

Seeds for Change

In-depth guide



Using mainstream media

A guide to putting your campaign message across in newspaper, radio and on tv

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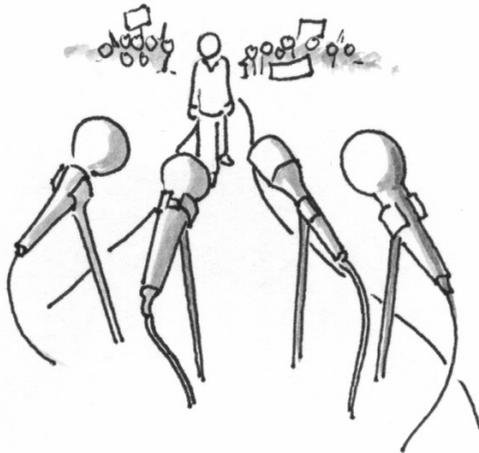
Introduction

Using the mainstream media as part of your campaign can help you to win it – it can inspire people to join you, put pressure on your opponents and turn neutral people into allies.

Working with mainstream media also throws up challenges - often the interests of media corporations run counter to the interests of your campaign. By developing a clever media strategy and learning how to get the right messages across to the right audiences we can dramatically increase our impact.

In this guide you'll find tips on media strategy, writing press releases, giving interviews and creating engaging footage. We also cover other ways of using the media, media coverage for direction action, a critical look at the media and tips on dealing with unwelcome media attention.

For ideas on how to create your own outreach without using mainstream media take a look at our guide *Good Publicity and Outreach*.



Develop a plan for media

If you're considering using the mainstream media, it's a good idea to think strategically and make a plan. This will help you get the right message, to the right people, in the best possible way. It will allow you to target a specific audience, set the agenda by creating bespoke messages and decide when it's useful to engage with media and when it's not.

Ideally your media plan will be heavily informed by your campaign plan. If you don't have a campaign plan, consider the information below. This will help you to develop a basic media plan and, by using a tool called the 'Spectrum of Allies', it will be particularly strategic!

What is your media aim?

Decide exactly what you want to achieve with your media campaign, e.g. raise public awareness about the dangers of fracking in your local area. This will help you to determine who you should be trying to reach and also help you create relevant, effective messages.

Who are you trying to reach?

People are different! And those different people will require different messages, so it's important to identify exactly who you are trying to reach. For example is it financially well off local people aged 65 plus or young parents with not much money?

It's also useful to consider whether the people you are targeting are with you, against you or neutral. This will influence what your message is and whether mainstream media is the best way to reach people / convey the message.

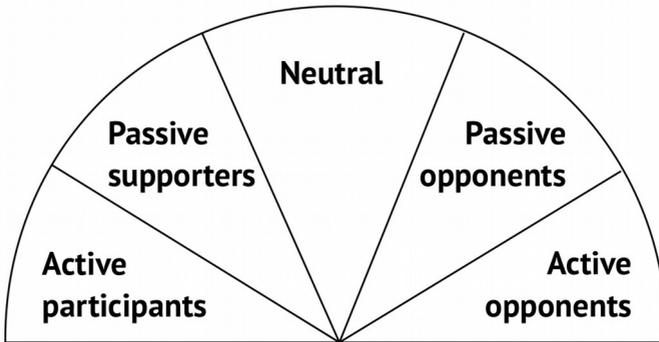
The Spectrum of Allies

The diagram below is called a 'spectrum of allies'. It's a tool that helps you to map out where key groups of people and organisations are on a spectrum of 'with us' or 'against us'.

You can then think about how your media could move these groups of people or organisations one wedge to the left, closer to 'with us'.

It's worth noting that it's rare to win over someone who is against you, and would require a lot of time and effort. It's also not necessary!

Campaigns usually win by converting the 'neutral' wedge to 'passive allies' and making the 'passive allies' in to 'active allies'.



What are your key messages?

Your key messages should be informed by your media aim, who exactly you are trying to reach and where they sit on the spectrum of allies. For example, if your aim is to raise public awareness about the dangers of fracking in your local area, you might decide that initially you'll target local retired people who currently feel neutral about fracking. Your key messages for this group of people might be:

- Fracking causes causes house prices to crash.
- Fracking has devastating effects on people's health.
- Fracking will ruin the planet for our grandchildren.

