



Tips on Working with the Media

As was stated in the previous section, successful media outreach takes time and effort. The most important aspect of this work is building relationships with members of the local media. This is one of the vital roles of a League leader. Whether the goal is to get the newspaper to print the League's voters guide or to get coverage of the League's recent testimony before the city council, the key is to be proactive and to be prepared.

The following tips on working with the media will help you identify opportunities, develop and deliver your pitch, and follow up successfully. These tips – along with the **worksheets** in the “Tools You Can Use” chapter – can help to strengthen your media outreach efforts and, consequently, strengthen results.

There is an old marketing adage that people need to hear the SAME message as many as 7 times before they are spurred to action.

With this in mind, state and local Leagues have the opportunity to increase awareness about the League's work simply by thinking about ways to deliver *concise and consistent* messages about the organization.

Every time you have an opportunity to speak about the League, it is important to underscore the value of the organization and how it serves the community. It is also helpful to imagine every opportunity as one that will grow the organization. Remember to talk about the members who do the hands-on work of safeguarding democracy, and always include an invitation for others to join the League. This might not always be obvious or intuitive, but these points can be woven into interviews, media releases, speaking engagements, etc.

To prepare for any outreach opportunity, answer these three questions:

What's my goal? What do you want to accomplish in this communication? Though you may not be used to writing down and outlining your goals, it's a great exercise to practice. For any outreach opportunity (large or small) that you have, you want to have a clear goal established for yourself going into it.

Who is my audience and what do they care most about? Think about your audience. What issues are important to them? How can you make your points resonate with them most?

What is my messaging going to focus on? Once your goal and target audience is determined, deciding on what points to focus on is simple. There are three phases to sharing a message: sharing knowledge, building a connection, and spurring the audience to action. Review your goal and audience and determine how you can most effectively accomplish these three steps.



Below are tips for utilizing the four main mechanisms for getting media coverage: press releases and media advisories; op-eds and letters to the editor; editorial board meetings; and media interviews.

Press Releases and Media Advisories

These are two methods to get out information about what your League is doing. Both provide succinct and pertinent information about your event or issue in an easy-to-read format and announce an upcoming event to the media.

Press release: A press release lets the media know of a newsworthy, upcoming event by providing detailed information on the event. Press releases are written like actual news stories and should include an interesting, attention-grabbing first paragraph, background information, and quotes. The purpose of a press release is to be published in a local media outlet to let your community know of the event.



Media advisory: A media advisory provides the media with only the Who, What, Where, When, Why of your event. The purpose of a media advisory is to invite the local media to attend your event. If the media attends your event, they may write a story about the event in a later publication of their news source.

Press releases and media advisories are great ways to inform the public and the media of upcoming League events!

It is absolutely vital that you include contact information on any materials you send to the press. Include your phone number, e-mail address and website address, especially if you're sending materials electronically.

While it may seem important to get the release out to as many media outlets as possible, there really is a great deal of importance placed on providing a personal touch. Taking the time to write a quick personal note to reporters, especially if you've seen their writing on your League's issues or have met them in the past, makes a huge difference. Also, remember that members of the press often set their calendars at the last minute; even if you send the release out a week ahead of time, be sure to follow up the day before the event to remind them. Even then they may not commit—but this is very normal!

LWVUS will provide press release templates related to “media hooks,” such as Women’s Equality Day and Bill of Rights Day, throughout the year. These tools will help Leagues to be in communication with the media on a regular basis. Templates will be posted on www.lwv.org and in the Leader’s Update as they are available. (See Chapter 4 for more information.)



Helpful Tips for Drafting a Press Release or Media Advisory:

Always make your most important point at the top. Reporters may only read the first paragraph before deciding if it's worth it to give you a call or include your League in a story.

Include a good quote. Why should they care? How does this relate to other issues affecting the community?

Keep things short. All information should fit on one page.

Do not send press materials as attachments. Paste the information right into body of your e-mail.

Call at the right time. Most reporters have story deadlines of 3 or 4 pm, so calling in the mid-morning is usually best. In a follow-up call you just want to reiterate why it's important that they attend your event. Keep it short and friendly, and offer to resend the information!

Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor

Opinion pieces (or op-eds) and letters to the editor are mechanisms for Leagues to get their opinions printed. These are generally short, no more than 250 words, and use very simple, clear, concise language that will grab attention.

Op-eds and letters to the editor serve as great opportunities to gain media coverage after an event has already happened.

Op/eds:

Op/ed is an abbreviation for "opposite the editorial page" and can denote both the page itself and the opinion pieces that a newspaper publishes on the page facing the editorial page. Newspapers generally have several op-ed columnists and regular contributors but most will also print op-eds written by outside authors. Sometimes a newspaper will call upon a local community group (such as the League) to write an opinion piece on a certain issue. Op/eds are often selected for their unique or fresh perspective on a recent event or news story. Opinion pages are generally put together a few days ahead of time, so be sure to submit it early enough in advance.

Simply put, op/eds express the opinion of the author on a particular issue, and can offer an excellent opportunity for you to advance your messages.

The following are some tips for writing and submitting an op-ed that will increase your chances of getting published:

- When drafting your op-ed, make sure that you are familiar with the types of pieces that are generally published in the paper and be sure to focus on the topic's significance to the community. Introduce yourself to your newspaper's op-ed page editor by telephone or e-mail and request the publication's op-ed guidelines. Then follow them.
- An op-ed is NOT the best forum to promote an upcoming local event.



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- Once you have confirmed the rules for submitting a piece to the paper (word counts, methods of submission and other factors vary depending on the outlet), submit one for consideration and be sure to follow up after a couple days.
- If it has not been accepted, ask if there are any adjustments that you might make to increase its chances of being published.

More Tips for Writing Successful Op/Eds:

(adapted from PNN Online, a leading nonprofit newsletter)

- **Determine your goal.** What do you want to achieve through your op-ed? Do you want people to behave differently or take a specific action? Keep this goal in mind as you write.
- **Select one message** to communicate.
- **Be controversial or thought provoking.** Editors like essays with strong opinions that will spark conversation.
- **Illustrate how the topic or issue affects readers.** Put a face on the issue by starting your essay with the story of somebody who has been affected or begin with an attention-getting statistic.
- **Describe the problem and why it exists.** This is often where you can address the opposing viewpoint and explain your group's perspective.
- **Offer your solution to the problem** and explain why it's the best option.
- **Conclude on a strong note** by repeating your message or stating a call to action.
- Add one or two sentences at the end that describe your **name, title, and credentials** as they relate to the topic.

Letters to the Editor:

Writing a letter to the editor is one of the best ways to respond to articles, editorials or op/eds published in your local paper. You should be prepared to submit a letter to amplify a positive editorial or highlight key information left out of an article.

The key to getting your letter published is making sure that it is timely. Ideally, you would submit a letter to the editor within 24 hours after the piece you're responding to appeared. The letter must include your full contact information and League title. The newspaper often will verify the authenticity of the submission with a follow-up phone call. When you want to submit a letter to the editor, call the opinion page office and ask them who to contact, what their submission requirements are, and if the paper is likely to run the piece. They will likely give you an honest answer. If they make edits to your letter, they may ask for your approval.



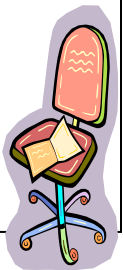
Editorial Board Meetings

Editorial board meetings generally involve one or more people from your organization and three or more writers for the opinions section of a newspaper. They're usually not on issues of immediate news importance, but ongoing issues that are of interest to the community or the editorial board itself. They are conversations, usually about an hour, and sometimes result in an opinion piece being written. The editorial board members will have questions, but you should also have talking points prepared to make your case.

The best way to set these up is to call the opinion page office and feel out their interest and find out who the best contact person is. *If you do get a meeting, be sure to do your research!* Look through archives of the paper online, and read through any opinion pieces that have been written on the issue. This will give you a sense of the views of the board ahead of time, and you'll be prepared for what questions are coming.

The Deskside Chat

Another way to build relationships with the media is to set the League up as a resource. Schedule an appointment with a reporter to let them know about some of the work that the League is doing and how it is impacting the community. For example, before the heat of the election season, meet with the appropriate reporter about some of the "non-horse race" stories related to the election. Discuss some important (although not typically front-page stories) related to the election season – e.g., Will the voting machines work? Does the town have enough pollworkers? What are the rules about absentee or early voting? Let the reporter know what the League is doing on these fronts and how we are the organization to turn to when it's time for these stories to break. In short, we are a great resource – we will always have the quote he/she needs! This serves the community and our mission, and it gets us visibility.



