

# Local Media Training

**PURPOSE:** To provide event organizers with an overview of how to engage the media to attend your event and get some positive news coverage and information out about your organization and its work in the community.

## Media Relations

Speaking with media for the first time can be daunting, but preparation can help ease much of the on-the-spot stress of explaining your message to an audience. Below you will find expert tips on how to prepare for an interview to ensure nothing can distract from your important story.

## Why Engage with The Media?

The media are a great tool for you to promote your initiative. It is important to connect with them because they can:

- Help spread the word about your harm reduction training event
- Highlight you and your organization as a place where they can get more information
- Encourage your local community to engage with harm reduction in their area

## What Makes a News Story?

Newsrooms are constantly inundated by interest groups, companies and organizations of all kinds in search of media coverage. Beyond the five W's – Who, What, When, Where and Why – the following criteria are considered when they are choosing a story to cover:

- Audience impact
- Newsworthiness
- Controversy
- Conflict
- Credibility and public awareness of players involved
- Emotional impact

## Interview Objectives

**Interviewer Aims** – to satisfy their readers, listeners or viewers. They must offer the audience an interesting and entertaining or informative story. The story will vary according to each interviewer's target audience.

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**Interviewee/Spokesperson Aims** – to get the message across on behalf of your business, objective or organization. This message must be expressed in a style that reflects the image your cause wishes to convey.

**Audience Aims** – wants to be informed and entertained. Really, the crucial step is to get their attention. Think about who the audience is (hint: it's not the reporter!).

## How to Secure an Interview

The best way to start is to reach out to your local media publications/outlets, whether it's a community newspaper, radio, television station or website. Local media tend to be very friendly and love to feature local stories told by those who live in the community. We've included an email template in this toolkit for you to use, should you wish, to contact your local media.

Usually the reporter's contact information can be found on the media websites. If you cannot find a dedicated email or phone number for a specific contact, call the general line and ask to speak with a producer, editor, or other newsroom contact.

Once you connect with a person working on story development, explain why you are calling and share your idea. Think about their objectives and how your story can help to achieve them.

Try not to feel discouraged if media decline – should this happen, simply ask if there is anyone else who might be interested in your idea, or if there is a better time for this type of story to be featured.

## Preparing for the Interview

When asked for an interview, take advantage of having the reporter on the phone at that moment and get the following information:

- Name of the reporter and outlet.
- Deadline (date, time) for completing the story.
- Details on the topic, desired angle.
- Names of people to be interviewed (is it just you, or are there other interviewees/angles?).
- Length of the interview.
- Live or taped interview (if television or radio).

Ensure you know your story. You should focus your comments on three key messages, which should sum up what you want to convey to the public. It should be simple, short, straightforward, convincing and easy to remember.

**Quick tip:** Make sure you rehearse and check any details or statistics you might use, so that you have documented references you can share if needed.

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## Different Types of Messages

**Phone** - if you have a radio or print interview taking place over the phone, keep your notes in front of you for easy access to information; however, be sure to not get distracted by them or other things around you. Make sure you still dress for the interview, and if possible, stand during the call. This will subconsciously encourage you to stay alert and professional throughout the whole interview. Don't get sucked into the conversational nature of phone calls. Make sure to continually refer to your key messages.

**Radio** – keep your messages short and concise. There is no room for detail or long-winded answers, as radio often works in “sound bites”, i.e. short sections of the interview to quote. Use your words to create an image for the listener, such as active verbs or anecdotes. Speak clearly and slowly so your responses are heard correctly.

**Television** – visuals are paramount and the interviewer will likely want to tape in a location that supports the message (e.g. your training location). Ensure there is no clutter, no brand or company logos and nothing distracting in the background.

Make sure to look at the interviewer, not the camera. Sit up straight, lean slightly forward, if possible, to show you are engaged in the interview. Be yourself, as any artificial persona will show through on camera. Avoid fidgeting or any nervous movement, as this can be distracting to the audience.

Dress conservatively, professionally and comfortably, but avoid wearing all black, all white or small patterns. Pants or long skirts should be worn for interviews, keeping in mind that many interviews may be filmed while in a seated position. Ask ahead if the reporter would want to film any clips outside, so you can prepare for poor weather or wind.

**Print** – back in the heyday of print media, there were beat reporters who specialized in certain areas of interest, such as a health policy reporter, a medical reporter, or a family lifestyle reporter, among others. With newsrooms such as they are now, there are no longer specialized reporters. Ensure you explain things thoroughly in clear language. The great news is that with print reporters, you have the freedom to explain any specific terms and expand on a given topic as needed.

## After Your Interview

Remaining in contact with the reporter who interviews you is important. By doing the following, you'll be able to build and maintain your relationship:

- Send them an email or give them a call to say thank you for their time.
- If the interview was for a written article, request a copy before it is printed or posted online. If they have any details that are incorrect, you may have time to change them.
- Stay in touch. They might be interested in covering future harm reduction events that you are holding.
- Post their coverage on your organizations social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).

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## Final Thoughts

- There is no such thing as “off the record”. Don’t share anything that you would not want to read or hear in public.
- Treat the media nicely and attempt to build relationships.
- Turn negatives into positives at all opportunities.
- You can take control of the interview or change the direction of the interview, if need be.
- Emphasize your key messages. Try not to stray from them.
- Don’t answer questions if they are meant for someone else. If you are not a doctor, don’t give medical advice. Instead, say (for example), “That is a great question. The best person to answer that would be the pharmacist who is leading today’s training’.
- Prepare to answer when the reporter says, “Is there anything else you wish to add?” This is an excellent opportunity to reinforce your key messages.