Delivering your key messages

What kind of media you use to get your messages across depends on the kinds of people you are trying to reach. Some of the main ways of reaching out to people include:

- Local newspapers, tv, radio
- National mainstream newspapers, tv, radio
- Alternative news channels and print media
- Social media – blogs, twitter, facebook etc.
- Direct communication – stalls, events, workshops, talks

Using the spectrum of allies can help you work out where to focus your efforts:

Passive allies already know a lot of facts about your campaign and are on the sidelines. Short and simple information, which is usually what the mainstream media wants, will have very little impact on these people. A great way to shift passive allies is by engaging them on an emotional level. **Stories** are a really useful tool for this. Unless it's an issue that is extremely current and everybody cares about, it's unlikely the mainstream media would be interested in stories. However, social media is an excellent way to reach people with stories and you have complete editorial control. Newsletters, stalls and other outreach events are also great. Seeds for Change hopes to include some information on effective stories for social change in our 'outreach and media' guide soon.

Neutral people won't give your message much time or concentration so you need to create a message that is **short and simple**. Mainstream media is the perfect tool to reach these people as it welcomes brief and easy to understand content. Social media platforms such as facebook and twitter are also great for short and simple messages but it is very hard to break out of the 'echo chamber' and reach a wide audience. Mainstream media has an incredibly wide audience.

Passive opponents are rarely targeted with media but some campaigns do target active opponents. This isn't generally with the aim of moving

them closer to 'with us', it's to let adversaries know they should expect resistance!

What tactics will you use to get coverage?

What can you do to get the media interested so they cover the story? You could publish a report, hold a dramatic press stunt, make an ordinary event photogenic with exciting visuals or take direct action. Is there a symbolic date, event or location that will add weight to your message?

Compile your media contacts list

Do a reality check and ask yourselves who will be likely to run your story and how they are likely to cover it. Each newspaper, tv and radio channel will have their own editorial policy and style. The best way to find out is by looking at the actual paper, tv programme or radio programme.

Local newspapers and radio will often be prepared to make a story out of quite minor events. National news outlets are usually more choosy. Try to hook their interest with exciting visuals, and if possible link your stories to the 'hot topics' of the moment. Industry press may be interested in covering related campaigns such as boycotts and divestment campaigns, which could increase pressure on a particular company.

Look at www.mediauk.com for details of radio, TV and print media outlets. To find out which papers cover your local area visit a newsagents. Compile a list with contact details and information about what particular topics or localities journalists cover, make a note of who is writing articles you agree with on similar topics.

If possible get to know individual reporters who are sympathetic to your cause. If they like and trust you then your stories are more likely to become news. Tweeting journalists is a good way to contact them too but this becomes a lot more effective if you have developed a relationship with them already.

Long-term media work

If you are planning to try for consistent media exposure during your campaign then as well as considering your aim, audience, message and tactics you should also consider how the whole media campaign will develop.

Your first priority may simply be to get the interest of the media. Later on in the campaign you may have lots of media attention, and your priorities will be to put across your chosen messages, and counter any negative ways the media is portraying you. You may have the greatest chance of success if you think through ways you could be misrepresented, and make a plan for how you will portray yourselves from the very beginning. Thinking ahead can also help you prepare responses to foreseeable events.

Another element of planning is making sure you can send out regular news releases, each with its own angle, in order to present it as a 'news' story. It doesn't have to be completely new – a minor development in the story should be enough. Planning ahead can help you ensure there are no big gaps with nothing new to report on.

If you want to find out more about developing strategies generally then have a look at our guide on *Planning your Campaign*.



Write and distribute your news release

Deadlines and timing

When planning your news release the first thing to find out is when the deadline is. All media have deadlines – make sure they get your news release in good time. As a rule of thumb for events: weekly local papers like to receive news releases several days before the deadline (but after the previous issue has come out). For a daily newspaper get your release in a day or two before your event happens.

To get coverage on TV or radio you need to think carefully about the timing of your event. For example, a lunchtime event misses the peak breakfast audiences and may be knocked off the news agenda before rush hour, when peak numbers of people listen to their car radios.