Media interviews

Issuing press releases and fostering relationships with members of the media (print, television and radio) will hopefully result in your League being called for interviews. Local television, of course, offers the broadest exposure to information from and about the League, so you are encouraged to focus there if possible. Below are a few tips to help you maximize these opportunities.

Prior to the Interview: Know the Message

Identify membership messages that will resonate with your League's target audience. Each message should be designed to make a connection between the work of LWV and the interests of this group of potential members.

In every interaction it will be important for you to communicate the unique benefits a League membership provides. As a member, you already know, a League membership offers one-of-a-kind opportunities to serve as a leader; it allows members to make a difference in their



communities; and as a member of the LWV, you are part of an organization where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. The worksheets in the “Tools You Can Use” chapter will help local League with these steps.

How to Prepare for an Interview:

- **Do your research:** The more knowledge you have, the more prepared you will be. There are several questions you want answered before the interview – some to consider are:
 - What’s the interview about?
 - What’s your organization’s role in the piece being proposed?
 - What is the interview format?
 - What outlet is it for? If it is not one you are familiar with, ask about their format: Is it a weekly, a daily, a conservative/liberal radio talk show?
- **Know what you want to say in advance.** Your expertise might enable you to discuss endless aspects about the League’s work but only one, *maybe two*, points will make it into a story and even then a consumer of the story may only remember bits and pieces. Don’t let an audience member or a journalist decide what the most important point is on this issue. Select one or two key points to make and make them well.
- **Create a fact sheet and have it handy.** To the extent possible, always have current, up-to-date information available about the League and work. You can refer to it also to help stay “on message.”
- **Tell a story.** People remember points much more if they are illustrated with a story. By forming a good story as part of your presentation, your delivery skills will automatically improve as well.
- **Use numbers, but sparingly.** Memorize one or two precise statistics that will give weight to your messages and bring your information to life.

What to Remember During the Interview:

- **Be calm and confident.** You may be nervous, but the most important thing is to be calm and confident. Getting flustered can convey a host of things – none positive! Prepare in advance, stick to your messages and you’ll ace any interview. Feel free to keep notes in front of you during a phone or radio interview.
- **Remember who you are talking to when you are being interviewed:** You are talking to the audience that reads the story or sees it on TV. You are not talking to the reporter who is interviewing you.
- **Speak up!** If an interviewer misstates something or has a fact wrong, make a correction *politely*.



- **Be concise and keep it simple.** Keep your answers between 10-20 seconds. Use clear language and avoid jargon. You don't want to bore your audience or make them feel stupid.
- **Repeat, Repeat, Repeat.** Try your best to repeat the information that is most important and relevant (website address, organization name and location, contact information, etc.)
- **Be honest!** Provide other sources that will back you up. Independent experts can help to provide support for your position.
- **Everything is on the record.** Don't give in to the temptation to tell the reporter something "off the record." If you say it aloud, or put it in an e-mail, assume that it will appear in the reporter's story.
- **Collect your thoughts.** If a journalist calls and wants to conduct an on-the-spot interview, ask if you can call back in five minutes. Use that time to gather your thoughts and review your key points.

Training Spokespeople

The League's spokesperson traditionally is the president (or his or her designee). It's important to ensure that the organization speaks with *one voice* on policy matters. This also helps to foster strong personal relationships with the media and local government officials. Therefore, it is vitally important that the League's spokespersons are familiar with your League's membership messages, feel comfortable asking people to join, and have perfected sharing their League story. This may require some training or practice, so membership teams are encouraged to share the materials in this section with their League's spokespersons.



This isn't just for the media!

The tips and suggestions mentioned in this section will also be helpful in other speaking opportunities and outreach activities, not just your interaction with the media. Many of these techniques will be valuable and useful when you reach out to potential allied groups, like the Chamber of Commerce or the YWCA. They also can be used in preparing to talk with a donor or potential donor. Remember to ask people to join, stay on message, be concise, and tell your story or others' success stories about the League, and you'll do well.



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