepared response to a story or report.*

- Provide contact information (title, program, telephone number and address).
- Localize the content (e.g. how does this affect us, the region).
- Should only be one or two paragraphs, maximum.
- Submit via email or fax. If emailed, type statement into the body of the email. Do not send attachments.
- Follow-up with media via email or phone call to make sure they have received your information. Try to make call earlier in the day between 10AM-1PM as most are working to meet deadlines toward the end of the day.

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## **Tips Op-Eds (Opinion-Editorials)**

Op-Eds are issue opinion pieces written by local readers, usually appearing opposite the editorial page. Decision-makers check out the opinion pages of the newspaper for a quick snapshot of what people care about at any given time. Op-Eds are an important tool for advocates and the arts and design sectors should use them regularly to communicate directly with decision-makers through the media they care about.

- Because a newspaper usually won't run multiple op-eds on the same subject, give careful thought to whom you want to have author your op-ed. Many papers will allow two authors and your messengers are often as important as your message.
- Identify the correct person to send your op-ed to, usually the editorial page editor.
- Include your name, address and daytime telephone number — include title if pertinent.
- Include all relevant information about the issue, including background information.
- Be aware that your piece is subject to editing by newspaper.
- Op-Eds should generally be 600 words or less, but check with specific newspaper's policy.
- Op-Eds are usually published in a timely manner, as most are related to a current event issue.

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## Tips for Successful Editorial Board Meetings

Decision-makers pay close attention to what media leaders have to say about key issues. But great editorials don't just fall from the sky. What we see in the media is often the result of a well-planned meeting between an organization and the editorial board. Such meetings are used to communicate a message/mission to the media with the intent of having the media outlet editorialize in favor of said mission and to establish contacts for future articles. Sometimes, media outlets don't have the staff or time for such a meeting, but they might agree to a teleconference instead.

- Identify the editorial board contact at the paper—usually the editorial page editor.
- Initiate communication and write a letter requesting an editorial board meeting.
- In your request, include the reason you'd like the meeting and the names/titles of your group participants. Include a spokesperson from the paper's circulation area.
- Approximate appropriate group size is 5 people.
- Once the meeting is scheduled, confirm it in writing.
- With group members, plan a strategy for meeting. Who will talk about what?
- Editorial board meetings are usually less than one hour. Be concise.
- Designate a team leader who will introduce the team and open the meeting.
- Outline the purpose of the meeting, state the areas you'd like to discuss, provide clear details and clearly state what you'd like to see in the media.
- Thank the board for their time, exchange business cards and shake hands.
- Team leader should send thank you notes to each member of editorial board.

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## Tips for Contacting the Media

There are many ways and reasons to reach out to the media, and advocates should use media advocacy as a means of influencing key decision-makers. For the sake of credibility, we should engage in media outreach when we have something that is actually **newsworthy**. When we get our issues covered by relevant media in a way that supports our advocacy goals – by framing the problem or our proposed solution – our campaigns are more likely to succeed. Media matters. Follow the rules.

- **Media Advisory** – Sent 3-4 days before an event, a media advisory alerts and invites the media. It should provide just enough ‘teaser’ information to get the press to attend - the logistical *who, what, where, when and why*.
- **Press Release** – Distributed the day of an event or can be embargoed a day or two before, a press release should include the most important details of your message, including data and quotes.
- **Letter to the Editor and Op-Eds** – Usually submitted in response to something that has been covered in the news recently. Offers a personal or professional perspective on the issue. Op-Eds are longer and may have two authors.

### Contacting Television Media

- Do not call TV reporters immediately prior to or during the news cycle.
- Best time to call TV reporters is 7AM-8AM; 9:30AM-11:30AM; and 1PM-4PM.
- Most daytime assignment editors complete their daily meetings before 9AM. If checking to see if they are covering an event day-of, call between 7AM and 8AM or if it is the day before 1PM-4PM.
- Plan ahead for Monday events and news. Information must be received Thursday or Friday the week before.

### Contacting Print Media

- Try to make call earlier in the day between 10AM-1PM as most are working to meet deadlines toward the end of the day.
- Be mindful of the deadlines for weekly, daily, and monthly publications. Each require different lead times based on printing schedule and frequency.

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## Interview DO's and DON'Ts and Dressing for Success on TV

### DO's:

#### BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:

- DO talk informally with the reporter about the focus of the story.
- DO preview the questions.
- DO prime reporters with your thoughts.
- DO take the initiative.
- DO ask how much time the reporter has.
- DO prepare your talking points for the interview.
- DO carefully prepare talking points or “sound bites” that you want to be sure to include during the interview.

#### DURING THE INTERVIEW:

- DO be yourself! Be likable and engaging. SMILE.
- DO keep answers short and simple. SIMPLIFY.
- DO use colorful words, analogies and absolutes to emphasize a point.
- DO talk in sound bites.
- DO shift the focus to your objectives, if necessary – go back to your sound bites.
- DO make your points in every answer.
- DO say “I don't know” when you don't, but offer to get back to them with info when able, in a timely manner.
- DO be positive.
- DO remain cool.
- DO always behave as if the camera/tape recorder is on.
- DO repeat your key message when ending the interview – again, sound bites!

### DON'Ts:

- DON'T speak “off the cuff” without time to prepare. If a reporter calls unexpectedly, say “I am in the middle of something right now, but if you tell me a little bit about what you'd like to discuss and what your deadline is, I can call you back.” Then hang up, prepare your talking points, and return the call.

- DON'T use jargon, acronyms or technical terms.
- DON'T speak off the record, ever! (There's no such thing.)
- DON'T become angry or provoked.
- DON'T speculate, guess or conjecture.
- DON'T speak for someone else.
- DON'T lie.
- DON'T answer dumb or impertinent questions.
- DON'T personally attack people.
- DON'T use offensive language.
- DON'T say "no comment" –don't answer a question you don't want to answer, but you can avoid saying "no comment" by responding with one of your sound bites.

### **Dressing for success (on TV)**

#### **DOs:**

- DO wear something appropriate for the subject matter you are discussing – you want the seriousness or good nature of the interview to reflect in what you are wearing.
- DO wear something you feel comfortable in – you don't want to look stiff.
- DO ask the reporter if there are colors you should stay away from.

#### **DON'Ts:**

- DON'T wear all black.
- DON'T wear all white.
- DON'T wear clothes with small patterns such as pinstripes and polka dots – they squiggle on TV.
- DON'T wear logos for products not associated with the interview.

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