A major story should be news released about two weeks to ten days before (marked 'forward planning'), then again 2-4 days before. Giving the media time to plan makes it more likely you'll have a photographer or camera crew show up at your event.

Sometimes it's not possible to news release your event – this is discussed in *Media coverage for direct action* below. Note that the picture desk often has different deadlines from the news desk, so check this out if you are trying to get photographic coverage.



News release basics

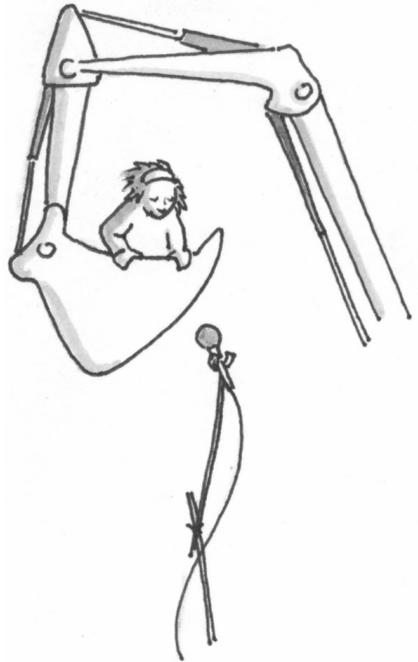
Because news releases are aimed at the news pages they should contain news (not opinions or rants!).

Send your news releases directly to the news desk by email, and, if you can, to a journalist known to cover this sort of news too (see *Distribute your news release* below). If you're arranging a photo opportunity send the release to the picture desk or Picture Editor also. Don't forget that journalists have to plough their way through hundreds of news releases every day, so make sure yours stands out. On the following pages we provide some tips on how to write an attention grabbing news release.

Creating news

News is about something happening, rather than somebody saying something (unless that somebody happens to be famous).

If you want coverage in the news pages then think about how you can create events, e.g. a public meeting, a colourful protest, a petition being handed in. You can then use these 'news events' to help get your message across.



Structure and length of your news release

Go for an eye-catching headline, then grab their attention in the first paragraph with the main points – always include all of the *five W's*: **Who, What, Where, When** and **Why** (not necessarily in that order, but do put them all in the first sentence, or at least the first paragraph).

After that, keep it short as everything needs to fit on one A4 page. Sentences and paragraphs should be short too and remember, stick to 'hard facts'.

Example of first paragraph



(who:) Local people *(when:)* today *(what:)* made a human chain *(where:)* around the trees in Church Road, Hull *(why:)* to stop the council contractors cutting down the healthy, beautiful trees, which would further reduce the residents' access to both nature and clean air.

Add quotes

Add a couple of quotes that use super snappy soundbites. For example have somebody involved in the campaign explaining what your group is doing and why. The quote is the one place where you can state your opinions so make sure it includes your key messages.

Add notes to editors

Add additional details at the bottom under the heading 'Notes to editors', including:

- **Contact phone numbers** – ensure the phones are working, and that the person answering the phone is fully prepared – they should know the contents of the news release, have some background information and be ready to put key messages across well. N.B. This can be the campaign media phone so no-one has to give the press their personal number.
- **Details of picture opportunities** – give them a time and place along with a short, visual and enticing description of what will happen, and provide links to where you'll uploading your own footage online too.
- **Details of where to access images and video clips you have produced yourselves**, e.g your campaign website or flickr.com
- **Background information about your campaign** – key facts and where to find more information
- **References** for any data cited so the journalist can check them or find out more information.

Follow the media's style

Look at how your targeted media write their reports. Follow their style as closely as you can. If you do it well, your news releases may be copied without any changes whatsoever – this is ideal as it lets you present your story how you want to.

Keep the interest going

Do regular (but interesting) news releases if you can, so that reporters will recognise your group's releases and build a relationship with your group.

