



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement

How to... ...work with news media

Getting started

This is important! Before you do anything, you need to follow the guidelines for any engagement process. Work out:

- why you wish to communicate
- what you want to get across (the purpose)
- who you are trying to engage (the audience)

This will help you to work out the best media to use to reach your target audience.

Which media?

Think about what you are trying to achieve. Different types of media will help you to reach different audiences.

- If you have an announcement to make or have made a breakthrough in your research, your best bet would be to send a press release to news organisations. These can include: local or national newspapers, online news sites, radio news bulletins, and local or national television news organisations. The news media will help you reach a wide audience, but you will have little control over what gets printed. See our guide to 'Working with the news media' for guidance.
- You may wish to write an article or blog for a print or online publication. If you target special interest publications, e.g. Needlecraft Magazine, you can reach a very specific audience. See our method: 'Writing for Non-Specialist Audiences' for guidance.
- If you want to engage people with a fun element of your research, or to promote a local engagement event, local radio is a great way of connecting with the local community. See our guide 'Working with local radio' for guidance.
- You might want to find innovative ways to use new technology to engage your audience i.e. via blogs, forums, social networking sites, sharing video and audio podcasts etc. This can be a great way of allowing audiences to get involved at their own convenience, take an active participation in your activity and can be useful in targeting specific groups, i.e. young people. See our method: 'Podcasting' and our guide: 'Working with digital technology' for guidance.
- If you are a skilled presenter and want to educate a captive audience, you could submit a pitch for a television programme. This is a useful way of reaching a wide audience and promoting your subject area on a national level. But remember - getting commissioned is a tricky and time-consuming task. See our guide: 'Working in TV' for guidance.

Tips for success

1. Do your research. Whichever media outlet you decide to approach, make sure that you fully understand the medium, the tone, style and the needs of the target audience.

2. Take advice. If you have a press office, or colleagues who are experienced in dealing with the media, seek their assistance. Working with the media requires an understanding of how the media works and how to write for non specialist audiences.
3. Think ahead. Whether you are sending a press release, writing for a magazine or pitching a television programme, give yourself plenty of time. Media outlets have varying (and often lengthy) lead times.
4. Time it right. Timing is crucial when working with the media. Success with the news media often depends on how current a story is, and whether it can be supported by other major news and events. It is also in danger of being overshadowed if there are a lot of other things happening. Working in TV is very dependent on the scheduling and the 'fit' with strands of programming being aired.
5. Look for the bigger picture. Any media organisation is primarily concerned with appealing to its broadest audience. Don't get bogged down with the nitty gritty of your research. Think about the implications of your research that are relevant to the target audience.
6. Mind your language. Whatever the medium, your audience is likely to consist of people who know nothing of your research. Think carefully about the language you use, avoid jargon and make use of anecdotes and narrative to add interest. See our guide to narrative and storytelling for guidance.
7. Think about the needs of the medium. Each media organisation will be driven by its own agenda. Think about what they look for when commissioning content. What aspects of your research, or activity, lends itself to visual or audio elements, or opportunities for audience participation:
 - Television requires video footage and strong visual imagery
 - The print media require striking imagery, such as photographs
 - Radio and podcasting require audio elements, such as sound effects
 - Digital technology often requires opportunity for audience interaction

What it can be used for

- To inform/educate different groups about a complicated or contentious issue and empower the audience to contribute to ongoing public debates.
- To highlight important yet little known, or badly understood, issues.
- To inspire people with particular aspects of research and to encourage new conversations about ideas and discoveries which have not yet been explored by different audiences.
- To promote research, developments and discoveries; both in the interests of publicity and sharing information, as well as to gain public support, attract interest from potential funders or partners, and to increase the number of people entering careers in the field.

Things to bear in mind

Before communicating through the media, there are a few things you should consider:

- Don't think of working with the media as an easy option – it requires a good deal of understanding of how the media works and an ability to write succinctly for non-specialist audiences.
- Be prepared to put in a lot of time and effort – just to get your foot through the door.
- Be prepared to be unsuccessful – media organisations have their own agendas, and they also receive numerous ideas, press releases and requests every day. Rejection rates are high when working with the media.
- Don't be surprised if the content you produce, or the interviews you give are edited.
- Network and build up contacts. Who you know is often as important as what you know when working with the media.
- It can be difficult for a researcher to step away from their body of knowledge. Practice on a colleague or friend who is not a specialist in your area of research, and who you trust to give you honest feedback.

Cost and time requirements

Example costs

The main cost is your time, which varies considerably, depending on the type of media and how much you are doing. Sometimes, working with digital technology, e.g. making podcasts often has an upfront cost in terms of equipment. In some instances, the media organisation might pay you for your time.

Example timings

Time the planning process takes. Lead times vary greatly between organisations. The effort you need to put in can also be lengthy in terms of planning and then producing content. Give yourself plenty of time in advance.

The lead times in television can be as long as two years. The lead times for newspapers and magazines can range from a couple of months to a couple of days.

Time it takes to produce content. When producing content for the media, give yourself plenty of time to write, edit and re-draft your material. Getting the language right for the target audience (and the target media organisation) is more difficult than you think. Developing content for digital media also requires a good deal of time in terms of planning, recording and editing.

Staff time needed: Variable



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