Example of News Release

For immediate release: Controversial fracking site blocked by protesters

Two women from Lancashire [1] have today immobilised a vehicle and secured themselves to it, thereby blocking the only entrance to Igas's controversial fracking site near Salford. The protesters say they want to stop fracking before it goes into full production as it will be a toxic nightmare [2], while providing hardly any jobs for local people. [3]

A statement released by one of the protesters locked on to the vehicle said "I have taken action today because from water contamination to air pollution and huge amounts of waste, there are so many problems with fracking. One third of the workforce comes directly from the US and most of the rest will be contracted in from other parts of the UK, meaning practically no jobs for local people". [3]

Simone Jones, another anti-fracking protester at the site says "Events in the US have clearly demonstrated fracking is dangerous, destructive and devastates communities. Despite regulation this will also be the case in the UK. Only one well has been drilled and fracked here and it caused earthquakes that damaged the well so gas and chemicals could leak out. [4] This was not reported to the Health and Safety executive for six months. We need clean, safe, affordable energy which can be achieved by renewables such as wind and solar owned by local communities."

Notes to the editor

For further comment or interviews please phone Mandy: 07779 xxxxxx

Pictures will be uploaded here [www.flickr.com/...](http://www.flickr.com/)

[1] The women are part of one of many independent, autonomous groups resisting extreme energy extraction.

[2] <http://frack-off.org.uk/campaign-materials/science-and-data/>

[3] <http://frack-off.org.uk/cuadrillas-big-gas-results-the-devil-in-the-details/>

[4] <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/mar/13/fracking-cuadrilla-halts-operations-lancashire>

Resulting article

The article below appeared in the Mirror newspaper, based on the news release on the opposite page, and a follow up call with one of the campaigners, who gave additional quotes and information. For more on giving interviews see page 17.

Anti-fracking protesters arrested after gluing themselves into car blocking Salford site - Two women fixed themselves to a concrete barrel wedged through a hole in bottom of the vehicle this morning.

Two anti-fracking protesters have been arrested after supergluing themselves inside a car to blockade the entrance to the Barton Moss drilling site. The women, aged around 25 and 45 and from Lancaster, fixed themselves to a barrel of concrete wedged through a hole cut in the bottom of the blue Ford escort.

It was parked outside the only entrance to the IGas site from 7.30am today, stopping site traffic from entering or leaving. The women were both removed by 10am and the car was towed away half an hour later. GMP said the pair had been arrested for wilful obstruction of a public highway.

A statement released by one of women said: "I have taken action today because from water contamination to air pollution and huge amounts of waste, there are so many problems with fracking. One third of the workforce comes directly from the US and most of the rest will be contracted in from other parts of the UK, meaning practically no jobs for local people."

Fellow campaigner Mandy Roundhouse, 30, said being arrested was a risk the pair had been prepared to take. "It's not a decision they have taken lightly but they have done letter-writing, they have done going on marches, they have tried all the other means and nothing is working so they have had to resort to this," she said.

Continued overleaf

Continued from page 13

GMP said it had an extraction team on standby after similar incidents at the site, such as when one woman super-glued herself to the site gates last week. "GMP continue to balance facilitating peaceful protest with the rights of others to go about their lawful business, whilst minimising disruption to the local community and businesses," he said. Policing the Barton Moss fracking site has cost the taxpayer £300,000.

Barton Moss became a test site for the controversial extraction process after development firm IGas was granted permission from Salford town hall for exploratory drilling. Government scientists have ruled the process safe but environmental campaigners, who set up camp at the site in early December, have branded it a "toxic nightmare".

Simone Jones, another anti-fracking protester at the site, said: "The US has clearly demonstrated fracking is dangerous, destructive and devastates communities. Despite regulation this will also be the case in the UK. Only one well has been drilled and fracked here and it caused earthquakes that damaged the well so gas and chemicals could leak out. This was not reported to the Health and Safety executive for six months. We need clean, safe, affordable energy which can be achieved by renewables such as wind and solar owned by local communities."

An IGas spokeswoman said: "We recognise the right to peaceful protest, however we do not condone any illegal activity, or anything that impacts the right of local residents to go about their daily lives and work. Our priority is to ensure that there is minimal disruption to the residents and businesses of Barton Moss Road. We have received all the necessary permissions to drill a vertical exploration well to take and analyse rock samples, and remain confident we will complete our programme as planned."

Distribute your news release

Email is often the best way to make initial contact with a journalist. Send your news release in the main body of the email and do not add attachments. Most news desks automatically reject emails containing attachments for fear of viruses. Instead you can include website links to a pdf version and to any images, reports or videos mentioned in your email. Try to gain the journalist's interest with an engaging subject line in your email. Then phone up and briefly pitch your story.

For local media it can be worth taking the news release directly to the offices. Ask to see the news editor and try to strike up a conversation so that they'll remember you.

Once your group has made the news it's possible that individual journalists will monitor your internet presence, particularly social media sites, so remember everything you post is available for public scrutiny and possible publication by the media.

Follow up on a story

Cultivate relationships with journalists – if you get a good write up, phone up the journalist and tell them that you liked the article. Suggest future items about what your group is doing that they might want to cover. Remember to contact them directly the next time you are planning something.

A negative or bad write up isn't the end of the world. If at all possible phone up the journalist, tell them that you were pleased to see an article on your group or action, but that you felt they missed or misunderstood some points, and that you'd like to meet them to set the record straight. It's important to be diplomatic and to give them the impression that they can get an interesting story out of this (or better: a series of interesting stories). If the journalist thinks that you just want to complain, you're not likely to see them again.

If, after trying to talk to a journalist who did a negative write up, you get another negative article from them, look for another journalist to talk to.

It's rarely worth the effort of complaining to the Independent Press Standards Organisation, but you may feel it worthwhile to get lots of people to complain to the paper. If you have been badly misrepresented then send out another news release as soon as possible to put your side of the story across, and write a letter to the editor, asking them to publish it as your '**right to reply**'.

News release check list

- ✓ Stick to the deadline
- ✓ Have a clever, appropriate, headline
- ✓ Have the five W's in the first (short) paragraph- who, what, where, when and why
- ✓ Use quotes which contain snappy soundbites
- ✓ Include contact details
- ✓ Use 'Notes to editors' for extra information
- ✓ State how the journalist can get pictures or video footage.
- ✓ Keep it all less than an A4 page
- ✓ After you email the release, phone the news desk and or journalist to tell them about your event. You could also try tweeting journalists too.

Interviews

The person provided as media contact may be asked to do an interview. This could be from a print journalist looking for more quotes, or for radio or television. Either way, this will be most effective (and a more enjoyable experience for you) if you are well prepared.



Research

Try and find out the following:

1. What exactly the interview will be about.
2. Who the typical audience is.
3. If anyone else will be involved and if so, who?
4. If it will be live or pre-recorded.
5. What form the final broadcast/article will take (one-to-one interview, panel debate etc.)
6. How long (in time or word count) the final edit of the interview will be.
7. Who the interviewer is, what their style is and what angle they are likely to take (find some of their previous interviews).
8. Whether you can have the questions in advance - tell them you'll be able to give more interesting answers. (But don't be surprised if they completely change the questions during the interview.)

Get your message heard

Keep it simple

If you want to ensure your message is heard, keep it simple. Think of no more than three points that you want to get across. Too many points can confuse people and make the issue sound complicated. If several of you are to be interviewed then agree on the same three points. Make your key points lots of times, but use different words every time so the listener doesn't get bored. Even better would be to prepare some super-snappy sound-bites.

Use sound-bites

A sound-bite is a brief sentence, short and self-contained. It should read nicely and sound good. For example:

“Cold homes kill: we need warm, well insulated homes, fuelled by clean, green energy.”

“With powerful politicians in their pockets, rip-off energy companies are raking it in.”

“It's time to turn up the heat on energy companies: their bosses are basking in bonuses while their customers are dying in cold homes.”

An advantage of using sound-bites is that if the media only use a small section of the interview, it's highly likely they will pick your sound-bites.. Here are some tips for composing sound-bites:

- ✓ A sound-bite is clear, concise and punchy.
- ✓ A sound-bite is a quotable quote!
- ✓ A sound-bite should be dramatic or metaphorical (a metaphorical sound-bite is as strong as an ox)!
- ✓ A sound-bite that has groups of threes will be a memorable media masterpiece (especially if it is alliterative)!
- ✓ A sound-bite uses everyday language, it's a jargon free zone.

Use clear language

Use everyday language and avoid acronyms and technical terms at all costs. Try to illustrate your points with clear examples. If you refer to scientific reports and your audience is the general public, then when you use an abstract fact or statistic, you'll need to add something that helps people relate it to their own experience. For example: 'In 2014 US fracking wells created enough toxic waste water to fill at least 1 million Olympic sized swimming pools'.

General advice

Be confident and co-operative. Point out any untruths immediately by calmly and politely interrupting to make sure mistakes or misinterpretations are addressed quickly.

You should also expect personal questions, especially at the end of the interview. Interviewers often focus on personal details, they can be more interested in your personal life (what they call the human angle) than the details of your campaign. Have a think before the interview what kind of personal details you are willing to talk about. It's perfectly OK to steer the interview away from your personal life and back to the issue at hand.

Don't feel pressured by any long, uncomfortable silences during an interview - it's a trick to make you say more than you intend! When giving an answer, say what you mean to say and then stop. If the interview is pre-recorded or for print then remember you can always pause to think about how to answer a question, the pause will be edited out. If you mess up an answer you could ask to have another go at the question, the interviewer will normally agree. If they don't agree and it happens again, start coughing immediately; they won't want coughing in the final edit so will re-ask you the question.

Photo shoots, TV cameras and DIY media

Photo shoots and TV coverage can be tricky. The camera operator will often try to get you to do what they think will make a good picture. Frequently it's something that will make you look silly, or possibly even give a negative impression of your campaign. If you are expecting cameras, or have invited them, spend a few minutes thinking about shots that would work well, and the kind of things they may ask you to do (and whether you are prepared to do them). It can be worth offering suggestions.

Photographers often go for an impression of multitude. That could be a flock of cakes on a table at a fund-raiser or lots of people occupying machinery: think of something that will give an impression of mass. TV cameras on the other hand prefer movement, particularly anything out of the ordinary like climbing a crane or throwing custard tarts at people (but not something 'boring' like a demo or somebody handing out leaflets). If you are doing something that looks relatively boring like handing out leaflets then get somebody to do it on stilts, or do a short theatre piece describing what you are fighting against.

Produce your own footage

The way the mainstream media works has changed dramatically in the last few years – especially in the context of the rise of social media.

Although the news release is still the standard way to attract attention, it's likely that reporters will make use of other content you provide, for example high quality images and video clips.

Ideally these should be high resolution, but even poor quality film is often posted on news sites if there are no alternatives. If you plan to make your

own photos and video available then mention this in your news release, and provide a download link.

Although it can take a lot of time it is worth considering putting together your own interviews and posting them on the internet. It can be as simple as interviewing people involved in an action, or doing a 'studio' commentary by a talking head sitting at a desk. Although there's only a small chance that the footage will be used by the mainstream media, at least you can ask your interviewees relevant, intelligent questions and you can make the clips directly available to your supporters.

Do bear in mind that not all videos taken on actions are suitable for publication, whether in the mainstream media or on your own sites. Check beforehand that everyone in the shot is comfortable with being filmed, and review the footage to see if it might get anyone into trouble before you post it or pass it on for publication.

Media stunts

A media stunt is an event created to gain publicity. The aim is to attract photographers and maybe TV and radio, so you'll need to be imaginative, visual and possibly audible for radio. The image presented needs to be clear, simple and directly connected to the issue of concern. Also think about the hook – why should the media turn out for this event? Your stunt needs to be relevant to the current news agenda.

Pictures taken at media stunts often appear without a story, just with a simple caption. So the picture itself must tell the story. Keep it simple and focused. Placards or banners strategically placed in the picture help to get the message across (particularly if they have a clearly legible web or social media address on them).

When news releasing media stunts, put *Photo opportunity* somewhere clearly visible near the top of the page together with the time and place. Make sure you are ready and set up before the cameras arrive (e.g. tell the journalists to turn up 15 minutes after the whole thing is due to start). Have paper copies of your news release on hand to give to those photographers and journalists who turn up, even if you've already sent them one beforehand.

Media coverage for direct action

If you want the press to cover 'top secret' actions, then you'll have to think carefully about how to manage involving the press whilst maintaining security around certain aspects of your action.

Writing “EMBARGOED UNTIL ...” at the top of the news release is not enough to guarantee that the media will respect your security! It's the media's job to get different viewpoints, and they may well pass on details of your action to the police or to the target before you've even started!

It's better to talk to a sympathetic journalist, telling them that there will be a really good story, and that they can come along. If you have built up a good relationship with a journalist, and have fed them lots of good stories, they should be happy to cover the story, even if they don't know what it is about. Don't tell them what it is unless you are really, really, really sure that you can trust them (i.e. almost never!)

If you don't want to take a journalist along on a 'top secret' action, send out a news release (or talk to your friendly journalist) a few days before with a few juicy, but very carefully chosen, hints. Let them know when you will release a full news release – usually as soon as the action has started.

When doing an action, designate a competent person to deal with the media. Do this even if you haven't invited any journalists – they might turn up anyway. Refer all media to that person. The media liaison doesn't have to be present – they could be on the end of a phone. They should be prepared to make statements and counter any false claims that may be made by the police or the target. The media liaison should also be able to re-email or hand out further information – including the original news releases - as this will be easier for the journalist than them trawling back through their emails to find the release.

Other ways to use mainstream media

The letters' page

Writing a letter to the editor can be a good way of getting your view across without it being edited too much. Luckily local papers thrive on publishing letters – it saves writing articles and they can appear to care about local viewpoints.

Make your letter concise and to the point – a short letter is more likely to be published than a long one. Letters referring to something in the previous edition of the paper may also be more likely to be printed. Send the letter promptly, e.g. if a weekly paper comes out on Thursday, get the letter to them by the Monday. Most newspapers want a postal address even if you email it. Finally, remember to re-read and check your letter before you submit it. Get someone else to read it too.

If there are a lot of letters about something your group is involved in, the paper may well take more notice of your news releases, or even approach you for a story. So get your laptops out and write lots of letters, and get friends and family to write as well!

Comments on news sites

...will probably have less of an impact. Most comments are left by a small number of persistent posters (a large proportion of whom are trolls or related sceptics, often paid). Try not to be disheartened by any nasty comments. Nevertheless it's worth checking other people's comments to see if you are getting your message across clearly, and if not, how you might want to fine-tune your messaging in the future.

Radio phone-ins

...are another good way to reach lots of people. Think about what you are going to say before you phone in. Write down one to three key points you want to get across and stick to them. Get other people to phone in too – it increases the chances of someone getting on air.



A critical look at the mainstream media

Using the media can help you win your campaign. But there are some important things you should bear in mind when you are preparing to contact the media.

Almost all of the world's media (most probably your local paper too) is owned by just a handful of media giants. These corporations also own and invest in the big businesses that are often the cause of many of the problems we are challenging.

So it's worth remembering that your aims aren't the same as the media corporations'. You want to let people know about what is happening and why. Publishers want to sell papers and advertising to make maximum profit out of your 'news'. This generally means that the mainstream media work on the assumption that readers, listeners and viewers don't want to be bothered with details. Sensationalism sells, so expect your story to be stripped down to the most exciting elements and turned into entertainment. Reasons, background and even central facts will often be left out in order to focus on whatever colourful imagery the media decides is the flavour of the day.

Independent, alternative media and social media platforms can help balance the mainstream media bias. Many campaigns use existing alternative media and also create their own (see our guide *Good Publicity and Outreach* for ideas).

When using mainstream media, think carefully about how to do it and how you can benefit from it.

Unwelcome media attention

Sometimes groups or projects experience unwelcome media attention. For example, they might cast your campaign in a bad light, or take an intrusive interest in individual group members. If you are involved in a campaign on a high profile and controversial issue this is a risk to consider.

Tips for dealing with unwanted media attention

Make an assessment before anything happens – is your group likely to be targeted by journalists? If so draw up a plan of how to deal with unwanted press attention. If someone from the media (or a suspected reporter) calls, take control of the situation:

- ◆ Find out who they are – ask for ID, write down the details and office contact number.
- ◆ What do they want? Find out as much information as you can without giving anything away.
- ◆ Don't be pressured into answering their questions. Tell them your media liaison will get in touch with them or that they will be sent a written statement.
- ◆ Do not pass on telephone numbers or contact details for other people without checking with them first.
- ◆ If one of your group does talk to the press, they can prepare by drawing up a list of the most likely 'difficult' questions, and working out how to respond.

Using mainstream media

Many people get most of their news and information from the mainstream media – so it can be useful to have your campaign reported on in newspapers and on the TV and radio. Using the media can help you win your campaign. But there are some important things you should bear in mind when you are preparing to contact the media. This guide covers the basics you need to know about getting your campaign message across in newspaper, radio and on tv.

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